

## **North Myanmar Minority Issues & its Impact on China-Myanmar Relations**

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### **Abstract**

The long-lasting contradiction and conflicts between north Myanmar minorities and central government resulted from that the bilateral relations status has not yet been settled down after Myanmar obtaining independence from British colony India: that is to say Myanmar government betrayed its original promise and deprived the ethnic groups autonomy right. Along with Myanmar preparation for reform and reconciliation with the US, its domestic political process has highly involved into regional/global big power struggles, thus the conflicts between north Myanmar ethnic militants and its military government have very complicated backgrounds of external forces. In fact, though there is every reason for Myanmar domestic contractions to break out and for a long time lead to factual conflicts, however the current conflicts directly result from the US Asia pivot strategy to contain China, not only making China a victim of Myanmar domestic conflicts, but also seriously deteriorating China-Myanmar relations.

**Key Words:** Northern Myanmar minority, military conflict, China-Myanmar relations, US Asia strategy, China-US rivalry.

After being independent after WWII, Burma was just a very ordinary country in Southeast Asia, since 1988, Burma/Myanmar has attracted a great deal of international attention however. Most of such attention pertains to domestic political developments and in particular the violence associated with the 1988 protests for democracy, the annulment of the 1990 election results, and the detention of opposition politicians particularly Aung San Suu Kyi.<sup>1</sup> Facing ever increasing pressure on its human rights issue thereafter, Myanmar military junta was further isolated by the US-led international sanctions. In 2007, the UN drafted a resolution that condemned Myanmar's human rights violations, which if it had not been vetoed by China, would have enabled international humanitarian organizations to operate without restriction and

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<sup>1</sup> N. Ganesan, "Myanmar-China Relations: Interlocking Interest but Independent output", *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, / Volume 12 / Issue 01 / April 2011, pp 95-111

begin political dialogue with all stakeholders.<sup>2</sup> So thanks to the Chinese government help that enabled Myanmar military government to weather the storm during the most difficult times, and China has been on quite good terms with Myanmar military government. But everything has changed since 2011, and China-Myanmar's long time good relations seem to be at the crossroads.

### **The worsening Northern Myanmar Minority Issues**

In the era of economic globalization, Asia Pacific countries generally emphasize on economic development and cooperation, Myanmar however plunges into domestic ethnic conflicts and seems to be out of control now, arousing both regional and international attention due to the following factors.

First, the conflict tends to be on rise recently. Myanmar political role and strategy keep changing in the recent years, specifically reflects in two processes: one is the so-called open to the western countries; one is the so-called democracy. In the name of terminating military ruling and moving toward democracy, Myanmar political circle has been reshuffled, more and more pro-western figures start to control power. In order to manipulate the country, the US wants to split Myanmar federation in the name of supporting Aung San Suu Kyi against its government, so Myanmar needs to seek China's help to maintain its integrity, but is unable to resist the American pressure to contain China. China however wants to retain Myanmar unification to serve as a buffer zone from the Southern frontier. The above two processes were supported and encouraged by the western countries or actually the result actively promoted by the US, promoting not only Myanmar political and economic shifts, but also its strategic shifts, making it a new player in the western strategic framework.

Second, Myanmar military government constantly increases striking against and even eliminating the north ethnic militants. Due to historic background and complicated reality of north Myanmar ethnic issues, as a close neighbor China suggests that Myanmar military government should face the objective reality of northern ethnic alliances, and north Myanmar peace needs a package plan to resolve instead of leaving behind problems for restarting war. Unfortunately Myanmar military did not listen to China's suggestions, and war broke out then, for sitting down to negotiate would mean recognizing northern ethnic de facto status. Some of

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<sup>2</sup> Billy Tea, "China and Myanmar: Strategic Interests, Strategies and the Road Ahead", *Institutue of Peace and Conflict Studies*, New Delhi, India, Sept. 2010.

the north Myanmar ethnic militants are the Kuomintang Chinese expedition troops children; some evolved from the former Myanmar communist troops. China-Myanmar border area situation is in tension, and the armed conflict crossed Chinese border, challenging China-Myanmar relations. That as a stronger party China suffers from Myanmar domestic conflicts does not accord by the international relations norm at all. But it is Kachin Independence Arm that fought furiously against Myanmar military, since Kachin has been supported by the US, it is clear to see the US role in the war against China. So there is no use for China to teach any Myanmar party a lesson without solving conflicts with the US first of all.

