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**PROMISES OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE:
CHANGES IN MYANMAR'S CEASEFIRE PROCESS**

by

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Myanmar's central government has wrestled with ethnically linked violence and separatism since its independence in 1948. Bilateral ceasefire efforts in the late 1980s and early 1990s achieved partial success, as many ethnic minority groups agreed to the ceasefires. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) process from 2011–2015 aimed to complete the task. This thesis explores why some groups signed the NCA and some refused. The comparative analysis of the two ceasefire processes, focusing on the Kachin and Karen minority groups, shows that the marked political shift in 2011 with President Thein Sein's administration affected ethnic minority groups' decisions of whether to sign the accord. Due to the built-up mistrust of the military government from broken ceasefire promises of economic development and political dialogue, along with a renewal of conflict, ethnic groups that had participated in the earlier ceasefire process tended to abstain from the NCA. Conversely, as the non-bilateral ceasefire groups had not amassed any additional resentment toward the government, they bought into the innovative NCA process, which promised future political dialogue toward a federal union. For the ceasefire negotiation process to succeed, Myanmar's government will need to cease the violence and obtain the trust of the remaining non-ceasefire groups to persuade them to sign the NCA.

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PROMISES OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE:
CHANGES IN MYANMAR'S CEASEFIRE PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Myanmar's central government has wrestled with ethnically linked violence and separatism since its independence in 1948. Bilateral ceasefire efforts in the late 1980s and early 1990s achieved partial success, as many ethnic minority groups agreed to the ceasefires. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) process from 2011–2015 aimed to complete the task. This thesis explores why some groups signed the NCA and some refused. The comparative analysis of the two ceasefire processes, focusing on the Kachin and Karen minority groups, shows that the marked political shift in 2011 with President Thein Sein's administration affected ethnic minority groups' decisions of whether to sign the accord. Due to the built-up mistrust of the military government from broken ceasefire promises of economic development and political dialogue, along with a renewal of conflict, ethnic groups that had participated in the earlier ceasefire process tended to abstain from the NCA. Conversely, as the non-bilateral ceasefire groups had not amassed any additional resentment toward the government, they bought into the innovative NCA process, which promised future political dialogue toward a federal union. For the ceasefire negotiation process to succeed, Myanmar's government will need to cease the violence and obtain the trust of the remaining non-ceasefire groups to persuade them to sign the NCA.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Arakan Army
ABSDF	All Burma Student's Democratic Front
ALP	Arakan Liberation Party
ANC	Arakan National Council
BGF	Border Guard Forces
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CNF	Chin National Front
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CPIC	China Power Investment Corporation
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
EU	European Union
JCMC	Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee
KDA	Kachin Defense Army
KIA	Kachin Independent Army
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KNG	Karen National Guard
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNPP	Karenni National Progress Party
KNU	Karen National Union
KPC	Karen Peace Council
KSPP	Kachin State Progressive Party
LDC	Least Developed Country
LHU	Lahu Democratic Union
MI	military intelligence
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MPC	Myanmar Peace Center
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team

NCUB	National Council Union of Burma
NDAA	National Democratic Alliance Army
NDA-K	National Democratic Army-Kachin
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	non-governmental organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang
PNLO	PaO National Liberation Organization
PNO	PaO National Organization
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSLA	Palaung State Liberation Army
RCSS/SSA-S	Restoration Council Shan State
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSPP/SSA-N	Shan State Army North
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UN	United Nations
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
UPDJC	Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee
UPWC	Union Peace Working Committee
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
UWSA	United Wa State Army
WNO	Wa National Organization

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Since the late 1980s, the Myanmar government has negotiated bilateral ceasefire agreements[1] with nearly all the country's ethnic minority[2] rebel groups. These ceasefires maintained a fragile peace, but some collapsed in 2010 when the government required that the rebel armies join the government-run Border Guard Forces (BGF), which was a mandate for the ethnic minority groups to integrate into the national military, the Tatmadaw.[3] Under a new quasi-democratic government, President Thein Sein called for a nationwide ceasefire in August 2011.[4] Over the next four years, the government and many of the ethnic minority groups engaged in negotiations over his proposal. On October 15, 2015, eight armed groups signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA); however, seven other groups abstained from the deal.[5] This thesis will explore why some armed groups agreed to the NCA while others did not, and to what extent the Myanmar government succeeded with the nationwide ceasefire process.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Since Myanmar's independence from British colonial rule in 1948, Myanmar scholars have argued that the country faced two major problems—the military-led regime, which took over the government in 1962, and its conflict with ethnic minority

[1] In this thesis, I will refer to the ceasefires negotiated by the Myanmar central government in the late 1980s and early 1990s as "bilateral ceasefires," and the ethnic minority groups that agreed to them as "bilateral ceasefire groups." Those that did not agree to the bilateral ceasefires during this period will be referred to as "non-bilateral ceasefire groups," or simply "non-ceasefire groups."

[2] Myanmar consists of more than a hundred ethnic nationalities; however, the main ethnicities consist of the Burman majority as well as the Shan, Karen, Rakhine, Mon, Chin, Kachin, Rohingya, and Wa minorities.

[3] Nehginpao Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," *Ethnopolitics* 14, no. 1 (2015): 23.

[4] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's Peace Process: A Nationwide Ceasefire Remains Elusive," Crisis Group Asia Briefing no. 146 (16 September 2015): 3.

[5] Jonah Fisher, "Ceasefire with Rebel Groups Marks Limited Milestone for Myanmar," BBC, October 15, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34528571.

groups.[6] In 2003, the military junta regime announced a seven-step roadmap from authoritarianism to democracy, which began a slow political liberalization process and was met with skepticism by much of the international community. Nevertheless, the regime slowly relinquished its grip on the government with the quasi-democratic elections in 2010, and a few years later the National League for Democracy (NLD) opposition party took control of the executive and legislative branches with victories in the national elections of 2015.[7] Regarding its ethnic minority issue, however, the government has had more of a challenge trying to establish a permanent peace with the armed groups. These ethnic minority groups are regionally located within Myanmar and occupy the outer hinterlands of the country (see Figure 1). As Ian Holliday asserts, "Myanmar's ethnic question is just as important as its disfiguring democratic deficit and must be addressed with equal energy and vigor."[8]

Since its independence, Myanmar's government has changed hands quite a few times—from U Nu's civilian regime to General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) to the military junta-led State Law and Order Restoration Council/State Peace and Development Council (SLORC/SPDC)[9]—but national unity remains one of the core aims of the central government.[10] The ethnic minority groups have fought for more autonomy from the government in the form of a federal union; however, no matter who has been in control, the military junta government has pushed back against those

[6] Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2009), xiii; David I. Steinberg, "Myanmar's Perpetual Dilemma: Ethnicity in a 'Discipline-Flourishing Democracy,'" *East West Center Working Papers: Politics, Governance, and Security Series* no. 22 (2011): 1.

[7] The seven-step roadmap to democracy may have been caused by a need to address increasing international pressures, to relieve domestic pressures from the populace, or a combination of both. The national elections of 2010 are characterized as quasi-democratic as the military had a distinct advantage going into the elections along with the boycott by the leading opposition party, the NLD.

[8] Ian Holliday, "Ethnicity and Democratization in Myanmar," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 2 (2010): 125.

[9] The military junta regime originally named itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council in 1988, but in 1997, it changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council.

[10] Tin Maung Maung Than, "Myanmar: Preoccupation with Regime Survival, National Unity, and Stability," in *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 396.

demands.[11] Thus, the government has not been able to achieve its ultimate goal of national unity but now has prospects for national reconciliation through the NCA.

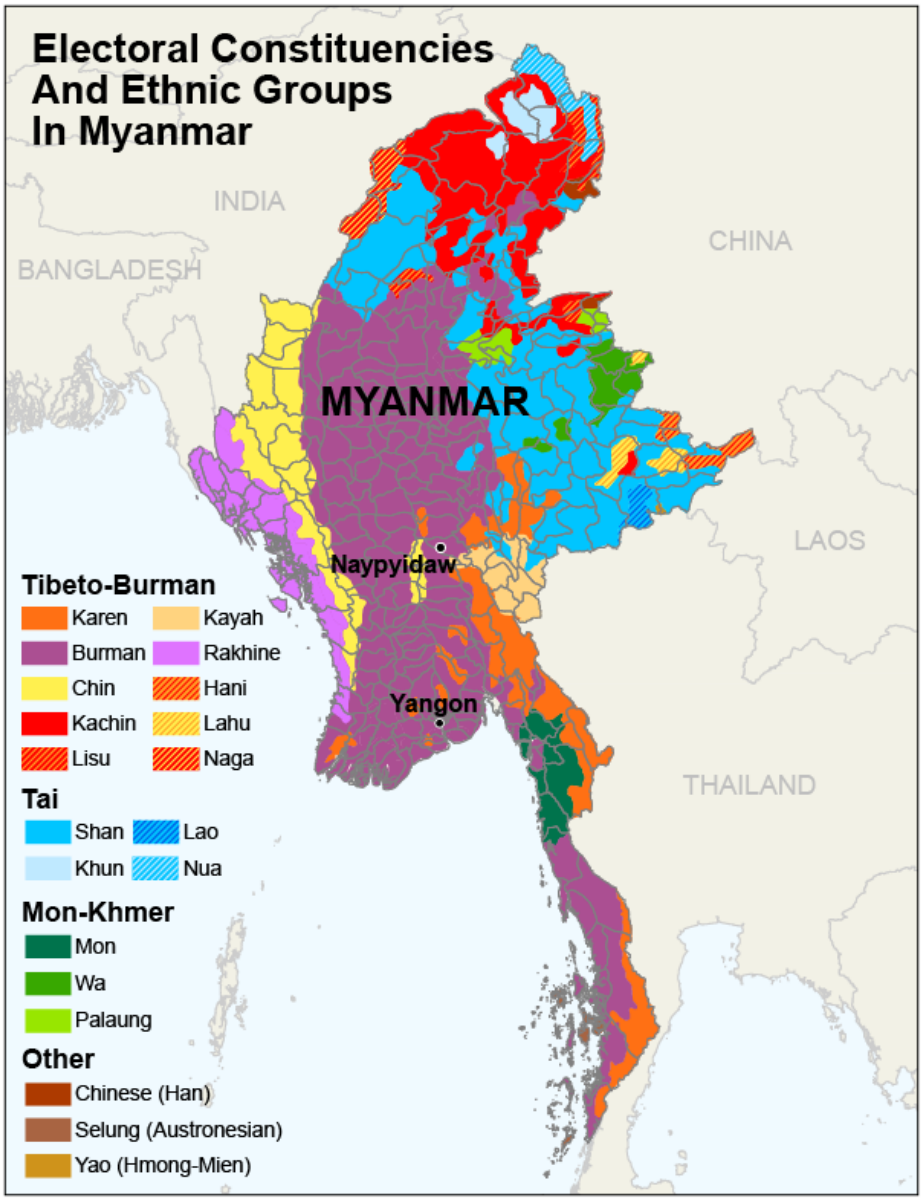

Figure 1. Ethnic Groups in Myanmar.[12]

[11] Martin Smith, "Ethnic Politics in Myanmar: A Year of Tension and Anticipation," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2010): 218; Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," 28.

[12] "Electoral Constituencies and Ethnic Groups in Myanmar." *New York Times*, March 30, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com.

According to Myanmar scholar Nehginpao Kipgen, "accommodation of the interests of minorities by the majority group and cooperation among the different ethnic groups are essential for national reconciliation and for the success of democracy in the Union of Myanmar."[13] Reduction of armed conflict between the ethnic groups and the central government is necessary for continued democratization in Myanmar and can be achieved without fully meeting the ethnic minority groups' demand for federalism. To meet the full expectations of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the Myanmar government needs to incorporate those groups that still oppose the ceasefire. Success with the agreement can legitimize the ongoing reforms of the budding quasi-democratic government and this process can be transformative for the fledgling democracy in Myanmar. Ethnic minority accommodation could be a significant factor in the democratization process.

On the other hand, by excluding some groups, the government could impede the consolidation process of democracy since it would not be representing all peoples of Myanmar. Whether democracy is contingent upon minority inclusion, incorporating all ethnic minority groups into the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement is an initial step in the peace process. With the participation in the nationwide ceasefire process by all ethnic groups, political dialogue could perhaps lead to a federal union or a variation of that political end-state, and ultimately, lead to the cessation of the cycle of violence brought on by ethnic differences. In addition to providing a template for minority accommodation in Myanmar, the elements of success in the NCA framework and process can also be applied to other countries that face similar challenges of solving ethnic conflicts.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature I looked at for analyzing the ceasefire issue in Myanmar included historical perspectives on the ethnic conflict, the bilateral ceasefire period, and the current nationwide ceasefire process. A large literature covers the historical context and background of the various ethnic conflicts. In an effort to explain the motivations of the ethnic minorities in their armed cause, authors highlight anecdotes from the British

[13] Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," 28.

colonial period, the different allegiances in the Second World War, and the majority-minority relationship following Myanmar's independence. Matthew Walton highlights the colonial policies' influence on the ethnic conflict and places an emphasis on the effect of the 1947 Panglong Agreement, which aimed to establish a federal union of autonomous regions for the ethnic minorities along the borderlands of Myanmar, on the ethnic minority demands for federalism.[14] The importance of the Panglong Agreement for ethnic conflict in Myanmar is prevalent throughout the literature. Walton emphasizes a key consideration that arises when looking at the historical background is the need to look at many different perspectives as "diversity within each of these oppositional perspectives has been disregarded" and different accounts explain different motives.[15]

Before going into the bilateral ceasefire and the nationwide ceasefire processes, I would like to address a glaring missing element in the ceasefire literature. There is a lack of compare and contrast between the bilateral ceasefire period of the 1990s and the current nationwide ceasefire process. There are many articles and books on each of the two different ceasefire periods, but there is not a comprehensive look at both of those together in a comparative sense.[16] This dearth of comparative literature is one of the issues addressed in this thesis to highlight some of the differences between the two time periods and their influence on various ethnic minority groups' decisions.

The bilateral ceasefires literature provides a general overview of what occurred and when it happened, but again the literature does not provide a comprehensive explanation of all minority groups' decisions. Scholars point to many different reasons and factors that may have swayed the ethnic minority groups to agree to the bilateral ceasefires with the central government in the early 1990s. These reasons are not

[14] Matthew J. Walton, "Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 6 (2008): 893, 907.

[15] Ibid., 907.

[16] Min Zaw Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements, Catalyzing Reflection* series (Bern, Switzerland: Swiss Peace Foundation, February 2014), 1–37; Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," 19–31; Renaud Egreteau, "Assessing Recent Ethnic Peace Talks in Myanmar," *Asian Ethnicity* 13, no. 3 (2012): 311–13; Paul Keenan, "Burma's Ethnic Ceasefire Agreements," Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies, Briefing Paper no. 1 (January 2012): 1–9.

conclusive since they are just a list of possible reasons or combination thereof and lack a consensus conclusion.

There are myriad reasons provided for why groups agreed to the ceasefires, but they focus on the ethnic minority groups' desire for economic development and a shift in economic power between the government and the ethnic minority groups.[17] It is certainly tough to single out a causal factor for all the groups as each ethnic minority group probably had its own unique motives and reasons. Alexander Dukalskis points to a combination of factors—territorial rights, political stance on a federal union, and accumulation of government mistrust—that leads to a conclusion that more established ethnic minority groups are more likely to refuse the ceasefires.[18] There exists a tension between finding a single causal factor and analyzing each minority group, but looking at the most common and leading reasons of all the ethnic minority groups mitigates this issue. I use Dukalskis' model of looking at a limited number of groups for an in-depth qualitative analysis.

With regard to the non-ceasefire groups, there is a consensus in the literature on why certain groups did not agree to the bilateral ceasefires—the one reason is the absence of political settlement or commitment by the government to future dialogue.[19] An important missing element in much of the literature is an explanation as to why some of the reasons overpowered or outweighed other factors that swayed minority groups' decisions, specifically the economic benefits versus the promise of a federal union. This piece could have been useful in making my arguments more robust.

Regarding the ceasefire process, the literature is less government-focused and looks primarily at the ethnic minority groups to which the government had presented bilateral ceasefire offers. Much of the literature does not explore in detail why the

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[17] Lee Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition: The Periphery Is Central," *Democratization* 21, no. 5 (2014): 792–793; South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 119–20; Zaw Oo and Win Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007), 14.

[18] Alexander Dukalskis, "Why Do Some Insurgent Groups Agree to Cease-Fires While Others Do Not? A Within-Case Analysis of Burma/Myanmar, 1948–2011," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2015): 3–5.

