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Non-State Armed Groups in the Myanmar Peace Process: What are the Future Options?

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Myanmar/Burma - Location of ethnic non-state armed groups (NSAGs)

NAGA
Mainly India-based separatist struggle from 1980. Ceasefire 2012.

NSCN-K

CHIN
Low-level insurgency over diffuse area from 1988. Ceasefire 2012.

ZRA

CNA

RSO

ALA

KACHIN
Separatist struggle from 1961. Ceasefire 1994–2011 and 2013. Sporadic fighting ongoing.

KIA

*NDA-K

AA, ABSDF
SSA-S
*KDA
*MNDAA (BGF)
MNDAA

WA
Largely autonomous. Ceasefire 2011.

PALAUNG
Separatist struggle from 1963. No ceasefire. Recent fighting.

TNLA
SSA-S
*PSLA
SSA-N

UWSA

UWSA

NDAA

SHAN
Fragmented separatist struggle from 1958. Multiple ceasefires but sporadic fighting continues.

PA-O
Separatist struggle 1949–58, again 1967. Ceasefire 2012.

PNLA
KNLP

SSA-S

SSA-S

WNO

*Lahu
LDU

UWSA

KA
KNPLF

KARENNI
Separatist struggle from 1948. Ceasefire 2012.

KNLA

*DKBA
DKBA-5
Manerplaw
*DKBA

KAREN
Separatist struggle from 1949, splits in 1994, 1997, etc. Multiple ceasefires 2010–12.

RAKHINE
Fragmented struggle by various groups from 1947.

ROHINGYA
Fragmented struggle by various groups from 1947, mainly from outside Myanmar.

MON
Separatist struggle from 1948. Ceasefire 2012.

mixed KNLA, KPC
DKBA-5, MNLA
*DKBA and *KPF

MNLA

MNLA

DKBA-5

KNU
MDUF

MNLA

MDUF

KNU

TAVOY
Low-level insurgency from 1948. Inactive.

🖐	Group still in conflict with government
🖐	Group in ceasefire agreement
🖐	Group converted to border guard/militia
🧍	Non-combatant group or inactive in Myanmar
*KDA	Defunct group
KIA	Full names of armed groups listed in text
2012	*Latest* ceasefire date

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ABSTRACT

In Myanmar/Burma the government and the many ethnic non-state armed groups (NSAGs) are close to signing a national ceasefire agreement that will end almost 65 years of conflict in the country's resource-rich borderlands. This is taking place alongside a transition from totalitarian military rule towards democracy, and a rapid influx of international aid agencies and foreign investors. While there is progress in the peace negotiations, the process has been contested and fighting has continued in Kachin state. A key controversy concerns the future status of the many NSAGs that represent different ethnic nationalities, such as the Karen and the Mon. The NSAG leaders demand a political settlement that allows them to retain arms and political positions within a federalist system. The government has now agreed to discuss a federal system, but this is not backed by the powerful Burmese army generals. Moreover, the term 'federalism' can have many meanings. Left out of the peace negotiation talks has been any open discussion of what will happen to the many middle- and lower-ranked armed actors after an agreement has been reached. Failure to include this may be detrimental to sustainable peace and to the building of trust in the peace settlement. This paper is a preliminary attempt to discuss the future options for the members of the ethnic NSAGs in Myanmar: what 'exit' options do the NSAG members have after decades of conflict and, for many of them, entire lives spent inside the armed groups? How do they envision their future – as armed actors, civil servants, politicians, businessmen or something else? In addressing these questions we draw on interviews held in Mon and Karen states in January 2014 and on prior research. We engage with that segment of the international peacebuilding literature which debates the transformation of ex-combatants through different forms of 'Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration' (DDR) programmes. A core argument of the paper is that in the Myanmar context it is highly unlikely that conventional DDR programmes will suffice to support sustainable peace and stability. This is not only due to the exceptionally low involvement of international aid agencies in the peace process, but also because of the predominant focus in DDR programmes on disarmament and on economic incentives to successful integration. In Myanmar this overlooks key political motives behind both the causes of conflict and the negotiations for peace. It also ignores the fact that the NSAGs have enjoyed decades of state-like control over territories and people. Based on this, we do not take a point of departure in disarmament, but instead outline seven different *integration* options. These consist of a combination of different forms of political, economic, civil society and security sector integration. We call for more in-depth analyses of the armed groups in Myanmar as a complex and dynamic set of actors with various motives, aspirations and incentives. Finally, the paper concludes by reflecting on the future role of international aid agencies in the context of the peace process.

INTRODUCTION

Right now there are no real ideas about what could happen to the lower ranking soldiers of KNU [Karen National Union]. KNU soldiers feel they still need arms for their own security. Lots of conditions need to be in place before they will even think of surrendering their arms. It is also about livelihood. KNU would vanish if it became a political party. They do not want that. Some elders and people in government have proposed that, but people will not accept KNU as a political party. This can only be realised if there is federalism and real democracy. We do not have that now here in Karen state. Even if KNU wins the elections they can do nothing as it is now without democracy. And political reform is also needed inside the KNU itself. There are still splits (Chairperson of Karen Development Network, 15 Jan 2014).

Myanmar is undergoing one of the most multifaceted transition processes in recent decades, *not* steered by the international community: from a totalitarian military regime towards democracy, and from almost 65 years of armed conflict in its ethnic minority states towards stability. Since 2013 a union-wide ceasefire agreement has been negotiated between the government and coalitions of the ethnic-based Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) (see appendix 1). While there is progress, and it is anticipated that an agreement will be signed in 2014, the process has been contested and fighting has continued in Kachin State (see map).

A key controversy concerns the future status of the many NSAGs that represent different ethnic nationalities, such as the Karen and the Mon. The NSAG leaders demand a political settlement that allows them to retain arms and have a leverage of autonomy within a federalist system. In August 2014 the government agreed to include this demand in the draft ceasefire agreement, yet the details are still sketchy and the term 'federalism' can mean many things (Hiebert and Nguyen 2014). Meanwhile the Burmese Army still seems to be demanding that the NSAGs respect the 2008 constitution and existing laws which, in effect, render the NSAGs illegal rebel organisations. The army does not endorse a federal constitution and demands that the NSAGs disarm or join the national army-commanded Border Guard Forces. Because the army acts independently and is not under government or parliamentary control according to the constitution, its position challenges progress in the peace negotiations (Irrawaddy 15 August; Mizzima News 17 August). At the same time the government now realises that the NSAGs are unlikely to be satisfied with economic benefits and military integration as past ceasefire arrangements have shown. For instance efforts in 2009 to transform the NSAGs through integration into military-controlled Border Guard Forces (BGF) led to renewed cycles of conflict. Sustainable peace depends on wider changes in the political order, and the granting of political status to the NSAGs (Hiebert & Nguyen 2014). Left out of the peace negotiation talks, however, has been an open discussion about what will happen to the many middle and lower-ranked armed actors after an agreement has been reached. Instead the negotiations have focused on high-level political and military aspects.

In this paper we discuss a number of possible future options for the members of the ethnic NSAGs in Myanmar within the context of the current peace negotiations. We argue

that consideration of concrete reintegration options at this point in time is very significant for sustainable peace and for trust in the peace negotiations. We particularly focus on the Mon and Karen groups: With the advent of peace what 'exit' options do the NSAG members have after decades of conflict and, for many of them, entire lives spent inside the armed groups? How do they themselves envision their future – as armed actors, civil servants, politicians, businessmen or something else? What possible experiences from elsewhere can the transformation of NSAGs draw on, and what role can the international community play in facilitating this transformation, despite its limited mandate in Myanmar's peace process?

We engage with these difficult questions in this paper, based on interviews in January 2014 with Karen and Mon NSAG members, political parties and civil society organisations, as well as on prior research and secondary literature. We relate our findings to that segment of the international peacebuilding literature that debates the transformation of ex-combatants through different forms of 'Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration', or DDR, programmes (Jensen & Stepputat 2014; Munive & Jakobsen 2012; Munive 2013; Muggah 2005; McMullin 2013b). This is a challenging affair because, so far, few dare to even talk about disarmament in Myanmar. However, we did ask all interlocutors about 'demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration' and this revealed very interesting insights about the potential futures of the armed groups, and how important these imaginings are for the peace negotiations.

One core insight from our analysis is that in the Myanmar context it is highly unlikely that the dominant international model of 'Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration' (DDR) will suffice to support sustainable

peace and stability. This is due to the predominant emphasis put by DDR programmes on disarmament and demobilisation as first steps to end armed conflict, and on economic incentives as the key route to successful integration (Muggah 2005; Munive & Jakobsen 2012). As critics have pointed out, this economic focus is based on the assumption that 'greed' is a key motivating factor for mobilisation of combatants in the first place (Munive & Jakobsen 2012: 363). In Myanmar this economic rationale overlooks key political motives behind both the causes of conflict and the negotiations for peace and, importantly, that the NSAGs have had decades of state-like control over territories and people. Undeniably there are NSAG members who today are mainly driven by economic concerns about their future and war economies have been significant. Yet as Muggah (2005: 248) has argued, successful DDR "depends equally on the management of ostensibly 'political' issues associated with reconciliation, peacebuilding and the meaningful reform of judicial, governmental and economic structures".

While conventional DDR programmes are unlikely to prove realistic in Myanmar at this point in time, there are experiences from DDR interventions that could be a source of inspiration, as long as the specific political and contextual factors are considered (Munive 2013). We suggest that it is important to initiate an open debate in Myanmar about the future role and (re)integration of armed actors in ways that are much more concrete and tangible than is the case in the current peace talks where no mention of DDR is made. While a peace agreement will ultimately depend on the government and the NSAG leadership, it is also significant to create trust in the peace process among the NSAG members in general. This latter aspect cannot be separated from the future aspirations of the

individual NSAG members and their sense of personal security.

In this paper we try to make a first attempt at discussing *seven* integration options for the armed actors, including: integration into the security sector; local and private security groups; political parties; civil service and local government; jobs/small businesses; large-scale businesses, and civil society organisations. These options are of our own creation, but are inspired by the DDR literature and our interviews in Myanmar. They are in no way exhaustive, but should be read as an initial contribution to the debate about reintegration in Myanmar. In fact, we make a call for a more in-depth analysis of the armed groups, not as homogenous, but as a complex and dynamic set of actors. Their motivations for joining the armed conflict, and also their incentives for ending the fighting vary, and thus a deeper understanding of such motivations and incentives are needed for successful (re)integration efforts (Specht 2003: 75).

Before we turn to the discussion of the seven reintegration options we provide two background sections. The first explores the history of conflict with a particular emphasis on the Mon and Karen NSAGs. Secondly we discuss the main challenges of the peace negotiations since 2012.

THE ARMED CONFLICT IN MYANMAR – IN BRIEF

Myanmar (or Burma) has been blighted by civil war, ethno-nationalist conflict and outbreaks of communal and religious violence since colonial times. The country is a multi-ethnic state with about 33% of its 55–60 million population belonging to ethnic minorities and the remainder to the Barmar or Burman majority. Buddhists form the majority, followed by 4% Christians and 4% Muslims.[1] British colonial rule politicised ethnicity and it is important to first briefly probe into colonial history in order to understand both the role of the army, its nationalism and the armed ethno-nationalist movements that engaged in major insurgencies, especially during the military regime from 1962–1988.

