

Human Security Challenges After Guns Fall Silent

A Case Study of Kayin State, Myanmar

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Abstract

While the impact of armed conflicts on human security attracts a lot of attention, the situation after guns fall silent has not been examined much. This paper attempts to shed light on the human security challenges after guns fall silent by analyzing the case of Kayin state. In Kayin state, one of the largest Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) in Myanmar became active after the independence of Myanmar in 1948. However, the Karen National Union (KNU) reached agreement with the central government on a ceasefire in 2012, and most of the major EAOs in Kayin state signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015.

Since the signing of the NCA, the central government and the KNU have been working in tandem to implement various measures to improve the human security situation in conflict-affected areas. Have these measures improved the human security situation in these areas? What kind of human security challenges do the people in these areas face after the ceasefire? How can these challenges be addressed? This paper attempts to answer these questions based on field research that the authors conducted in January and February 2019.

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INTRODUCTION

Since Myanmar gained its independence in 1948, it has suffered from prolonged armed conflicts, making for one of the longest periods of internal conflict in the world. Yet, there is little sign of an end to the armed conflicts. The central government of Myanmar managed to survive its greatest security crisis when it successfully defended the capital city Yangon from armed groups led by the Karen National Union (KNU) marching toward the capital. After the battle of Insein near Yangon in 1949, the independence movement of Karen became significantly weaker. Although the central government could not fully repress armed conflicts in Myanmar, the security of Myanmar became gradually stabilized (Callahan, 2003; Selth, 2002; Adachi, 2019).

Needless to say, armed conflicts are not only a threat to state security; they also endanger the human security of the people living in the conflict areas. While security at the national level has improved to a great extent, on a human level it is still heavily impacted by the prolonged armed conflicts between the central government and various ethnic armed organizations (EAOs).

Because the continuing conflicts hinder development efforts, a large percentage of the minority ethnic population, most of whom live in conflict-affected areas, lives under the poverty line. For example, 73.3% of the Chin population, 43.5% of the Rakhine population, and 33.1% of the Shan population lived below the poverty line in 2010 (Asian Development Bank, 2014). Continuation of armed conflicts makes it harder for humanitarian aid workers to access these areas. Sometimes the central government bars such international actors from accessing the conflict areas. For example, many international NGOs that used to work in northern Rakhine state have been barred from resuming aid work since August 2017 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2018).

People living in conflict areas often have no other choice but to leave their hometown to escape from the fear of being killed, thereby improving

one of the components of human security: freedom from fear. Or they cannot secure sufficient food and appropriate medical care, so they leave their hometown to enhance another component of human security: freedom from want. Sometimes they are forced to move by the central government or EAOs. The 70-year long internal conflicts in Myanmar have resulted in a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as refugees living in neighboring countries such as Thailand, Bangladesh, India, and China. In Rakhine state, the situation remains tense following the armed attacks and subsequent military operations and violence in 2017 that led to the exodus of over 700,000 people to Bangladesh. In Kachin and Shan, ongoing armed conflicts continue to result in displacement and family separation.

Figure 1: Impact of Armed Conflicts on Ethnic Minorities in 2018

	Kachin	Kayin	Shan	Rakhine
IDPs	97,227	10,300	8,815	128,141
Affected People	70,221	0	27,308	116,864

Source: Humanitarian Response Plan (2018)

Some recent developments have arisen that are calming down the internal ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. One of the most important events was the conclusion of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) between the central government and eight EAOs on October 15, 2015.¹⁾ Two more EAOs later joined the ceasefire and signed the agreement on February 13, 2018.²⁾ As mentioned, it is true that there are still some EAOs that have not signed the NCA and continue fighting against the central government. But the internal ethnic conflicts in Myanmar have gradually calmed down. Since the central government and EAOs agreed to the ceasefire, the central government has been implementing various measures to improve human security in the areas controlled by EAOs.

