

Asymmetric Alliance Formation by the Arakan Army during the Civil War/Peace Process in Myanmar¹

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Received: March 15, 2022

Revised: August 9, 2022

Accepted: September 23, 2022

Abstract

Ethnic conflict in Rakhine State of Burma/Myanmar has recently been labeled as “the new textbook of ethnic cleansing.” While the international community has been paying attention to the plight of Muslim Rohingyas, an Arakan Buddhist group, the Arakan Army (AA), is also fighting against the Myanmar state for the right to self-determination. This article questions why the Arakan Army refused to participate in the official peace process and how it formed an alliance with other actors during the civil war. Drawing on ethnographic research and documentary data, including academic journals, news reports, and information from websites, it argues that the current peace process mechanism is not appropriate for the structure of the conflict, especially the required degree of autonomy in the ethnic state. “Asymmetric alliance formation” is a new perspective for explaining how ethnic groups form alliances from the local level to the global level. At the local level, the Arakan Army is an ethno-nationalism movement to gain complete autonomy of a confederation state. At the state level, it cooperates with other ethnic coalitions, including the Northern Alliance and FPNCC (Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee), to negotiate with the Myanmar army. At the global level, AA also interacts with China to gain support along the border. Thus, the ethnic conflict in Myanmar is not solely a domestic affair, but one that leads to truly complicated interactions at the international level.

Keywords: peace process, ethnic conflict, civil war, ceasefire agreement, federalism, confederation

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the ISA Midwest Annual Conference 2019, St. Louis, Missouri, USA. The current version extensively develops and incorporates the findings from other research on the peace process in Myanmar (the interrelation among government, army, and ethnic groups), to point out the dynamics of ethnic conflict from the local to the global level.

Introduction

Previous literature on the ethnic conflict in Myanmar was caught up in debates over two issues: democratization and the modern nation-state. The first assumed that the conflict stemmed from the uncompleted state of democratization that would allow civilians to govern the entire state. In reality, the military has retained control of power through various mechanisms, in particular, using coups to topple the civilian government (South, 2018; Holliday, 2010). Interestingly, the constitution of 2008 is also used as a tool for the military to intervene in politics, as the army must approve all amendments (Egreteau, 2016; Stokke and Aung, 2020). In this sense, the military always maintains that it is their responsibility to protect the sovereignty, solidarity, and unity of the state. Consequently, any attempt to change this dynamic of the military's ideology must be rejected, including allowing the ethnic groups autonomy over their respective states.

The second debate argues that the modern nation-state of Myanmar discriminates against ethnic groups in various ways, such as undermining the Panglong agreement of 1947. Thus, ethnic armed groups need to separate from Myanmar and establish their own state. In this way, ethno-nationalism is a powerful ideology guiding the ongoing civil war. The historical background has also shaped the conflict in the worst ways; it has led to other types of conflict, such as the political economy of drugs in the conflict zones. The present article attempts to shed light on the structure of ethnic conflict after the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) took place in 2012. At that time, the peace process began in the era of quasi-military government, and the civilian government has continued the process since 2015. Ten ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) have signed the NCA, and there are seven more active armed groups that have not signed, but are currently negotiating. The present article looks at why and how one of these seven, the AA, could not participate and decided to form a new alliance.

These dynamics are examined by analyzing the political life cycle of the AA, drawing on documentary data and ethnographic

research. The article argues that the current peace process mechanism is not suitable for the structure of conflict. The "political sphere" is limited by the Myanmar army, which attempts to dominate the meaning of the "right to self-determination." Thus, the peace process is not open for all EAOs to discuss the state's future, especially the issue of federalism. In the meantime, the AA is discriminated against by being left out of the peace process because of its demand for a confederation system. This position is widely supported by the ethno-political alliances, especially, the Northern Alliance. Interestingly, this alliance has a close relationship with China, in attempting to establish stability along the Myanmar-China border. China is increasingly becoming a crucial factor, and this situation will soon be a challenging issue for regional and global security.