Third, important strategic position of Myanmar makes the conflict consequence much more serious. In history, Myanmar used to be the only channel for the war fighting China on continent during the WWII, thus Japan tried its best to invade Myanmar; today, it is the important passage and shortcut for China to go to Indian Ocean and thus China cooperated with Myanmar in port construction and oil and gas pipelines, consequently inviting external powers to compete. Adjacent to Andaman Sea to the west, India and Bangladesh to the northwest, China to the northeast and Thailand and Laos to the Southeast, Myanmar is located in a very important strategic location. China's strategic objective appears to be to gain direct access to Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea through Myanmar bypassing the narrow Strait of Malacca.<sup>3</sup> So for a long time, Myanmar has been the US-led western subversion target in order to prevent China from entering Indian Ocean. Since promoting Asia Pivot strategy in 2010, the US has been more determined to contain China, and thus paid more attention to Myanmar.

Last, the US is determined to compete with China over the region, and Myanmar serves as an arena. While economic considerations are clearly a motivation, the primary aim of the Obama administration is to undercut China's relations with Burma as it seeks to develop anti-China alliances throughout the region.<sup>4</sup> Speaking at a development aid conference en route to Burma Dec. 2011, Ms. Clinton warned that emerging economies might be more interested in exploiting natural resources than promoting development. She warned that "be wary of donors who are more interested in extracting your resources than in building your capacity".<sup>5</sup> Since Chinese investments went to mostly ethnic minority area, such as Kachin, she certainly intended warning them. With the political and economic rise of China, the US initiated its "return to the

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<sup>3</sup> Col R Hariharan, India-Myanmar-China relations, *Asian Tribune*, Vol, 12, No. 1166, July 19, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Symonds, "Clinton in Burma: Another US move against China", World Socialist Web Site, International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), Dec. 3, 2011, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2011/12/burm-d03.html>

<sup>5</sup> "Clinton warning over aid from China", Dec. 1, 2011, <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001042005/en>

Asia-Pacific region" strategy in a bid to reconsolidate its global hegemony. Myanmar was once more on the US political agenda, reflected in its support to Kachin's military operation to pressure Naypyidaw.

The major condition for government military to reach ceasefire agreement is "One country one army", demanding the independent armies disarmed. Since Myanmar government has signed agreements with many other ethnic militant groups, conflicts occurred mostly with Kachin independent army (KIA). Three successive years war fighting brought Kachin independent army overwhelming pressure, its economy also faces breakdown. Due to the need for the US to reconcile with Myanmar, Washington did not provide any real support to Kachin independent army, instead of directing it to develop alliance with Aung San Suu Kyi. However, due to China's position, Kachin did not implement any plan plotted by the US to lend military support to Aung San Suu Kyi, thus reaching no agreement at all with the US. KIA commander in chief Zaw Khaung said that Myanmar government military attacked Kachin after "the US Pacific army deputy general commander in chief and defense department high rank officers arrived Myitkyina", it is not coincidental but for demonstrating strong Myanmar military strength for the military groups to negotiate with the US, indicating Myanmar army is the real American followers, which proves that the US would rather sacrifice its ally in order to drag China into the conflict. The American think-tank CSIS recently proposed Asia Pivot 2.0 targeting against China, the first country it mentioned in Southeast Asia overall arrangement is Myanmar.<sup>6</sup>

In one word, since the US will not miss any Chinese neighbor to organize its containment network, so China-US rivalry increased Myanmar strategic importance. When both the Pacific and Indian Oceans are blocked by the US and its allies, China has to find new strategic breakthroughs. If viewed only from political spectrum, for China Myanmar is the most important country from ASEAN, besides geographic connection, more important is that Myanmar is the most strategically balanced country from ASEAN, or even to say it strategically important just because of China. Despite the fact that US-Myanmar relations are developing rapidly, Myanmar's future still largely depends on the development of the Sino-Burmese relationship however.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Asia Pivot 2.0, What the Administration and Congress Must Do to Sustain our Engagement Across the Asia Pacific", CSIS, Jan, 5, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Hein Khaing, "China, Myanmar and the US: A history of political expediency", China.org.cn, Dec. 13, 2012, [http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2012-12/13/content\\_27402248.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2012-12/13/content_27402248.htm)

### **The Internal and External Factors for Northern Myanmar ethnic issues**

There are both domestic and foreign factors for north Myanmar ethnic conflicts, and the combination of the two further complicates the problem.