Have these measures improved the human security situation in these areas? What kind of human security challenges are the people in these areas facing? How can these challenges be addressed? Immediate human se-

1) The eight EAOs that signed the NCA were the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), Arakan Liberation Party, Chin National Front, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council, Karen National Union, Pa-O National Liberation Organization, and Shan State Army-South.

2) Lahu Democratic Union and the New Mon State Party.

curity crises caused by armed conflicts or natural disasters tend to attract a lot of attention from inside and outside of the country. However, not much attention has been paid to what happens after such immediate human security crises have been addressed. This short paper attempts to shed light on human security challenges after guns fall silent by analyzing the case of Kayin state based on the authors' field research.³⁾ Kayin state, which used to be called Karen state, is where one of the first and largest EAOs was established. Even after the battle of Insein, when the KNU was soundly defeated, a severe confrontation between the central government and the KNU continued. However, the KNU reached a ceasefire agreement with the central government in 2012. The KNU and other major EAOs in Kayin state, namely the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army and the Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council, signed the NCA in 2015. The government and the national military (Tatmadaw) often cite the example of Kayin state in their efforts to encourage EAOs in other parts of the country to sign the NCA (Htoon, 2018). Thus, Kayin state is a good case for examining the impact of the ceasefire between the central government and the EAOs on human security.

HUMAN SECURITY IN KAYIN STATE BEFORE AND AFTER THE NCA

Although the percentage of those living under the poverty line (17.4%) is not very high in the Kayin state as a whole compared to other states (Asian Development Bank, 2012), KNU-controlled areas under prolonged armed conflicts remain underdeveloped. The civilians living in the conflict areas often experience human rights violations by both the central government and EAOs. Many have been killed or injured because of the landmines as well. Forced labor, sexual abuse, use of child soldiers, and child trafficking has been observed in the conflict areas (Humanitarian Response Plan, 2019). Such a situation has produced a massive number of displaced people, internally and externally. In 1980, Thailand accepted Kayin refugees at Mae Sot. In the late 1990s, NGOs increased their support for refugee camps in the Thailand-Myanmar border area (South, 2009). In 2006, there were nine camps along the Myanmar-Thailand bor-

3) Field research was conducted from January 29th to February 3rd in Yangon as well as in various places in Kayin state.

der (Win, 2019).

After the confrontation between the central government and the EAOs in Kayin began to calm down,⁴⁾ the human security conditions of the people in conflict-affected areas in Kayin started to improve. Since the signing of the NCA, the central government has been cooperating with the KNU to enhance development in conflict-affected areas in Kayin state, including the areas still controlled by the KNU. KNU-controlled villages were the least developed in Kayin state, not only because they were affected by the conflicts, but because they were in the periphery of the Kayin state. Job opportunities have been quite limited, and little education has been available. It is indispensable for the central government to help these villages to develop in order to build support for the NCA from the local people. For example, the central government has been cooperating with the KNU to build roads between Hlaingbwe and Hpa-An (Htoon, 2018). The improved access to the rural part of Kayin state is expected to help develop these areas.

The rural development department supports the local people with three main priorities in development plans: improvement of sanitation, alleviation of poverty, and promoting the social development of rural people. To achieve these objectives, the rural development department cooperates with the World Bank to give loans to farmers and small and medium enterprises. The government also provides education and training to empower women with the support of international NGOs. The development projects have been supported by international organizations such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Peace Wind Japan, and UNICEF (Soe Naing, personal communication).

People living in Kayin state have been suffering not only from the prolonged armed conflicts, but also from natural disasters. In July 2016, when the Thanlwin River flooded, 300,000-400,000 people were affected and more than 20,000 were displaced. Immediate support to open evacuation centers at schools was provided by the central government in KNU-con-

4) There have been sporadic clashes between the EAOs and the Border Guard Forces backed by Tatmadaw after the signing of the NCA. One of the most famous is the one between the DKBA and BGF in 2016. However, the overall situation has calmed down after the NCA. One township administrative officer whom we interviewed described the overall situation in the areas controlled by EAOs in Kayin as peaceful since 2016 (Zay Htet, personal communication).

trolled areas under cooperation with the KNU. Support to restore the agricultural land was provided by the NGOs and the World Food Programme (WFP). Such disaster relief supports by the central government and international actors became much easier and smoother in KNU-controlled areas after the NCA (Zay Htet, personal communication).