Colonialism and the ensuing ethnic divide

The pre-colonial Burman royal state included many of the present-day ethnic groups in a tributary system with fluid boundaries to neighbouring countries. The hills were not directly ruled, and rebellions were sometimes organised from the hills. James Scott (2009) has argued that the hill peoples evaded the state and organised their own more egalitarian societies. However, the Shan and Kayah princes ruled minor 'feudal' states, and the Mon and Rakhine had their own monarchies until Burman kings conquered them in 1757 and 1785 respectively. Many Mon and Karen, loyal to the Mon king, then became refugees and citizens in Thailand. Whereas these groups have old resentments against Burman conquest, the tributary monarchy was founded on personal power and patron–client relations where allegiance to the Buddhist king was more important than ethnicity in politics. This was very different from the modern identity politics that British colonial rule introduced, which reified and generalised ethnicity.

Colonialism dissolved the royal administration after the final conquest in 1886. Colonial rule imposed a new order of classifi-

[1] A new, controversial census, based on the colonial categorisation, was conducted during March 2014. Figures are not yet available and all figures used here are estimates.

cation and administration upon the old and divided its subjects according to ethnic group as well as in terms of culture and religion (Furnivall 1956: 304–307). This implied new taxonomies and a new game of politics. One important means was the census. The new knowledge was used to create a divided administration: between Ministerial Burma, the plains where the ethnic Burmans (Bamar) dominated, and the hills or the Frontier Area (FA) along Burma's border, which had a separate administration directly under the governor. Burmans had only restricted access to the FA. The country was governed as a dual polity based on ideas about economic and cultural evolution.

Religious diversity was also central in later conflicts. Christian missionaries converted some among the ethnic minorities and during the British conquests (1824, 1852, 1886) Christian converts helped the British fight Burman rebels led by Buddhist monks.[2] The monks started rebellions not just to reinstall the monarchy, but also because they considered Buddhism to be in danger. Missionaries, for their part, viewed Burma as ruled by 'Buddhist despotism' and thus also defined the conquest as a religious war. During the 1920s–1930s Burman nationalist organisations flourished and a serious rebellion broke out in 1930. Many Burmese also opposed the colonial-driven immigration of labourers from India, resulting in serious anti-Muslim riots in 1938.

After World War II and during the negotiations leading to Independence the ethnic minorities expected their loyalty to the British during the war to be rewarded with autonomy. The head of the FA administra-

tion organised a conference in Panglong in 1947, where a federation was proposed that comprised local councils and a united hill people's council within the FA. The federation would be under British rule until developed, and then amalgamated with independent Burma. General Aung San, head of the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League, in the end agreed to an autonomous administration for the hill people. However, the constitution of 1947 only recognised Shan and Kayah States with a clause allowing for their secession from Burma after ten years. A Kachin State was formed later, but as an administrative region of the Union of Burma. The Karen lived mostly outside the FA and did not get a state. The federal principles in the constitution never materialised and in the unclear results of the Panglong agreement lay the roots of the long civil war. Today it provides a model for the political negotiations of the NSAGs.

Conflicts after Independence and previous ceasefires

In 1949 the Kayah were the first ethnic group to rebel, followed by the Karen and the Mon (see next section). Simultaneously, dissatisfied soldiers from the assassinated General Aung San's Army, who were not integrated into the national army, rebelled. The army had two Karen battalions and some Karen officers stayed neutral, but many soldiers joined the insurrections. In 1948 the communist party began a revolution, mujahideen were active in Rakhine State and other ethnic groups followed such as the Pa-O people. The Kachin and other groups followed in 1961 (see list of armed groups in appendix 1).

In 1962 the army commander General Ne Win staged a coup. This happened after 15 years of a democracy plagued by splits with-

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[2] Today 80–90% of the Chin and Kachin are Christian and about 20–25% of the Karen are Christian. On the Karen and their expectation of a state, see Smith (1999); Gravers (forthcoming).

in the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League (Aung San's coalition), struggles between charismatic politicians, and a state of exception caused by the insurrections. Prime Minister U Nu had made Buddhism the state religion provoking religious riots. He had promised a Rakhine and a Mon State and joined a seminar on ethnic autonomy in 1962. Fearing that Shan and other groups would secede, Ne Win arrested U Nu and took power. Ne Win then launched a military offensive against the rebels, known as the 'four cuts campaign': cutting the rebels' food, finances, recruits and intelligence (Oh 2013: 6). He demanded unconditional surrender from the NSAGs. The army used forced labour, forced porters, human minesweepers and child soldiers, and committed many atrocities. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees increased dramatically. Ne Win's idea of order was a corporate state of one nationality, and he isolated Burma from the world. He created a one party socialist union.

After pro-democracy protests in 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC –renamed in 1997 the State Peace and Development Council, SPDC) took over power from Ne Win and initiated the first ceasefires with at least 17 NSAGs (between 1989–1997).[3] The head of Military Intelligence, General Khin Nyunt, formed relationships with some of the ethnic leaders – probably in order to prevent an alliance between the National League for Democracy and the armed ethnic groups. The NSAGs kept their weapons and lucrative local trade. The focus of these ceasefires was on military issues and economic benefits, rather than political settlements and thus some of the NSAGs like the Karen National Union (KNU) did not agree

(South 2012: 11). The ceasefire groups maintained territorial control in designated ceasefire zones and were promised local development assistance and business concessions in exchange for giving up the armed struggle (Oh 2013: 10). While, as South (2012: 11) notes, these ceasefires provided the space for civil society networks to emerge within and between ethnic communities, the military government proved unwilling to engage with any of their political demands, which finally increased tensions. Most agreements simply stipulated that the ceasefire groups would be allowed to retain their arms and territories until the promulgation of a new constitution. These ceasefires also split up the NSAGs, like the KNU. Despite some development projects that improved the lives of villagers, the ceasefires also ended up strengthening the illicit businesses of ceasefire groups and the Burma Army. Rather than sustainable peace, they allowed for the expansion of the army's territorial control, counter-insurgency strategies and abuses (Oh 2013: 11).

In 2009 the ceasefire groups from the 1990s became subject to the Border Guard Force (BGF) or People's Militia Initiative, which followed the 2008 Constitution's demand for a single army. It was an open strategy for military integration that would incorporate the armed groups that had already signed ceasefires as special units under the command of the national Defence Services (Keenan 2013). It involved stable salaries, social benefits (including free accommodation, healthcare, education, public transportation also for soldiers' families), and continued armament for the ethnic actors involved. However, the agreement came with no political settlement and the majority of the leadership of the BGFs were from the Burma Army. Thus many NSAGs refused the deal, which led to renewed cycles of fighting and ten-

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[3] On the ceasefires see Kramer (2010); Zaw Oo & Win Min (2007); Callahan (2007); M. Smith (2006).

sions.[4] The BGF initiative highlighted, even more than before, that far from all NSAGs were willing to surrender their autonomous status and political demands in exchange for government benefits. Like the 1990s cease-fires, the BGF initiative has been criticised not only for drowning out ethnic political demands, but also for exacerbating abuses of villagers and illicit business (e.g. land-grabbing for businesses, drug trade and forced recruitment to local militias) by BGF forces, partly because salaries and benefits did not always materialise (Keenan 2013: 3-4). Until 2011, joining the BGF was made a precondition for any talks with the government, and thus other NSAGs were spoken about as 'insurgents' and essentially deemed illegal by the government.

The BGF initiative was implemented after a longer political process beginning in 2003 with the military government declaring a seven step roadmap to 'disciplined democracy', which in 2008 led to a referendum for the new constitution, followed by general elections in 2010. Both events were allegedly marred with fraud. The military proxy Union State and Development Party (USDP) was declared overall winner of the elections, which in 2011 dissolved the SPDC and inaugurated a newly elected government under President Thein Sein. He declared a surprising political and economic reform agenda based on fundamental rights of citizens. During the first year he also made a peace process with the NSAGs a top priority (apart from beginning a reconciliation process with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and releasing hundreds of political prisoners). Between January and April 2012 ceasefires were signed with the majority of

the NSAGs. However, the breaking of the 17 year ceasefire with the Kachin Independent Organisation and Army (KIO/KIA) in 2011 challenged the belief in the government's commitment to peace.

Before turning to the current nationwide ceasefire negotiation process, we will first take a closer look at the NSAGs with a particular focus on the Karen and Mon.

THE ETHNIC NSAGs: THE EXAMPLES OF KAREN AND MON

All the NSAGs are militarised ethnic organisations in control of resources and trade, and most of them also have political wings. Administration, schools and other institutions are organised under the ethnic military leadership. All the groups fight for political and cultural autonomy in a federal constitution, but have now renounced secessionist claims.

Today the NSAGs in Myanmar can muster an estimated 100,000 soldiers and perhaps similar reserves. Thus, they still constitute a significant force. The table in appendix 1 lists the main NSAGs, but in addition to these there are many other parties and splinter groups. Most of the organisations have ceasefire arrangements in place with the government, or are negotiating these. The size of the various ethnic armies is difficult to assess. No doubt they are often exaggerated. For example, The United Wa State Army (UWSA) has an estimated 20–25,000 troops, with heavy arms, and has recently been able to purchase two helicopters from China. UWSA is not directly involved in the ceasefire negotiations, and one can speculate that thre may well be a silent agreement between the army, China and the UWSA. The Kachin Independent Organisation/ Kachin Independ-

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[4] The United Wa State Party (UWSP) and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) also refused the deal. In effect this meant that these groups broke their prior ceasefire agreements with the government (Keenan 2013: 1).

ence Army has approximately 7,000–10,000 soldiers and is said to have grown since the 2011 outbreak of fighting.

The political economy of the NSAGs has been tied to a shadow economy that also involves the bordering countries of China and Thailand, yet shifting alliances have also undermined the NSAGs. In the resource rich borderlands the NSAGs have earned revenue from mines, gems, timber, plantations as well as trade in drugs (see Woods 2011). During the socialist period the KNU, among other NSAGs, also earned large sums of income from cross-border trade of black market consumer goods from Thailand, and they also ran mills and mines jointly with Thai businessmen (Oh 2013: 7). In the 1970s and 80s the Thai authorities treated the KNU as the de facto authority along the border (ibid: 8). Today Thailand has strong agricultural and mineral business interests in Karen State, as well as in dams and ports in Mon State, but is regarded a as supporter of the Myanmar government, rather than the NSAGs. This shift in alliances came in the 1990s when the Thai commander-in-chief met with the new SPDC government to secure timber and fishing deals for Thai companies in Burma. Because many of the Thai logging companies, supported by the Thai military, were located in KNU areas, the move undermined KNU's sources of revenue and ultimately control of territory (ibid. 9). Support from China also shifted around the time of the ceasefires of the 1990s, resulting in greater control by the Burmese army of land and business in the Kachin and Shan States. Today China also supplies the army with weapons. However, until the ceasefires China had first funded the Communist Party of Burma and then the United Wa State Army. The Wa ethnic group were the core of the now defunct Communist Party of Burma and to-

day probably finance their army with money from drug trading. Until the 1994 ceasefire KIA/KIO largely financed their armed struggle through their monopoly on the Burma–China jade trade, but this was taken over by the army through business deals with China and the ceasefire, leaving KIO with timber concessions, now also largely controlled by the army. Most recently China's agricultural finance has spearheaded large-scale industrial developments in northern Myanmar, which has considerably weakened the NSAGs' political position and territorial control (Woods 2011). As Woods (2011: 750) argues, this means that Chinese investors and businessmen have been drawn into the Burmese military's counter-insurgency strategy to gain control of the borderlands.