From the domestic perspective, north Myanmar ethnic problem is very long lasting: in 19 century, British colonizers launched three aggression wars against Burma, and formally established colonial rule. The British adopted “divide and rule” policy in Burma and set up “Seven states and seven provinces”, and intentionally transferred some military and political key positions to Karen, Kachin and Wa minorities. Along with the passage of time, relations between minorities and Burmese turned to be worse, with increasing ethnic separatism movements. But in fact, there was no such a thing as British colonial Burma, Britain took King Bodawpaya into an Indian province in 1886 with its capitol in Rangoon. In 1897 Qing Dynasty ceded Kokang to British India. After Chinese expeditionary force entered north Myanmar, its entire territory was under Kuomintang China’s control. After Cairo conference in 1943, the US voluntarily subjected Burma to Chinese theater, admitting Burma belonging to Kuomintang China’s sphere of influence. Burma obtained independence from British India in 1948, which however did not prove that Kokang was its territory. Since Bangladesh, India, Burma, Pakistan were British Indian territories, after British India perishing, Kokang should be either taken back by China or obtaining its own independence from suzerain. So to certain extent it was neither rational nor legal for Kokang becoming Burma territory.

Influenced by British colonizers, the majority of Kachin and other minorities abandoned traditional Fetishism of faith, and converted into Christian, cooperating with the British to fight against Burma. Early before Burma independence in last century, Kachin letters were coined with American priest Ola Hansen help, and he delivered the first Kachin letters Bible to the minority and started their religious conversion then. At present, more than 90% Kachin people believe in Christian, encouraging separatist elements thereafter. During Ne Win military junta in 1962 contradictions started sharpening, and Kachin Independence Army was founded on Feb. 2, 1961, serving as the military forces of Burma Kachin separatist movement independence organization (KIO) . As one of the largest regional ethnic armies as well as north Myanmar anti-government forces, it has fought against Myanmar government defense troops for dozens of years. Burmese nationalists tried to unify the multinational country after assuming power. However contradiction and hatred between Burmese national and other minorities particularly Karen (the political heritage left over by British colonial rulers) became the serious barrier for

Burmese new government to carry out political power construction and realize ethnic reconciliation. Due to the multinational Myanmar has never been integrated, and each minority has support from Britain and America, Myanmar has never really unified as an integrated country so far. For a long time, Burma government could not wipe out the regional warlords, nor could it negotiate with them, so the war between them must be long lasting, which resulted from the failure to implement ethnic relations status after the WWII. After obtaining independence, Aung San promised to give 7 states semi-independence or even independence in constitution to get rid of British rule. Since Aung San successor did not fulfill the items in Panglong Conference to respect minorities autonomy wishes, but expanding its influence northward to violate other regional ethnic rights and interests, increasing contradiction and conflicts between Burma government and minorities, which was the fundamental reasons for dozens years Burma civil wars.

Since Burma federation agreement stipulated to give each minority high level autonomy could not be guaranteed, then Burma federation is in fact disintegrated. For other minorities, since there is no security guarantee under Burmese national ruling, then opposing Burmese oppression to realize ethnic autonomy and protect own ethnic survival and development rights is the most important political interests. But for Burmese national, that other minorities demand to realize ethnic autonomy and self development is in fact splitting the nation and destroying national unification action, thus absolutely intolerable. Besides, many Burmese leaders have big Burmese national chauvinism mentality, taking it for granted that other ethnic groups should unite around Burmese national. Dictated by such mentality, Burmese government could hardly stand by other minorities position to make and implement laws, though Burma has experienced many times government changes, every government staunchly opposed separatist action, and tried to realize their political proposition through war-making. In 1995 Buddhism ceremony, Religion Minister Miu Nu said that “Myanmar can maintain peace only under the circumstance of unitary national and unitary religion”, which summarized the essence of assimilation policy, meaning to integrate every minority into Burmese national. Thus struggles over “autonomy vs unification” and “solidarity vs separatism” lasted for dozens of years all the way into the current brutal conflicts.