[19] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords,* 22–23.

government made the decisions it did. Some of the questions still lacking analysis are what drove the government's bilateral ceasefire strategy and its multiple stages, how did the government know groups would agree to the ceasefires, and what was the intent of the government's demand that minority group armed forces join government-led Border Guard Forces? Analysts portray the Thein Sein government (2011–2015) positively, as reform-minded and optimistic, specifically referring to his Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement as a "bold peace initiative."[20] As the focus of the literature is mostly on the conflict between the central government and the ethnic minority groups, many authors do not really allude to the intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts that took place within and among the minority groups.

Along with the lack of information on the central government's aims, there is little information regarding the motives of the Tatmadaw, the national military. Up until the Thein Sein administration, the military had enormous influence on government affairs, including the ceasefire process, even during the nationwide ceasefire one. Alfred Stepan discusses military prerogatives in his book, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*, by describing

> military as an institution [that] assumes they have acquired a right or privilege, formal or informal, to exercise effective control over its internal governance, to play a role within extramilitary areas within the state apparatus, or even to structure relationships between the state and political or civil society.[21]

This description fits the Myanmar military during the pre-2011 era and even since then. According to authors such as Andrew McLeod and Adam MacDonald, the prerogatives that the junta-led regime has retained throughout the ceasefire period and

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[20] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," Crisis Group Asia Report no. 214 (30 November 2011): Executive Summary.

[21] Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* (Princeton University Press, 1988), 93–98. Stepan introduces 11 different selected prerogatives of the military as an institution in a democratic regime, which include the following: 1) Constitutionally sanctioned independent role of the military in political system, 2) Military relationship to the chief executive, 3) Coordination of defense sector, 4) Active-duty military participation in the Cabinet, 5) Role of legislature, 6) Role of senior civil servants or civilian political appointees, 7) Role in intelligence, 8) Role in police, 9) Role in military promotions, 10) Role in state enterprises, and 11) Role in legal systems. These selected prerogatives can then be placed into low, moderate, or high categories depending on how effective de jure and de facto civilian control is in governing the military.

into the quasi-democratic government are concerning. Examples of these prerogatives include the current requirements that 25 percent of the legislature's seats go to military members, 75 percent majority vote is necessary to alter the 2008 constitution, and the commander-in-chief must appoint the ministers of defense, home affairs, and border affairs.[22]

Turning to the literature on the nationwide ceasefire process, Myanmar scholars provide an overview, but the literature lacks a comprehensive approach to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. As Min Zaw Oo, a Burmese local actor involved in the ceasefire process, explains, "the current peace process in Myanmar is still new to most analysts and observers of Myanmar affairs."[23] As the NCA was only signed in late 2015, there is not that much literature explaining the motives of the ethnic minority groups on whether to sign or refuse the deal. Much of the literature seems speculative and requires readers to infer their own conclusions.[24]

With minimal literature on the nationwide ceasefire process, there is even less material that covers the aftermath of the nationwide ceasefire. Following the signing of the NCA by some groups, there has been literature that provides a narrative of what occurred during the process but not enough analysis on the agreement and its effects. As time passes and the nationwide ceasefire process matures, an abundance of literature that covers the consequences of this process will most likely emerge.

While the ceasefire literature in Myanmar that discusses the history of ethnic conflict and introduces the bilateral ceasefire and nationwide ceasefire process may lack some of the detail necessary to pinpoint the ethnic minority groups' motivations that led to their ceasefire decisions, there is enough of a consensus on most decisions to arrive at a conclusion. In this thesis, I will tie all three elements together to create a more fully formed picture and to provide a comparative analysis of the two ceasefire processes. This

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[22] Andrew McLeod, *Bingham Centre Myanmar Project: Constitutional Transitions and the Role of the Military* (London: Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, November 2014), 5; Adam P MacDonald, "From Military Rule to Electoral Authoritarianism: The Reconfiguration of Power in Myanmar and its Future," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 40, no. 1 (2013): 24.

[23] Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements*, 7.

[24] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's Peace Process," 1–2, 9, 14.

way, some of the gaps that are present by only looking at one or the other period will be filled.

D. HYPOTHESES

The pattern that emerged when looking at the groups that signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and the ones that did not sign it was the inverse of what occurred back in the late 1980s and early 1990s during the first round of bilateral ceasefires. In general, ethnic minority groups that had took on the bilateral ceasefires were the holdout groups this time around, while the ones that held out in the past signed the NCA (see Table 1 and Table 2). The regime change that occurred in 2011 marked another inflection point in the government's ceasefire history. First, the reasons used to explain why ethnic minority groups agreed or did not agree to bilateral ceasefires in the past have to be reevaluated in this political context. Next, the circumstances surrounding the shift from an authoritarian regime to a more democratic government should be analyzed. Lastly, the political shift may have caused some changes that forced ethnic minority groups to reevaluate the ceasefire that they were in or the one that they could be in. The change in political context provides the most convincing arguments as to the ethnic minority groups' decisions.

Table 1. Selected Bilateral Ceasefires[25]

Ethnic Armed Group	Date
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)	March 21, 1989
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	May 9, 1989
Shan State Army North (SSPP/SSA-N)	September 2, 1989
Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)	October 1, 1993
New Mon State Party (NMSP)	June 29, 1995
Arakan Army (AA)	2002
Karen Peace Council (KPC)	2007

Note: KPC is the only group to agree to both a bilateral ceasefire and the NCA.

[25] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 122–23, 126–27.

Table 2. Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (October 15, 2015)[26]

Signed	Abstained
Karen National Union (KNU)	Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)
Karen Peace Council (KPC)	Karenni National Progress Party (KNPP)
PaO National Liberation Organization (PNLO)	New Mon State Party (NMSP)
All Burma Student's Democratic Front (ABSDF)	Arakan National Council (ANC)
Chin National Front (CNF)	Lahu Democratic Union (LDU)
Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)	Shan State Army North (SSPP/SSA-N)
Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)	Wa National Organization (WNO)
Restoration Council Shan State (RCSS/SSA-S)	

Note: Some groups were excluded from NCA while some rejected the negotiation process.[27]

The arguments used to explain the bilateral ceasefire decisions are unlikely to be as robust in this case with the nationwide ceasefire as in the previous bilateral ceasefires, because the groups that agreed to those ceasefires refused to sign the NCA. The bilateral ceasefire groups that agreed in the late 1980s and early 1990s did so due to an understanding that the government would assist with economic development while the holdout groups did not agree to the ceasefires because of the military junta regime's refusal for political dialogue toward a federal union.[28] With the change in political context, the arguments of economic development as opposed to political dialogue could still be worth analyzing but may not be as strong as some other theories. Lagging economic development could be why ethnic groups signed this time around, as those groups did not receive any economic benefits from the government. Regarding the political dialogue argument, the bilateral ceasefire groups took on the agreements valuing economic benefits over the desire for a federal union, so this reason seems like it falls under faulty logic; however, it is worth exploring the political dialogue aspect, as there was a nuanced change to it following the political transition in 2011.

[26] Eleven Myanmar, "Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement," December 30, 2015, http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/special-focus-politics/nationwide-ceasefire-agreement.

[27] Over the years, due to the changing nature of some of the ethnic minority groups by combining, splitting, or integrating into the Border Guard Forces, it worked out that about half of the groups that did sign the NCA were mostly the ones that had not agreed to the deals and half of them were ones that had previously took on bilateral ceasefires. Some of the groups that did agree to bilateral ceasefires in the 1990s were excluded from the NCA or did not want to participate in the process, such as the UWSA.

[28] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 11–12, 14–15.

The 2011 political transition is a pivotal period surrounding the decisions on whether to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The military junta regime's efforts to transform itself into a more quasi-democratic government may have affected the decisions of the ethnic minority groups. Due to the government's prolonged process to democratize throughout the 2000s, the attention given to ceasefire agreements may have been diverted to more political administrative efforts. With its focus on democratizing under the seven-step roadmap to discipline-flourishing democracy, the ethnic minority groups may have seen limited economic development under the bilateral ceasefires. On the other hand, following the elections in 2010 and the appointment of Thein Sein as president, the government may have focused more of its efforts on gaining the support of the non-ceasefire groups. This shift toward a more democratic government under President Thein Sein may have had both detrimental effects on the standing ceasefires as well as positive effects on the non-ceasefire groups, which could have affected the ethnic minority groups' decision in signing the nationwide ceasefire.

Lastly, the decisions could simply come down to ethnic minority groups either finally getting what they want or finally realizing that they cannot get what they want. The ethnic minority groups that held out on the bilateral ceasefires of the 1980s and 1990s did so due to their desire for political dialogue for a federal union. With the promise of political dialogue by a new government in power, that renewed guarantee could entice the ethnic minority groups.[29] Additionally, with reform-minded personnel in government, the groups may have signed due to an increased trust in the quasi-democratic government more so than the military junta regime. These arguments have more sticking power as it reflects the change in the political context. This reasoning may be more salient as it is relevant to the changing nature of Myanmar's government and the ceasefire process.

Conversely, as for the more convincing reasons why the groups that had bilateral ceasefires before did not sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, they also derive from the changes due to the recent political transition. The central government failed to deliver

[29] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's Peace Process," 2.

on the agreements under the bilateral ceasefires and this resulted in the reversal of the ethnic minority groups' decisions. First, the re-emergent conflict between the Tatmadaw and some ethnic armed groups signifies a breach of agreement and the groups could abstain from the NCA on principle.[30] Since the new government has taken power, there have been conflicts that emerged in the states of Kachin and northern Shan, specifically the Kokang region. Armed group leaders have stated that a nationwide ceasefire signing would not be credible while fighting continued between the Tatmadaw and armed groups in those regions.[31] Next, many groups remain opposed to the NCA due to the government's exclusion of some groups.[32] A summit in June 2015 among the armed group leaders resulted in a decision that none of the groups would sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement unless all of them were permitted to sign.[33] Since then, some groups have gone back on their word, but the remaining groups point to this as a reason for abstaining from the agreement. These groups could be abstaining in solidarity based upon experiences of divide-and-conquer by the military government. Lastly, Dukalskis' idea that a lengthier time of animosity toward government preventing the ceasefires could be easily translated to a lengthier time in failed political and economic efforts under the bilateral ceasefires. The groups that had agreed to bilateral ceasefires early could have built up resentment toward the false promises of the central government. Due to the outbreak of violence, exclusion of other minority groups, and built-up resentment toward the central government, the ethnic minority groups realized the bilateral ceasefires did not give them what they desired, thus that led to their rejection of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

The transformation in government brought about many changes to the ceasefire process. Different ethnic minority groups' trust in the government shifted in opposite directions with some groups believing in the quasi-democratic government of Thein Sein

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[30] Nehginpao Kipgen, "Ethnic Nationalities and the Peace Process in Myanmar," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (2015): 414.

[31] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's Peace Process," 7.

[32] Antoni Slodkowski, "Myanmar Signs Ceasefire with Eight Armed Groups," Reuters, October 15, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-idUSKCN0S82MR20151015.

[33] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's Peace Process," 7.

and some groups turning to violence against the military. Future promises of political dialogue following the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and, conversely, the failure to bring about political dialogue and measurable economic benefits under bilateral ceasefires both contributed toward shifting attitudes. The significant changes in political context led to the reversal of stances on ceasefires by these ethnic minority groups.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

The minority groups that have been in negotiation with the Union Peace Working Committee (UPWC), the government-led organization heading the nationwide ceasefire negotiations, to come to an agreement on an inclusive ceasefire represent various ethnic minorities all across Myanmar's borderlands. They vary in size, speak their own languages, and have different wants and desires. Looking at each individual group and the variables that led to each group's decision regarding the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement would be an arduous task, so I intend to look at two groups—one that has agreed to sign and one that has not—that are mostly representative of the groups on their respective sides. The two case studies will not encompass every individual factor, but will capture the main driving variables that led to the groups' decisions. Additionally, by doing comparative case studies, it will highlight these key variables even more.

The two ethnic groups I have chosen to look at are the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The KNU is relevant in that it is one of the major ethnic groups that held out the longest from signing a ceasefire with the government. The Karen ethnic conflict lasted over 60 years until the KNU signed a monumental ceasefire in January 2012 with the nationwide ceasefire waiting in the wings.[34] This group presents an interesting case as it remained one of the few groups to abstain from the earlier rounds of bilateral ceasefires but made a complete turn-around with the newly democratic government under President Thein Sein. The KIO is also relevant in that it is one of the largest ethnic armed groups with a common ceasefire historical trajectory, albeit contrary to the KNU experience. The Kachin signed a bilateral ceasefire with the government in late 1993; however, after about 17 years of peace

[34] Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," 21.

between the group and the government, the ceasefire prominently broke down in 2011 with the Tatmadaw launching a major offensive against the Kachin Independent Army (KIA), the KIO's military arm.[35] The KIO provides a case study with a group that was originally on amicable terms with the government but fell out of its good graces. Not surprisingly, the KIO is the lead opposition group in the nationwide ceasefire process, but there may be other underlying factors besides being at war with the government to contest the agreement. The KNU and the KIO are the principal groups in each camp—the ones that the other groups rally around—so they will provide a representative perspective on each side.

The types of sources and materials that will be used for these comparative case studies is mostly literature on the two specific ethnic armed groups—including their history, culture, and ethnic identity—and general literature on the history of Myanmar ceasefires. Due to the contemporary nature of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, many of the sources will be articles in recent newspapers and periodicals. This breadth of literature will provide an overview of the two ethnic groups as well as the long history of the relationship between these two groups with respect to the central government.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

The following chapter will look at the extensive history of bilateral ceasefire agreements made by the military junta in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The political context surrounding these ceasefires along with the content of the ceasefires will be explored. The subsequent ethnic minority responses, both receptive and antagonistic, and the outcomes will provide additional details as to the effectiveness of the ceasefire strategy.

The third chapter will begin with the state of the bilateral ceasefires up until the mid-2000s as well as the controversial stipulation to them regarding Border Guard Forces as the SLORC/SPDC regime transitioned to an electoral government in the late 2000s. It will also explore the new nationwide ceasefire framework, the reformed peace process, and particular comparative points from the bilateral agreements. Additionally, the

[35] Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," 21.

political context surrounding this change in ceasefire negotiations will be presented. The minority responses will look specifically at the KIO and KNU decisions and the reversal of their original agreements. These case studies will provide a detailed look at the transformation from the bilateral ceasefire context to the nationwide ceasefire framework.

The final chapter will draw comparisons between the two ceasefire periods to reach a conclusion about the reasons why some groups have signed the nationwide ceasefire while others have abstained. Additionally, it will address the central government's effectiveness with the nationwide ceasefire and its implications for the future of Myanmar's government and society. With the promise of political dialogue for the groups that signed the agreement that could lead to further talks of a federal union, the prospects for peace are tenably higher than before. The success of this accord will largely be predicated on the future inclusion of the major groups that failed to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Accommodating these groups will be the next step in achieving a long-lasting peace.

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II. BILATERAL CEASEFIRE PROCESS (1989–1995)

This chapter addresses the political and economic context leading into the bilateral ceasefire process, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) government's approach to negotiating bilateral ceasefires with the ethnic minority groups, and the subsequent reactions by the minority groups to these arrangements. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: 1) to show how the bilateral ceasefires were constructed to compare and contrast with the new nationwide ceasefire process, and 2) to explain what the driving factors were for both ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups to provide context for motivations during the nationwide ceasefire process. The takeaway for this chapter is that most groups that agreed to the bilateral ceasefires during the 1990s were motivated by economic factors while the ones that resisted were holding true to their demand for political dialogue concerning a federal union.[36] By denying this political dialogue during the bilateral ceasefire negotiations, the government closed the doors on agreements for those groups that remained ideologically driven.[37] Conversely, the groups that held economic development in higher regard than their political demands succumbed to the government's ceasefire deals.[38]

The rounds of bilateral ceasefires that the military government of Myanmar implemented from 1989 to 1995 occurred during a time of significant change in the political landscape. The political environment shifted to one in which Myanmar's central government had a more diplomatic relationship with its neighbors, China and Thailand.[39] Before this shift, Myanmar suffered under more than two decades of General Ne Win's autocratic government that devastated the country politically and economically. General Ne Win took over the Burmese government in a military coup in 1962. During that time,

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[36] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma,* 120; Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords,* 14.

[37] Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung, *Beyond Armed Resistance: Ethnonational Politics in Burma (Myanmar)* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2011), 53–54.

[38] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords,* 14.