In the following we take a closer look at the Karen and Mon organisations in order to give an idea of their heterogeneity and of how entrenched the militarised ethnic politics are.

The Karen

Tensions between the Karen leadership and the Burmans arose with World War II, when Aung San's Burmese Independence Army and the Japanese army attacked Karen communities, killing 2–3,000 Karen. The Karen cooperated with the British Forces against the Japanese. In 1948, Karen Christians near Tavoy were killed by Burman auxiliary forces. These events revoked Karen historical memories of persecution and violence from the Burmans.[5]

All Karen organisations merged in the Karen Central Organisation (KCO) in 1945 in order to be a coherent unit in negotiations

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[5] On the long Karen struggle and its complexity, see Thawnhmung (2012); Gravers (2012). The majority of the Karen ethnic group has not participated directly in the armed struggle.

with the British and the Burmans. However, in 1947 a split occurred in the KCO, leading to the formation of the Karen National Union (KNU), mainly by Baptist Sgaw Karen. The Buddhist Karen (and some Christian Karen, mainly Pwo) wanted to join the Union of Burma with the promise of 24 extra seats in parliament and a state within the union. The Baptist Sgaw viewed an armed struggle for an autonomous state in eastern Burma as the only option. The KNU claimed to represent ten Karen groups comprising Christians and Buddhists, living across the country and speaking different languages (Gravers & Ytzen 2014: 173-175). The KNU leadership was formed of the elite of the Karen, who belonged to a totally different world than the poor, Animist Pwo and Sgaw in the hills.

The KNU insurrection in 1949 nearly resulted in the taking over of Rangoon, but General Ne Win managed to drive the armed group out to the hills of present Karen State (established in 1952 as part of the Union). KNU hereafter became the *de facto* government of the *Kawthoolei* ('Old Country') State with departments of culture, education, forestry, administration and so forth. The KNU is controlled by its army, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), which consists of seven brigades and 4–6,000 troops. These brigades control their own territory relatively autonomously under a central command. They are financed by income from taxation of civilians and (as mentioned earlier) trade. Most leaders are based in Thailand and move in and out of Burma.

KNU's control of territory decreased significantly after the Burma army began a major offensive in 1984. A serious split within the KNU occurred in 1994 when many Buddhist soldiers in the KNLA mutinied and followed a charismatic monk, U Thuzana, to form the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organisation and Army (DKBO/DKBA). The Buddhist soldiers felt discriminated against and took the brunt of the fighting whilst educated Baptist Sgaw Karen had villas in Thailand and access to hospitals and education in Bangkok. U Thuzana agreed to a ceasefire and cooperated with the Burmese army to take KNU's Headquarter at Manerplaw in 1995. In exchange for military cooperation, the DKBA was given logistical, military and financial assistance from the government as well as permission to conduct businesses, like logging (South 2011: 19). This reflected the general emphasis on economic incentives in the 1990s ceasefires, which lacked any political settlements. Conversely, U Thuzana managed to maintain relative peace, construct schools, roads, clinics and monasteries in his area, Myaing Gyi Ngu, with large donations from locals as well as from rich Thai businesspeople with plans to invest in Karen State.[6] DKBA had about 6,000 troops and seemingly had much less interest in political demands than the KNU. This was also evident in their agreement to transform into a BGF in 2010, which, in Karen state, has been engaged mostly with the control of local trade, including illicit businesses. An exception was Brigade 5 (approximately 1,500 soldiers), who refused to lay down arms to the military government, leading to fighting and tensions with support from the KNU/KNLA.

After the DKBA split, more splinter groups from the KNU appeared such as the Karen Peace Force (KPF) in 1997 (split from Brigade 6), The Karen Peace Council (KPC) (split from Brigade 7) and others led by officers who were fed up with the struggle and looked after their own business interests and

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[6] For details on the DKBA and U Thuzana, see Gravers (forthcoming)

supporters. They signed ceasefire agreements with the army and were rewarded with licenses for trade and mining or rubber plantations. The KPF also transformed itself into a BGF in 2010. In January 2014 we spoke with the leader of KPF, who explained that he entered the deal with the government so as to establish peace and development in his area. Today he *de facto* manages his own armed force, which is tightly woven into business and development activities. He collaborates both with the government and the KNU.

At village-level KNU has the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) – local militias and often former KNLA fighters. Numerous civilians have been trained in using arms and many civilians have small arms and can easily be mobilised. Large areas have been mined during the long conflict in order to protect civilians or by the army in order to cleanse an area of its enemy, leading to thousands of IDPs. Business is a mix of border trade, timber, mining and plantations, but as described earlier revenues have decreased substantially since the lucrative business arrangements of the 1980s with Thailand dwindled. KNU also receives substantial donations from its diaspora in the USA and UK, as well as from donors and Christian organisations. Civilians are burdened by taxation and more or less forced recruitment of soldiers. Karen IDPs have often complained that they also had to pay other Karen forces such as the DKBA, and then the army, when combat fortunes changed. The whole Karen State and borderland is thus a segmented society where military organisation and shadow economy amalgamate in an ethno-nationalist semi-state polity. Weapons remain crucial in order to protect civilian followers and business against the army or competing Karen organisations. Soldiers mainly follow their officers and rely on patron–client relations in order to have a livelihood. This is what Woods (2011) has aptly termed *ceasefire capitalism*. Thus, 'ethnic wars' or 'new wars' (Kaldor 1998) are complex in their rationale and rely on force, fighting abilities and economic resources in the form of trade and remittances from refugees, as well as international support – all this combined with identity politics.

The most important Karen national rule is never to surrender weapons. This is considered as major treason against the Karen nation, and is contained in the four principles of the KNU, promulgated by its first president: "surrender is out of the question"; "we shall retain our arms"; "recognition of Karen State must be complete", and; "we shall decide our own political destiny" (Karen News 12 July 2014). These principles make a DDR solution very difficult. They have also made it very difficult for the peaceseeking faction lead by the KNU President, General Mutu, to pursue negotiations. When Saw Mutu met the army chief for talks and was handed a personal gift from the Senior General, KNU's sceptical faction viewed this as a sign that Saw Mutu is now corrupted by the army and is pursuing his own business interests (interview with Karen leader, Mae Sot 2013). Today KNU, DKBA and BGF units cooperate within a Karen Unity Committee of Armed Groups and have avoided clashes in the recent year, but there is no single unified Karen voice.

The Mon

The Mon people used to dominate lower Burma and Thailand. Today the official number is one million, although many more are of Mon origin. Buddhism spread from the Mon Kingdoms of Thaton and Bago (Pegu) in the eight century. After the Burman conquest in

1757, and during British rule, the Burman language replaced Mon. Thus the main Mon organisation, New Mon State Party (NMSP) (estimated to have 500–700 armed men today) (Keenan 2012: 5), which was formed in 1958, has struggled to maintain the language and literary tradition.

U Nu promised the NMSP a state in 1958, after their first insurrection collapsed and they entered a ceasefire. The state was only recognised in 1974 and only as an administrative region in the union. Thus, NMSP resumed its armed struggle in 1962. Its headquarters and political leader Nai Shwe Kyin were based at Three Pagodas Pass on the border to Thailand. Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) had approximately 3,000 troops in the 1970s. Nai Shwe Kyin cooperated with KNU, but there was disagreement on control of some areas and on strategies. In the 1980s an internal conflict in the leadership split the NMSP. It was mainly a personal struggle about leadership and key resources. NMSP reunited again in 1987 (South 2003).

In 1991, NMSP lost its stronghold at Three Pagodas Pass when the army attacked, helped by a Thai timber company. NMSP lost income from logging after the defeat. Pressured by increased Burma Army incursions into Mon State, directly related to the construction of a railway and gas pipelines to Thailand, the NMSP signed a ceasefire agreement in 1995. The group was granted nominal control of an area of Mon state spread out over 12 cantonments. They were given 17 industrial concessions in areas of logging, fishing, inland transportation and gold mining and allowed them to make trade agreements with Malaysia and Singapore. The government (or SPDC) also agreed to supply NMSP with USD 3,500 in economic aid each month for its political body to function. During the first period of ceasefire numerous IDPs returned, and Mon CSOs, like the Mon Women's Organisation and the NMSP Education Department, were able to expand their community development and literacy programmes, even into government controlled areas (Human Rights Watch 2005: 56–7). However, despite these benefits in exchange for 'internal peace', the ceasefire agreement also led to new splits. Some leaders and MNLA officers formed new, smaller groups such as Mon Army Mergui District. The NMSP also came more and more into tension with the military regime due to its unwavering political stance – they had expected some sort of political settlement in the longer term, including residuary powers to the ethnic states, independent taxation and separate defence forces (Keenan 2012). The NMSP also ignored demands from the SPCD to condemn Aung San Suu Kyi's call for political dialogue and refused to openly condemn the move to bring the SPCD before the United Nation's Security Council. In 2004–5 the army began to withdraw its aid agreement, increased village surveillance of NMSP and placed them under pressure to surrender weapons. In short, despite clear economic benefits, the NMSP did not relinquish its political demands. In 2009 they threatened to break the ceasefire by refusing to join the BGF initiative, as this would force NMSP to give up their political work (Keenan 2013: 4). Although this did not give way to open combat, many returned IDPs (after the 1995 agreement) fled again.

Like the Karen, the Mon have suffered forced labour, rape, relocation and civilian casualties during the civil war and there is an unknown (at least 10,000) number of refugees in Thailand and about 20,000 in Malaysia (Independent Mon News Agency, 12 March 2010).

THE CHALLENGING PEACE NEGOTIATIONS (2012–2014)

Since the 2012 bilateral ceasefires a process towards a National Ceasefire Accord (NCA) has taken place, which is expected to be signed in late 2014, with a political dialogue following in early 2015 (Hiebert & Nguyen 2014). The breakthrough for this came at a conference in Laiza in December 2013 with the formation of the National Ceasefire Co-ordination Team (NCCT) of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), which is one of the main NSAG coalitions. The NCCT has worked on drafting an accord that all parties can agree on, but there are still many challenges, and it was only in August 2014 that the government agreed to include the NSAG demand for a federal system into the draft agreement (ibid.) Details of the exact content of a federal system are not accessible. Also there is no concrete mention or description in the accessible sources of any DDR process or future integration options for the middle and low-ranking armed actors. This regards both the proposal of the NSAG coalition and the statements by the government. There is, seemingly, only a focus on the leadership, reflecting the elite-driven peace negotiation process. In addition to this, the international involvement is meagre, albeit the Japanese Nippon Foundation has provided support to the UNFC and the EU has funded the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC), which provides technical support to the ceasefire talks on the side of the government. Also, recently, Japan and the United Nations have had observers at the peace negotiations, but they are not invited as mediators. It is unlikely that international peacekeepers will be let in. In this section we discuss the main content of and obstacles to the current peace negotiations.