External forces involvement into north Myanmar conflicts is equally critical. For a long time, in the name of “democracy” and “human rights”, the US intervened Myanmar domestic affairs, particularly taking the peace-making between Myanmar government and ethnic militants as one of the key conditions, further worsening the contradictions between Myanmar government and

Karen militants. On Dec. 5, 2005 Myanmar military government held “National Constitutional Making Conference”, 17 “ceasefire groups” and 13 “other peace groups” were invited to attend. But Karen Alliance declared that the National Constitution Making Conference could not solve the political problems, nor could it bring domestic peace. Declaration appealed for Myanmar military government to stop civil war, withdraw oppression policy, set free all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, hold three party dialogue of military government, democratic forces and every ethnic force to resolve political issues through dialogue. Such rhetorical and action certainly had influence of western support, reflecting connections between them over Myanmar issue. In March 2011, after taking power Myanmar new government actively sought to negotiate peace with ethnic militants, tries to promote national conciliation, including ceasefire with Karen. Meanwhile, American special representative visited Myanmar, while admitting Myanmar new government effort and determination to carry out political and economic reforms, still demanded for further promoting more open democratic reform, including setting free political prisoners and terminating minorities long time conflicts and turmoil. In order to promote reform, Myanmar new government had always been trying to restart negotiation with ethnic independent militants, still periodically fighting against each other, until Jan. 2012, but by the end of 2012 and early 2013, conflicts accelerated again.

Taking consideration of the recent years Myanmar political reform, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was set free and resumed Congresswoman status, and American heavy political figures frequently visited Myanmar, it is easy to see that Myanmar already became a key geopolitical bargaining chip for the US to contain China.<sup>8</sup> US-Myanmar honeymoon reached climax during Obama visit in May 2013 and then started to decline. While visiting Myanmar, Obama met Aung San Suu Kyi and held secret talk. In June after meeting, Aung San Suu Kyi declared to take part in presidential campaign. Such abrupt change apparently broke through Myanmar government bottomline, after more than one year struggle, Myanmar parliament speaker U Shwe Mann expressed on Nov. 18, 2014 that next presidential election can amend the existing constitution, and the next year presidential election still follows the current constitution. It indicates Aung San Suu Kyi could not possess the quality for presidential election, and the American five years plan to control Myanmar through election went aborted, indicating to some extent Aung San Suu Kyi has lost some weight to Washington, so turning to the military government in power. As

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Korybko, “The US is Juggling Chaos And Coordination In Order To Contain China”, *Global Research*, March 17, 2015.  
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-us-is-juggling-chaos-and-coordination-in-order-to-contain-china/54371>  
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a matter of fact, the Burmese society's exposure to western values had been limited even during the British colonial period, thus western concept of democracy did not take root in Burma at all, however it could serve as a power struggle tool among different political factions in China, further complicating the already difficult domestic conciliating process. Particularly what the US concerns is not Myanmar political reform nor its human rights progress, but its role to check against China. At present that Kachin militants fighting most furiously against the government troops are not those close to China but to the US is clear evidence to see the American involvement.

### **Northern Myanmar Ethnic Conflicts “Kidnapped” China-Myanmar Relations**

At present, the hawkish faction represented by Myanmar supreme commander of armed forces Min Aung Hlaing attempted to turn away from the traditional pro-China policy and make compromise with the US at the expense of China's strategic interests. In the recent years, the US frequently used inciting defection, peaceful evolution, color revolution to crumble from inside and cultivate puppet instead of direct military occupation to pursue its foreign policy goals. Its effect is much better than direct military occupation, not only avoiding opposition from the occupied people, but also set pious gentlemen image to the international hooligans. Often times, in the course of regime change and after that, it is time to harvest strategic interests or politicians exchange interests at the state machine level. But who could get more is decided by national strength. So what happened in Myanmar is not isolated and coincidental. It is part of color revolution under the universal tide. That the west promoted western democracy in Myanmar is politically significant; it is also part of the US Asia Pivot strategy; important for strengthening American Asia strategic position. Recently, US seventh fleet commander in chief Robert Thomas suggested ASEAN countries jointly patrol South China Sea and promise to provide support,<sup>9</sup> which clearly explained the American purpose to stir up Myanmar crisis.