[39] Ramya P S, "China's Myanmar Conundrum," The Diplomat, April 22, 2015, https://thediplomat.com/2015/04/chinas-myanmar-conundrum; Kavi Chongkittavorn, "Thai-Burma Relations," in *Challenges to Democratization in Burma: Perspectives on Multilateral and Bilateral Responses*, ed. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (Sweden: IDEA, 2001), 118.

Ne Win essentially cut off ties with the rest of the world and created a failed socialist experiment within the country. Myanmar's economy stalled and failed to keep up with its more successful neighboring East Asian countries.

Following the democratic protests of 1988, the political environment changed markedly with a regime shift from an authoritarian socialist system to a more military junta-led government. The new military government in power, the State Law and Order Restoration Council, aggressively pursued a ceasefire strategy with the ethnic minority groups. Due to the dire economic situation many of these groups were in, there were few alternative options than to accept a bilateral ceasefire with the government. With the central government's increasingly favorable relationships with its neighbors and the economic strain on the majority of the Burmese population, the central government's power was at its apex.[40] The military junta government seized upon this power imbalance between the government and the ethnic minorities to secure ceasefire arrangements with most of the largest opposition groups by enticing them with economic incentives.

The government's strategy was to take on the ethnic minority groups individually and sequentially. First, the ex-Communist Party of Burma (CPB) groups, which were the most resistant and largest groups during Ne Win's regime, were dealt with to eliminate the biggest threat to the SLORC regime. Afterward, the government agreed to bilateral ceasefires with many of the smaller minority groups. Finally, some of the remaining larger groups that were part of an ethnic minority coalition, including the KIO, agreed to a ceasefire with the government—the one significant exception to this pattern was the KNU.

A. POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CONTEXT PRIOR TO THE BILATERAL CEASEFIRES

The political-economic context leading into the government's decision to go forth with the bilateral ceasefires played an important role in how the ethnic minority groups reacted to the offer. The legacy of ethnic conflict compounded by the economic woes of

[40] Michael W. Charney, *A History of Modern Burma* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 169.

an autocratic regime led to political unrest—the protests ultimately ended with another military government taking over.[41] Due to the ethnic minority groups' economic troubles and diminishing support from China, the central government was in an advantageous situation to negotiate bilateral ceasefires with most ethnic minority groups.[42]

1. Ethnic Conflict Post-Independence

Ethnic conflict in Myanmar is a complex situation that dates back to the end of the country's British colonial period.[43] Once Myanmar achieved independence after World War II, the Burman ethnic majority took over the government and the military, which was predominantly composed of ethnic minorities prior to and during the war. The ethnic minorities, many of which assisted the British against the Japanese during the war, felt neglected and pushed to the wayside after the war.[44] Additionally, the Burman majority had cooperated with the Japanese to fight the British forces and consequently, the ethnic minorities, which further strained the majority-minority relationship.

This relationship became more complex with a failed negotiation between the Burman majority and the ethnic minorities. Following its independence after the war, on February 12, 1947, the Burman-dominated government did come to an understanding, referred to as the Panglong Agreement, with some of the major ethnic minority groups, including the Shan, Kachin, and Chin, that would establish a federal union allowing for full autonomy of the frontier regions.[45] Another major ethnic minority, the Karen, decided to stay out of the negotiations, as they wanted their own independent state.[46] Shortly thereafter in July 1947, with the assassination of Aung San, the major architect of

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[41] Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition," 785, 787.

[42] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 3.

[43] Martin T. Smith, "Ethnic Politics and Regional Development in Myanmar: The Need for New Approaches," in *Myanmar: Beyond Politics to Societal Imperatives*, ed. Kyaw Yin Hlaing, Robert H. Taylor, and Tin Maung Maung Than (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 62.

[44] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords,* 5; South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma,* 12; Charney, *A History of Modern Burma,* 71.

[45] Tin Maung Maung Than, "Dreams and Nightmares: State Building and Ethnic Conflict in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Ethnic Conflicts in Southeast Asia*, ed. Kusuma Snitwongse and W. Scott Thompson (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 73.

[46] South, "Ethnic Politics in Burma," 25.

this system, the central government stopped pursuing the federal union issue any further. The government's reversal on this particular issue was an important causal factor in the ethnic conflict.[47] Differing perceptions of the government and the ethnic groups muddle the legacies of the failure of the Panglong Agreement, but ethnic identity has been fundamentally shaped by those legacies.[48] This unresolved situation caused the ethnic minorities to take up arms in the continuous struggle against the government to meet their political demands.[49]

2. Ne Win Regime

After independence, Myanmar fell into the grip of autocratic rule that led to economic hardships. The government changed hands from civilian rule to military rule in 1962, when General Ne Win, part of the Burman majority, led a military coup. Ne Win cemented his control over the Burmese government in 1974 when he established the Burma Socialist Programme Party as a single-party, military government and subsequently led the country to its political-economic nadir by the late 1980s. As Ardeth Thawnghmung states, the regime's "self-imposed mismanagement, isolationist policies, and distrust of foreigners all deprived the country of necessary skills, technology, and revenues."[50] Under Ne Win's rule, Myanmar became isolated from the international stage and suffered economically. Ne Win's isolationist policies cut the country off from the globalizing economies of the region and the accompanying benefits from trade with those countries. Due to his socialist policies, the economy did not thrive as much as neighboring countries. The majority of Myanmar's population suffered economically with worsening conditions leading to poverty.[51]

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[47] Walton, "Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma," 900–01.

[48] Ibid., 907.

[49] Martin T. Smith, *Ethnic Groups in Burma*: *Development, Democracy, and Human Rights* (London: Anti-Slavery International, 1994), 19, 24, 50.

[50] Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung, "Responding to Strategies and Programmes of Myanmar's Military Regime: An Economic Viewpoint," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2008): 277.

[51] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative, 2.

Ne Win's government implemented many harmful policies that further exacerbated the economic state of the country. Under BSPP rule, the military bureaucracy ran a government that rewarded party loyalty over competence while looking to serve its own self-interests and ignoring the needs of its people.[52] With most sectors of the economy under state control, the military's incompetence in governing drove the economy to the ground. In the 1970s and 1980s, Myanmar's economy was primarily based on the export of rice, timber, and minerals, but the complete takeover of trade and production, the low compulsory prices that the government implemented under Ne Win's regime, and the rigid control of these goods hurt these important sectors of the economy.[53] Additionally, foreign debt grew drastically as the value of export commodities dropped while the costs of imports rose.[54] Lastly, Ne Win implemented multiple demonetizations of the currency with the most severe ones coming in the mid-1980s where the government devalued almost 70 percent of the currency in circulation.[55]

These negative economic policies had more extreme effects on the ethnic minorities living in the border areas of Myanmar. In addition to state control of the economy, the central government strictly controlled much of the actions of the Myanmar population. These restrictions included what communications could be sent or received, where citizens could travel to, and what could be read.[56] Tight control of its population stymied the country's already-weakened economy additionally. The worsening economic conditions and the isolationist state policies hurt the entire nation, but the ethnic minorities at the periphery of the country suffered even more. Specifically, Ne Win's policies required that "urban populations and public servants were heavily subsidized through a mandatory procurement system" and that farmers shoulder the burden of this

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[52] David I. Steinberg, *The Future of Burma: Crisis and Choice in Myanmar* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 25.

[53] Peter John Perry, *Myanmar (Burma) Since 1962: The Failure of Development* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 27.

[54] David Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 24.

[55] Ibid., 22.

[56] Perry, *Myanmar (Burma) Since 1962: The Failure of Development*, 35.

rice subsidy.[57] This system disadvantaged the rural farmers living in the border regions of Myanmar. By the end of the Ne Win era, Myanmar was designated a Least Developed Country by the United Nations.[58]

The ineffective government under General Ne Win created an environment ripe for revolution. Due to the political and economic woes in Myanmar, many students began to rise up against the Ne Win regime in the 1980s. These sentiments built up and boiled over throughout the decade as Myanmar's economy began to crumble. Michael Charney describes the situation as a "fall [due to] the results of popular pent-up frustrations" against the Ne Win government.[59] In 1988, democratic protests erupted around the country and culminated in the massacre of August 8, 1988, in which the government-led Tatmadaw forces tamped down on the protesters with violent force. Thousands of students and pro-democracy protesters died at the hands of the Ne Win regime. This revolt was a result of the economic and political dissatisfaction of the population, but the people were unable to overthrow the corrupt government. The government remained in the hands of the military following the failed protests.

After the violent demonstrations in early August, the military staged a coup d'état a month later and took over Ne Win's government.[60] The rapidity and effectiveness with which the military took control of the democratic protests was indicative of its power over the people. This swift coup gave the military junta added leverage over the ethnic minority groups.[61] The Myanmar military was much stronger in force strength and numbers, and more financially secure than the insurgent groups. The economic imbalance contributed to the military advantage that the central government already had over the

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[57] Thawnghmung, "Responding to Strategies and Programmes of Myanmar's Military Regime," 279.

[58] Perry, *Myanmar (Burma) Since 1962: The Failure of Development*, 1.

[59] Charney, *A History of Modern Burma,* 148.

[60] On September 18, 1988, Saw Maung staged a coup against the government toppling Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party, and the new resulting government consisted of those military officers that supported Saw Maung.

[61] Ashley South, "Political Transition in Myanmar: A New Model for Democratization," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2004): 242.

ethnic armed groups. These advantages were some of the factors that contributed to the bilateral ceasefire dynamics that followed the SLORC takeover of the government.

3. Geopolitical Factors Leading into Bilateral Ceasefires

Another essential element that added to the power imbalance between the central government and the ethnic minority groups was the relationship between Myanmar and its neighbor to the north, China. The People's Republic of China directly supported the ethnic minority groups that formed the Communist Party of Burma in the 1960s and early 1970s; however, China distanced itself and pulled its support of these groups once Deng Xiaoping, Chairman Mao Zedong's successor, took over the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and focused on domestic economic reforms.[62] Deng shifted from Mao's Communist party lines somewhat by emphasizing the economy over ideology. Thus, the geopolitical situation caused a shift in relationships for the government and the ethnic minority groups with respect to China—the central government became closer to China while the ethnic minority groups, primarily the ones in the Communist Party of Burma, were pushed away.[63]

The budding relationship the central government had with its neighbor added to the power advantage it had over its populace. The shift in the dynamics between Beijing and Yangon brought the two governments closer together and helped China become Myanmar's closest ally. The insurgent groups on the other hand saw the opposite effect due to the closer relationship between Myanmar and China. For instance, the Kachin ethnic group, residing along the China-Myanmar border, and the CPB, which had benefited greatly from CCP support since the 1960s, saw dwindling support from its Chinese benefactor beginning in the early 1980s because of Deng Xiaoping's economic policies that focused on globalization. The normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries was one of the underlying reasons for the dissolution of the CPB into

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[62] Tom Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace: The Future of the Cease-Fire Agreements in Burma* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2009), 8; South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 42; Smith, "Ethnic Politics and Regional Development in Myanmar," 57.

[63] Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition," 791.

splinter groups that no longer supported the communist effort.[64] Deng's six-day visit to Myanmar's capital city of Yangon to meet with General Ne Win in January 1978 highlighted the shift in Chinese support from insurgent groups to Myanmar's central government.[65] In the past, China mainly implemented policies benefiting the CCP regime, which included supporting communist regimes in other countries. Some earlier policies came at the detriment of China's economy; however, focusing more on its economic policies than its ideological agenda, Beijing began to cooperate more with the government in Yangon. Along with the withdrawal of Chinese support, there was a slow decline of the ethnic minorities' trade-driven revenue streams from China, which was followed by the loss of a major commercial and trade center at Panghsai in 1987.[66] Whereas the policies of Ne Win's regime significantly hurt the ethnic minority groups economically and politically, international factors added to their disadvantaged position.

With the eventual decline in Chinese support to the CPB, the group splintered into smaller breakaway factions in 1989 and created an opening, which the central government could exploit. Without financial support from China and opportunities for trade, the ethnic minority groups in the CPB quarreled over power and resources. In April 1989, the Wa, a large portion of the Communist Party of Burma, revolted against the party leadership and forced them out of Myanmar into China.[67] Following the revolt, there was a lack of senior leadership within the CPB and the alliance subsequently split into four groups—the National Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K), the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the United Wa State Army (UWSA). [68]

The Communist Party of Burma had essentially split along ethnic lines into four smaller forces. The northernmost territory in Kachin state became the NDA-K, which had

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[64] Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace,* 8.

[65] Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1999), 237.

[66] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 15; Perry, *Myanmar (Burma) Since 1962: The Failure of Development*, 143.

[67] Steinberg, *Future of Burma: Crisis and Choice in Myanmar*, 46.

[68] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 49, 118,

defected from the KIO in 1968. In the East, the CPB's former 815 war zone became the NDAA. Units in Mong Ko and Kokang regions formed the MNDAA and lastly, the Wa units merged with some non-communist Wa forces to come together as the UWSA.[69] The communist ideology had bonded these groups together, but following the withdrawal of financial support from the CCP, the organization split into their smaller ethnic divisions. The communist groups had a difficult time adapting to the self-reliance tactics following the reductions of revenue from cross-border trade with China.[70] Not only were these groups hurting economically but also they had lost support from an outside power and were left to fight the central government divided and on their own. Thus, broken up into smaller contingents and damaged in ideology, these groups were primarily motivated by financial gains following the fall of the Communist Party of Burma.[71]

B. BILATERAL CEASEFIRES: CONTENT AND STRATEGY

The strategy used by the central government to get the ethnic minority groups to agree to bilateral ceasefires was effective in getting most of them to buy into the agreements. The SLORC government took advantage of a situation, in which the ethnic minority groups were at their weakest economically and ideologically, in order to realize these bilateral ceasefires. The strategy relied on multiple waves of ceasefire negotiations that targeted the groups individually, which turned out to be successful in neutralizing most of the ethnic minority groups. With offers of economic development, the decision to agree to a ceasefire came down to economic interests over political ideology.

In late 1989, with the severe economic situation of the ethnic minority groups coupled with the breakup of the Communist Party of Burma, the State Law and Order Restoration Council seized upon an advantageous opportunity to establish a reprieve in conflict with many of the groups. During the Ne Win era, negotiations had failed due to the government's demand that the armed minority groups give up their weapons and their autonomy. With the new bilateral ceasefires under the SLORC regime, the junta

[69] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, 297–98.

[70] Ibid., 292.

[71] Marie Lall, "Ethnic Conflict and the 2010 Elections in Burma," Chatham House, Asia Programme Paper, November 29, 2009, 9.

abandoned these ultimatums to make the ceasefires simpler with reduced demands. The government initially offered unofficial, verbal ceasefires to the CPB breakaway factions. With the decade of support from China, the CPB groups had accumulated a vast stockpile of arms and ammunition, so it was essential for the SLORC regime to neutralize the former CPB threat.[72] The government made the ceasefire offers in secrecy at the time and the terms of agreement were not made public.[73]

An important component of the SLORC regime's divide-and-rule strategy to neutralize the minority groups was the concept of multiple waves of ceasefire negotiations. The idea of these waves was a variation of the individual divide-and-rule strategy but applied to certain clusters of ethnic minority groups. The government completed the initial wave of ceasefire negotiations in late 1989 with the breakaway factions of the CPB. The second wave of ceasefire negotiations from 1991–92 involved smaller ethnic minority groups that had little influence or power. A last wave of ceasefire negotiations occurred a couple years later from 1993–95 with additional minority groups—most of which were those that disassociated themselves from the National Democratic Front (NDF)[74] joint organization. These three waves of ceasefire negotiations allowed the government to lock down a series of ceasefires, so that the Tatmadaw could concentrate its forces and negotiate with other groups. Taking on individual groups in the negotiation process, as well as block by block with the divide-and-rule strategy, allowed for the government to secure bilateral ceasefires.[75]

The first wave of ceasefires that the SLORC regime undertook began almost immediately after it took over the government. In March of 1989, the government established a ceasefire with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, one of the splinter groups from the Communist Party of Burma. As the first group to reach an agreement with the government, the ex-CPB group was able to garner many economic

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[72] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, 299.

[73] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 33.

[74] The National Democratic Front (NDF) was a KNU-sponsored ethnic insurgent alliance formed in 1976 and headquartered in Manerplaw.