Obstacles to peace and a political settlement

Since 2013 the NSAG coalition has made a number of demands to be included in the Nationwide Agreement with the government:[7]

- Cessation of hostilities, with particular reference to Kachin State.
- Recognition of the Panglong Agreement, which essentially means the adoption of a federal constitution and a federal army into which the ethnic NSAGs are integrated.
- A national political dialogue and building of trust.
- Protection of the basic rights of the ethnic nationalities.
- A code of conduct for the army and the militias (including a range of issues like demilitarisation, relocation of troops, reduction of weapons and a halt to recruitment). This has been difficult to obtain in the form of zoning because the national army has a legal right to be everywhere within state borders.
- Legal reform that regulates land grabbing, development projects, control of the drug trade and allows ethnic control of culture. This demand is closely related to the implementation by the government of large-scale development projects initiated during the ceasefires – such as dam and port constructions in Karen and Kachin States – which have been associated with land grabbing. This also applies to large plantations and mines. The NSAGs demand a stop to these and an end to what a KNU leader termed 'developmentalism' supported by foreign businesses such as those related to the business deals made

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[7] The list is based on a paper published in relation to the Ethnic Armed Organisations Conference in Laiza, December 2013, which is known as the Laiza agreement.

between the army/government and Thai and Chinese investors (see Woods 2011; Oh 2013).

The extent to which these demands will be met by the government is not clear yet. Yet according to various newspaper sources and our interview with the MPC, one of the major steps for the government since 2012, has been the move away from the past demand that NSAGs must first surrender weapons before any peace negotiations. Now they are open to political dialogue before disarmament. Also, the government no longer believes that they can 'buy off' the NSAGs (with business concessions and development activities in their own areas): "the ethnic groups also want political deals, not just economic resources […] the conflict is also about ethnic identity and not just about economic gains" (interview MPC, 20 Jan 2014). Despite recent news that the government now seems to agree to include 'Federal System' in the draft agreement, there are no available details about the ceasefire proposal from the government. It does not seem to allow for the NSAGs to administer their areas of control and the army can move weapons and personnel into ethnic areas. Of interest to this paper is also that the MPC representative very openly explained that, although they have spoken internally about DDR, the government cannot yet talk about this to the NSAGs. This would create great suspicion, and even the risk of a return to armed conflict (interview MPC, 20 Jan 2014). Thus disarmament and demobilisation are currently not explicitly on the peace negotiating table, either on the government or the NSAG side. Also, there has been no explicit mention of reintegration options.

A core challenge to the peace process is the unclear position of the government in rela-

tion to the army on the peace agreement. The national army still holds on to the demand that the ethnic NSAGs not only come under the army's command, but that they respect the 2008 Constitution and abide by existing laws before signing the nationwide ceasefire agreement. This means that, by law, the NSAGs are considered illegal rebels rather than legitimate stakeholders in a political settlement. If, for example, KNU wants a legal status they must drop arms and become a registered political party or a business company. The army further demands that the ethnic organisations stop taxing civilians. This will make it difficult to maintain ethnic armies and a political organisation. Because the government has no control over the army according to Chapter vii, § 338 in the Constitution, these demands of the army pose a key challenge to the negotiations.

The main challenges to a nationwide ceasefire and political resolution can be summarised as:

- While the government now seems to agree to include 'federal system' in the draft peace agreement, the army still demands that NSAGs must be integrated into the army according to the 2008 Constitution in opposition to the NSAGs' demand for a political settlement.
- NSAGs are considered illegal rebel organisations according to current law (the 1908 Unlawful Association Act and the 1988 Law Relating to Forming Organisations).
- Internal disagreements within and between NSAGs on a peace strategy
- A widespread mistrust in the peace process among the ethnic nationalities, who have a deep-seated sense of being victims of state violence and of being denied legitimate political power.

- State incursions into NSAG areas, and disagreement on who controls resources and development projects. Some NSAGs believe that the army is using the ceasefires as a means to penetrate conflict zones through the granting of resource extraction and land concessions, including to foreign investors like the Thais and Chinese (see above), as well as by setting up government schools in the name of 'development'.
- The peace negotiations do not include all-important ethnic organisations.

The organisation of the negotiation process also poses challenges. Negotiations include three parties: U Aung Min, presidential minister, Myanmar Peace Center (MPC), and the NSAG Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiating Team. Not all NSAGs are included in the latter, for example the Wa and Khokang. Moreover, while the participating NSAGs agree on federalism, they disagree on specific details such as on geographic markers in multi-ethnic areas and on how to move forward with the negotiations. Hardliners within the NSAGs, as well as within the army and the government, are hardly inclined to compromise and this has delayed the process towards an agreement (Keenan 2014). The army sends officers to the peace talks, but army chief, Min Aung Hlaing, rarely participates, which may undermine commitment to the process.

Another current challenge for the NSAGs is the growing number of new ethnic political parties and community-based organisations (CBOs), who can claim to represent the ethnic minorities as much as the NSAGs do. This is, not least, relevant as the next elections are coming up already in 2015 (Hiebert & Nguyen 2014). With the political changes, these civil society groups have gained more political space and can question

the backing of the NSAGs by claiming to speak for the many who did not participate in the armed struggle. Whereas the CBOs still very much depend on the protection of the NSAGs in the ceasefire areas, the political parties move more independently and may take over the policymaking role after a political settlement is achieved. Some of these parties were formed for the 2010 elections and now have seats in national and state-level parliaments. Examples are the Ploung-Sgaw Democratic Party (PSDP), a mainly Buddhist party, founded with the help of a monk in Karen State and supported by youth activists, and the Karen State Democracy and Development Party (KSDDP), which was formed by elements close to the DKBA leadership after the BGF transformation. Previously, NSAGs in general looked upon these parties as 'traitors', or as being in the pocket of the government, although the seats they won do suggest some support from the ethnic communities (Nilsen & Tønnesson 2013). Moreover, the new ethnic parties do reflect a possible self-chosen exit option from armed struggle, albeit at a very individual-based level: of the successful KSDDP candidates there was one from DKBA. In addition, an ex-KNU forestry minister was elected for the ruling party USDP in Karen State (South 2011: 28–9). More ethnically-based political parties are now emerging in the run-up to the 2015 elections, which could potentially both challenge and support the political settlement demands of the NSAGs (Nilsen & Tønnesson 2013). Another core concern, raised by our interviewees, was whether the Karen and the NSAG leaders have the capacity to govern a Karen State. These matters of possible political integration of NSAG members are further discussed in the next section.

FUTURE OPTIONS FOR THE ARMED ACTORS

As also reflected in the ceasefire negotiations, our interviews in Mon and Karen States pointed to a very strong conviction that the KNU in particular, but also the NMSP, is not ready to disarm. To some interviewees our question about disarmament was seen as odd and even surprising, as if giving up arms is unthinkable. This was not only the view of NSAG members; the Mon Women's Organisation, a CSO that works for Mon education and greater female involvement in the peace process explained: "the people do not want the armed groups to disarm, because they need them to protect their identity and freedom", adding that this is also a military power issue, because as long as "there are only Burmans in the top army positions, the NSAGs do not accept the army proposals" (group-interview 16 Jan 2014). The majority of interviewees envisioned some restructuring of the army into a Union Army or the development of a Federal Army, essentially meaning that the NSAGs would remain armed. Others also made it clear that the NSAGs will not be satisfied with economic incentives. A church pastor working with communities in the area of the Karen Peace Council (KPC) explained: "To have peace the government has tried to give the armed groups opportunities like land, cars and business, but the groups still do not trust them. The leaders need to be given high positions. They hold onto arms still because they want a federal state. Federalism will resolve the conflict" (interview, 17 Jan 2014).

Keeping arms was also seen as necessary for the NSAGs to protect the ethnic civilians in light of the continued mistrust in the Burma Army as the peace negotiations are still ongoing. One Catholic bishop, however suggested that NSAGs could lose their popularity among civilians as *armed* actors, because the ceasefire means that the Burma Army is no longer a real security threat. People decreasingly need the KNU's protection, and thus people are less willing to pay them taxes in exchange for security provision. This threat to the legitimacy of the NSAGs may increase as the ceasefires also allow the government to do development projects, including schools, in ethnic communities, as other interviewees suggested. Thus even in the course of the peace negotiations the NSAGs may be forced to try to reinvent themselves, or to come up with alternatives to their source of legitimacy as armed protectors of ethnic groups. Irrespective of all this, there was a general impression that disarmament before any political settlement is an unrealistic option. Moreover, despite what has been written in the media and by campaign organisations abroad, our interviews strongly contrasted with the view that the NSAGs were mainly motivated by financial opportunities (Keenan 2014). Some individuals within the NSAGs are satisfied with economic benefits and military integration, but this is far from everyone, as past ceasefire agreements have also shown.

In this section we consider seven possible options for the NSAGs in the future, in light of present positions *against* disarmament as a first step towards peace and integration. As we shall address, there are also some examples to draw on where formerly armed actors have voluntarily disarmed, for instance to become part of political parties or CSOs. Apart from this, the outlined options are of our own creation, and should therefore be seen as a preliminary contribution to the debate about future DDR in Myanmar, still not included in the peace negotiations. The options outlined are, however, informed by our interviews and by the wider DDR literature.

It should be further noted that a key emphasis here is *not* on demobilisation and disarmament, as is the case with mainstream DDR, but on reintegration options. This is due to our realisation that demobilisation and disarmament are unlikely as first steps in DDR in Myanmar. Reintegration here refers to the process in which fighters change their identity from 'combatant' to 'civilian', and change their behaviour by ending the use of violent means and increasing activities that are sanctioned by the mainstream community (Torjesen 2013).[8] The seven options are not mutually exclusive, and may likely work best if combined. They are: 1) integration into the security sector; 2) private security sector and village defence programmes or community policing; 3) political integration in the form of new or existing political parties; 4) government civil service and decentralised local government positions; 5) economic integration such as job creation and skills training, resembling conventional DDR programmes for lower ranks; 6) formalisation of large-scale businesses run by ex-combatants, and; 7) NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) for development projects.

We consider the obstacles and the dilemmas of each of these options below. Our analysis is far from exhaustive, and thus we make a call for a much deeper, evidence-based analysis of the various views and strategies of the

armed actors across Myanmar, as part of the peace process. Such an analysis should also thoroughly consider the political economy of the war and the post-war situation, which we have only touched upon briefly in this paper. This means paying attention to alternative systems of power, protection and profit that often entail both formal and informal networks of power and forms of social control (Berdal & Zaum 2013; Torjesen 2013).

Security sector integration

The international community in other post-war contexts has tended to prioritise the downsizing of the security sector in peacebuilding operations, because this signals the formal end of a conflict and demilitarisation is seen as key to economic development and political stability. This has implied a strong focus on disarmament as the first step to prevent re-ignition of conflict (Spear 1999; Mutengesa 2013). However, as Berdal & Zaum (2013) assert, this will very much depend on context; experiences from Uganda and Tajikistan, for instance, do point to military integration, rather than immediate disarmament as an appropriate first step towards stability (Mutengesa 2013; Torjesen & Macfarlane 2007). This resonates with our interviewees in Mon and Karen States who predominantly envisioned a future role for the NSAG members in either a reformed Union Army with relatively independent ethnic armed factions, or alternatively a federal army based on ethnic state divisions. Few spoke about downscaling the army and NSAGs after a peace agreement, although based on experiences elsewhere and the level of military spending in Myanmar, this could occur in the long term.