The present high rank Myanmar military officials including Min Aung Hlaing all were beneficiaries of 88 Kokang massacre in 2009. So no matter it is suggestion from China or Kokang's effort to return to Kokang through military struggle, meaning to force Myanmar military high-ranking officials to return what already possessed, certainly falls on deaf ear. Facing international and domestic constitution amendment pressure, if the military regime

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<sup>9</sup> “Why is the US constantly sowing discord in South China Sea?” *People's Daily Online*, Feb. 5, 2015.



insisted on opposition to constitution amendment, it will be very unwise. According to Thein Sein government plan, Myanmar is going to sign national peace agreement on Feb 22, 2015, the Myanmar Federal Date to end 60 years long civil war and start the national election by the end of the year. Under this background, since it is the Myanmar dry season, it is the best opportunity to attack the north ethnic military groups. So Myanmar government hopes to launch war against ethnic groups before national election to force Kachin independent army return to negotiation table. The war breaking out in Kokang provides Myanmar military valuable political opportunity, Min Aung Hlaing even said to attack Kokang is a kind of anti-aggression war, intending to show the Myanmar masses that 25% military representation is not amendable through the domestic Burmese nationalism.

Though traditional China-Myanmar relations are very good, based on similar position on a series of regional and international issues facing American sanctions, and even once forming de facto semi-allies. However some scholars such as Poon Kim Shee and Tin Maung Maung Than based in Singapore, and Andrew Selth from Australia thought China's presence in Myanmar and the influence on Myanmar Junta was seriously overstated.<sup>10</sup> For quite a long time China was wrongly believed Myanmar Junta's sole patron and thus under heavy political pressure from the West to push Myanmar human rights and democracy movement. The real situation of China-Myanmar relations were further exposed by the American Asia Pivot strategy, particularly the north Myanmar ethnic conflicts even become a powerhouse to put China-Myanmar relations at a difficult situations, not only worsening China-Myanmar relations, but also disturbing the "One belt one road" strategy that Chinese government is pushing, thus creating very far-reaching impact.

First, serious challenges to China-Myanmar relations. China's previous definition of Myanmar as one of China's "few loyal friends" and the foundation of its strategic blueprint has been fundamentally shaken, and China is recalibrating its expectations regarding future policies.<sup>11</sup> As an important neighbor of China and its gateway to Indian Ocean, Myanmar provides the shortest access from mainland China to India's eastern borders, so Myanmar's position is very critical, and China-Myanmar relations are actually a very important strategic point for China's foreign relations.<sup>12</sup> The current situation indicates there is no route of retreat for China, for its

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<sup>10</sup> Li Chenyang, speech at The Charhar Institute, Oct. 13, 2014, <http://www.charhar.org.cn/newsinfo.aspx?newsid=8279>

<sup>11</sup> David Steinberg, "On China-Myanmar Relations", Editorial, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1/2012, 3-6.

<sup>12</sup> Col R Hariharan, India-Myanmar-China relations, *Asian Tribune*, Vol, 12, No. 1166, July 19, 2007.

natural gas and oil pipelines both passed through Myanmar territory. On Oct. 20, 2013 China-Myanmar natural gas pipeline was complete and started transferring gas to China, upsetting the US at once. But the basic relations between China and Myanmar have not changed, while Kachin and Kokang controlled areas are Myanmar's problem. So the US tried to make full use of this problem to even abandon the long time ally Kachin and courted Myanmar government, making it a tool to threaten Kachin and pressure China. Under the American strategic containment and destruction reflected in Myanmar situation, it is easy to predict that China's economic diplomacy and One Belt One Road strategy are going to encounter more resistance and difficulties in the time ahead.