In addition, the peace process is the first stage and needs to be used as the means to achieve agreement. The study of the peace process leads to understanding non-violent means, particularly eliminating the image of the other side as "the enemy" by both ethnic-nationalists and the state (Jonas, 2018). Specifically, the state should not label ethnic-nationalists as terrorist groups. In the same way, the ethnic-nationalists should not resort to violence, but should find a compromising way to negotiate with the state. Hence, the mechanism of attempting to bring both parties to accept the peace process is part of the transformation from conflict to non-violence.

The peace process is an attempt to find various mechanisms to propel the peace talks to move forward. In particular, cooperation is needed from various actors in all stages. The crucial stages are the cessation of conflict, preparation, and implementation of both agreements. All agree that the first step to end the conflict is the stipulation that both parties agree not to provoke conflict. The peace process is not one-dimensional; it consists of contexts, concepts, methods, and development. Furthermore, it needs the combination of every means, including military, political, humanitarian, psychological, and post-conflict development that will encourage all parties to withdraw from the conflict (Tonge, 2014).

Regarding the conflict from the view of the ethnic groups, traditionally the starting point has been to look at how the Panglong agreement was ruthlessly eliminated after General Ne Win seized state power in 1962. Thus, the priority of the constitution is currently to keep state power on the track of disciplined democracy. Ironically, the ongoing peace process during the democratization process is not suited for disciplined democracy, and ethnic-nationalists have been labeled as terrorist groups. Theoretically, democratization is the crucial means for ethnic conflict resolution and it has been remarkably successful in many cases. The well-known democratic concept that is used in the peace process is that of power-sharing or consociation democracy (Lemarchand, 2006; O'Leary, 1989).

However, democracy can impede the peace process because transitional periods sometimes create a vacuum in which terrorists can operate or attack for political purposes. This is because a democratic regime does not allow the government to react brutally. However, another view is that rule of law in democratic regimes could prevent conflict and build citizens' trust. Ending the civil war does not mean finding a permanent resolution in a short time. First, a mechanism is needed for forming a legitimate peace agreement. Ironically, terrorist tactics may be used during the peace process to pressure the parties in the conflict. In the same way, terrorist attacks frequently occur after the signing of a peace agreement if the agreement is not legitimate (DeRouen, 2014). Interestingly, if the peace process is interpreted as a political dynamic, the actors involved might attempt to use every possible means to achieve political goals. This means that all parties have to be confident that they can win in such a process and take all measures to ensure that their group will gain something in the future.

At this point, there is a gap in the concept of the peace process as it was implemented in different contexts. In order to address this gap, the present article incorporates the concept of alliance formation during civil war and the peace process to explain the circumstances in Myanmar. Theoretically, it assumes that there are factions in each party in the conflict and sometimes they are uncertain about future fighting and attempts to form alliances in various ways (Walt, 1985). In this sense,

ethnic ties are not the ultimate factor guiding cooperation with other groups; rather, political factors are more vital (Christia, 2012). Even if ethno-nationalism remains a vital ideology to mobilize people in the domestic groups, the question of how to survive in civil war causes the leaders of ethnic groups to rethink other contexts. In doing so, the process known as "asymmetric alliance formation" refers to derailing the peace process so that the parties in conflict find other means to negotiate with the state, including using violence and collaborating with different levels of alliances. This article, dealing with the case of AA during the peace process, is divided into three sub-sections: 1) local alliances: the formation of the ethno-nationalist movement; 2) state alliances: FPNCC² (Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee) and the proxy of China; and 3) global alliances: the dilemma of superpower rivalry.