With reference to Uganda in the late 1980s, Mutengesa (2013) argues that the benefits of military integration for ensuring stability and

[8] A note of caution here: reintegration, with the prefix 're' can be a misnomer, because it suggests that armed actors were totally separated from family and community life during the war (Torjesen 2013: 3; see also McMullin 2013a). Many combatants maintain close contacts with their families and continue to function, at least part-time, in pre-war roles or in newly-established social structures created during the war, such as in the KNU 'liberated zones' (McConnachie 2014). The definition of reintegration must also consider that combatants may not always have exclusively used violent means, and they may also have partially lived civilian lives. This is a relevant observation for Myanmar, where decades-long conflict has seen pockets of self-governance within NSAG-controlled areas.

integration of ex-combatants can considerably outweigh the fiscal costs of keeping a large army. He argues that the national army was the appropriate place for fighters, who had known little else than rebel life, to 'decompress' and make the transition to civilian life. It also worked as a kind of confidence building and gave ex-combatants employment and a much needed sense of security (ibid: 343). The logic behind military integration was that it would have run counter to trust building and reconciliation efforts, had the government made civilian reintegration conditional on the surrendering of arms. Conversely, hasty disarmament would have meant 'reintegration into poverty' or, at worst, engagement in illicit activities or re-mobilisation into militia units, because employment opportunities were very scarce (ibid: 342).

In Myanmar it is questionable whether the NSAGs will be willing to enter a unified army, as the Burma Army now demands, even if such an army were restructured. In light of the BGF initiative, the NSAGs would likely only agree to military integration if they were given equivalent ranks within the army, rather than being subordinated to former Burmese army commanders. This has, for instance, been the case in Tajikistan, where NSAG commanders were also given positions in law enforcement structures, as well as allowed to directly control their wartime armed units. This was combined with positions in government for NSAG political leaders, business concessions as well as limited central government control of local police and law enforcement structures in those areas that the NSAG controlled (Torjesen & Macfarlane 2007). These arrangements ensured stability and trust in the peacebuilding process. However, due to lack of political regulation of illicit economies, such stability came at the cost of sustainable economic development,

because commanders used their positions for personal enrichment (ibid: 327). There are thus important political-economic issues to consider with such forms of military integration. Experiences from Congo also suggest that ethnic-based solutions to military integration risk that old ethnic rivalries from the war are reproduced across the units of the army (Knight 2009: 9).

In other post-war contexts military integration is now typically combined with wider Security Sector Reforms (SSR), including to the police and judiciary, which can involve the integration of NSAGs into national as well as regional police branches (Knight 2009). In the Philippines in the mid-1990s this proceeded without disarmament, and was combined with individual and on-the-job training (ibid: 11). Yet SSR has yet to be discussed in Myanmar, and presently it seems that the NSAGs are proposing specific federal police forces for the ethnic nationality states, as well as recognition of their own customary justice systems.

As Knight (2009) notes, integration into the police is less straightforward than military integration, as it requires radically different skills and education than does the military. Experiences from Burundi and Namibia illustrate the need for comprehensive training and careful recruitment among ex-combatants, if human rights abuses by police, or political instrumentalisation of them by former leaders, are to be avoided. Knight (2009) and Hill & Bowman (2006), also bring to attention the need to consider that the national police in post-war contexts are often viewed as an instrument of state repression, rather than as a service to citizens, and therefore they typically lack not only physical outreach, but also popular legitimacy. Moreover police integration – and SSR more broadly – need to take into consideration that there is seldom a com-

plete security vacuum at village and community levels in conflict or ceasefire areas: armed and non-armed local security forces, with varying levels of legitimacy and effectiveness exist in the absence of a well-functioning police service. This is also the case in Myanmar, such as in the KNU areas, although little evidence-based knowledge exists of how these forces operate, are structured and relate to or overlap with the NSAGs (UNDP 2012; McConnachie 2014). The KNU has initiated a training programme for a new Karen police force in their areas based on their own idea of a judiciary (including severe punishment for drugs and adultery) (Karen News, 24 February 2014). It is strongly criticised by the government. Thus, any integration of ex-combatants into the national or alternatively regional/state-level police services needs to consider these local security landscapes.

Community policing and private security guards

Although little is written in the DDR literature on the integration of ex-combatants into local-level security provision, with a predominant focus on national police forces, there are some experiences. In Liberia, for instance, a programme for community strengthening set up Community Peace Councils (CPCs) in areas hit hardest by the conflict as part of a more society-centred approach to improving security. The CPCs included different civilian representatives, amongst them IDPs and ex-combatants. They received various forms of training in conflict resolution, human rights, community policing, security, trauma healing and so forth, and have subsequently resolved hundreds of disputes related to land, thefts, marital conflicts etc. This has been important in an area where police presence is low and the judiciary is not yet fully functioning.

At a later stage the CPCs also began to work with the police and other national security actors, ensuring that community grievances were heard and that the police are responsive to them. Apart from potentially improving police–community relations, such initiatives can also provide an option for ex-combatants to integrate into civilian life, while developing their skills and getting community recognition in the area of security (Hill & Bowman 2006).

In Myanmar such community policing as an integration mechanism for ex-combatants could be considered as part of a wider SSR process, which could include not only members of NSAGs but also, potentially, existing government militias. Such an initiative should be based on proper understanding of already existing village defence forces, government militias and NSAG security providers, and the power dynamics that they are embedded in. Initiatives could consider to what extent such different groupings could be jointly integrated into local security councils.

Experiences from elsewhere however warn against allowing local security groups to be armed. In some instances community policing in post-war situations has involved the recruitment of civilians or ex-combatants, who are then provided with weapons to police their own societies due to the inadequacy of national police forces, such as in Afghanistan (Kumar & Behlendorf 2010: 13). Because such community police units do not receive professional training, the risk is that they develop into new forms of militia that can create other kinds of local instability. This suggests that disarmament of ex-combatants in the case of local security forces would be preferable, and that it is important that they are accountable to and vetted by local communities (ibid: 13).

Another option for ex-combatants that is little discussed in the DDR literature is em-

ployment in the private security sector. This sector typically grows in post-war societies, especially if transition involves economic liberalisation and the influx of foreign investors and international agencies, as is the case in Myanmar. In Kosovo for instance, private security companies have grown enormously since the end of the war and their manpower is now approaching the number of public police, and ex-combatants have established many of these companies. According to Florian (2014) the companies have increased the security for individuals and properties while also relieving the financial burden on public security institutions. They have created large employment possibilities for ex-combatants. While in Kosovo they are prohibited from handling weapons, private security companies in other contexts, such as Afghanistan, were used as a way for NSAG leaders with powerful political and economic networks to remain armed (Derksen 2014). Sierra Leonean ex-combatants have also been recruited by a large British private security company to take up security jobs in Iraq with salaries well above those that they can hope to receive in Sierra Leone. This has fulfilled the purpose of engaging ex-combatants in productive activities to avoid a return to conflict (Ramachandran 2010).

While creating employment, there is, however, the risk that when ex-combatants are hired as private security guards it places individuals who are often traumatised and accustomed to using violence to protect themselves and resolve conflict, in positions of power where they are charged with maintaining security. If such alternatives to 'decent work' become widespread, there is a real risk of destabilisation and rising insecurity (International Alert 2009). The question is whether and to what extent ex-combatants in Myanmar will be able to enter such business in a

way that is regulated so as to mitigate the potential destabilising effects of such employment.

Political parties and positions

Transformation of NSAGs into political parties, and political integration of ex-combatants into existing ones, is a common option used in peace settlements across Asia, Africa and Latin America. Political integration predominantly targets NSAG leaders, but it is also believed that it can give lower ranks a conduit for political expression so as to realise personal, social and economic goals through non-violent means (Mitton 2008: 202). In Aceh, Indonesia, for instance, ex-combatants could form local political parties as well as run as independent candidates, and this gave many NSAG commanders high political positions (Feith 2007). Here, and in other post-conflict contexts, political integration has been extensively supported by international agencies, financing the establishment and training of the new parties (Mitton 2008: 198). This is because it cannot be assumed that NSAGs already have the required political and technical skills to operate party apparatuses and engage in parliamentary politics. While most of our interviewees supported political integration as an option in Myanmar, there were also concerns. One of the supporters of the Karen party PSDP, a Buddhist monk, stated: "The leaders [of NSAGs] are not ready to be politicians in a democracy. They are not educated and civilised, but speak in a too rough manner like military way. They do not understand that democracy is to be representative of the people. They are individualists and think about personal gains" (Interview, 12 Jan 2014). He rather sees a political future for those youth who have no military

background, such as those of his own party, PSDP.

Although the Myanmar government has previously proposed that NSAGs transform into political parties, this proposal did not come with any specific promise of support or transition plans that would prepare the new parties to participate in the electoral system. They would simply have to contend for power on equal terms with others. Conversely, Nilsen & Tønnesen (2013) argue that the problem of adequate skills also concerns already existing political parties in Myanmar, and therefore a transformation of NSAGs into parties should be seen as part of a wider democratisation process.[9] Likely successful political integration will also depend on a profound transformation and demilitarisation of the political culture of NSAGs and beyond. Otherwise, as Torjesen (2013) warns with reference to other contexts, there can be a risk that political integration reproduces patronage politics and the mobilisation of military networks within electoral politics. Yet these issues cannot be generalised across all contexts and for all the NSAGs. In Myanmar for instance, the KNU and other larger NSAGs already have entrenched political structures and some internal democratic procedures in place, including many important CSOs like the Karen Women's Empowerment Organisation. Smaller splinter groups, like the KPF, do not, however, have well-organised political wings.

A core challenge to political integration in Myanmar is the great complexity and heterogeneity of already existing parties that represent the same ethnic minorities, which seems to be expanding further in the preparation for the 2015 elections (see Karen News, 2 May 2014). As mentioned earlier, it is not clear to what extent current parties represent the NSAGs, or if individual NSAG members are involved or support them or would be willing to lay down arms to join them. Potentially, political integration could involve motivating combatants and commanders to join these existing parties, especially those that represent their political goals (like those parties in Karen and Mon states which support the equality and self-determination of ethnic nationalities). While some few examples of alliances exist from the past, a main challenge is that many NSAG members view the parties that won seats in the 2010 elections as instrumentalised by the USDP government, rather than representing ethnic interests. In Karen State the youth activists showed little trust in the current Karen political parties, asserting that they mainly represent the Yangon Karen, rather than the 'native' Karen (Group interview, 13 Jan 2014). By running for the 2010 elections the parties were also seen to support the 2008 constitution, rather than a federal arrangement (interview, Mon Democracy Party leader, 16 Jan 2014).