[75] Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements,* 9; South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma,* 119.

and business incentives. Desperate for food and vital resources, the ex-CPB groups were in a dire situation. Two additional ex-CPB groups, the United Wa State Army and the National Democratic Alliance Army ethnic minority groups, followed in the summer of 1989 and the National Democratic Army-Kachin reached a deal by the end of the year. Economic interests and the desire for opportunities for local economic and social development motivated these groups. According to Ashley South, by the late 1980s, the ex-CPB groups were "largely devoid of political ideology, beyond a broad and mostly ill-defined ethnic nationalist stance" so they easily agreed to the terms laid out by the SLORC government.[76]

The government had offered a deal to the ex-CPB groups that was hard for them to refuse. These groups were allowed to retain arms and autonomy over their territory.[77] Additionally, they were tacitly permitted to increase growth of opium and continue with the trade and business of that drug.[78] Promises of cash and material aid added to the potentially beneficial nature of the deal. As Alexander Dukalskis states, the "best option for obtaining some level of security and development was accepting economic aid in exchange for elimination of conflict and allowing the SLORC to dictate economic and political life on its own terms."[79] The economic situation many of the ex-CPB groups were in made it difficult for those groups to refuse the SLORC government's deal.

The next wave of ceasefires came in 1991–92 with the Kachin Defense Army (KDA), Pa-O National Organization (PNO), Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA), and Kayan National Guard (KNG) agreeing to bilateral ceasefires with the government. These groups were much smaller than the ex-CPB groups from the first wave of ceasefires and did not have much weight within the ethnic insurgent groups. Many of the same sentiments surrounded these agreements as the first ones with the pursuit of economic

[76] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 120.

[77] Ibid., 121.

[78] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 15–16.

[79] Dukalskis, "Why Do Some Insurgent Groups Agree to Cease-Fires While Others Do Not?" 12.

interests driving these groups to the ceasefires. Peter Perry describes the situation as a "trade of ceasefire for commercial autonomy."[80]

This pattern continued with the last substantial wave of ceasefires from late 1993 to early 1995. Among the groups that agreed to ceasefires in the last round were the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the KIO. With low ammunition and little money available to them, the NMSP was at its weakest militarily and economically at the time of the agreement, which contributed to its decision.[81] Both the NMSP and the KIO were among the bigger, more significant ethnic armed groups, so this accomplishment by the SLORC government was a huge feat.

With the SLORC's divide-and-rule strategy and its four cuts campaign, the central government implemented a two-pronged approach to convince the ceasefire groups to subscribe to the bilateral ceasefires. The four cuts campaign consisted of constraining food and resources, finances, movement of information and communications, and recruitment of new troops.[82] By restricting the ethnic minority groups in this manner, the government weakened the relative position of these groups. This strategy was not a novel one as Ne Win's regime had implemented it beginning in the 1960s. It was first employed against the Kachin where it was highly effective in destroying their agricultural resource base.[83] With the economy at its worst in the 1980s, the four cuts campaign took a heavier toll on the minority groups and made the struggle for their political ideology even more difficult. The strategy proved to be even more effective than during Ne Win's regime due to the economic hardship.

With the regime's divide-and-rule strategy, the junta's tactic was simply a matter of taking on each minority group individually. The SLORC would only negotiate with one group at a time and refused to do so with any joint organizations, such as the

[80] Perry, *Myanmar (Burma) Since 1962: The Failure of Development*, 151.

[81] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 21.

[82] Ibid., 18.

[83] Perry, *Myanmar (Burma) Since 1962: The Failure of Development*, 142.

Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB)[84] and the National Democratic Front.[85] The fragmentation of the CPB into four separate entities made this an easier tactic. This negotiation process between the government and one minority group at a time gave the SLORC a power and size advantage, especially since the negotiations were done in secrecy, so none of the other groups knew what was occurring behind the scenes.

These ceasefires were only verbal agreements—no papers or contracts were signed. The fact that the agreements were verbal left them up for interpretation, but these ceasefires guaranteed that the minority armies could retain their arms, territories, local administrations, and the ability to conduct business and trade in their regions.[86] While the retention of arms was an influential factor in the ceasefire decision, the sticking point for the ethnic minority groups was the economic opportunities that were made available by agreeing to these ceasefires.[87]

The issue of potential political dialogue for a federal union became a diminished issue for most of the ethnic minority groups. The agreements made were mostly relevant to military-related issues, including troops' positions, areas that ceasefire groups could control, and other military matters, while political topics were off the table as the SLORC claimed that it was only an interim caretaker government until the new constitution was written.[88] During the early Ne Win years, political dialogue between the government and ethnic minorities for a federal union was the crucial missing ingredient in the ceasefires to many of the groups that still wanted autonomy under federalism. The central government refused to budge on allowing political dialogue between the groups and the government after the ceasefires were established. The minority groups' hope was to continue dialogue to work toward a federal union solution.

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[84] The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) was a broad-based, joint ethnic minority/Burman opposition front against the military regime that was formed in 1988.

[85] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 119.

[86] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 33.

[87] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma,* 120

[88] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 34–35.

This restriction on political dialogue, however, did not seem to be as crucial a factor for many of the groups compared to the promise of economic development once the SLORC came into power. With political dialogue not even on the negotiation table, political transition and a permanent peace resolution were set aside even more so. The developmental economic interests of the struggling ethnic minority groups outweighed this lack of a timetable for political transition and a more permanent peace resolution.[89] These ceasefires seemed to be based on economic incentives as the minority groups agreed to many constraints. For example, one restriction that was common among the early ceasefires was the stipulation that the minority groups that agreed to the ceasefires should not contact any of the non-ceasefire groups or the SLORC's political opposition parties, such as the National League for Democracy.[90] Later ceasefires that followed in the early 1990s with the KIO and the NMSP had additional restrictions on purchasing new arms and ammunition, recruiting new troops, and conducting new military training. None of these agreements guaranteed that the Tatmadaw would not expand its forces and strengthen its position in other parts of the country.[91] Between 1989 and 1995, one by one, most of the remaining ethnic minority groups succumbed to the government's demands and settled on the bilateral ceasefires following the initial agreements with the ex-CPB groups. Both sides did not give up too much to establish these bilateral arrangements, but due to the unofficial nature of the ceasefires, there was a higher risk that either party could violate the agreements.

C. ETHNIC MINORITY GROUP REACTIONS

The bilateral ceasefires proposed by the central government were met with differing reactions. Some groups agreed to these ceasefires with little pushback, and some conducted more negotiations with the government before agreeing to the terms. Other groups kept on refusing the bilateral ceasefire arrangements indefinitely. The pattern that arises for the groups that accepted the ceasefires is that the economic drivers were

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[89] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma,* 120; Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 14.

[90] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 36.

[91] Ibid., 38.

significant motivating factors.[92] For those that did not agree to the ceasefires, the political ideology of fighting for a federal union outweighed their economic interests so that a deal was not reached between the parties.[93] The decision for these ethnic minority groups came down to whether the desire for economic incentives or the dedication to their political ideology was greater. Two specific groups, the Kachin Independence Organization and the Karen National Union, serve as exemplars to demonstrate the different lines of thinking. These case studies will highlight the reasoning of the ethnic minority groups that led them to their decision whether to accept the bilateral ceasefires.

1. Accepting the Bilateral Ceasefires

The Kachin Independent Organization, as a member of the National Democratic Front and Democratic Alliance of Burma, made an agreement with the government that was unexpected at the time. Their joint organizations, which also included the powerful Karen National Union, had a strong political desire for dialogue toward a federal union that prevented its members from making a deal with the SLORC government. The offer of development aid and the promise of multiple infrastructure projects in its territories, however, swayed the KIO over as the four cuts campaign had a severe negative impact on the Kachin community in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[94] For instance, the KIO agreed to a bilateral ceasefire in 1993 in anticipation of future beneficial infrastructure projects that would improve roads and bridges, build schools and hospitals, and provide electricity through new hydropower plants.[95]

There was an important difference with the KIO bilateral ceasefire, however, in that the agreement between the KIO and the government was the only one to have been formalized in a written document and signed by both parties.[96] This formalization of the ceasefire gave the central government more credibility toward the KIO. Additionally, the

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[92] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma,* 120.

[93] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 14.

[94] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 25; Dukalskis, "Why Do Some Insurgent Groups Agree to Cease-Fires While Others Do Not?" 15; South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 152.

[95] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 25.

[96] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 154

KIO was able to retain some 15,000 square miles of its own territory under the deal.[97] Even though the Kachin's desire for future political dialogue toward a federal union was not met, the economic opportunities with the added benefit of a formal document was enough for the KIO to agree to the bilateral ceasefire. Economic development was a driving factor for most ethnic armed groups that took on the ceasefires, including the KIO.

Regional scholars provide many reasons for why the groups agreed to the ceasefires, but they predominantly fall under a desire for economic development and a shift in power between the government and the ethnic minority groups.[98] Due to the isolationist policies of Ne Win, Myanmar did not experience the high economic growth like its neighbors. This lack of economic progress left the country impoverished with the ethnic borderlands even more deprived. The primary reason for ethnic armed groups to accept ceasefire terms was the pressure stemming from lagging economic development.[99] The central government did little to help the ethnic minority communities economically. Many of the ethnic minority groups' primary grievance against the government was underdevelopment and the state of their regional economies.[100] Additionally, the former Communist Party of Burma ethnic minority groups eventually lost their support and resources from the Chinese and needed an alternative source of income. The ceasefires paved the way for conflict-free zones in which economic and social development could occur. The right to retain arms and to administer their territories themselves further incentivized the ethnic armed groups to agree to the bilateral arrangement.[101]

Another reason ethnic minority groups accepted these ceasefires was the changing geopolitical climate.[102] The withdrawal of Chinese support of the CPB and the

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[97] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 155.

[98] Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition," 792–93; South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 119–20; Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 14.

[99] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 119.

[100] Smith, "Ethnic Politics and Regional Development in Myanmar," 66.

[101] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 11.

[102] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 119; Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 29; Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition," 791–92.

diminishing amount of resources the armed groups received from China created less favorable external conditions. Martin Smith notes that the "People's Republic of China transformed its policy from support to the insurgent CPB to becoming Myanmar's major trading partner."[103] This situation contributed to the economic woes mentioned above and tested the ethnic minority groups' willpower. Due to the Chinese government's growing cooperation with the Myanmar government, external support was tilted in favor of the central government.[104] The two governments developed closer relations and focused on economic and military development.[105] With Chinese assistance in defense modernization of Myanmar's military, the odds kept growing against the ethnic minority groups. The ethnic armed groups' battle fatigue further exacerbated this imbalance.[106]

With the favorable shift in Chinese and Thai support toward Myanmar's central government, the ethnic armed groups lost access to refuge in neighboring countries as well. Myanmar's neighbors pursued this policy, which sought to establish closer relations with the Myanmar government and encouraged the minority groups to make peace along the borders, was one of the most significant changes since 1988.[107] Many of the ethnic armed groups had links to foreign nations, as they were situated on the strategic China-Myanmar and Thailand-Myanmar borders. At the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, the Thai government pursued a policy that supported transforming the Indo-Chinese region from "battlefields into a marketplace."[108] As a result, ethnic minority groups that once used the Thailand-Myanmar border as a safe haven were pushed back into Myanmar, so that Thailand could normalize formal relations with the Myanmar government to promote trade and investment.[109]

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[103] Smith, "Ethnic Politics and Regional Development in Myanmar," 57.

[104] Smith, *Ethnic Groups in Burma*: *Development, Democracy, and Human Rights*, 40.

[105] Jürgen Haacke, Myanmar's Foreign Policy: Domestic Influences and International Implications (London: Routledge, 2006), 25–26.

[106] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 57.

[107] Smith, "Ethnic Politics and Regional Development in Myanmar," 70.

[108] Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition," 791.

[109] Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace*, 10.

Without protection from their cross-border sanctuaries, the ethnic armed groups were in a less favorable position to negotiate with the government. This shift in power of the central government and the ethnic minority groups was a significant factor in the settlement of the bilateral ceasefires.

2. Rejecting the Bilateral Ceasefires

While most of the ethnic armed groups accepted the bilateral ceasefires by the mid-1990s, there were some groups, such as the Karen National Union, that resisted. With declining external support and increasing need for economic development, the government's offer for a ceasefire was a tempting one. The Thai government even pressured the KNU for an agreement with the Myanmar government since it wanted to be rid of its Karen refugees that came over the border, but the KNU did not succumb to those pressures.[110] Though economic reasons were instrumental in leading most groups into ceasefires, there were other reasons that kept the holdout groups from reaching an agreement with the government. The main reasons for why a group did not agree to a bilateral ceasefire were its political ideology, sunk costs of protecting its territory, and a built-up animosity toward the government.[111]

Since Myanmar's independence, the ethnic minority groups fought for federalism and the desire to govern their own autonomous regions within the state structure.[112] Despite being so close to a form of federal union with Aung San's vision at the Panglong Conference, his assassination effectively halted any talks that would further this cause. Thus, the Panglong Agreement legacy remained a main political cause for these groups.[113] The groups that held out against the bilateral ceasefires stood firm on their unwavering demands for political settlement with the government. If ceasefire terms had spelled out opportunities for political dialogue in the ceasefire, then the ceasefire groups could broach the issue of federalism with the government in future talks. Since the

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[110] South, "Political Transition in Myanmar: A New Model for Democratization," 239.

[111] Dukalskis, "Why Do Some Insurgent Groups Agree to Cease-Fires While Others Do Not?" 2.

[112] Smith, *Ethnic Groups in Burma*: *Development, Democracy, and Human Rights*, 44, 60, 127.

[113] Walton, "Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma," 889.

government rejected the responsibility of initiating this political dialogue, some groups were not convinced to accept these bilateral ceasefires for economic reasons. Their desire for political dialogue overshadowed their need for economic development.[114]

Due to the geography of Myanmar, the ethnic hinterlands were somewhat isolated from central Myanmar, which was the base of the military government and the Burman majority. With some distance and separation from the central government, some minority groups were able to build their own communities. This condition was a significant contributor to the minority groups' desire for federalism. In building their own communities, these minority groups put time and effort into protecting and administering their territories. To hold on to their territory and their assets, the groups refused to agree to bilateral ceasefires with the government.[115] The sunk costs were too much for them to give up their territory. The weakness with this argument is that many groups settled on ceasefires to purposely protect their territories as the government gave them the right to hold on to their land.

The last prominent factor that contributed to groups abstaining from bilateral ceasefires was the longer, pent-up animosity toward the government that the older armed groups experienced. The frustrations with the central government that the groups faced over the years progressed into a natural distrust of the government.[116] The minority groups' grievances against the government included constant refusal for political dialogue toward a federal union, violent conflicts between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic minority groups, and unfair treatment compared to the Burman majority. The animosity between the two parties was too much for the government and some minority groups to agree to a bilateral ceasefire.

By the mid-1990s, the Karen National Union was one of the few remaining groups that had not agreed to a bilateral ceasefire with the central government. The

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[114] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 14.

[115] Tom Kramer, "Ethnic Conflict and Land Rights in Myanmar," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (2015): 360–61, 371.

[116] Mikael Gravers, "Disorder As Order: The Ethno-Nationalist Struggle of the Karen in Burma/Myanmar—A Discussion of the Dynamics of an Ethnicized Civil War and Its Historical Roots," *Journal of Burma Studies* 19, no. 1 (2015): 29, 33–36, 66.

economic incentives that the government offered did not persuade these non-ceasefire groups; rather, the principal factor that prevented them from agreeing to the ceasefires was the lack of a political settlement between the central government and the ethnic minority groups.[117] One of the enduring policies of the Democratic Alliance of Burma, which the KNU was a prominent member, was to make ceasefires with the government "contingent on commitment to future political dialogue" toward a federal union.[118] As a larger, stronger group within the alliance, the KNU was able to stick to the Democratic Alliance of Burma's ideals and not give into the military junta government while other smaller or weaker groups were enticed by the economic incentives. With the SLORC government's claim as the temporary caretaker government during the bilateral ceasefire negotiation process and its subsequent lack of movement on the political desires of the ethnic minority groups, the KNU continued to refuse the bilateral ceasefire deal.[119] Alexander Dukalskis adds that the KNU had a "well-developed ideology that was infused with… nationwide federalism with autonomy guarantees" and held that as a sacred value that it could not compromise.[120]

D. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The political context changed dramatically in the late 1980s when the State Law and Order Restoration Council replaced Ne Win's government. Due to Ne Win's socialist policies, Myanmar was in dire economic conditions, but the disadvantaged ethnic minority groups in the frontier areas were hurting even more than the Burman majority. After China stopped assisting the Communist Party of Burma, the communist ethnic bloc split into multiple groups. The SLORC regime took advantage of this situation and was able to establish bilateral ceasefires with many of these ethnic minority groups. Economic interests drove most groups to accept ceasefire terms.[121] Through the late 1980s and 1990s, the government continued to make these deals with the groups one by one with its

[117] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 14.