Local Alliances: The Formation of the Ethno-nationalist Movement

Although all ethnic armed groups in Myanmar aim to fight against the Myanmar army, the AA is unique. This sub-section shows how its emergence is intertwined with the formation of the nationalist movement and alliance formation. AA is a new EAO in Rakhine state and was established on April 10, 2009. Previously, there were other Arakan EAOs in the Rakhine state, such as ALP (the Arakan Liberation Party) and ANC (the Arakan National Council). AA also works as the military wing of the United League of Arakan (ULA). AA mobilizes primarily under the KIA (the Kachin Independence Army), which is a close ally. It has grown dramatically in the past ten years as a result of gaining fighting experience and cooperating with other EAOs. It is estimated that there were 1,500 troops in 2014, a number that increased to 2,500 in

² The primary purpose of the formation of FPNCC is to negotiate a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the government. The group consists of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Arakan Army (AA).

2015. At present, there are 7,000 personnel and over 10,000 supporters. The main military base is located on the Myanmar-Bangladesh border. The ideology of AA is steadily formulated ethno-nationalism, the so-called “Rakhita Way” or the “Arakan Dream,” which consists of the following goals:

- To struggle for the right of self-determination for the people of Arakan, who are now subjected to alien subjugation, domination, and exploitation under the Burman colonial rule,
- To provide for the safeguarding and promotion of the national identity and cultural heritage of the people of Arakan,
- To serve the “national dignity” and best interests of the people of Arakan (BNI, 2019).

Historically, ethno-nationalism refers to the relevant memory in which the Rakhine state used to be an independent empire, but was invaded and colonized by the Bamar monarch, Boedaw U Wine, in 1784. This situation led to the discrimination policy that the modern Myanmar state uses to exploit Arakan people and make Arakan state the poorest in Myanmar. Therefore, the occupation by the Burmese needs to end and the right of self-determination must be formulated, which is the duty for the new generation of Arakan people. At present, AA has gained widespread support from Arakan people domestically and abroad. There are at least two reasons. First, the new leaders of the young generation set precise political goals that are attainable. They can be found in the set precise Arakan Dream 2020, which is the master plan to achieve the right to self-determination by the end of 2020. Second, the recruitment system of the AA is effective. It uses social media to disseminate ideas about ethno-nationalism to mobilize people to participate. In the meantime, many Arkan people lost their jobs in Kachin state because of the Myanmar army’s attacks on the KIA. This situation motivated the Arakanese to seek revenge and they decided to become a new ethno-nationalist solidarity movement.

The peace process in Myanmar was officially restarted again when President Thein Sein signed the National Ceasefire

Agreement (NCA) on October 15, 2015. However, not all Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) signed the agreement, including AA. According to the ethnic armed groups, the ongoing peace negotiation prioritizes two political objectives: self-determination and federalism. The problem, however, is that before all agreements can be implemented, the 2008 constitution must be amended. This is not very likely, as the Myanmar army always prevents any change to the constitution.

Practically, the strategy of the Myanmar army in dealing with non-signatory groups is “talking while fighting.” In reality, however, the suppression by military means has led to many clashes in Rakhine state. The crucial reason for such operations is that the Myanmar army does not need the AA to operate a new military base in Rakhine state. Thus, the government announced a unilateral ceasefire for negotiating means (from December 21, 2018, to April 30, 2019), excluding Rakhine state (Myanmar Times, 2019).

Under this political and strategic context, the AA disagreed with the ongoing peace process and decided to cooperate with other EAOs to form a new alliance politically and strategically, namely the Northern Alliance (also known as Northern Brotherhood Allies). It consists of the KIA (the Kachin Independence Army), the MNDAA (the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army), the AA (the Arakan Army), and the TNLA (the Ta’ang National Liberation Army). Subsequently, the structure of the parties in conflict of civil war changed strategically from jungle to city. That is why terrorist tactics were used, such as the setting of explosions in the city center. Significantly, the war has expanded extensively into large parts of the northern Shan state and Kachin state.

It must be noted that the policy failure has caused new alliances, as can be seen in the way that the Myanmar army classifies rebel groups into ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups. Interestingly, the Myanmar army and government called the first group EAOs or ethnic armed organizations while the second group was dubbed “terrorists.” The terrorist moniker was used to refer to three groups consisting of the AA, the MNDAA, and the TNLA.