To overcome these splits, some of the existing party representatives suggested that alliances could be built between NSAG parties and existing ones. A KPP minister in Karen state asserted: "the KNU leaders can become party officials in the KPP or they could make their own party […] and then we can make an alliance. This would mean a strong constituency, because KNU has support in the villages and KPP is strong in towns" (interview, 15 Jan 14). In Mon State we met one of the newer political parties, the Mon Democratic Party (MDP), formed after the ceasefire in 2012, and whose leader

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[9] The Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD) is already working with over 40 existing political parties in Myanmar to strengthen their skills and to raise the parliamentary dialogue. This work could be extended to the NSAGs if they were to turn into political parties (http://dipd.dk/partnerships/myanmar/).

is an NMSP ex-commander. MDP is therefore an example of 'self-integrated combatants' (Torjesen 2013: 4). However, there is not necessarily a direct overlap between this party and the armed group: "we do not represent the NMSP. We represent the Mon people, but NMSP is our ally" (Interview, 16 Jan 2014). He did not support the NMSP itself becoming a political party, but rather suggested that it joined the MDP to form a 'Mon National Party', which would then constitute a united ethnic representation. When we met with him he was deeply engaged in forming a Mon political alliance, but this is not easy: "we now see that maybe there will be three parties rather than two, because not everyone can agree" (Interview, 16 Jan 2014). A key challenge for political integration is therefore the potential rivalries and splits among those who already politically represent ethnic minorities through political parties and the NSAGs, whose political transformation could add to such rivalries.

For the 2015 elections the ethnic parties will face the challenge of creating broad alliances if they are to secure a voice and adequate representation in the current political system (Nilsen &Tønnesen 2013). Besides the 25% reserved seats for the military in parliament, there is today a single member constituency voting system, which favours larger parties.[10] Unless the system is changed to proportional representation or alternatively to a federal system that ensures seats to ethnic representatives, smaller ethnic minorities like the Mon

will end up still being poorly represented in a multiparty democracy.[11] Elections in the current system are therefore no guarantee that the NSAGs and their commanders will *de facto* gain power and voice by transforming into political parties (even if they were successfully elected by the communities that they have governed and protected). This could demotivate NSAG members from laying down arms in exchange for political integration. Conversely, the parliament is currently debating whether to introduce a proportional election system, but this is opposed by the main opposition party NLD, and by some of the very large ethnic political parties, because they will likely win more under the current system.

A related concern is the political legitimacy of the NSAGs in the various Karen and Mon constituencies. According to South (2012) many ethnic communities in Karen conflict-affected areas display strong support for the KNU, yet there is concern that this is not the case in other Karen constituencies. Some NSAG leaders fear losing popular support and control over client populations during the current peace process, especially as civilians resettle in government-controlled areas. Transformation into political parties as part of a peace settlement and disarmament process will arguably only be attractive to the NSAGs if they believe they are able to mobilise enough votes, as the unsuccessful experience of RUF in Sierra Leone also showed (Mitton 2008: 198). In other contexts, insecurity about the popular legitimacy of NSAGs

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[10] With this current single member system the majority Burman dominated National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is likely to win the 2015 elections and it is unclear to what extent they will represent ethnic minorities, despite claims that they support federalism. In principle the NLD could field ethnic minority candidates in the ethnic minority constituencies, but it is unclear how the ethnic parties and the NSAGs would react to this (Nilsen & Tønnesen 2013: 3).

[11] Proportional representation (PR) is a principle applied to voting systems to elect an assembly or council to ensure that the number of seats won by a party or group of candidates is proportionate to the number of votes received. For example, under a PR voting system, if 30% of voters support a particular party then roughly 30% of seats will be won by that party. Under PR systems, smaller parties are allocated seats in proportion to their share of the vote and are thus more likely to secure a certain level of representation.

has led to a combination of political integration in the form of electoral competition with power-sharing arrangements and the granting of higher positions to NSAG leaders within the existing government and state apparatus (Torjesen 2013; Mitton 2008). The question is whether the NSAGs in Myanmar would agree to such positions without this being combined with a federal system. Yet, even if the latter is the case, the NSAG leaders are not *ipso facto* guaranteed high positions.

Irrespective of the form it takes, political integration, Torjesen notes, also needs to consider the potential power games for positions among top and mid-level NSAG members, which may also affect lower ranks (2013: 6). In Aceh for instance, conflicts between rival fractions among the former GAM ex-combatants who became politicians after the 2005 peace settlement led to political violence in the run-up to the 2014 elections (Jakarta-Globe, 24 March 2014). Political integration must also consider the potential risks of violent remobilisation, especially if lower ranks are not integrated in other ways than being merely assumed to follow their commanders, as the political violence by ex-combatants in Sierra Leone illustrates (Christensen & Utas 2008). This further raises the question of the extent to which lower ranks will benefit and feel represented enough through the political integration of higher and middle ranks, so as not to return to conflict. According to Spear (2007) one of the problems in other post-war contexts is that many NSAG members, especially of lower rank, do not regard being in political opposition as providing for them economically, at least not sufficiently. This calls for a consideration of the heterogeneity of incentives to give up fighting and thus for different integration options. For instance in Sierra Leone more in-depth research illustrated that for the younger combatants it was

not political integration, but the promise of security, offer of amnesty, employment, and promises of social and economic welfare that were key (ibid: 201).

Civil service and local government positions

Another possible option for ex-combatants is positions within the civil service and local government. In Myanmar quite extensive decentralisation is already laid down in the 2008 Constitution and, in areas of the country not affected by conflict, international donor-supported decentralisation programmes are already being rolled out (interview, Susanne Kempel, 22 Jan 14). Currently it is unclear how decentralisation will be implemented in the ethnic minority states following a peace agreement, which will depend on what kind of federal solution the parties agree on. Also, the extent to which ex-combatants could find positions within local government has not been discussed, nor even whether the political agreement could involve an explicit plan to integrate at least some of the ex-combatants into the new local government institutions.

This option is apparently of more immediate relevance to members of the non-armed wings of the NSAGs, who already have experience as civil servants in the NSAG areas. For instance the NMSP Education Department has already had relative success in establishing schools with a Mon curriculum, even in government-controlled areas. The Mon State now allows teaching in Mon. In the peace negotiations the right to teach ethnic languages in schools is one key demand of the NSAGs, and as such integration of NSAGs into, and reform of, the educational sector could help further reconciliation. As mentioned earlier the NSAGs have also, over longer periods,

functioned as *de facto* local administrators, operating oftentimes in collaboration with village leaders (South 2011; McConnachie 2014). These experiences could be an asset in future governance reform and sustainable peacebuilding, but if not carefully considered they could also lay the ground for future tensions. Not only do local governance set-ups vary across the ethnic minority states, due to the shifting contours of the conflict; there are also areas with mixed local government, for instance where both KNU and government village headmen operate, sometimes along with village leaders accountable to other armed fractions, like the KPF splinter group (Interview, KPF leader, January 2014). Against this background South (2012) argues that present peace negotiations should already now include a dialogue about the future role of the various local government setups, and the question of what will happen with existing personnel within them and the power positions they hold. He also questions the governance capacities and technical expertise of existing personnel from the NSAGs, but adds that this also applies to officials within the government. These matters point to the need for extensive civil service training across all of Myanmar as part of broader governance reform.

In the literature on DDR very little is written about the relationship between ex-combatant reintegration and local government reform. This is likely because these are commonly separate processes, with DDR programmes preceding and/or being isolated from more regular development programmes (Date-Bah 2003). An exception is Aceh since the 2005 peace agreement, which involved the granting of considerable autonomy to the Aceh area and the transformation of GAM combatants into government administrators (Ansori 2012). Such integration was part of a wider local democratisation process and has been significant for peacebuilding. However, this has not been without problems, as mentioned earlier. Whereas the GAM elite has been able to get lucrative business contracts through their political and bureaucratic positions, most of the rank and file remain unemployed and live in poverty. Some have, resultantly, also engaged in criminal activity. Tensions are further complicated by ethnic antagonisms between the Acehnese and the various ethnic minorities who reside in the area (Ansori 2012: 37–38). This shows that it is significant that not only NSAG leaders, but also rank-and-file combatants and civilians from other ethnic groups, are considered in local government initiatives, combined where necessary with economic (re)integration efforts, skills training and education.

Economic integration: job creation, education and training

Internationally-supported DDR programmes have typically focused on the economic sides of (re)integration, especially of lower rank-and-file combatants (McMullin 2013a). Commonly economic integration is understood as a process whereby the combatants are moved away from livelihood support mechanisms associated with militia or military networks, towards sustainable employment in formal and informal sectors, and other income-generating activities, including agriculture (Torjesen 2013: 6). Apart from providing an income and an occupation that moves them away from combat or criminality, a job can also give ex-combatants a sense of pride about supporting their families and thus aid their psychological and social reintegration (Specht 2003).

McMullin (2013a) describes a whole array of different reintegration mechanisms used

by international agencies that apart from cash, housing, land, food and clothing, include different forms of vocational and agricultural training, job placement, education for ex-combatants, income generation with microcredit schemes, and public works schemes. In previous years DDR programmes have also moved away from an exclusive focus on ex-combatants to involve whole communities in joint community development and reconstruction work, where both civilians and ex-combatants participate and get on-the-job training (such as the rebuilding of schools, clinics, roads and wells) (Munive & Jakobsen 2012: 362). Apart from job creation and contribution to community development, this also potentially lessens distrust and increases tolerance between different conflict-affected groups, thereby also supporting reconciliation and social reintegration (Specht 2003: 96).

A key challenge is the overall problem of unemployment and lack of jobs in post-war situations, as civil wars often leave large parts of the country with devastated economies. Thus not only ex-combatants, but also numerous civilians often face unemployment. DDR programmes targeting exclusively ex-combatants with training and job creation risk undermining other people's needs and, at worst, exacerbating already existing social tensions and resentment of ex-combatants (Specht 2003: 76). Moreover Specht (2003: 87) argues that reintegration programmes should go hand in hand with wider economic revival efforts such as labour intensive works, local economic development and capacity building of employment-related institutions and ministries. She speaks about creating a 'political economy of peace', which involves integrating ex-combatants into a licit economy, essentially by closing off illicit routes to economic gain. This requires a deep under-

standing of wartime economies, and of how armed actors of different ranks have been engaged in these. In our interviews one of the critical issues raised was that the armed conflict has created a kind of 'lost generation' of people who have known little but war and military conduct, and who see few incentives or opportunities to join the licit economy.

Myanmar is already, as the peace negotiations are going on, experiencing large investments and new businesses, as the country is opening up for foreign investors and the economy is becoming more liberalised. Potentially, if exploited in the right way, this could also benefit the reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life through acquiring jobs in new private sectors. However, as experiences from elsewhere have shown, this will likely be more realisable if ex-combatants are given heightened skills and education as part of, for instance, internationally-funded skills training. It is in this area in particular that international donors can play a part and where there are already strong experiences from elsewhere. Specht (2003) also suggests that there may be a need for the government to lobby potential employers to recruit ex-combatants, as it cannot be taken for granted that private business will necessarily be willing to hire them. Sometimes providing benefits to the employers in the form of tax reduction or other incentives might be necessary (Specht 2003: 95). According to our interviews there is a real worry now in Mon and Karen states that government and foreign businesses are not hiring local residents from among the Karen and Mon, but are importing labourers from central Myanmar. If this is a tendency that continues, this will not only make it difficult for ex-combatants to get jobs, but will also challenge the reintegration of returning IDPs. A concern in the Karen and Mon states is also that the new businesses are owned by

foreigners or the Bamar, and thereby challenge the economic power of the ethnic minorities in their own states. As we discussed earlier with reference to Woods (2011), these concerns are deeply embedded in experiences with the ceasefire economies, including the Burmese military's alliances with foreign Chinese and Thai investors.