[118] Ibid., 22.

[119] Thawnghmung, *Beyond Armed Resistance*, 54.

[120] Dukalskis, "Why Do Some Insurgent Groups Agree to Cease-Fires While Others Do Not?" 18.

[121] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 120.

divide-and-rule strategy, but there were holdout groups that stood their ground based on political ideology. Ultimately, these groups were not swayed by the government's economic incentives but abstained due to their political ideology and desire for a federal union.[122] While the economy under that political context created an environment conducive to economic deals with the government, some of the groups had a strong political ideology that prevented the SLORC government from making bilateral ceasefires with all ethnic minority groups.

By providing the context of the bilateral ceasefires' content and strategy, that past iteration can be compared and contrasted with the current nationwide ceasefire process. The ceasefires that the ethnic minority groups agreed to were verbal agreements, which maintained their right to retain arms and their territories and were negotiated in an opaque manner. The SLORC government combined a strategy of limiting resources to these ethnic minority groups with a divide-and-rule strategy to take on each group individually.

Additionally, the driving factors of the ethnic minority groups that led to the decision whether to enter a bilateral ceasefire or not were laid out to see how that affected the groups during the nationwide ceasefire process. The two incentives at play were the economic factors and the political ideology and the decisions were based on how much the ethnic minority groups valued one over the other. These motives provide context for how the ethnic minority groups responded to the government's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2011–2015.

[122] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 14.

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III. NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE PROCESS (2011–2015)

After the multiple waves of ceasefires negotiated by the military government with most of the ethnic minority groups, there was a fragile peace between both parties. Martin Smith suggests that "by any international standards, the achievement of ceasefires with so many insurgent groups, in one of the most conflict-torn countries in Asia, has to date been unexpectedly smooth and stable."[123] Much of the economic and social development that was promised did not come to fruition though. Due to the broken promises of the ceasefires, the bilateral ceasefires slowly disintegrated following the government's decision to push a burdensome military reintegration plan called the Border Guard Forces deal onto the ethnic minority groups.

The period of relative peace began following the ceasefires of the 1990s and lasted until some critical events that culminated with the Kachin conflict with the Tatmadaw. The military junta government forced upon the population a new constitution in 2008 that would embed the military's influence in government. This event was followed by a 2009 ultimatum from the government to the ethnic minority groups to integrate into the national military under the Border Guard Forces initiative. The deadline for this ultimatum, which eliminated the existing bilateral ceasefires if the ethnic minority groups did not agree to the BGF deal, was just before the November 2010 elections for the new government. These events culminated in the conflict between the KIO and the Tatmadaw soon after the new Thein Sein administration took over in early 2011. This timeline of events represents the devolution of the bilateral ceasefires that led to the nationwide ceasefire process.

The experiences of both bilateral ceasefire groups and non-ceasefire groups, with a focus on the Kachin Independence Organization and the Karen National Union groups as examples, will present different perspectives of the groups' experiences. The first section will describe the factors that led to the bilateral ceasefire groups' distrust of the

[123] Martin Smith, "Ethnic Participation and National Reconciliation in Myanmar: Challenges in a Transitional Landscape," in *Myanmar's Long Road to National Reconciliation,* ed. Trevor Wilson (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 53.

government and resistance to signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. In the next section, the nationwide ceasefire process will be explained along with the differences with the bilateral ceasefire negotiations of the late 1980s and 1990s. Lastly, these two diverse experiences will provide an analysis of the various ethnic minority groups' motivations that led to the decision whether to sign the NCA in 2015.

The analysis leads to two conclusions: Due to the lack of promised economic development, minimal movement on the political dialogue for a federal union, and the renewal of violence between the ethnic minority groups and the Tatmadaw, most bilateral ceasefire groups stood with the Kachin Independence Organization in not signing the NCA due to their built-up mistrust of the government. On the other hand, the non-bilateral ceasefire groups, including the Karen National Union, did not experience the level of built-up mistrust of the government; rather, they bought into the Thein Sein administration's new nationwide ceasefire process, which was an innovative approach compared to the bilateral ceasefire negotiations, and thus signed the NCA.

A. FACTORS LEADING TO OPPOSING THE NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

The reality of the economic development and the political dialogue that occurred for the bilateral ceasefire groups slowly disintegrated into the violent aftermath following the ethnic minority groups' rejection of the government's Border Guard Forces deal. There are three major factors that led to the bilateral ceasefire groups opposing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, which are the broken promises of economic development and political dialogue, the BGF deal that the government forced upon the ethnic groups, and the violence that followed the breakdown of the bilateral ceasefires. The ethnic minority groups that agreed to the bilateral ceasefires in the late 1980s and 1990s did so because the economic factors overrode their political ideology.[124] While the economic motives did outweigh the desire for political dialogue, those groups still had the desire to engage in political dialogue with the government. Additionally, the transition from a military junta regime to a more democratic government resulted in the

[124] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma,* 120.

unexpected mandate that the ethnic minority groups join the national military. Lastly, due to the bilateral ceasefire groups' decision to reject the government's deal, several groups resumed violent conflict with the Tatmadaw.[125] These three factors will be discussed, as they are the primary reasons for the bilateral ceasefire groups in rejecting the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Due to the combination of these factors, these groups lost trust in the government and held skepticism toward the nationwide ceasefire process. These sections will each culminate with a more focused case study of the Kachin Independence Organization to show how these factors affected a specific ethnic minority group that agreed to bilateral ceasefires in the 1990s.

1. Broken Promises

The ethnic minority groups that accepted the bilateral ceasefires did so mostly for the benefit of economic development and political dialogue for a federal union, but these turned out to be broken promises in the end. Under the bilateral ceasefires, the basic provision of minimal violence held throughout this period, but the promised economic development did not benefit the ethnic communities directly and the political struggle of the armed ethnic groups for a federal union remained at a standstill. The military government "maintained that it was an interim administration and therefore not able to discuss political matters."[126] The protracted National Convention process taken by the interim government highlighted this discrepancy even more as there was no opportunity to discuss the ethnic groups' desire for a federal union.

The economic improvements that did come to the ceasefire areas were not evenly distributed to the local communities. While the Border Area Development Program assisted with the improvement of frontier infrastructure with the construction of roads, bridges, and other key infrastructure projects, most of these developments benefited the central government more so than the ethnic minorities.[127] For instance, these roads and bridges made it easier for the military to gain access to the ethnic communities and gave

[125] Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements*, 13.

[126] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 4.

[127] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 50–51.

them additional mobility throughout the ethnic hinterlands. The other potentially valuable economic projects disproportionately benefited the central government or foreign companies instead. The ethnic communities did not get their fair share of the profits from the resources extracted from their territories, such as teak, jade, and hydroelectric power, as the central government had the authority to tax all of these resources.[128] Additionally, foreign companies that had ties to the political elite received many of the contracts for resource extraction of these regions.[129] As Mandy Sadan explains, these ceasefires "allowed the Myanmar army to penetrate new areas that had previously resisted that penetration, while also enabling them to engage in the preferential exploitation of natural resources."[130] The reality of the economic developments in the ceasefire areas did not match the original expectations of the ethnic minority groups.

Due to the military government's stance that it would not conduct any political dialogue, there was little hope that there would be a political solution under the bilateral ceasefires. During the bilateral ceasefire period, the ethnic minority groups were not demanding secession; they just desired autonomy for the ethnic minority regions under a federal union to self-govern some of their political affairs and establish a system in which they could receive a fair share of their own resources.[131] The prospects for political dialogue did not materialize as the military government kept on dragging out the constitution-drafting process and holding on firmly to the reins of political power. The State Peace and Development Council was still claiming it was a transitional caretaker government and would address the political dialogue issue once the new elected government was in place.[132] As the International Crisis Group affirms, the "basic problem from the outset with the ceasefires was the lack of a process to turn these security agreements into lasting peace."[133] Although liaison offices were set up to resolve disagreements between the two parties, the agreements did not lead to any further

[128] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 14.

[129] Ibid., 15.

[130] Mandy Sadan, "Ongoing Conflict in Kachin State," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2015): 250.

[131] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 5.

[132] Thawnghmung, *Beyond Armed Resistance*, 54.

[133] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 5.

political dialogue.[134] Thus, the movement toward a federal union was forestalled during the bilateral ceasefire period.

Under the governance of the military government, the level of violence against the ethnic minority groups declined with the establishment of the bilateral ceasefires. Despite this reduction in violence, however, few of the ceasefire groups actively supported the central government.[135] When the early ceasefire groups had agreed to the bilateral agreements, the government official who the groups trusted most was General Khin Nyunt, who was the architect of the bilateral ceasefires. Due to disagreements between the junta regime and Khin Nyunt, the central government ousted Khin Nyunt in 2004 from his position as head of Military Intelligence as well as the entire Military Intelligence apparatus.[136] The ethnic minority groups with bilateral ceasefire agreements worried that this event would upset the tenuous balance of their arrangements with the government.[137] There was no major disruption, however, in any of the arranged bilateral ceasefires, and all groups, with the exception of the armed wing of the Karenni National Progress Party, maintained their respective ceasefire agreements.

The Kachin narrative mirrors that of most of the bilateral ceasefire groups. Like most of the ethnic minority groups that agreed to the bilateral ceasefires, the Kachin group endured a similar experience that included limited economic development as well as no movement on the political front. By signing a ceasefire in 1993, the KIO was one of the last major groups to accept ceasefire terms with the government, but as one of the major groups, the group has much influence in the nationwide ceasefire process.

The economic development that occurred in the Kachin state did not materialize into a direct community benefit; rather, the profits from lucrative projects went to foreign companies or directly to the central government. A 2013 Transnational Institute policy

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[134] Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements*, 10.

[135] Lawrence E. Cline, "Insurgency in Amber: Ethnic Opposition Groups in Myanmar," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, nos. 3–4 (September–December 2009): 587.

[136] In 2003, Khin Nyunt became the military junta's prime minister, but his term came to an unexpected end a year later due to divergences with Than Shwe's policies. He was accused of corruption, placed under house arrest, and many of his supporters were either jailed or purged.

[137] Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements*, 11.

briefing that explored the Kachin ceasefire experience reveals "in economic terms, the strategic and financial importance of the Kachin region dramatically increased toward the end of the SPDC era… [which was] accentuated by the number of major economic agreements with China."[138] Jade mines in the region came under government control and regime-backed companies were given comprehensive business contracts across the region.[139] One project that raised the ire of the Kachin people was plans for a hydropower plant at the Myitsone Dam. The project agreed to by the Myanmar government and a Chinese company, the China Power Investment Corporation, in 2009 amounted to $3.6 billion.[140] Minimal economic benefits went to the local population and most of the area's inhabitants were pushed out of their homes. Protests over the dam as well as other government injustices fueled the discontented sentiments of the Kachin people. Mandy Sadan highlights that the "responses to these [Chinese-owned hydropower plants], not least of which was a perception of the progressive exclusion of local to foreign economic interests in the exploitation of the region's natural resources, continued to undermine the notion that the ceasefire and current processes of political reform were capable of delivering substantive, positive economic and political change."[141]

2. Unexpected Ultimatum

Reverting back to the general factors that led to bilateral ceasefire groups' mistrust of the government, along with the broken promises of the bilateral ceasefire experience, the government demanded that the ceasefire groups integrate into the Tatmadaw. This unexpected ultimatum canceled the ceasefire agreement for most groups. The development of the new constitution in 2008 that led to the government's decision to enforce this Border Guard Forces deal, which put the ethnic minority groups in a difficult

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[138] Transnational Institute, "The Kachin Crisis: Peace Must Prevail," *Transnational Institute*, Burma Policy Briefing no. 10 (March 2013): 4.

[139] Transnational Institute, "Conflict or Peace? Ethnic Unrest Intensifies in Burma," *Transnational Institute*, Burma Policy Briefing no. 7 (June 2011): 3.

[140] Jürgen Haacke, *Myanmar and the United States: Prospects for a Limited Security Partnership* (Sydney: The United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, November 2015), 12.

[141] Sadan, "Ongoing Conflict in Kachin State," 251.

position. Again, the KIO experience will provide a more in-depth look at the BGF deal aftermath.

The Tatmadaw took several steps toward molding the government in a more democratic image, but outsiders viewed the transition as disingenuous and self-interested.[142] While the military junta government formed a National Convention in January 1993 to discuss the basic principles of a new constitution, which would be the basis of the new electoral government system, there was no forward movement on the document until almost a decade later. The military government received much international criticism and pressure following the 2003 Depayin massacre, in which an allegedly State Peace and Development Council government-sponsored mob murdered over 70 members of the National League for Democracy political party.[143] This event prompted an expedited drafting process of the constitution, thus the Tatmadaw outlined a seven-step roadmap to discipline-flourishing democracy. This roadmap included reconvening the National Convention, drafting a constitution, holding a national referendum on the new constitution, conducting fair and free elections, and building a democratic state with elected representatives. Donald Seekins claims that the "constitutional drafting process [was] a delaying tactic to offset domestic and foreign demands for genuine political liberalization," so despite the SPDC's intention to follow this roadmap, the public and international community perceived the government to be delaying as much as possible in this slow, drawn-out process.[144] The government finally announced in February 2008 that there would be a referendum on the new constitution scheduled for 10 May of that year.

The referendum vote on the new constitution coincided with one of Myanmar's largest natural disasters in recent history. Cyclone Nargis devastated the country in early May, immediately preceding the vote. The government deflected questions of rescheduling the referendum vote as it planned to proceed with the vote. Additionally, the

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[142] Kyaw Yin Hlaing, "Understanding Recent Political Changes in Myanmar," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 34, no. 2 (2012): 204.

[143] South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 106; Charney, *A History of Modern Burma*, 190–91.

[144] Donald Seekins, "Myanmar in 2008: Hardship, Compounded," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 1 (2009): 170.

Myanmar government refused any humanitarian assistance from the international community to help with the national emergency as it claimed that the disaster efforts were a matter of national sovereignty. Both the government's response to Cyclone Nargis and the decision to maintain the referendum's original date were met with widespread criticism and protests; however, the SPDC followed through with the vote.[145] The contentious referendum results reported that 98.12 percent of qualified voters participated and that the "yes" vote was 92.48 percent.[146] There were allegations of incomplete polling lists, pre-marked voting tickets, and proxy votes for military personnel and civil servants that surrounded these questionable results.[147] The overall referendum process amid the Cyclone Nargis disaster supported the argument that the military still retained and desired control of the government and also questioned whether the regime's efforts were really genuine or out of self-interest.

While the Tatmadaw responded to calls for a more democratic government with the new constitution in 2008, the military influence in the government was still heavy-handed. The new constitution itself had many stipulations that preserved many of the military prerogatives in place, even within a democratically elected government. First, the military maintained complete autonomy over its own affairs. The Tatmadaw had complete control over its own budget and remains independent of civilian oversight.[148] Second, the commander-in-chief maintained a lot of the power he had in the previous government. With the ability to appoint many of the critical Cabinet members, such as the ministers of defense, home affairs, and border affairs, and the sovereign authority in national state of emergencies, the senior military officer had authorities that rivaled the president. Third, the constitution allowed the commander-in-chief to appoint 25 percent

[145] Tin Maung Maung Than, "Myanmar in 2008: Weathering the Storm," *Southeast Asian Affairs (2009):* 197.

[146] Michael F. Martin, "Burma's 2010 Elections: Implications of the New Constitution and Election Laws," *Congressional Research Service*, CRS Report for Congress, April 29, 2010, 4.

[147] Than, "Myanmar in 2008: Weathering the Storm," 204.

[148] Roger Lee Huang, "Re-thinking Myanmar's Political Regime: Military Rule in Myanmar and Implications for Current Reforms," *Contemporary Politics* 19, no. 3 (2013): 257; Vikram Nehru, *Myanmar's Military Keeps Firm Grip on Democratic Transition* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2, 2015), http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/06/02/myanmar-s-military-keeps-firm-grip-on-democratic-transition/i9d7.

of both houses of national parliament with military members and with a 75 percent majority vote required for amending the constitution, this scenario gave the military members of parliament an effective veto over any proposed constitutional changes.[149] Last, an "immunity clause" protected the military and all government personnel from being persecuted for any act carried out "in the execution of their respective duties."[150] Due to these constitutional provisions, the military retained much of its influence in the new government.

