



# Myanmar's Peace Process: More Process than Peace

Jayesh Khatu  
Research Associate, CAPS

**Keywords:** Panglong Peace Conference, Myanmar, Tatmadaw, Suu Kyi, Ethnic conflicts.

The *Tatmadaw*, Myanmar's military, has extended its unilateral ceasefire to August 31, 2019 for facilitating negotiations among ethnic armed groups and the government of Myanmar aiming at national reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> This comes after an initial extension of a four-month ceasefire (from December 21, 2018 to April 30, 2019) to June 30, 2019 at the insistence of the Northern Alliance, a military coalition of four ethnic armed rebel groups in Myanmar namely Arakan Army, Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).<sup>2</sup>

The struggle between distinct ethnicity and common Burmese identity has been at the core of instability that Myanmar faces today. Undertaken under the larger framework of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference, the peace process in Myanmar is aimed at national reconciliation and achieving longstanding peace in the country. It aims at addressing the internal

armed conflicts, many of which date back to pre-independence (pre-1948) era. Myanmar government, the *Tatmadaw* and around 16 armed ethnic minority groups form the major parties of the peace process. Daw Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) had envisioned to organize the peace conference twice every year since 2015. But to date, only three have taken place, the last one held in July 2018.

The Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), an ethnic political group, announced in November 2018 that it would not participate in the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) meetings at various levels.<sup>3</sup> The RCSS is one of the major signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) of October 2015 along with the Karen National Union (KNU), another armed rebel group. The latter had declared annulment of its participation in the JCM meetings in October 2018. These events have questioned the progress made on the peace

process in ending the internal armed conflict in Myanmar and bringing stability to the nation.

The October 15 and 16, 2018 informal peace talks between the government, the *Tatmadaw* and the ethnic armed organizations in Nay Pyi Taw had ended in a deadlock over issues of federalism and non-secessionism which remain the major areas of conflict and disagreement. Where the ethnic minority groups wish to address the problem of proper evolution and implementation of federalism in Myanmar, the government and the *Tatmadaw* prioritize non-secessionism and maintaining a unified Myanmar. For instance, Myanmar's largest ethnic armed force, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), had organised a grand parade to commemorate the 30th anniversary of its inception in April 2019 with a display of power at large scale by showcasing its modern weaponry. <sup>4</sup> Bao Youxiang, the UWSA's commander-in-chief, proclaimed during the parade, "Until our political demands are realized, we will hold high the banner of peace and democracy in one hand and armed self-defence in the other."<sup>5</sup> The UWSA stands firm on the idea of armed self-defence by maintaining its own armed forces rather than supporting the government and *Tatmadaw's* notion of unified armed forces because of the existing mistrust between the entities. The three national duties namely, non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of national sovereignty are underpinned by the *Tatmadaw* for each citizen

which does not support the idea of self-armed defence.<sup>6</sup> Thus, interpretation of the notions of federalism and non-secessionism impedes progress in the on-going peace process which elongates the same.

One of the positives of the peace process in Myanmar is that it is *Myanmar-led and Myanmar-driven* peace process with minimal involvement of external actors. This makes the peace process independent and restricts influence by vested interests of external actors like China. Moreover, the commitment of the NLD government led by Daw Suu Kyi to resolve the internal conflicts and bring stability to the nation through the peace process is commendable. But without addressing the concerns of the ethnic armed groups, the process would be lengthened and peace would look as a farfetched dream. Therefore, the deadlocks in the peace process should be resolved at first. For instance, sincere concerns regarding differences over independent state armies should be addressed. The ethnic armed groups could be transformed into Border Guard Forces by providing them legitimacy to secure Myanmar's borders by the government as envisioned by the Myanmar government in 2009 to overcome the impasse with respect to having a national unified army and independent state armies.<sup>7</sup>

The ethnic armed conflicts have not only paralyzed national integration in Myanmar since its independence but also act as impediments to the social wellbeing and economic prosperity of

the Southeast Asian nation. The peace process and the institutions created under it provide a steady platform for conflicting parties like the ethnic armed groups, the government, and *Tatmadaw* to work together for dialogue and reconciliation. They can only be strengthened by continuous dialogue and addressing genuine concerns of the varying parties.

***(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])***

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Swe Lei Mon, "Tatmadaw extends ceasefire a second time, to August 31", *Myanmar Times*, July 3, 2019, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tatmadaw-extends-ceasefire-second-time-august-31.html> . Accessed on July 4, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Chit Min Tun, "Join Peace Process, Don't Complain from Outside: Senior Govt Negotiator", *Irrawaddy*, June

14, 2019, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/join-peace-process-dont-complain-outside-senior-govt-negotiator.html>. Accessed on June 17, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Aung Zaw, "The Wa Flex Their Muscles on The Hill", *Irrawaddy*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/commentary/the-wa-flex-their-muscles-on-the-hill.html>. Accessed on June 17, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Refer Article 383 of the constitution- [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar\\_Constitution-2008-en.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf) .

<sup>7</sup> Please refer- <http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/border-guard-force-scheme> .