For ideological issues during the peace process, AA felt that federalism was not appropriate for the nature of the Arakan people,

particularly in terms of their history and memory. As the leader of AA chief Major-General Tun Myat Naing stated:

We prefer [a confederation of states] like Wa State, which has a larger share of power in line with the Constitution.’ [He was] referring to the status of the AA’s ally, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), adding that a confederation is “better” than federalism (Irrawaddy, 2019).

Furthermore, the AA leader attempted to explain extensively that a confederation is more appropriate because it allows people to govern themselves. More importantly, AA and the Northern Alliance do not agree with the “One State, One Army” policy of the Myanmar army. The policy made a specific condition for the Northern Alliance to demobilize and put down their weapons before signing and participating in the peace process. Thus, the position of AA is that it needs the defense system to be the central part of a confederation, as its leader, Maj-Gen Tun Myat Naing, stated,

In a confederation, we have the authority to make decisions on our own. Nevertheless, there would be a standard defense system. Furthermore, there would be cooperation on market regulation and foreign affairs. To have control over our destiny—self-determination—is the aspiration of every ethnic group. We can try (Irrawaddy, 2019).

In reality, political means have not brought an end to the civil war in Myanmar and the emergence of the peace process has led to the formation of domestic alliances among numerous ethnic groups. For example, the Northern Alliance was strategically formed and mobilized in the area of Kachin state, Arakan state, and the northern part of Shan state near the Myanmar-China border. The question is: how would China respond to the conflict in Myanmar, which directly affects border security? The following subsection will explain the role of China and analyze why China is interested in becoming involved in the peace process.

State Alliances: FPNCC and the Proxy of China

As for the superpowers like China and the United States, from their postures in peace negotiations after the Cold War, there was doubt that involvement of ethnic conflict was reflecting global political competition and stability, mainly, the support of EAOs. In other words, the division of EAOs in modern times is being built in connection with the local security alliances of the superpower countries, especially the support of the establishment of China’s FPNCC through the vital role of Sun Guoxiang, Beijing’s special envoy for Asian affairs and a Chinese special representative who worked in coordination with EAOs. On the other side, another coalition of superpower EAOs located along the Thailand-Myanmar border is closer to the west in their ideology and has close ties with the western world. In the case of FPNCC, of which AA is a member, there is a position to support and guarantee Chinese interests in the case of the construction of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR). Bao Youxiang, the prominent leader of the FPNCC, stated that the project would benefit development in ethnic areas (FPNCC, 2017). China is also trying to act as an intermediary between the government and the FPNCC by participating in peace conferences or the Panglong Meeting in the 21st century. Even in the first phase of the peace conference, the FPNCC was not willing to participate. One of the adverse effects is that if these alliances were used to negotiate with Myanmar or even between the superpower countries, it would mean that the factors of the peace process had not arisen with the consent of the Myanmar side and EAOs. Such a process must also arise from the harmonization of the interests of the superpower countries (see more about competition of superpower countries in Sun (2014) and Woods (2011).

A person who played an essential role in the peace process (Lung K [Pseudonym], 2018) noted that in the first three meetings, China played an increasingly active role in supporting the Northern Alliance. This group is unlikely to enter into negotiations since the ceasefire was signed in 1989, and it has stopped for a long time without

any political negotiations, unlike signatory groups on the Thai border that want to talk or negotiate politically. In addition, the Northern Alliance has not yet expressed any interest in the federal system. Note that the UWSA, NDAA, and MNDAA do not have their own states. Therefore, the organization of the federation would put the previously-signed groups at a disadvantage. The Northern Alliance signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement, unlike the current one, which is multilateral. However, in the case of KIA, the military has terminated the bilateral ceasefire agreement. In addition, since 2019, there have been no negative factors that might affect the current peace process. According to the plan for the peace process, there are still three times remaining before the government will bring the results of the negotiations into consideration at the parliamentary level. However, the signatory groups are trying to find ways to keep the peace process going. If an agreement could be reached to allow the 2008 constitution to be amended, that would be the final step of the peace process, and the weapons would be laid down because the current peace process would be viewed as the only way to make a change.