Historically Myanmar harbored strong nationalist emotion and treasured independence and national sovereignty. As a former colonization of the west and once xenophobia to external influence, Myanmar may still feel sensitive and uneasy while handling relations with big powers like China, any pressure perceived by it from the big partner will serve as reminiscent of past unhappy colonization and thus resentful. The nationalism and xenophobia present in the attitudes of elite from the Myanmar military junta is both recognized and understood by China that is keen to have a stable peripheral environment.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately Burmese nationalism was already stirred up and anti-China rhetorical was already manifest since the grassroots mentality was easily flared up. In fact Myanmar is trying to play a balance of power strategy. To actively develop its ties with India, ASEAN, Russia and West especially the US signifies Myanmar's endeavor to counterbalance the impact of a single power and to maintain diplomatic independence even at the expense of Myanmar-China relations. If Myanmar military government does not care the overall relations of the bilateral peace and stability, but always vent the anger inside and demand for more returns from China, China's position will probably change accordingly.

Second, heavy impact on the cross-border minorities relations. Shan and Kokang in northeast Myanmar have very close relations with Chinese counterparts across the near borders. As a matter of fact, north Myanmar and Yunnan minorities are both cross border ethnic groups, possessing common languages, cultural customs and psychological features, and most of them believe in Buddhism instead of Muslim. Due to Kokang special history, culture and geographic situation, conflicts in Kokang posed more serious challenges to China. Myanmar military operation in Kokang has resulted in many air bombs dropping in China's territory, and killing 5,

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<sup>13</sup> N. Ganesan, "Myanmar-China Relations: Interlocking Interest but Independent output", *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, / Volume 12 / Issue 01 / April 2011, pp 95-111

wounded 7 Chinese, more than 30 000 refugees entering China, bringing very serious challenges to China's Southwest border area security and stability. After fighting against Kokang military alliance, Myanmar military attacked other special areas close to Chinese borders, probably causing new round of regional tension along China-Myanmar borders. Besides, Many of the ethnic insurgent armies along the China-Myanmar border have in the past been complicit in the manufacture and sale of drugs, both heroin as well as synthetic methamphetamines, whose consumers were mostly Chinese across the border and even to the hinterland.

Kachin Independence Army is actually a pro-US, anti-China political organization, few years ago China had suffered a lot from investing Myitsone dam since Kachin opposed it and later Letpadaung copper project. In the present military conflict it tried to instigate Chinese Jingpo nationality, intending to kidnap China as its protective umbrella. In 2011, when Kachin relations with Myanmar government worsened it did not communicate with China but blackmail China by Chinese investment in its land. Kachin Independence Army could not see through the western anti-China purpose, but echo each other in opposing China to build Myitsone dam. Myanmar government wants to strengthen its control over Kachin area, but worry about increased Kachin economic strength through the project; Kachin wants to kidnap China to support its de facto independence status through the project, trapping China in dilemma.

Last, after 30 years of hard work, China has become the world's second largest economy, and this power is not the so-called threat to regional security some western countries have described, and the "One Belt One Road" strategy will continue to offer Myanmar opportunities for economic cooperation and development. But unfortunately China-Myanmar economic cooperation levels correlate to Myanmar domestic political situation particularly the northern Myanmar ethnic conflicts with the government. China invests large-scale projects in Kachin State and Shan State; the security of these projects is intimately intertwined with and bound up to with the stability in those ethnic regions. They are alarmed of the fact that these mega-projects could be manipulated by Myanmar government as an excuse to deprive them of the relatively independent stature by deploying troops to nibble the territory under their control in the name of security.

On the contrary, Myanmar government also worries about economically stronger ethnic groups out of control after Chinese mega-projects accomplished, so neither can be reliable partner for the Chinese investments. Besides, foreign involvement simply adds salt to wound. Soon after China-Myanmar gas and oil pipelines started operating and China's high-speed train system

extends to Southeast Asia, north Myanmar was in turmoil. Myanmar is not confident about China's "One Belt One Road", particularly China proposal of China-Myanmar-India-Bangladesh economic corridor, possibly help each Myanmar ethnic autonomy develop their economy, increasing the opposition position against government, so Myanmar government is not positive. But China needs stable peripheral relations to promote "One Belt One Road" strategy. So Myanmar becomes a new battlefield for China-US rivalry. Each party inside Myanmar is changing own position to try maximizing interests. In fact, China tried to persuade each party to sit down to negotiate and avoid eventual Myanmar outbreak of large-scale civil war, falling in the US trap. However due to the unresolved contradiction between Myanmar government and north Myanmar ethnic militants, it is unavoidable to be used by the US, only difference lies in what degree and whether it will cause nation-wide war. Now in order to avoid any further expansion of the conflicts, China warns each party, but tolerates certain level conflicts for them to reach final compromise to each other.