One of the most influential additions to the constitution that negatively affected ethnic ceasefires was the Border Guard Forces amendment. In April 2009, the central government mandated that all ceasefire groups be incorporated into the national army structure under the BGF or the ceasefire agreements would expire. Each battalion would consist of 326 troops from the ceasefire group and 30 from the Tatmadaw, and one of the three commanding officers would be from the Myanmar army.[151] These integrated battalions with Tatmadaw forces and leadership would allow more government influence on the ceasefire groups. With the ethnic armed groups broken up into smaller units and under Tatmadaw control, they would lose much of their military autonomy. Another stipulation of this deal was that if the ethnic groups did not agree to it, they would not be allowed to contest the 2010 elections as an ethnic political party. The BGF structure did not meet any of the ethnic minority groups' political demands and they would be giving up much of their autonomy for nominal gains. This situation put ceasefire groups in a bind: either they would lose autonomy and hope for political changes, or they would lose security from a nullified ceasefire agreement. This demand added to the ethnic minority groups' distrust of the government and contributed to an escalation of their pent-up tensions. The government won out in either scenario as it could solidify the military's influence in the new government with ethnic groups pushed out of the political system or it could add to its military forces' strength.

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[149] MacDonald, "From Military Rule to Electoral Authoritarianism," 24.

[150] Than, "Myanmar in 2008," 202.

[151] Smith, "Ethnic Politics in Myanmar," 219.

The government gave a deadline date of September 1, 2010 by which the ceasefire arrangements would expire, only two months before the national elections in November 2010. This expiration date was not a coincidence as the Tatmadaw's goal was to ensure political victory for the military in the new democratically elected government. The tough predicament that the government placed on the ethnic minority groups would be advantageous for the military. Despite the severe nature of this demand, many small groups joined the BGF while those that disagreed created their own breakaway factions that continued to resist. The major bilateral ceasefire groups, including the KIO, however, wholly resisted the government's demands.[152] Larger groups that still desired autonomy and saw little hope for political dialogue rejected the BGF compromise. With the passing of the deadline, the bilateral ceasefires were terminated due to the ethnic minority groups' refusal to agree to the BGF arrangement and the military solidified its control of the new government.

Even with the failure of the government's Border Guard Forces initiative, the military junta pushed forth with the national elections. As many ethnic political parties were marginalized, banned, and outnumbered, the military scored a huge victory with the elections in late 2010. There was a noticeable political shift as President Thein Sein took over the reins of the government. This system was a more democratically looking government as there were elections for the legislative and executive branches. As a former military general, however, Thein Sein had many connections to the prior military regime. Additionally, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), a proxy political party for the military, dominated these elections and won a majority of the parliamentary seats. The boycott of the elections by the military's opposition party, the NLD, facilitated the USDP's overwhelming victory in these elections. The heavy military influence aroused skepticism for the government's legitimacy as a democratically elected one.[153] Amid these concerns, Thein Sein took steps toward a more liberal approach to his

[152] Five major ethnic armed groups refused the BGF deal, including the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the New Mon State Party (NMSP), the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Karen Peace Council (KPC), and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA).

[153] Xiaolin Guo, "Political Developments in Myanmar in Light of the 2010 Elections," Institute for Security and Development Policy, Asia Paper, March 2011, 7.

policies. He implemented many liberal reforms, including freeing political prisoners, loosening the tight government control over the media, and reaching out to Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the NLD. Kyaw Yin Hlaing suggests that under the new government, a "new era of political openness has begun."[154] The military junta eliminated the bilateral ceasefire construct prior to the new government taking office in 2011, which allowed newly elected President Thein Sein to take a different approach to dealing with the ethnic ceasefire issue. In this political context of a heavily military-influenced government and nullified bilateral ceasefires, Thein Sein attempted to take on the ethnic minority issue once again with a clean slate.

Looking at the KIO experience specifically, there were some additional details that made its situation unique. On the political front, there was little progress made by the Kachin minority. There were no direct calls for the government to initiate political dialogue for a federal union as collaboration with the Myanmar government became socially acceptable among Kachin elite.[155] As the central government moved closer toward becoming a democratically elected one, the Kachin leaned into the potential opportunities that the new government could provide. The Kachin leaders pushed their objectives through the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) as they sought to be included in the new political structure. With many of the political party leaders coming from the KIO leadership, the group still represented many of the same values as those of the KIO. As Nick Farrelly states, "Despite the absence of political dialogue for a federal union, the Kachin maintained fervent support of the nationalist cause due to their passionate defense of Kachin language and culture and widely-held Christian faith."[156]

Many of the changes implemented by the government frustrated the bilateral ceasefire groups, especially the KIO. With respect to the Border Guard Forces deal, the government singled out the KIO. While many different armed groups refused the BGF deal, the government relaxed its BGF mandate on some of the larger groups like the

[154] Hlaing, "Understanding Recent Political Changes in Myanmar,"198.

[155] Nicholas Farrelly, "Ceasing Ceasefire? Kachin Politics beyond the Stalemate," in *Myanmar's Transition*: *Openings, Obstacles and Opportunities*, ed. Nick Cheesman, Monique Skidmore, and Trevor Wilson (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), 55.

[156] Ibid., 56.

UWSA; however, the KIO in particular did not get a reprieve from the central government.[157] The Kachin minority group's political representation was barred from running in the 2010 elections due to the fact that they had refused to accept the BGF requirement; the government rejected the registration of the KIO-backed KSPP as well as two other Kachin-based political parties.[158] The International Crisis Group reports "KIO leaders were surprised and deeply unhappy that, having cooperated with all stages of the government's political roadmap [National Convention], the border guard demand had suddenly been imposed on them."[159] Additionally, Kachin leaders alleged that the military government "deliberately planned to marginalize the Kachin cause during the change from the SPDC to Thein Sein governments."[160] Martin Smith states "the sense of marginalization and disenfranchisement among many Kachin people was very deep."[161]

3. Devolving into Violence

The ultimatum of the Border Guard Forces deal acted as a triggering event that set off the violence by the Tatmadaw against some ethnic minority groups; in particular, the Kachin Independence Organization's experience with the fallout of its bilateral ceasefire with the government is a prime example of the government's reversal on the peace process. The KIO's refusal to join the Border Guard Forces terminated its agreement and added some political hindrances as well. The government forced the KIO's political arm out of the 2010 elections. Shortly thereafter, conflict reignited between the Tatmadaw and Kachin forces. These clashes impeded the Thein Sein administration's nationwide ceasefire process and added to the KIO's and other bilateral ceasefire groups' resentment toward the central government.

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[157] Martin Smith, "Reflections on the Kachin Ceasefire: A Cycle of Hope and Disappointment," in *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar*, ed. Mandy Sadan (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2016), 85–86.

[158] Transnational Institute, "Conflict or Peace? Ethnic Unrest Intensifies in Burma," 5.

[159] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 6.

[160] Transnational Institute, "The Kachin Crisis: Peace Must Prevail," 4.

[161] Smith, "Reflections on the Kachin Ceasefire," 89.

Due to the government's abrupt BGF directive, many of the smaller ethnic minority groups jumped at the opportunity to be a part of the Tatmadaw. Some of the larger groups saw through the military government's intentions and resisted the demanding offer. Due to this dynamic, there existed some factions within the larger groups that wanted to take the government deal and went against their larger groups' decision. In August 2009, tensions flared when the Tatmadaw went into the Kokang region in northern Shan state to support a small contingent of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army that supported the BGF requirement against the larger group.[162] This violence ultimately sparked the larger conflict that would follow in the Kachin regions. After the deadline date of September 1, 2010 passed, the bilateral ceasefire that the KIO had with the central government was no more. The BGF deal became a flare-up for the ethnic tensions as the issues revolving around the majority-minority relationship resurfaced. The bilateral ceasefires collapsed due to the ethnic minority groups' refusal to agree to the BGF arrangement.

Regarding the Kachin conflict, while the ceasefire period led to a decrease in violence in the area, a secondary background effect led to a Kachin landscape that was ripe for war. Due to the bilateral ceasefire, the most noticeable benefit of the bilateral ceasefire for the Kachin community was the increased integration of the Kachin state to Yangon. After about a decade under the ceasefire, the Kachin areas were better connected than prior to the agreement with improved transportation links and more opportunities for travel.[163] This ease of mobility throughout the country allowed for many Kachin people to travel and find opportunities outside of their home state. With this level of interconnectedness between the Kachin state and the central government, there was a tenuous peace between the Tatmadaw and the KIO. During the ceasefire period, however, the military government expanded its troop presence in Kachin State by building up its forces along the ceasefire area borders. The Tatmadaw increased its presence in the state by over 50 army battalions.[164] This action led to militarization of these borders, which

[162] Transnational Institute, "Conflict or Peace? Ethnic Unrest Intensifies in Burma," 5.

[163] Farrelly, "Ceasing Ceasefire? Kachin Politics beyond the Stalemates," 56.

[164] Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," 23.

included armed troop patrols and sentries, and prevented significant improvements in economic development of the areas.[165] Thus, this tentative peace allowed for the build-up of military forces on both sides; however, ceasefire was not the ultimate goal of the KIO, so even though some economic benefits resulted from this bilateral ceasefire and there was a fragile cessation of violence between the two groups, this agreement did not allow for a way to implement a proper process of political reform.[166]

Following the end of the bilateral ceasefires, there remained a violence-free period when the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was proposed, but the Tatmadaw reengaged violent conflict with the KIO. This temporary truce lasted until June 2011 when fighting broke out unexpectedly between the Kachin army and the Myanmar military. A flashpoint occurred on June 9, 2011 when a prisoner exchange resulted in the death of a Kachin soldier. This event incited clashes between the government troops and the Kachin forces. These clashes progressively escalated throughout the summer of 2011 and onwards. The Kachin conflict has resulted in many casualties and the United Nations estimates over 100,000 civilians have been internally displaced.[167] Escalation of the conflict led to the Tatmadaw resorting to aerial attacks on the China-Myanmar border town of Laiza, which was the unofficial headquarters of the KIO, in late 2012 to 2013. The violence between these two parties made the peace process more difficult as many ethnic minority groups questioned the sincerity of the Thein Sein administration since "such military and political targeting of the Kachin region appeared to contradict the peace and reconciliation efforts."[168] The conflict endured through the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and made the peace process more difficult as the KIO was one of the major groups abstaining from the agreement.

[165] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 4.

[166] Sadan, "Ongoing Conflict in Kachin State," 248.

[167] Ibid., 253.

[168] Smith, "Reflections on the Kachin Ceasefire," 90.

B. FACTORS LEADING TO SIGNING THE NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

For the groups that did not accept bilateral ceasefires with the SLORC regime, they did so due to their political ideology.[169] Their desire for political dialogue for a federal union was far greater than that of economic benefits. The Karen National Union represents one of these groups and provides an example of how its strong beliefs drove its decision not to negotiate with the government. Along with this case study, the framework and process of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement provides another factor to why some groups ultimately signed the NCA. The nationwide ceasefire approach was vastly different from that of the bilateral ceasefires in the late 1980s and 1990s. The political ideology and the structural differences that the nationwide ceasefire process introduced provide the background for the ethnic minority groups' decision to agree to the NCA.

1. Political Ideology

A case study of the Karen National Union, a non-bilateral ceasefire group, demonstrates how its political ideology was not compromised by incentives for economic development. The KNU is one of the major groups that rejected the government's bilateral ceasefire overtures during the 1990s and 2000s. The group's desire for a federal union remained a sacred value to the KNU as well as other minority groups, so it was vital for the government to include this element in the nationwide ceasefire process.

The ethnic minority groups that held out from a bilateral ceasefire with the government in the late 1980s and 1990s had one common factor: their political ideology. The ethnic alliance National Democratic Front's desire for the formation of a federal union drove those groups' continued insistence on resolving political problems by political means for a solution acceptable to both sides.[170] While each non-ceasefire group may have slightly varying views on what each specifically asks of the central government, they all ultimately desire "dialogue to discuss the possibility of a genuinely

[169] Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 14.

[170] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar Backgrounder: Ethnic Minority Politics," Crisis Group Asia Report no. 52 (7 May 2003): 4–6.

federal state" leading to a "new union based on the spirit of Panglong, namely the principles of equality, self-determination, and democracy."[171] This desire for nationwide federalism with autonomy guarantees is embodied in the Karen experience, which is presented below.

After the ceasefires in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the KNU remained one of the last major ethnic armed groups with which the government had not agreed to a bilateral ceasefire by the mid-1990s. The Karen resistance to the bilateral agreement held throughout the two decades of the SLORC/SPDC regime. At the beginning of this resistance during the bilateral ceasefire period, General Bo Mya, a long time Karen leader, issued a manifesto under which the KNU would continue to fight the Tatmadaw until it achieved its political objective of a federal union.[172] The KNU's desire for political dialogue with a legitimate government prevented forward movement on a ceasefire with the military junta regime.

General Bo Mya played a substantive role in solidifying the Karen minority's stance against these bilateral ceasefires. Bo Mya was the leader of the KNU, its president from 1976 to 2000, and the commander-in-chief of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). His ability to bring the various Karen groups together into one single entity under a "coherent sense of identity" labeled him as one of the most successful KNU leaders of his time.[173] His staunch views on federalism caused him to remain opposed to the bilateral ceasefire as he conflated the idea of accepting the agreement with defeat of the KNU and its fight for autonomy.

Until the early 1990s, the KNU remained one of the most powerful armed ethnic groups in Myanmar since it was located in an isolated region along the Thailand-Myanmar border and was seen by most Karen people as the most legitimate and popular Karen organization as it was the largest one.[174] With that strong influence, Bo Mya

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[171] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar Backgrounder: Ethnic Minority Politics," 6.

[172] Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," 24.

[173] Martin T. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 391.

[174] Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma: Diverse Voices, Uncertain Ends* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2008), 25.

became the leader of the National Council Union of Burma (NCUB), which was an umbrella organization for anti-junta regime groups.[175] While the KNU remained one of the steadfast groups in the NCUB with its incessant call for a federal union, the defection of the KIO from the alliance with the signing of a bilateral ceasefire with the SLORC in 1993 led to a weakening of that organization. With more defections from the group, the KNU remained one of the last large groups to resist the central government's ceasefire offers.

The Karen community was economically self-sufficient leading up to the bilateral ceasefire period, but as the other major ethnic minority groups made arrangements with the SLORC government, the Tatmadaw was able to concentrate its offensive efforts in the Karen state, which led to deteriorating conditions in the area and made it difficult for the KNU to sustain its community. As the only large ethnic organization that was located along the Thailand-Myanmar border, up to the mid-1980s, the KNU was financially self-supporting with its cross-border trade with Thailand.[176] In its headquarters of Manerplaw, the KNU built many hospitals, medical clinics, and schools for both primary and secondary education for its people. With the government's four cuts strategy, however, the Tatmadaw gradually took control of many strategic bases in the KNU's critical strongholds and started to build supply routes to those bases; subsequently, the cross-border trade between Thailand and Karen state dwindled and the Tatmadaw was able to gain a strategic positional advantage in its ongoing conflict with the KNU.[177] After Thailand adopted a constructive engagement policy toward Myanmar's central government, the geopolitical situation was no longer favorable to the KNU.

Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, the military continued to concentrate its forces on the KNU armed forces. With fewer ethnic armed groups to deal with, the SPDC was able to execute a full onslaught against the KNU. In 1997, a Tatmadaw

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[175] Thawnghmung, *Karen Revolution in Burma*, 29.

[176] Ashley South, "Conflict and Displacement in Burma/Myanmar," in *Myanmar: The State, Community, and the Environment,* ed. Monique Skidmore and Trevor Wilson (Canberra, Australia: ANU Press, 2007), 59–61.

[177] Thawnghmung, *Karen Revolution in Burma*, 28.

offensive caused the KNU to lose most of its territory.[178] These attacks alternated with talks between the KNU and the military government, but the multiple attempts at negotiations did not amount to a bilateral ceasefire in the 1990s or the 2000s.

Despite the deteriorating conditions in the Karen community, the push for political dialogue for a federal union was fervent. In 1995, about a year after the KIO signed a bilateral ceasefire with the central government, the SLORC regime urged the KNU to follow suit and enter the legal fold by renouncing its policy of armed insurrection.[179] Though the government attempted to persuade the KNU as it did with previous groups, the KNU leadership stood firm on its stance for a resolute agreement to discuss political reform before agreeing to anything with the SLORC government. The KNU valued equal rights, the right to self-determination, and the fight for federalism over economic and financial incentives. Martin Smith asserts that the "strategies of other ceasefire groups were based on a peace-through-development policy of mutual trust building [while] the KNU advanced a politics first demand."[180] Even with deteriorating social and economic conditions in the Karen region, the KNU leadership was able to advocate for its views of federal autonomy over economic gain, and thus, until the political transition, it successfully resisted the central government's tactics to bind the KNU into a bilateral ceasefire agreement.