Significantly, the role of superpower countries still has a huge impact on the enforcement of the ceasefire agreement throughout the country. A prominent intellectual who played a role in the peace negotiations (Lung S [Pseudonym], 2018) said that in the case of the Northern Alliance, the first problem was to figure out how to enter the peace negotiation process. The second was designing a local development project after the ceasefire that would create incentives for participation. Third, if the Myanmar state and the EAOs that have already signed a ceasefire could agree whole-heartedly on the federation, the Northern Alliance would become interested and would return to join the peace process and sign the NCA. However, all three of the above conditions have not materialized. Part of the problem arose because no binding agreements were derived from the Pang Loun peace conference in the 21st century, and consequently the northern allies were not attracted to the peace process.

In addition, there are other observations. First, in a meeting of Chinese-Myanmar academics, observations were made that on the Chinese border there are groups of scholars who set a meeting to discuss the NCA. However, the FPNCC did not agree to sign the NCA, unlike those in Thailand who have agreed to sign. The groups that are located along the Myanmar-China border have their own weapons factories. However, China denies that, in such cases they cannot be compared with those along the border with Thailand. Interestingly, on September 15, 2018, there was a statement from the Northern Alliance that it had agreed with the Yunnan government not to sign the NCA if the Western countries intervened in their internal affairs. Therefore, if the Northern Alliance signed, it would be considered to have broken the contract. After the official statement, the Yunnan government denied it.

In the meantime, the Northern Alliance became part of the FPNCC and hired academics to develop and draft their own NCA. On the other side, China has continuously exerted pressure, ultimately causing the Northern Alliance to adjust its political position by showing that it would sign as long as the NCA is amended as per the group's needs. If the Wa group or UWSA is compared, it can be found that if the NCA is amended and the UWSA comes into peace negotiations, the negotiation framework will be extended for another year or a year and a half. If the UWSA and Myanmar agree to sign a ceasefire, the Myanmar side said that the NCA amendment was neither necessary nor needed to be amended, as it was already listed in the NCA, chapter 21/37, and so no further action was needed.

On the part of Muang La group and Kokang group, NDAA wants to sign, but there are conflicts with the UWSA group. However, in the case of MNDAA, Myanmar authorities still do not accept it because it is one of the three groups that the Myanmar authorities call terrorists, which also include TNLA and AA. All three groups in the past have had very minor roles. The AA had never appeared in a prominent role, but in 2011 it was newly formed by taking advantage of the political transition because Burma seemed to be weaker since there was a meeting in September of the same year. UWSA's role as an

observer, according to Myanmar, was that the NCA provided an opportunity for political negotiations.

Moreover, although the problem of national unity between ethnic groups does not seem to be a form of military conflict, as it appeared in political competition for ethnic armed forces and Arakan State, for instance. An important person in a fighting group in Arakan State (Lung N [Pseudonym], 2018) noted that currently, the people there prefer the AA to any other group, particularly because of the strength of its armed forces. However, the people themselves do not yet understand politics because they still think that armed fighting is the only way to meet their needs. Politics is a better way to solve many problems. The crucial point is that the Arakan Army is a newly-formed group, and the government does not allow them to sign the NCA.

Regarding the political and strategic interests, China plays an essential role on two levels. First, it supports the domestic peace process to guarantee its interests on the border. Second, at the same time, it supports FPNCC strategically because of the deep connection since the Cold War period. The critical impact of AA is that it can establish connections not only among ethnic groups but also with the superpowers along the border through the role of UWSA. UWSA used to be part of the Communist Party of Burma, and it still uses communism as its central ideology. Even though the Communist Party in Myanmar collapsed, the ideology shared by UWSA and China is still alive. When UWSA acts as a big brother or leader of FPNCC, there is suspicion that China has a role in the mobilization of FPNCC, including AA.