One of the side effects of the NCA was a significant reduction in NGOs' support for the refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thailand border. This resulted in the return of a large number of refugees back to Myanmar. Refugee camps in Thailand provided not only shelter and food, but education and vocational support. However, IDP camps in Myanmar only provided shelter. Moreover, there are not enough job opportunities near IDP camps. Thus, while many refugees returned to Myanmar after the NCA, they faced more difficulties in making a living (Htay Myint Aung, personal communication). If neglected, such a situation may deteriorate the human security of the former refugees because of the NCA. Hence, how to deal with these returning refugees began to be recognized as an urgent task for the central government, the KNU, and international actors.

There are 34 IDP camps along the Myanmar-Thailand border, most of which are located in Myawaddy. After the signing of the NCA, a Township Border Committee was established between Myawaddy and Mae Sot. The committee meets four times a year to discuss issues in the border area and promote cooperation in dealing with trans-border issues. Both townships do not have sufficient resources to deal with the returning refugees, but various international actors assisted their initiatives to support returning refugees.

For instance, the township administrators cooperate with the United Nations to provide vocational training to IDPs who returned from Thailand. The Myawaddy township's local government authorities signed Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to assist with family reunification as well as children who lost their parents during the armed conflicts. The central government also attempts to improve human security in conflict-affected areas in cooperation with international NGOs. For example, the Department of Social Welfare signed a Memorandum of Understanding with an international NGO, Save the Children, to cooperate in mine clearance.

One of the biggest issues regarding returning refugees is to find plac-

es for them to live and to create sustainable life outside the IDP camps. For this purpose, the central government agreed with the KNU to create new villages where returning refugees could start their new lives outside of IDP camps (Zaw Ko Ko, personal communication). What are these like? And what are the human security conditions in these villages? We will discuss these in the next section.

HUMAN SECURITY IN A NEWLY CREATED VILLAGE FOR IDPs – CASE OF LAY KAY KAW

The central government and KNU leaders discussed the issues of returning refugees who could not return to their hometowns and became IDPs. After the signing of the NCA, as the support to the nine refugee camps in Mae Sot in Thailand decreased substantially, many refugees decided to come back to Myanmar. To deal with the huge influx of returning refugees, the central government and the KNU immediately built 19 refugee resettlement centers in southern Myanmar. In order to help these returning refugees settle, the KNU proposed to build new villages for them. The central government and the KNU agreed to create nine new model villages for them in 2015. As of February 2019, IDPs had started their new life in two of these newly created villages, Lay Kay Kaw and Myaing Gyi Ngu. What are these newly created villages like? What are the human security conditions in these villages? In this section, we will discuss these points based on our field research at one of the newly created villages, Lay Kay Kaw.

Based on their agreement to create new villages for conflict-affected people, the central government built 223 houses in 2015 in Lay Kay Kaw, nine miles away from the Myawaddy township. As the number of returning refugees increased, the government built over 300 additional houses in the village with the support of an international actor, namely the Nippon Foundation. Those who moved to this newly created village were mostly KNU family members returning from refugee camps in Thailand. Some moved from IDP camps in Myanmar, and others returned from Thailand after working there as migrants. Though they have quite diverse backgrounds, they did not have much problem getting along together as they are all Karen, according to the Secretary of the Rehabilitation Committee of Lay Kay Kaw (Htay Myint Aung, personal communication). They are all

victims of prolonged ethnic conflict, after all, and it means a lot for them to have safe places to live.

The KNU has the primary responsibility for the security and administrative issues of Lay Kay Kaw. Under the NCA, the central government helps the KNU with policing, but the KNU is the main security provider for Lay Kay Kaw. Since its establishment, there had been no serious crime in Lay Kay Kaw as of February 2019, according to the Secretary of the Rehabilitation Committee of Lay Kay Kaw (Htay Myint Aung, personal communication).