2. Nationwide Ceasefire Framework and Process

There were major differences in the nationwide ceasefire process compared to the bilateral ceasefire process in the late 1980s and 1990s. The military junta regime's bilateral ceasefires were verbal agreements between the ethnic minority group and the government, which were done with little transparency. Additionally, the government negotiated these ceasefires individually and sequentially in order to take away the ethnic

[178] Saw David Taw, "Choosing to Engage: Strategic Considerations for the Karen National Union," *Conciliation Resources: Accord* 16 (2005): 42.

[179] Thawnghmung, *Karen Revolution in Burma*, 30.

[180] Martin Smith, "Burma: The Karen Conflict," in *Encyclopedia of Modern Ethnic Conflicts*, ed. Joseph Rudolph (London: Greenwood Press, 2003), 20.

minority groups' collective bargaining power. The description of the nationwide ceasefire process provides many examples in which the two approaches are vastly dissimilar.

Even with a political transition to a more democratically looking government,[181] the groups that were spurned refused to negotiate with the new government, which still had strong ties to the military. Under the new administration of Thein Sein, the government proceeded with a nationwide ceasefire strategy. To work toward national reconciliation, the president proposed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, an effort to bring together all armed groups under one national agreement. This ceasefire agreement differed in substance with the bilateral ceasefires with the all-inclusive nature of the agreement and promise for political dialogue. With these changes, the president hoped to bring permanent peace to the ethnic conflict that plagued his nation for over half a century. Thein Sein's different approach with negotiations occurring on foreign soil, civil society representatives involved in mediating, and a promise for political dialogue changed the strategic landscape.[182] Through many years of negotiation, the government was able to conclude a deal with the Karen National Union and many smaller groups that had not previously agreed to bilateral ceasefires; however, the groups that refused the BGF deal continued to be at war with the government.

The nationwide ceasefire proposed by Thein Sein was drastically different from the bilateral ceasefire process of the military junta regime era. Initially, Thein Sein took a two-pronged approach by appointing political leaders to conduct negotiations with the ethnic minority groups—Thein Zaw, deputy chairman of the government's Union Peace Working Committee, which was the government's ceasefire negotiating body, and former minister under the previous SPDC regime, to take on the groups that had previously agreed to a ceasefire with the government, and Aung Min, the minister of rail transportation in the new President's cabinet, to negotiate with the groups that had not reached a bilateral agreement, which included the KNU.[183] Aung Min, who operated

[181] The president that was elected, Thein Sein, was a civilian; however, he had extensive military background and much of the rest of the government was composed of former and current military members.

[182] Egreteau, "Assessing Recent Ethnic Peace Talks in Myanmar," 312.

[183] Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements*, 16–17.

under Thein Sein's direct mandate, had high public support based on built-up trust and personal relationships with some of the armed groups, but the public perceived Thein Zaw as a SPDC loyalist and hardliner regarding ceasefire agreements.[184] This negotiation process still involved cementing a bilateral ceasefire with the groups initially before moving on to the nationwide agreement. Another difference between the bilateral ceasefire and the new approach was that the government dropped the demands for the armed groups to join the BGF. The requirement for integration into the national army was a primary reason for the dissolution of the previous bilateral ceasefires, so the government's decision to take that off the table appeased many of the groups. Additionally, the central government dropped the condition that all talks must take place inside Myanmar and opened up international locations for these discussions.[185] This decision allowed the two parties to hold talks in neutral locations, such as border cities in China and Thailand, so a neutral presence would be available at these places. Most importantly, the NCA process had three elements that made it distinct from the bilateral ceasefire process: a multilateral approach, the collective nature of the ethnic minority groups, and a tiered framework of varying negotiation levels.

The first major difference between the bilateral ceasefire and the nationwide ceasefire processes was the multilateral approach. The nationwide ceasefire talks would not only be a tripartite dialogue among the government, its democratic opposition in the NLD, and the ethnic minority groups, but also a more inclusive one that involved international observers and non-governmental organizations (NGO).[186] This joint effort allowed many different voices to be heard and diffused the power the government had over the ethnic minority groups. Thus, the peace process was not seen as the government solely taking advantage of the ethnic minority groups. Aung Min continued to be the government's representative and chief negotiator in the Union Peace Working Committee, as the ethnic minority groups perceived him favorably. The Myanmar Peace Center (MPC), which was established in October 2012 and run as an NGO by the

[184] Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements*, 24.

[185] Keenan, "Burma's Ethnic Ceasefire Agreements," 1.

[186] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 23.

European Union, became the headquarters for the Union Peace Working Committee (UPWC), the government-led organization heading the nationwide ceasefire negotiations, and location of many of the ceasefire talks between all parties.[187] Government officials made up the executive committee of the MPC while technocrats conducted operations and facilitated technical aspects of the peace process. With the formation of the UPWC and the MPC, the government achieved institutionalization of the peace process.[188] This multilateral effort was significant in confidence building for all parties involved in the process.

Along with this multilateral approach, the ethnic minority groups decided to take on the government negotiations as a collective organization. The first iteration of this organization was the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC),[189] which was formed in February 2011 from a preexisting group and was open to all groups, whether they were based at state, organization, or ethnic levels. The goal of the UNFC was "to represent all armed ethnic groups during peace negotiations with the government" and demanded that the government hold direct talks with the groups collectively, not individually.[190] This strategy of collective bargaining provided the ethnic minority groups a united front against the government.[191] Later, a more formal organization was formed in November 2013 to deal with the UPWC in the nationwide ceasefire process under the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team (NCCT)[192] composed of almost all members of the UNFC.[193] This group had a similar objective of collaborating as a group to negotiate with

[187] Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements*, 18–19.

[188] N. Ganesan, "Ethnic Insurgency and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 3, no. 2 (2015): 273.

[189] The UNFC is made up of twelve ethnic armed groups (KIO, NMSP, SSPP/SSA-N, KNU, KNPP, CNF, LDU, ANC, PNLO, TNLA, WNO, MNDAA); the KNU withdrew its membership in September 2014.

[190] Kipgen, "Ethnic Nationalities and the Peace Process in Myanmar," 404–05.

[191] Ganesan, "Ethnic Insurgency and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar," 277.

[192] The NCCT is made up of members that represent sixteen ethnic armed groups (AA, ALP, ANC, CNF, DKBA, KIO, KNPP, KNU, KPC, LDU, MNDAA, NMSP, PNLO, SSPP/SSA-N, TNLA, WNO).

[193] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's Peace Process," 4–5.

the government toward a nationwide accord[194]. This collective approach was an added advantage as the "absence of such a strategy has long been the stumbling block of ethnic resistance" for the bilateral ceasefires.[195]

The last element of the ceasefire process that made these negotiations different from the bilateral ones was the tiered approach, starting at state level meetings gradually culminating in union level ones. The representatives from all the ethnic minority groups and the government met multiple times for confidence-building meetings and meaningful exchange. There was room for potential political dialogue. Since the stipulation that the military government did not act as the interim caretaker government was now defunct as the newly elected government participated in these negotiations, there could actually be some movement on the political dialogue regarding a federal union.[196] The tiered approach began with state-level peace talks, which were basically bilateral ceasefires with the ethnic minority groups, to discuss preliminary ceasefires before moving forward, negotiate cessation of the violence, and establish designated areas for the ceasefire. The government also set up liaison offices and a date for union-level talks. This first step mirrored the bilateral ceasefires of the late 1980s and early 1990s; however, these ceasefires were part of a multi-step approach that was followed by the union-level talks. At the union level, all parties would discuss more confidence-building measures, foster broader dialogue, and address specific concerns, such as political prisoners, immigration, human rights, and development issues. The process culminated at the parliamentary-level talks, which would be the signing of the NCA.

The multilateral, tiered approach coupled with the collective strategy of the ethnic minority groups allowed for a back and forth negotiation process that constituted a meaningful exchange. Beginning with a meeting that occurred in Myitkyina, Kachin State, on November 4–5, 2013, which was the first exchange between the UPWC and the NCCT with the presence of international observers from the United Nations and China,

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[194] International Crisis Group, "Building Critical Mass for Peace in Myanmar," Crisis Group Asia Report no. 287 (29 June 2017): 4.

[195] Sadan, "Ongoing Conflict in Kachin State," 252.

[196] Thawnghmung, *Beyond Armed Resistance*, 54.

the process involved multiple rounds of meetings. This first meeting ended with a joint statement that stated that both parties were "encouraged by the promising collaboration between the parties during this dialogue."[197] The negotiation process was diametrically different from the ones in the past due to the transparent nature of the talks that allowed for discussion of political dialogue toward a federal union.

C. RESPONSES OF THE ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS

The responses from the ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups during the political transition were based in opposing experiences. An analysis of these separate experiences produces two conclusions. The bilateral ceasefire groups reacted negatively to the government transition leading up to the national elections in 2010. With the discontent provoked by the BGF deal in 2009, the tension between these ethnic minority groups and the central government grew. Once the bilateral ceasefires expired and the promises under the agreements did not materialize, conflict between the Tatmadaw and the rebel forces was imminent. In contrast, the non-bilateral ceasefire groups held fast to their desire for political dialogue, and when the new approach to the nationwide ceasefire process offered that dialogue and other beneficial changes to the bilateral ceasefire process, these groups went forward with caution. The ethnic minority groups' perception of the government played a major role in the decision whether to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

1. Bilateral Ceasefire Groups

Through the experiences that the bilateral ceasefire groups had with the military government, a level of mistrust had developed that was insurmountable in the minority groups' cooperation with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The initial unfulfilled promises of economic development and political progress was the foundation of this mistrust.[198] The actions the central government took during the bilateral ceasefire period, such as the delay of the drafting of the constitution as well as the Border Guard Forces

[197] Kipgen, "Ethnic Nationalities and the Peace Process in Myanmar," 408.

[198] Gravers, "Disorder As Order: The Ethno-Nationalist Struggle of the Karen in Burma/Myanmar," 29, 33–36, 66.

deal, supplemented this apprehensive sentiment. The BGF deal brought some groups over the edge and resumed conflict between those ethnic minority groups and the Tatmadaw. The amalgamation of these factors contributed to the reason why some groups like the KIO rebuffed the NCA.

The promises that the government made with the bilateral ceasefire groups were not kept during the ceasefire period. Most of the bilateral ceasefire groups saw limited economic development. This shortfall could have been less than what these groups had expected would occur under a peaceful ceasefire. The ceasefire groups' reality did not meet their expectations. In addition to the lack of economic growth, the political dialogue for a federal union was forestalled due to the military junta's claim that it was just a temporary caretaker government. Although the ethnic minority groups' political ideology was compromised by these bilateral ceasefires, the desire for a federal union was still present in these groups. These broken promises led to a buildup of resentment against the military junta government.

Besides the broken promises of the bilateral ceasefires, there were many more actions by the government that led to the ethnic minority groups' distrust of the SLORC/SPDC regime. First, despite the military junta's claim that it would work on a new constitution to reinstall a democratic government, it did not take any substantial steps until a decade and a half into its rule in 2003 following the international backlash against the Depayin Incident—the horrendous massacre of opposition party members by an allegedly government-affiliated organization. Additional delays occurred in drafting the constitution until it was completed in 2008. Second, the way in which the constitution was ratified during Cyclone Nargis' aftermath as well as the constitutional provisions itself showed that the military still had a substantial role in the new government. The military's interests were placed before those of the people of Myanmar. Last, in the midst of the political transition in the late 2000s, the bilateral ceasefire dynamics between the military government and the ethnic minority groups changed abruptly.[199] The demand for the bilateral ceasefire groups to integrate into the Tatmadaw was an additional burden on

[199] Smith, "Ethnic Politics in Myanmar," 217–19.

the ethnic minority groups, which added to the ethnic minority groups' built-up resentment and distrust of the government.

This BGF deal was the last straw for the ethnic minority groups that were in bilateral ceasefires with the central government. The benefits of economic development through increased infrastructure projects and government-funded programs did not come to fruition and the political dialogue that would lead to a federal union did not materialize. The ceasefires did not meet the expectations of these ethnic minority groups and the government was essentially forcing the ethnic groups to take a disadvantaged deal. The military government's "insistence on the BGF scheme and the pressures that it had put on groups to agree severely undermined trust and critically damaged the fragile peace."[200] After almost two decades under unofficial bilateral ceasefires for the ethnic minority groups, there was no permanent peace between the two parties, economic opportunity was uneven at best, and regional autonomy under a federal union was still a distant future prospect.

The violence inflicted by the Tatmadaw against the KIO impeded the government's overall nationwide ceasefire process. Although the Tatmadaw was somewhat independent of the Thein Sein administration, the ethnic minority groups that were at war viewed the military and the government as the same entity. The violence between the various peace negotiations was representative of opposing realities. The conflict made the peace process more difficult as those groups questioned the sincerity and validity of the central government. Along with the built-up resentment throughout the bilateral ceasefire period, the violence added another real dimension to why some groups did not buy into the government's NCA process.

2. Non-Bilateral Ceasefire Groups

The Thein Sein administration's innovative approach to the ceasefire process took into account the ethnic minority groups' desire for political dialogue and was able to garner support for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The groups that did not accept

[200] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 5.

the bilateral ceasefires during the SLORC regime era remained true to their political ideology. Along with the promise of political dialogue in the ceasefire conditions, the nationwide ceasefire process appealed to the non-ceasefire groups' by gaining their trust through a transparent and comprehensive approach.

As seen from the Karen experience, its political ideology remained the primary reason for continually rejecting the bilateral ceasefires from the central government. Economic and financial benefits could not outweigh the ethnic minority group's fight for federalism and right to self-determination. As the Karen wanted to negotiate with a legitimate government, the military junta's claim that it was just an interim caretaker government was non-negotiable for the Karen. The KNU leadership's views of accepting a bilateral ceasefire as a defeat for its struggle for autonomy added to this steadfast understanding that negotiations were not possible. Even with economic hardship, the KNU's political ideology overcame any desires to succumb to the military government. Thus, with the new ceasefire approach by the Thein Sein administration of promising political dialogue once a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed, the KNU came back to the negotiating table.

While the KIO's bilateral ceasefire devolved into violence with the government, the Karen experience was civil. With the change to a more democratically looking government and Thein Sein's outlook for a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the Karen formally agreed to an initial ceasefire in January 2012. The KNU emphasized, however, that the "success of [the] ceasefire agreement would be measured by how political talks progressed."[201] This agreement laid the foundation for all involved parties to implement the NCA framework effectively.

The new approach to the nationwide ceasefire process and the differences between the bilateral ceasefires of the late 1980s and 1990s contributed to the non-ceasefire groups' decision to sign the NCA. While the bilateral ceasefires were verbal agreements between just the ethnic minority group and the central government, the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement included multiple parties in the negotiation process.

[201] Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and Its Importance to the Success of Democracy," 25.

The multilateral effort created a mutual trust between all parties during the process, which was a strong confidence-building measure for the ethnic minority groups. With the collective efforts of the ethnic minority groups, there was strength in numbers, whereas in the past, the government would pick one group off at a time with its divide-and-conquer strategy. This collective negotiation strategy added to the ethnic minority groups' trust in the nationwide ceasefire process. The tiered approach for the nationwide ceasefire added a logical progression for the government to get the ethnic minority groups on the same page. By starting at the state level, where initial ceasefires would be agreed to, and gradually working toward a nationwide effort, the whole process added a level of validity that the past bilateral ceasefires did not have. Lastly, due to the stipulation that political dialogue would be a condition in this new process, the non-ceasefire groups came back to the negotiating table.

The dichotomy of the two ethnic minority groups—the Kachin resuming fighting with the Tatmadaw and the Karen finally agreeing to a ceasefire—led to the splintering of the collective organization of ethnic minority groups. While some groups sided with the KNU to support the NCA process, other groups remained hesitant and skeptical of the government as the Tatmadaw continued to conduct attacks on the Kachin territories and forces. Some of the groups siding with the KIO saw the government's approach as an iteration of the divide-and-rule strategy used in the past.[202] The military conflict with the KIO as well as the attacks in the Kokang region in early 2015 was a sign that the government was unwilling to negotiate an all-inclusive agreement. Due to the differences in ideology and approach to organizational structure and policies, in August 2014, the KNU withdrew from the UNFC organization.[203] The Karen desired to continue the NCA process and see it through to its completion. Many of the smaller groups, including the Chin National Front, All Burma Student's Democratic Front, and Restoration Council Shan State, held the same position as the KNU. Thus, on October 15, 2015, the KNU and seven other minority groups signed the NCA while the KIO and six other groups abstained.

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[202] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 21.