In short, this section shows that alliance formation in the civil war is complex, and it is an open opportunity for foreign states to interfere in domestic conflicts in both positive and negative ways depending on how the ethnic groups balance power among various parties. Interestingly, AA can pass the first stage of alliance formation, moving forward to achieve the political goal. The question is, what will happen if another superpower attempts to play the game of balance of power with China by using the conflict in Myanmar as an arena? The following section will explain such issues.

Global Alliance: The Dilemma of Superpower Rivalry

As mentioned in the previous section, looking at the historical overview, the role of the superpowers in the ethnic conflict of Myanmar was evident during the Cold War era. However, intervention in those days was not an act to directly change the political structure or conflict between the state and ethnic groups. Instead, it focused on creating alliances for ideological battles, resulting in two major alliances.

The first alliance is with Western countries, especially the United States. These countries have unique connections with the armed forces on the Thai-Burma border, such as RCSS/SSA (Restoration Council of Shan States/Shan State Army). These forces were created as a coalition to restrict the spread of communist ideology during the Cold War period together with the Kuomintang of China (KMT) and the army's 93rd division.

The second alliance is with the communist world. The ethnic groups involved are along the Chinese border. This alliance also has solid ties with the Communist Party of Myanmar and had unique relations with the Chinese Communist Party.

Therefore, one of the observations in this era is the participation of EAOs in political-ideological conflicts. The ideology of fighting for independence and secession from Myanmar is the main motivation for establishing armed forces. However, the characteristics of other forms of political ideology, both democratic and communist, depend on the decisions of a group of leaders. The important part is to adapt to the need for political support and other forms of assistance, especially the security of allied superpowers.

For example, ethnic groups living on the Thai border will become a united front of the Western countries or the liberal world, and if they are near the Chinese border, they will automatically become part of the communist world. However, within the ethnic groups, such as the Shan, various forces were established, and in part, even though they were the same ethnic group, they had different political ideologies. They support both the communist and the liberal world concurrently, according to the location mentioned above.

In the case of post-Cold War relations, the end of the Cold War did not affect the end of the civil war in Myanmar. In other words, the fall of the resistance alliance between (and the parties) of the global political ideology of ethnic groups occurs only in practice and in some cases, such as the separation of the Wa group or UWSA after the Communist Party of Burma collapsed. However, the connection between superpowers and ethnic conflicts in Myanmar still exists, yet it has changed from an ideology to the creation of vulnerabilities associated with cross-border issues relating to the superpowers' interests and universal principles. For example, Western countries create relationships in two main areas: helping refugees escape from fighting in the case of humanitarian aid and other human rights issues through NGOs and international organizations.

As for the Chinese side, the connection is guaranteed for the existence of the former ethnic communist alliance, as a guarantee of armed forces through the unofficial border. Both alliances also emphasize the principles of relations with ethnic groups. Some are based on relationships with the state of Myanmar at a higher level, but as a balance that addresses immediate interests, such as the case of China. China helps Myanmar avoid pressure from Western countries by using the VETO right to evade condemnation by the UN. However, at a lower level, there is still a relationship with the Wa group or UWSA (the prominent supporter and ally of AA and the Northern Alliance) to create a coalition of both economic and security in the area. Ironically, in the case of the Western countries pressuring Myanmar on human rights violation issues, there is still a security connection in the lower levels of relations with ethnic groups, especially in drug suppression.

An interesting question about the role of the superpowers on the stage of peace negotiations is whether they will become a united front to solve problems or increase obstacles.

The attempt to resolve conflicts in the race to change from "the battlefield to political negotiations" has been seen clearly since 2011. The precise acting power from various superpowers at first was not very apparent to the outside world or the public. However, one limitation is that Myanmar has consistently announced its position to

make ethnic conflict a national or domestic issue. The issues of Myanmar's side are the opposite of those of the ethnic groups.