On April 29, 2014, Gan Mao said to Myanmar Ayerwady River New Magazine that Myanmar civil war has lasted for 60 years, which could not be resolved by the two sides themselves. China is a strong neighbor, while the US is superpower with serious dialogue to Myanmar, only when China and US participate could Kachin ethnic peace be realized. Kachin Independence Army just follows the American interests, and once Myanmar issue becomes internationalized, it must impact on China's One Belt One Road economic corridor strategy implementation. Of course there is also pro-America elements in Myanmar military government, but those who resist western infiltration and uphold China-Myanmar friendship are still the main stream, mainly demonstrated in that Myanmar army used Chinese and Russian military equipment and weapons, till recently almost 80 per cent of Myanmar's defense equipment was of Chinese origin. China has considerable economic influence in a number of fields too, including supply of electricity and trade and commerce,<sup>14</sup> so it is not easy for Myanmar military government to totally turn away from China to the US as it is too far from God too close from China.

### **The Possible Solution to Northern Myanmar's Ethnic Conflicts and the China-US Rivalry**

It is a kind of multilevel complicated contradictions in Myanmar: China-US-Japan, China-Myanmar and China-north Myanmar at least three levels. The changeable situation in

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<sup>14</sup> Col R Hariharan, India-Myanmar-China relations, *Asian Tribune*, Vol, 12, No. 1166, July 19, 2007.

Myanmar and its impact on China actually reflected a kind of China-US relations. So as the accompanying products of China-US rivalry, the future trend of north Myanmar situation must change along with the two countries changing relations. But as to the north Myanmar conflict itself, it is not certain whether it could realize ethnic independence, complete unification or return to the original status.

First, it is not practical choice for north Myanmar ethnic to realize independence. One is the gap between north Myanmar ethnic militants and Myanmar military government, and it is also against Myanmar government strong wishes to pursue unified national state, which will not easily be abandoned. Two is that the independent north Myanmar minorities will mean losing bargaining chips for the US and consequently weaker ability to check against China, so it will not support independence. Three is that China does not want to see a divided Myanmar as well, since it will mean more turbulent South China border situation. On Kokang and Kachin issues, China absolutely does not accept any one to be independent from Myanmar, for a unified Myanmar conforms to China's interests. So there is certainly no hope for north Myanmar ethnic groups to seek independence, the best practical way is to realize conciliation between Myanmar government and north ethnic groups. Myanmar peace issue needs a package plan based on historic background and the present reality, to take every side interest into consideration.

Second, though there is much stronger military strength than north Myanmar ethnic militants, Myanmar government could hardly realize its goal of unification in short time. For it is against the original agreement thus unacceptable by the minorities who would rather sacrifice as martyrs than yield, especially a kind of racist policy is adopted to Rohingya, having been alleged as an attempt of ethnic cleansing by the Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar.<sup>15</sup> So the contradiction between the military government and the minorities could not be resolved simply through military means, let alone this will probably repeat the Rwanda style genocide tragedy in 1994. Myanmar government should strictly follow the federal agreement and confess to the minorities sincerely and help them improve living standard, only this could help secure stable and prosperous national situation. For any coercive method will plow seeds for future contradictions, not only leading to causing destruction to both sides, but also intolerable by neighbors.

Last, it is hard to decide which former status should be restored then, but generally speaking to

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<sup>15</sup> Sonu Trivedi, "The narrative of statelessness in Myanmar", June 23, 2015, in AT opinion, Southeast Asia.

a basically stable and peaceful situation. To restore to original status means compromise from both sides, particularly Myanmar government should uphold its promise to give minorities the political treatment they should enjoy, instead of bullying the weaker by the big Burmese nationalism. Due to Myanmar government own policy readjustment and external forces especially the American involvement into Myanmar government and ethnic militants conflicts, it is impossible to restore the original status, the only solution is to pursue relative stability and peace based on new situation. China should take the chance to help mediate Myanmar internal disputes, to persuade Kachin abandoning independence goal on the one hand, and persuade Myanmar government to stick to Panglong agreement, allowing the minorities high level autonomy, completely implementing its articles.