[203] Kipgen, "Ethnic Nationalities and the Peace Process in Myanmar," 408.

D. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Myanmar's government transformation from the military junta regime of the 1990s to a quasi-democratic government following the national election in 2010 formed the framework for the latest version of ceasefire negotiations. Though the 1990s version of the bilateral ceasefires between the central government and the ethnic minority groups did not break out into full-scale conflict, the progress toward a more permanent peace treaty stalled and fizzled. Following the failure of the government's BGF deal, those ceasefires did break down into violence-fueled conflicts between the KIO, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and some other groups. These groups ultimately abstained from President Thein Sein's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

Thein Sein had success with a handful of other ethnic minority groups, however, and convinced the KNU along with seven other minority groups to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Most of these groups did not have prior bilateral ceasefires with the government. With Thein Sein's innovative approach that utilized a multilateral negotiation process with the NCCT, starting at local levels and moving toward a national agreement, these groups bought into the NCA that for the first time offered promises of political dialogue toward a federal union.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Burmese ethnic minority groups' decisions to either sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement or abstain from it following decades of conflict and broken deals with the central government stem from the political changes in 2011. A majority of the ethnic minority groups agreed to the bilateral ceasefire arrangements during the 1980s and 1990s due to a significant shift in economic and political forces at the time with the central government taking advantage of the situation and locking these deals in place. A major political shift since 2011 has contributed to the contrasting positions of the various ethnic minority groups toward the NCA, a process that has differed from the previous bilateral ceasefire process. The first part of this chapter will summarize the findings about the two ceasefire periods and draw conclusions from these findings. With the significant political change in 2011, the Thein Sein administration-led innovative nationwide ceasefire process, which incorporated political dialogue toward a federal union, convinced some groups to sign the agreement while historical grievances and resumption of violent conflict led other groups to reject it. The next section will provide a brief overview of the current NCA process after the signing date in the context of this argument. Finally, this conclusion will address the central government's effectiveness with the NCA and its implications for the future development of Myanmar's government and society.

A. CEASEFIRE DYNAMICS DURING POLITICAL INFLECTION POINTS

There were significant changes in ceasefire dynamics during Myanmar's political inflection points, periods in which there was great upheaval in its government. The political changes in the late 1980s/early 1990s, late 2000s, as well as 2011–2015, brought new approaches to attempting to solve the ethnic minority problem with ceasefires. These changes in ceasefire dynamics during the political shifts provide a contextual background for the factors that caused some ethnic minority groups to sign or reject the government ceasefires.

The democratic protests of 1988 ended the socialist Ne Win era, but the military junta still maintained control of the central government. Despite the military control,

there was enough political and economic change to instigate a chain reaction of bilateral ceasefires between the government and many ethnic minority groups. The State Law and Order Restoration Council government was able to negotiate better deals as the ethnic minority groups lost their economic advantage as outside financial assistance declined. In subsequent waves, most of the ethnic minority groups adopted bilateral ceasefires with the military government due to their need for economic development. One by one, the ethnic armed groups agreed to the bilateral ceasefires and subsequently violence went down. Only a few holdout groups remained at the end of the process. In the end, most of the bilateral ceasefire groups saw limited economic growth opportunities and no movement on the political front through the years that the bilateral ceasefires were in effect. The SLORC government was therefore able to consolidate its power by neutralizing the bulk of the ethnic armed resistance.[204]

During the SLORC/SPDC era, the military junta claimed it was only a transitional caretaker government and stated that a new constitution would establish the new government.[205] For years, the junta delayed the constitutional drafting process, but in 2003, sparked by a controversial incident called the Depayin Massacre in which over 70 members of the political opposition were brutally murdered, the military took the process more seriously. A questionable popular vote in 2008 ratified the resulting constitution that laid the foundation for the election in 2010.[206] The new constitution also created another situation with the Border Guard Forces deal. The government's attempt to finalize its neutralization process of the ethnic minority groups, which would eliminate the ethnic threat, backfired when most of the major groups refused to sign the deal. The failure of this policy led to the breakdown of the bilateral ceasefires during the period leading up to the 2010 election.

Even without the ethnic minority groups cooperating with the government, the election was a political win for the military as ethnic minority groups were shut out from

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[204] Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition," 792–793; South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, 119–20; Oo and Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, 14.

[205] Thawnghmung, *Beyond Armed Resistance*, 54.

[206] Than, "Myanmar in 2008: Weathering the Storm," 204.

the ballots and the National League for Democracy boycotted the election. This election maintained the military's heavy presence in the new quasi-democratic government with a former general in charge as president and a large contingent of former and current military in the political realm. The minorities' rejection of the BGF deal coupled with the strong role of the military after the 2010 election led to the resumption of violent conflict between the Tatmadaw and several ethnic minority groups.[207] Despite the military's dominance in politics, President Thein Sein initiated a new nationwide ceasefire process in order to bring about national reconciliation.

Under Thein Sein's leadership, there was much political reform, including the freeing of many political prisoners, a more open press, and accommodation of the opposition party, the NLD.[208] This political reform led to the by-elections of 2012, which were held to fill vacant parliamentary seats, in which the NLD won 43 of 45 contested spots. The inclusion of the opposition party in the legislature was a significant step toward establishing the legitimacy of the new central government. This increased legitimacy gave the Thein Sein administration more influence in dealing with the ethnic minority issue.

Thein Sein's innovative approach with the nationwide ceasefire process was multi-tiered, multilateral, and inclusive. This approach allowed for robust negotiations between the central government and the ethnic minority groups. With the national elections approaching in November 2015, the government pushed for the signing of the NCA before then. Despite the collective organization of the ethnic minority groups under the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team, some of the groups signed the agreement while others abstained—the minority groups with previous ceasefires withheld while the ones that had not agreed to them before did so this time around. This agreement occurred

[207] International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," 4, 14; Smith, "Reflections on the Kachin Ceasefire: A Cycle of Hope and Disappointment," 85–86; Sadan, "Ongoing Conflict in Kachin State," 248.

[208] Hlaing, "Understanding Recent Political Changes in Myanmar," 206–7.

on October 15, 2015, only a month prior to the national election, which was considered the first free and fair election in Myanmar since 1990.[209]

Throughout this extensive ceasefire history in Myanmar, significant changes occurred to the agreements between the government and the ethnic minority groups during disruptions in the political arena. The bilateral ceasefires followed the democratic protests that put the SLORC junta regime in power. These remained in place while the junta ruled for almost two decades. The new constitution, which included the failed BGF deal, and the quasi-democratic elections of 2010 led to the end of these bilateral ceasefires. Finally, while the nationwide ceasefire process was ongoing during Thein Sein's presidency, the agreement was signed at the tail end of his term prior to the free and fair 2015 national elections. Due to the consequential effects of the political shift from the military junta government to the Thein Sein administration, ethnic minority groups that had previously agreed to bilateral ceasefires, which did not come to fruition, refused to take part in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, and those groups that upheld their political ideology warmed to the new administration and agreed to the nationwide ceasefire to further pursue their desire for a federal union. These momentous political inflection points in Myanmar's history coincided with these changes in ceasefire dynamics.

B. CONTINUATION OF THE NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE PROCESS

Following the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement by some ethnic minority groups in October 2015, the process continued with its promised mechanisms. The continued progress of the NCA is important to keep watching to see if my argument will be supported or undermined. Not much has occurred in the two years since the signing of the agreement, but the process is still ongoing.

Despite the opposition party's rise to power following the 2015 elections, the progression of the NCA slowed. With her ascendance as "state counselor" and de facto leader of the Burmese government, Aung San Suu Kyi placed a heavy emphasis on

[209] Zoltan Barany, "Democracy in Myanmar: A Long Way to Go," *Foreign Affairs*, December 1, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2015-12-01/democracy-myanmar.

prioritizing the continuation of the ceasefire negotiation process.[210] As Robert Taylor suggests, "As the NLD was not involved in the ceasefire discussions, how the talks will go forward remains in doubt, though the leader of the government side, Aung Min, gave his assurance that the process would continue."[211] Aside from the initial establishment of the multi-party Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) and the union-level Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JCMC),[212] the only other conditions of the NCA were to draw up a political framework within 60 days and start a political dialogue with the signatory groups within 90 days.[213] Following the initial three months of the NCA, implementation of the agreement slowed significantly and little was achieved.

With the NLD's inexperience in bureaucratic systems and an enduring military presence in the government bureaucracy, there was little change in ceasefire negotiations during the first year of the new government.[214] There was still a substantial military influence in the political system. With the 2008 constitution still in place, the military had at least 25 percent of the parliamentary seats and a de facto veto due to a 75 percent minimum vote requirement for any constitutional changes, in addition to the other military prerogatives. Suu Kyi's prioritization of the nationwide ceasefire process did not come through until the Union Peace Conference, or the first 21st Century Panglong Conference, held in Naypyidaw from August 31 to September 3, 2016. This national-level event was seen as a success as nearly all the ethnic minority groups participated,

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[210] The elected president is Suu Kyi's close confidante, Htin Kyaw, from the National League for Democracy; however, since Suu Kyi is barred from being the president per the constitution, he is seen as a stand-in for Suu Kyi herself.

[211] Robert H. Taylor, "Myanmar in 2015: *Hki'mala. dukka* or Hard Times," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2016): 232.

[212] Per the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JCMC) will closely monitor the ceasefire areas under the agreement, and the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), as a government peace monitoring body, will conduct multiple dialogues within the NCA framework.

[213] David Hale, "What Now for the Peacebuilding Process in Myanmar?" The Diplomat, November 26, 2015, http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/what-now-for-the-peacebuilding-process-in-myanmar/; Xinhuanet.com, "Myanmar forms trilateral union peace dialogue joint committee to implement ceasefire pact," November 22, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/22/c_134841414.htm.

[214] Taylor, "Myanmar in 2015: *Hki'mala. dukka* or Hard Times," 235; Trevor Wilson, "Why a National Peace Agreement is Important for Myanmar," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017): 141; Mandy Sadan, "Can Democracy Cure Myanmar's Ethnic Conflicts?" *Current History* (September 2016): 214; Barany, "Democracy in Myanmar: A Long Way to Go."

including some groups that were not signatories of the NCA, and this represented a new beginning for the NLD's approach to the complicated ceasefire process.[215] The process experienced continuous delays as the next conference was held three months later than planned on May 24–29, 2017, and the third session is planned for the last week in January 2018.[216] This prolonged process seems to have achieved little progress on the nationwide ceasefire as key differences have not been resolved and the situation remains essentially the same as when the agreement was signed in late 2015. The argument that the non-ceasefire groups signed the NCA for the renewed promise of political dialogue remains valid as they are still involved in the ongoing process. Conversely, the argument that bilateral ceasefire groups rejected the NCA due to the violent conflicts with the Tatmadaw and its broken promises from the earlier ceasefires also continues to be relevant as they have not signed the NCA yet. Thus, the recent developments neither confirm nor undermine my argument, but they show that the findings are potentially worth exploring further.

C. IMPLICATIONS OF THE CEASEFIRE NEGOTIATIONS

Even with the National League for Democracy as the new head broker of the ceasefire negotiations, there remains a significant military aspect of the government that many ethnic minority groups distrust. There needs to be an approach that mitigates this sentiment. One way to tackle this problem is to be more inclusive of the groups that the government has shut out from the ceasefire process. With more inclusivity, the government may be able to get the outside groups to endorse the agreement. Involving some of the groups that the government has excluded, including the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Arakan Army, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, will increase the government's credibility in the ceasefire process. Moreover, with respect to the ongoing conflicts between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army as well as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, one side needs to

[215] Wilson, "Why a National Peace Agreement is Important for Myanmar," 142.

[216] International Crisis Group, "Building Critical Mass for Peace in Myanmar," 11–13; Eleven Myanmar, "Third Round of 21st Century Panglong Conference Scheduled for January," November 29, 2017, http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/12592.

back down. As the more powerful of the two parties, the government has the responsibility to do so in order to stop the violence and move into ceasefire negotiations. With cessation of violence, the government will not be hemmed into a two-faced position in which it is actively seeking a peace deal while fighting some of the ethnic minority groups. Despite getting some ethnic minority groups that had never signed ceasefires with the government to agree to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the government could do more to get all the groups to subscribe to the agreement. A 2017 International Crisis Group report identifies key issues that the government can focus on, including "bringing more armed groups into the process… [by investing] considerable effort to understand what might induce these groups to sign the ceasefire agreement," and "improving the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement [process]… as the eight signatory groups have felt overlooked."[217] The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement should therefore be evaluated as a partial success as the government still has much work left to do to 1) stop the violence between the Tatmadaw and some ethnic minority groups and 2) obtain the trust of the remaining NCA non-signatory groups. Even with the total compliance of the ethnic minority groups, that situation would be the start of a long journey to national reconciliation.

With the next national election scheduled for 2020, another political transition could be an opportunity to change the ceasefire dynamics once more. A government in which there is less military influence and more ethnic minority involvement in the political process can lead to the next major breakthrough. Renaud Egreteau maintains that "when compared to the period of direct military rule that preceded it, the period between 2011 and early 2016 is one in which the military limited its interventionism in Myanmar politics to that of the 'guardian' army."[218] Based on this observation, to ensure this political transition occurs, the current NLD-led government needs to cooperate with the military to amend the constitutional provisions that allow the military to wield so much

[217] International Crisis Group, "Building Critical Mass for Peace in Myanmar," 15.

[218] Jürgen Haacke, "*Caretaking Democratization: The Military and Political Change in Myanmar* by Renaud Egreteau (review)," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39, no. 2 (2017): 393.

power.[219] The constitutional restrictions that ensure the military prerogatives need to be dropped. While this situation would make it more conducive for the NLD-led government to exert more influence, the revision of the constitution may be a politically impossible pipedream.[220] Additionally, the National League for Democracy has to double its efforts in building trust within the ethnic minority community. Although the NLD may have the Burman majority on its side, it needs to cooperate with the ethnic minority parties to achieve some progress on that front. Lastly, following this significant effort, all involved parties in the ceasefire negotiations need to define what kind of federal union system is appropriate for Myanmar. Trevor Wilson argues that there has been limited research into the types of federal systems that are suitable for the country, and discussions of a federal union do not describe specific arrangements, thus "there is no point in endlessly pursuing a political dialogue with no idea of what a workable and satisfactory compact might need in order to endure."[221] Productive discussions on what a federal union should look like can be had outside the ceasefire process, then once a structure has been decided, it can be integrated into the broader nationwide ceasefire. This parallel track for the federal union may be a better use of time than the meetings of some of the nationwide ceasefire committees. At a recent Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee meeting on October 30, 2017, Aung San Suu Kyi recently pushed for this idea by saying during a keynote speech that the government "must aim to complete laying down the basic principles for a federal union in 2018."[222] Myanmar has transformed

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[219] Barany, "Democracy in Myanmar: A Long Way to Go."

[220] Jon Emont, "Can Myanmar's New Government Control its Military?" *The New Yorker*, November 9, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/can-myanmars-new-government-control-its-military; Prashanth Parameswaran, "Constitutional Reform Fails in Myanmar Ahead of Polls," The Diplomat, June 26, 2015, https://thediplomat.com/2015/06/myanmar-fails-to-curb-its-militarys-power-ahead-of-elections/; Dan Sullivan, "Aung San Suu Kyi's Ultimate Test," *Harvard International Review*, January 19, 2017, http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=14495.

[221] Wilson, "Why a National Peace Agreement is Important for Myanmar," 144.

[222] Min Aung Htoo Naing, "Daw Aung San Suu Kyi eyes 2018 for establishing basic principles of the future federal union," *Mon News Agency*, November 1, 2017, http://www.bnionline.net/en/news/daw-aung-san-suu-kyi-eyes-2018-establishing-basic-principles-future-federal-union.

itself from an isolated socialist regime to a more democratic nation,[223] but the stalled progress on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement seems to be holding Myanmar hostage from achieving a solution to the ethnic minority issue.

[223] "Freedom in the World 2017, Myanmar: Country Report," Freedom House, 2017, accessed November 28, 2017, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/myanmar. In 2017, Myanmar's status changed from Not Free to Partly Free, according to Freedom House, based on the country's first relatively fair and free elections in 2015. "Myanmar's transition from military dictatorship toward democracy is ongoing, with relatively free parliamentary elections in 2015 ushering in a peaceful transfer of power to the National League for Democracy (NLD). However, ethnic peace remains elusive as military offensives and other violent conflicts offset a government push for more comprehensive negotiations with ethnic armed groups. Persecution of the country's mostly Muslim Rohingya minority has created sustained refugee outflows."

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