Ethnic groups want the outside world and superpowers to resolve conflicts in many ways, either in the case of negotiating intermediaries or witnessing any future signing events, such as the signing of a nationwide ceasefire or even the signing of a peace agreement. The reality is that NCA was witness to and was supported by various kinds of international action—an international role as an observer, consultant, and supplier of technical support, three roles that in practice, cannot be implemented because the government and the military do not agree. However, there is an official action from that was precisely allowed to be made: the establishment of the JPF (Joint Peace Fund), which donates money to perform peace-related activities (see more details in Joint Peace Fund-JPF (2018)). The role of foreign countries is not strong enough to pressure the government to enable the peace process to proceed smoothly. In the case of mediation in negotiations, the government does not allow foreigners to be part of the negotiations, which are considered an internal matter. Moreover, negotiations in many parts have to be done domestically, and the government views those foreign countries that come in the form of facilitators or intermediaries to lack sufficient knowledge of internal problems.

By contrast, a senior leader of an ethnic group (Lung J [Pseudonym], 2018) noted that many foreign organizations currently support ethnic groups in terms of knowledge such as issues in the peace negotiations by setting up workshops and training for ethnic delegations. However, Western knowledge is thought to cause more complex problems within the ethnic groups, especially in terms of the divisiveness that already exists. It is interesting that during third peace negotiations with Myanmar, the government tried to observe whether EAOs used academic terms from the West. If such academic words are mentioned, the Burmese state will immediately reject the information in negotiations, especially in meetings and respond that this was not the idea of the Burmese or other Asians and immediately discontinue the ongoing issues.

The foreign coordinator of the EAOs (Lung O [Pseudonym], 2018) who signed the ceasefire agreement noted that foreign countries know and understand the situation in Myanmar. However, no serious intervention has been made. Those giving foreign aid must also consider border areas adjacent to each other by comparing the roles of China and the Western powers. The countries that affect Myanmar's peace process are China, Thailand, India, and Western countries.

Interestingly, the role of superpowers in the peace negotiation process is not always smooth because there is still an overlap in the case of a position for their benefit in creating peace in Myanmar. In other words, foreign aid is not free. Many doubts, therefore, occur, such as in the case of Scandinavian countries. Although they are known as a group that supports peace building around the world, their role is ambiguous. This means that they are essentially financial supporters in organizing various peace platforms. At the same time, they have also established relationships with Myanmar in investing and taking advantage of natural resources, especially in Rakhine State, the motherland of AA.

Conclusion

The AA's political position is quite substantial because of its emphasis that confederation must be the only way to resolve and end the civil war. To achieve political goals, the AA established various alliances during the peace process and ongoing civil war. At the local level, the Northern Alliance was formed to strengthen the ties among the ethnic armed groups, which do not agree with the peace process structure. It caused AA to be ultimately labeled a terrorist group. Nonetheless, the emergence of FPNCC as a new umbrella for the ethnic alliance to strengthen the coalition has been quite an important dynamic since the Cold War era. At this point, because of the role of UWSA, it also allows the influence of China to take place in the ethnic area. China has its interests and attempts to deal with both ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar state.

It is clear that other superpowers or Western countries have attempted to intervene in the civil war and peace processes for strategic reasons. This is because such actions aim to limit the power of China in Myanmar. At the global level, the presence of the superpowers' representatives on the symbolic stage concerning the peace process causes each EAO to have different characteristics of adaptation. In other words, even though Myanmar's internal politics has three central pillars—the military, civilian government, and EAOs—the upcoming peace negotiations are supported by the pursuit of external alliances in order to balance or solve internal problems, and these alliances are becoming part of the crucial variables. The state of peace negotiations in Myanmar is at the forefront of the debate about whether a third country needs to be involved in peace negotiations. The more interesting points are that sharing benefits both internally and externally will be variables that will make the peace process succeed or fail. In the meantime, asymmetric alliance formation from the local to the global level has been growing dramatically, and it will affect both ethnic conflict and peace for the long term.

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