So, the future Myanmar situation could not be decided only by Myanmar itself, and the external forces involvement into the process makes it more difficult to handle, for the American Asia Pivot strategy determines Myanmar's battlefield role if not victim of China-US rivalry. It is more unrealistic for Myanmar to balance against China by inviting foreign powers, even it can succeed for a while, but will leave behind long time turmoil seeds due to the Haunted Samurai, and impact on China-US relations will last long.

First, US-Myanmar relations' improvement is certainly a big shock to China-Myanmar relations, also a temporary setback to Chinese foreign policy. Many Chinese analysts perceive the "obstacles" that China has encountered in Myanmar to be largely the result of a US premeditated strategy to undermine China-Myanmar relations and "contain" China.<sup>16</sup> For China as long as Myanmar situation is stable and all kinds of cooperation with China is smooth, it is definitely in China's national interests, but the American strategy is on the contrary. So Aung San Suu Kyi is absolutely not a barrier to US-Myanmar relations, but a pretext for each side to dispute. The US is not eager to reform Myanmar for the strategic interest is more important to it, and it could never rely on democracy to return to Asia, so democracy is simply a concomitant to the US Asia strategy. Even its economic sanctions against Myanmar are not really serious, just for puzzling China's policy readjustment. The unexpected quick reconciliation between the US and Myanmar military government would mean some backroom deal to fool China together. So to China, the American involvement is not welcome, particularly at the moment when China needs to go to Indian Ocean through Myanmar.

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<sup>16</sup> "Myanmar in US-China Relations", Stimson, Books and Reports, June 10, 2014, <http://www.stimson.org/books-reports/myanmar-in-us-china-relations/>

Second, Obama administration gave carrot to Myanmar immediately after assuming power, Myanmar received American rapprochement without hesitation. Both military government and Kachin militants demonstrate their strength but in reality try to gain favor from the US. In the US Asia Pivot strategy to check against China, Myanmar military government could likely win over. There are no complete pro-China organizations in Myanmar now, and the biggest opposition faction is the pro-west democratic alliance. It is not in China's interest to see a pro-west organization in power. Though Kachin Independence Army repeatedly expresses that "we have kept very good relations with Chinese government and companies", if Myanmar government indecisive attitude to China is just on paper, Kachin Independence Army already interfered China's project on its territory.

Third, as to the future Myanmar situation, if it changes completely against China, maybe China would have to learn from the US. Aung San Suu Kyi visit is such a good beginning. In reality, China objects Kachin independence idea, but will not necessarily stick to it if the Myanmar government turns against China. Whatever the victim is only Myanmar if it tries to play cards with big countries like the US and China. Along with rapid growth of Chinese national strength, the defensive diplomacy China followed in the past should be changed into offensive at least at the Southern border. Any way, China does not want to see Myanmar as another Vietnam.

No matter how rich in natural resources and desperate of Myanmar government for economic growth, investments from the US and Japan will still be limited in the foreseeable future due to their cautious attitudes, and more importantly their political interests in Myanmar as a counterbalance actor or simply outpost to contain China. As a result, no matter how close relations between Myanmar with the US and Japan, it however could hardly count on them for economic development assistance, let alone lessons from Chinese companies could also discourage their investments. China has important, rational, legal and traditional interest in Myanmar, and it is still China that is accountable for Myanmar seeking for economic assistance. Considering the Chinese military situation, the American military involvement and traditional China-Myanmar friendship, China should promote status quo choice in Myanmar. But it is exactly China's non-interference foreign policy and inactive diplomacy resulted in the current closer US-Myanmar relations. China's interest is clear. Whoever destructed China's Myistone dam project, China-Myanmar railway, natural gas and oil pipelines, he will be enemy! In order to protect overseas Chinese interests, particularly the One Belt One Road strategy, Chinese must be well prepared to deal with the toughest challenges in the near future.