Infrastructure development for Lay Kay Kaw is very important to improve human security in the village. Access to drinkable water is one of the most urgent tasks among the infrastructure development issues in Lay Kay Kaw. Since Lay Kay Kaw is located in a limestone area, the water available around Lay Kay Kaw is not very good for the health. Access to affordable electricity is another. As Lay Kay Kaw is in a remote area, it is costly to bring electricity from other cities or towns in Myanmar. It is easier to bring electricity from Thailand, but the price of electricity from Thailand is much higher than that in Myanmar (Htay Myint Aung, personal communication). There has been some progress in providing better access to drinkable water and affordable electricity, but much still needs to be done.

The KNU and the central government have been cooperating to support education for the children in Lay Kay Kaw. The central government provides financial support for the primary education, while the KNU is responsible for the secondary and higher education in the village. Schools are built with the support of international actors such as the Nippon Foundation. But they have difficulties finding teachers for these schools. Even when they can, most of the teachers appointed by the central government can teach only in Burmese. However, as quite a few children living in the village were born and/or raised in refugee camps or IDP camps, they can neither speak Burmese very fluently, nor read and write Burmese much. The KNU has been asking the central government to help hire teachers who can understand the Karenic language.

In the meantime, some volunteer students from Pha-An University support a home schooling program for the children in the village. There is also an initiative called Child Dream Project supported by a local NGO to provide career training for the youth in the village by teaching them Eng-

lish and computer skills. The leader of the project is an ethnic Kayin youth who himself returned from Thailand. He learned Thai, English, and computer skills at a refugee camp in Mae Sot, Thailand (Htay Myint Aung, personal communication).

Another serious problem is that Lay Kay Kaw is not a good place to cultivate rice or seasonal crops, as it is in a mountainous area. That is why opium had been the only product raised around this area during the armed conflicts. In order to have money to buy rice, it is indispensable to find a way to earn money without producing opium. Here again, international actors, such as the Greater Mekong Committee (GMC) and the Nippon Foundation, have provided agricultural technical training and support to raise chickens and mushrooms in cooperation with the central government, especially the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement.

Other international NGOs, such as Bridge Asian Japan and Peace Wind Japan, have been working hard to help create job opportunities for returned refugees while also providing job training. Yet, it is still very difficult to make a living in Lay Kay Kaw. That is why most of the residents in Lay Kay Kaw at this moment are women and children. Most of the young men choose to live and work in Myawaddy or in Thailand to support their family (Htay Myint Aung, personal communication).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Myanmar has been suffering from prolonged armed conflicts since its independence. Such prolonged conflicts between the central government and various EAOs have been impacting the human security of the people living in the conflict areas. Prolonged conflicts have also been undercutting development efforts and international assistance by international organizations or NGOs. To improve their human security, many people in the conflict areas have been fleeing from their hometowns.

While the impacts of armed conflicts on human security attract a lot of attention, the situations after guns fall silent have not been examined much. This paper attempts to address this gap by analyzing the situation in Kayin State after the NCA. Indeed, after the NCA, the central government and the KNU have been working hard in tandem to improve human security in conflict-affected areas. One of the biggest, and not well recognized, side effects of the NCA was the influx of returning refugees to My-

anmar.

To deal with this issue, the central government and the KNU built new villages for these people who fled from their hometowns during the conflicts. These new villages for conflict-affected people certainly provided safe places for them to live. However, building new villages alone is not enough to solve the problems. There are many challenges in developing infrastructure, providing education for children, and securing ways of earning a living in the newly created villages.

In order to achieve sustainable peace, it is indispensable to pay attention to human security after guns fall silent and to address the challenges to improve the human security for the conflict-affected people. Though the armed conflicts in Myanmar still continue and the number of refugees and IDPs keeps increasing, it is very important to start analyzing how to improve human security after the conflicts end. We hope this short paper can help deepen the discussion about the human security condition after conflicts end not only in Myanmar but all over the world.

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