In this regard Torjesen (2013) points out that economic reintegration should not be divorced from considerations of politics and power, so often overlooked in international DDR programmes. In a post-war situation most economic activities are deeply connected to networks of power nurtured during the war, and key combatants have often controlled or enjoyed the benefits of the war economy, which can be hard to break. What need to be considered are the evolving patterns of domination after a peace agreement and the conditions for open competition or alternatively monopolisation in the economy as these aspects matter a lot, especially to the actual capacity of low-level combatants to get jobs (Torjesen 2013). One of our interviewees in Karen State, a Karen but also a member of the ruling party, suggested that it is important to strengthen Karen business corporations that assist the Karen – and potentially ex-combatants – in creating businesses (Interview, 14 Jan 2014). His concern was that the KNU itself has already established such a corporation, which he feared would not be inclusive of other Karen businesses.

Economic integration: large scale agro and mineral business development

This option focuses on the integration into and/or formalisation of ex-combatant's existing agricultural or mineral businesses and other forms of trade, for instance by granting them land and establishing larger corporations. This is not an area that DDR programmes have engaged with, but more one that has been used by governments or winning parties to a conflict as part of an effort to satisfy the economic incentives of NSAG commanders to end the armed conflict (as in Angola). Such an option already has historical roots in Myanmar from the 1989–1995 ceasefires, yet without accompanying disarmament. For instance the KPF general with whom we met in January 2014 had used his deal with the government in 1995 to commence large-scale agricultural and infrastructural projects that also benefit the population in his area at large. However there is cause for concern as this also involves considerable emphasis on personal enrichment. Many KNU commanders, as other NSAGs, have also been involved in business development for a long time. These experiences do point towards a potential entry point to economic (re)integration as part of the peace process. The challenge is that these businesses have also tended to reproduce war economies, and been partly illicit. This calls for regulation and formalisation of the informal or illicit economic activities as part of the peace negotiations. It must also be ensured that they benefit the ethnic populations at large, as well as involving employment of rank-and-file combatants. In addition, it is necessary to consider the large business concessions that are driven by national army commanders – a critical matter that is high on the NSAGs' peace negotiation agenda, and in their demands for clear land laws that support ethnic rights.

Civil Society Organisations and NGOs

Civil society organisations (CSOs) enjoy an expanding space for operation in Myanmar,

and as international donor flows are increasing inside the country there will be a growing demand for local NGOs as partners in development. In one respect such new civil society organisations could be seen as challenging the NSAGs' local legitimacy, as we discussed earlier, because many of them claim that they represent those civilians who did not participate in the armed struggle. Conversely, many of those operating in the ethnic states still need the protection of the NSAGs in the areas where they operate and therefore have some deep alliances. The possibility of CSOs becoming spaces for ex-combatant integration into civilian life is not something one reads about in the DDR literature, but in Myanmar this could be relevant. This became clear to us in Mon State when we met with the Ramanua Peace Foundation (RPF), which had been established after the 2012 NMSP ceasefire. Two of its founders were former NMSP members, and essentially they had 'self-integrated' by setting up RPF. It now receives considerable international donor funding (from USAID and ILO) to support the peace process by doing projects in the areas of water and sanitation, women's empowerment and leadership training in conflict-affected areas. Their work is ground-breaking because, as one of the first CSOs, it was registered with the government and allowed to carry out development projects in NMSP areas. The two founders already had some skills to enable them to re-invent themselves as a development CSO, because they had been part of the NMSP's education department.

To summarise, while not exhaustive the seven options listed above provide concrete starting points for envisioning the future role of armed actors in a post-conflict Myanmar, drawing already on some concrete examples and on what our interviewees brought to the table. Such options still need to be discussed openly in the peace negotiations, where little attention has been paid to what middle and lower ranked armed actors can expect for the future. This creates continued mistrust in the peace process and a sense of insecurity among armed actors. Likely the seven options will need to be combined, because political and economic integration are tightly interwoven, and because a political settlement will probably involve some form of military integration as continued armament of the NSAGs is high on their negotiating agenda. In addition, reintegration concerns should also consider the many returning IDPs and refugees as well as the disabled ex-combatants.

CONCLUSION

In this paper our discussion of the future options for ethnic armed actors in Myanmar's peace process took its point of departure in the realisation that conventional DDR programming will not be realistic without, first, a far-reaching political settlement that involves all armed groups. The ethnic NSAGs will not lay down arms before the political system changes towards a federal one. In contrast to the main rationale underlying international DDR programmes, economic incentives have previously proven futile and will likely only satisfy a minority of NSAG members in Myanmar, unless combined with political positions and status. The strong emphasis on political change should be seen in light of the exceptionally long history of ethnic-based armed conflicts in Myanmar's borderlands under repressive military regimes which have, despite the growth of war economies, always been embedded in strong ethno-political agendas. This is now also recognised by the government, which has opened up for polit-

ical dialogue about federalism in the current ceasefire negotiations.

Yet even if conventional DDR programmes may be unrealistic in Myanmar without political change, we have also argued in this paper that it is important to open a dialogue about the future *reintegration* options for armed actors. If conducted in an inclusive way that combines economic incentives with political and social ones, this could have the positive effect of creating more trust in the peace process. So far in Myanmar concrete suggestions towards reintegration have been lacking in the peace negotiation talks. In this paper we have therefore made a first attempt to outline some of the potential options: from security sector integration to economic and political integration, including the possible inclusion of ex-combatants in civil society organisations and local government. These options have been inspired by the critical DDR literature.

As Derksen (2014) notes: "supporting armed groups in their integration into politics, security forces or civil society is arguably the most important element of DDR". However, in arguing for reintegration it should be highlighted that there are no quick solutions and no blueprint. The modalities need to be based on particular contextual understandings. It is also important not to treat armed actors as homogenous groups. The latter is particularly pertinent in Myanmar, where there is a multiplicity of different NSAGs. Against this background Sedra (2003) calls for extensive data and research on combatants on a countrywide basis, which aims to "determine the socio-economic positions and needs of ex-combatants" (Sedra 2003: 64). Torjesen (2013: 2) further suggests that a thorough analysis of reintegration options should start not with DDR programme activities, but "with the ex-combatants them-

selves and their encounters with social, political and economic challenges". In this regard, Specht (2003) adds that political analysis of conflicts, studies of the structure of NSAGs and the goals of the leaders, assessments of economic potential and so forth, "need to be complemented by anthropological studies on the cultural and religious background of the combatants and the socio-cultural status of ex-combatants in their communities" (Specht 2003: 103). She adds: "It is only through the understanding of motives, coloured as they are by economics, politics, culture and religion, that one can think about solutions and social healing" (ibid: 104). So far such analysis is lacking in the Myanmar context. Although some NSAGs, with support from the Norwegian-funded Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI), have facilitated community consultations on the peace process, these seemingly do not include efforts to also understand the perspectives of lower and middle ranking armed actors.

The absence of a focus on middle and lower ranks is likely influenced by the fact that the peace negotiations in Myanmar are in general very focused on the elite, involving predominantly the leaders of the main NSAGs. Experiences from elsewhere point to the need to give transparently equal treatment to all armed units in a DDR process. If not the excluded groups are at risk of feeling undermined in the process, and at worst turning into autonomous spheres of violence and predation (Derksen 2014; Spear 2007). Another critical aspect seen in other peacebuilding contexts is that a split is created between the leadership who get a political settlement and political roles, and low ranks who undergo a rather depoliticised, and donor-driven DDR process. Meanwhile the middle ranks are forgotten (Spear 2007: 181; Derksen 2014). This poses a risk to the remobilisation of lower ranks,

because usually mid-level commanders have stronger connections to the lower ranks than do the leaders. Moreover, in many contexts of conflict and also in Myanmar, mid-level commanders have enjoyed considerable local power, prestige and access to informal trade and business, as well as having connections to powerful figures at the local level. Currently, it is unclear what future position and roles such armed actors will have in Myanmar, and how this will feed into the new local governance reforms and the wider political settlement. This raises the issue of political settlement in relation to a much more profound governance reform process.

As Derksen (2014: 2) argues with reference to Afghanistan, it is important that DDR discussions also consider local ownership and power dynamics rather than focusing on national-level political settlements alone, adding that: "if there is a political settlement, translating national power-sharing into local arrangements that give the main local actors access to power and resources will be crucial". In this paper we touched on this matter in our discussion of options for ex-combatants within new local government structures. This aspect is essentially about politics and power sharing, not only at a macro or national level, but also at village and township levels. As discussed in this paper, many NSAGs in Myanmar have for years run *de facto* local administrations, schools, health posts and at least rudimentary security and justice institutions, which enjoyed considerable local support. As South (2012: 22) argues, this makes it particularly important to discuss sub-national governance issues in the peace process negotiations. While the current governance capacity, technical expertise, and also popular legitimacy of the NSAGs can be questioned – indeed much more knowledge is needed of these matters – there are potential opportunities

for NSAG members to be incorporated into post-ceasefire governance positions. Myanmar may look to experiences with local government integration in Aceh and also, more recently, in the Philippines. Yet again this will very much depend on what kind of political settlement is reached during the next months and how the government and the NSAGs can agree to define the 'federal system'.

The remaining question is what role can the international donor community play in the current process and in future DDR-style programmes? Despite the influx of major bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, there is hardly any international involvement in the peace process. Myanmar is known for its home-grown and rather secretive peace negotiations, even since 2012 when the government began to open up to the international community. Apart from the Norwegian-funded MPSI, which is phasing out, and the funding by the EU of the MPC, and of UNFC by the Japanese Nippon Foundation, donors are today principally involved in supporting programmes related to the government-led reform process, along with humanitarian aid. While donors such as the UNDP have a stated focus on the ethnic nationalities, there is very meagre engagement in, or inclusion of, peacebuilding concerns in their programmes. This may be related to the fact that the international community is not invited by the government to actively partake in peace negotiations, as in other contexts. At the same time it likely reflects a tendency for donors in general to prefer to work through formal government structures. Resultantly development programmes in support of government-led reforms are being rolled out on the sidelines of the peace process. This should be carefully considered, with a clear 'do no harm' emphasis, because development has political implications (Anderson 1999).

In the Mon and Karen states our interviewees aired a concern for current international involvement in development projects. There was a strong view that until a political settlement is reached international donors should stay out of ceasefire and NSAG areas in the sense of supporting government development initiatives, because this is seen as boosting the legitimacy of the government and undermining the political demands of the NSAGs in the peace process. This raises the question of how and to what extent donors can be inclusive of ethnic nationalities' concerns when they are operating through government agreements. There must at least be a strong awareness among internationals about the potential damaging effects on sustainable peace.

Having said this, there are clear openings for support. For instance, CSOs like the aforementioned Ramanua Peace Foundation (RPF) whose leaders are from the NMSP, are welcoming donor funds for development assistance to NSAG areas, including in agreement with the government. Moreover, there could be openings, after the signing of a National Ceasefire Accord, for international agencies to support DDR-like programmes, drawing on the long-term experiences and expertise from other contexts. However, as we have argued in this paper, and as suggested in the critical literature on DDR (Munive & Jakobsen 2012; Spear 2007; Torjensen 2013; Muggah 2005; McMullin 2013b), such eventual support should not take the form of models exported from other contexts, but be based on careful contextual analysis that is sensitive to the power dynamics and heterogeneity of the NSAGs. National and local ownership of the process must be ensured (Munive 2013).

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APPENDIX: LIST OF ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS[12]

Source: Gravers & Ytzen 2014

Name of ethnic armed groups	Founded	Description
*Burma Communist Party (BCP) // People's Army (PA).	1939	Multi-ethnic, Burman leadership with ethnic minority troops. First led by Aung San. Resisted Japanese occupation. Expelled from AFPFL 1946, rebelled 1948 but fragmented. Supported by China esp. after 1967 anti-Chinese riots, when became powerful, controlling N. Shan State, involvement in drug business. Effectively destroyed after ethnic mutiny 1989. Progenitor of many groups, some retaining informal links.
Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) // Army (KIA).	1961	Ethnic Kachin. Lead group pursuing Kachin independence, Strength 7,000–10,000. Member UNFC, NCCT. (For fuller details, see 'Kachin Independence Army').
*New Democratic Army–Kachin (NDA-K).	1989	Ethnic Kachin, mainly Lachik sub-group. KIA unit defected to BCP 1988. NDA-K created after BCP demise, signing ceasefire with regime. Heavily involved in local cross-border timber trade. Ceased to exist 2009 when became a Border Guard Force (BGF).
Arakan Army (AA).	2008	Ethnic Rakhine but based in Kachin State. Has fought alongside KIA since 2011. Strength c. 500. Member NCCT.
*Palaung State Liberation Organisation (PSLO) // ~ Army (PSLA).	1963	Ethnic Palaung. Origins in Palaung National Force, which began uprising in 1963. Ceasefire with regime 1991. Forcibly disarmed, converted into People's Militia Group (PMG) 2005.
Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF) // Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).	1992	Ethnic Palaung. Formed after PSLO ceasefire. Currently fighting with KIA and SSA-N against regime in N. Shan State. Strength 1,000–1,500. Member UNFC, NCCT.
Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) // Shan State Army–North (SSA-N).	1964	Ethnic Shan. Origin in Shan State Army; split in 1970s, northern faction joining BCP. SSA-N created 1989 after BCP demise, signing ceasefire with regime. Most converted into PMG 2010, remainder attacked by Tatmadaw. New ceasefire 2012 but sporadic fighting continues. Strength c. 4,000. Member UNFC.
*Kachin Defence Army (KDA).	1991	Ethnic Kachin (NE Shan State). Ex-KIA unit, broke away 1990. Signed ceasefire with regime 1991. Involved in narcotics trafficking. Application to become BGF rejected and forcibly disarmed by regime, converted into PMG units 2010

[12] Organisations/groups marked by an asterisk (*) are defunct but have historical relevance. The term 'defunct' is relative, however. Despite becoming border guard or militia units, some groups like the KPF seem to have retained considerable autonomy whereas others like the NDA-K appear under total Tatmadaw control. For this reason, the KNPLF is not marked as defunct; though converted to a BGF, it seems to have recreated itself as a political and business organisation.

Name of ethnic armed groups	Founded	Description
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).	1989	Ethnic Kokang Chinese. Founded after BCP demise, signing ceasefire with regime. Major drug supplier (also methamphetamine, yaa baa). Rejected order to become BGF, attacked by regime 2009 ('Kokang incident'), converted into BGF. Remnant fled to Yunnan, regrouped with Chinese, Wa and Mongla support. Strength c. 300. Member NCCT, observer UNFC.
United Wa State Party // ~ Army (UWSA).	1989	Ethnic Wa. Founded after BCP demise, signing ceasefire with regime. Strongly supported by China, close ties NDA-K, MNDAA and NDAA. Major drug supplier (also yaa baa) but has banned poppy cultivation in its territory. Supported regime against MTA 1996, also more recently against SSA-S drug-trade rival. Rejected order to become BGF, supported MNDAA during Kokang incident 2009 but not directly attacked. New ceasefire 2011 but building up military resources. Strength c. 30,000 (biggest ethnic army).
National Democratic Alliance Army–Eastern Shan State (NDAA)	1989	aka. Mongla group. Ethnic Shan and Akha. Founded after BCP demise, signing ceasefire with regime. Close ties NDA-K, MNDAA and UWSA. Lucrative casino business with Chinese tourists, also money laundering of drug money. Rejected order to become BGF 2009 but not directly attacked. New ceasefire 2011. Strength c. 3,000.
Lahu Democratic Union (LDU).	1962	Ethnic Lahu. Origin in Lahu–Shan rebellion 1958, Lahu National Organisation founded 1962, ceasefire 1994. Most Lahu militias converted into BGF 2010. LDU apparently remnant group. Strength <100. Member UNFC, NCCT.
Wa National Organisation (WNO) // ~ Army (WNA).	1976	Ethnic Wa. Anti-communist roots. Opium producer. Unites with UWSA against Khun Sa, remnant later allied with SSA-S. No ceasefire but today non-combatant. Strength c. 200. Member UNFC, NCCT.
*Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA).	1971	Ethnic Shan. pro-KMT, involved in narcotics. Joined with Khun Sa to form MTA 1985.
*Mong Tai Army (MTA).	1985	Mainly ethnic Shan. Origins in groups led by opium warlord Khun Sa, formed when his Shan United Army joined with SURA. Became dominant Shan group, Golden Triangle's main opium supplier. Weakened by mutiny/SSNA defection 1995, attacked 1996 by UWSA and Tatmadaw, surrendered but remnant spawned SSA-S.
Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) // Shan State Army-South (SSA-S).	1996	Ethnic Shan. Origin in SURA/MTA. After Khun Sa surrender, remnant regrouped as SURA, merged with other groups to form SSA-S, continued resisting regime. RCSS established as political wing 2000. New ceasefire 2011 but sporadic fighting continues, also with UWSA. Strength c. 6,000.

Name of ethnic armed groups	Founded	Description
*Shan State National Army (SSNA).	1995	Ethnic Shan. Formed by mutineers concerned MTA more interested in drug trade than Shan freedom. Ceasefire 1995. Rejects disarmament and merges with SSA-S 2005.
*Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organisation (SNPLO).	1967	Multi-ethnic, Pa-O dominated. Founded from several Shan State groups including PNLO. Splits after alliance with BCP 1976. Ceasefire 1994. Forcibly disarmed 2007–08, armed remnant reforming as revived PNLO.
*Pa-O People's Liberation Organisation (PPLO).	1991	Ethnic Pa-O. Origin in Pa-O National Organisation, anti-communist splinter group from SNPLO. Ceasefire 1991, rejectionist group forming PPLO. Combines with PNLO 2009.
Pa-O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO) // ~ Army (PNLA).	1949	Ethnic Pa-O. Surrendered 1958. Revolt resumed 1966, merges with SNPLO 1967. Revived by remnant group 2007 when SNPLO forcibly disarmed, combines with PPLO 2009. New ceasefire 2012. Strength c. 400. Member UNFC, NCCT.
Kayan New Land Party (KNLP).	1964	Mainly ethnic Karen (Kayan and Kayah sub-groups). Opposing Mobye Dam, ceasefire 1994. Pressured to become PMG 2010, refuses but holds ceasefire. Strength c. 500. Observer UNFC.
Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) // Karenni Army (KA).	1957	Ethnic Karen (mainly Kayah). Origins in struggle from 1946 to preserve nominal independence of Karenni States, anti-communist. Ceasefire 1995 but quickly fails. New ceasefire 2012. Strength c. 600. Member UNFC, NCCT.
Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF).	1978	Ethnic Karen (Kayah). Formed by pro-BCP splinter group of KNPP, ceasefire 1994. Converted to BGF 2009 but continued existence as political party. Observer UNFC.
Karen National Union (KNU) // Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).	1947	Mainly ethnic Karen, Christian-led. Founded seeking Karen independence, fighting 1949. Controls large area from Manerplaw by 1970s, funded by control of black market trade on Thai border. Largely driven into exile after DKBP split and fall of Manerplaw 1994–95. Ceasefire 2012. Strength c. 5,000. Member UNFC, NCCT.
All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF).	1988	Multi-ethnic. Formed after crushing of 8888 Revolt by students fleeing to border regions. Ceasefire 2013 but continues to support KIA. Strength c. 600.
*Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).	1994	Ethnic Karen (Buddhist). Founded as Buddhist splinter group from Christian-dominated KNU/KNLA. Supports Tatmadaw capture Manerplaw and drive KNU into exile, wars on KNU also in Thai refuge. Converts to BGF 2010.

Name of ethnic armed groups	Founded	Description
Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA-5).	2010	Ethnic Karen (Buddhist). Founded by DKBA splinter group rejecting conversion to BGF. Ceasefire 2011 but still fighting BGF comrades, cooperation with KNLA. Strength c. 1,500. Member NCCT.
*Karen Peace Force (KPF).	1997	Ethnic Karen. Founded as breakaway KNLA unit seeking peace with regime, ceasefire 1997. Converts to BGF 2010.
KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC).	2007	Ethnic Karen. Founded as breakaway KNLA unit seeking peace with regime, ceasefire 2007, new ceasefire 2012. Strength 100–200. Member NCCT.
New Mon State Party (NMSP) // Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA).	1958	Ethnic Mon. Origins in Mon uprising from 1948, NMSP formed after surrender of main rebels. Ceasefire 1995. Rejected order to become BGF 2010 but not attacked. New ceasefire 2012. Strength c. 800. Member UNFC, NCCT.
Myeik-Dawei United Front (MDUF).	1989	Ethnic Tavoy (Burman). Origins in BCP insurgency from 1948 in Tenasserim. Founded after BCP demise. No ceasefire but today non-combatant. Strength 100–200.
Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), aka. Rakhine State Liberation Party // Army (ALA).	1967	Ethnic Rakhine. ALA formed 1974. Part of fractured Rakhine rebellion. Ceasefire 2012. Strength <100. Member NCCT.
Arakan National Council (ANC).	2004	Ethnic Rakhine. Umbrella organisation of Rakhine groups including ALP. Member UNFC.
Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO).	early 1980s	Ethnic Rohingya. Origins in fragmented Rohingya resistance from 1947. Based Bangladesh, no presence in Myanmar, links with Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Joins ARNO 1998 but rejects full integration 2001, factional splits. Strength unknown (miniscule).
Arakan Rohingya National Organisa-tion (ARNO).	1998	Ethnic Rohingya. Formed to unite fragmented Rohingya resistance. Currently leading Rohingya organisation, claimed links with Taliban and Al-Qaeda.
Chin National Front (CNF) // ~ Army (CNA).	1988	Ethnic Chin. Limited fighting. Ceasefire 2012. Strength c. 200. Member UNFC, NCCT.
Zomi Reunification Organisation (ZRO) // ~ Army. Ethnic Chin (Zomi).	1996	Seeking unification of Zomi in Burma and India. Mainly active in India. Strength c. 3,000.
National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Khaplang (NSCN-K).	1980	Ethnic Naga. Seeking union of Naga in Burma and NE India. Split 1988, NSCN-K Burma based wing. Ceasefire 2012. Strength 500–600.