

# The incompatibility of myanmar ethnic conflicts essay sample



Is it possible to succeed Myanmar peace process? Which resolution can bring an end to civil wars in Myanmar? As the ethnic conflict in Myanmar is the asymmetric one, it takes too long to national reconciliation in Myanmar. Even though, the successive Myanmar governments try to create peaceful Myanmar, there are many arguments about Myanmar peace process is failing.

It can be apparently seen that USDP government under President U Thein Sein's administration achieved bilateral agreements and nearly succeeded political dialogue with the ethnic armed groups. NLD government also restructures the USDP's peace process and leads to find a way to peace with 21st century Panglong Peace Conference. Seven distinct mechanisms from the theory can obviously provide the resolution to overcome the incompatibility of Myanmar ethnic conflicts.

## Introduction

Since Myanmar received independence from the British colony in 1948, ethnic conflicts or civil wars have been faced until now. The conflict has been regarded as the world's longest struggling civil war. The situation worsened for ethnic minority groups after the military coup in 1962, when their rights were further curtailed. The military government has as yet refused to take political demands from ethnic nationality groups into account, for the most part treating ethnic issues as a military and security issue.

The main grievances of ethnic nationality groups in Myanmar are the lack of influence in the political decision-making processes; the absence of economic and social development in their areas; and what they see as the

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military government's Burmanization policy, which translates into repression of their cultural rights and religious freedom. The conflicts between the various minority ethnic groups and the central government were rooted in issues of sovereignty and the greatest access to natural resources.

The successive governments tried to end these civil wars with such measurements like bilateral agreements and also ceasefire agreements. However, Myanmar cannot meet with the real peaceful society without any bloody wars till the current Myanmar government, National League for Democracy (NLD). This paper intends to answer the question: what the suitable conflict resolution for Myanmar peace process will be? by highlighting Myanmar's ceasefire efforts since 2011.

This paper includes five sections; (1) seven distinct ways to dissolve the incompatibility, (2) the ceasefire efforts by the outgoing government; Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), (3) 21st century Panglong by NLD, (4) the comparison of ceasefire efforts between USDP and NLD and (5) the most suitable way to resolution for this conflict. In describing the facts, USDP's efforts are more than NLD's because NLD is currently running just 2 years.

### Transcending Incompatibility: Seven Mechanism

Peace can be defined as a two-sided concept. On the one hand it implies absence of violence and on the other the presence of positive, harmonious, cooperative relationships. These two aspects are referred to as negative and positive peace. Conflict consists of three components: incompatibility, action

and actors. It is a situation in which a minimum of two actors strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources.

In conflict both the parties want to win but that often is not possible or does not resolve the conflict completely and permanently. Conflict Resolution is a social situation where the armed conflicting parties in a voluntary agreement resolve to peacefully live with- and/ or dissolve their basic incompatibilities and henceforth cease to use arms against one another. Thus, conflict is transformed from violent to non- violent behavior by parties.

In theory there are seven distinct ways in which the parties can live with or dissolve their incompatibility. First, a party may change its goal i. e. its priorities. Second way is when parties stick to their goals but find a point at which resources can be divided. Third way is horse trading in which one side has all of its demands met on one issue while the other has all of its goals met on another issue. Forth way is shared control; the parties decide to rule together over the disputed resource.

Shared control may require some degree of trust. Fifth way is to leave control to somebody else, which means externalizing control, so that the warring parties agree not to rule the resources themselves. Sixth way is resorting to arbitration or other legal procedure that the parties can accept. It means finding a procedure through a process outside the parties' immediate control. And seventh way is that the issue can be left to later or even to oblivion.

Ceasefire efforts under USDP's administration

By the time USDP government came to power in 2011, 11 groups continued fighting, in addition to the five groups that refused to be transformed. These five organizations were the Kachin Independent Organization (KIO), the New Mon State Party (NMSP), the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Karen Peace Council (KPC), and the National Democratic Alliance Army. Although there are a few other smaller groups that claim to be fighting the regime, the government recognized 16 groups in total to be a part of the new ceasefire process.

As the ceasefire efforts, the government made its first reconciliatory announcement on the peace process on 18 August 2011, to invite ethnic armed groups “ to secure lasting peace” in the country. It was the first of official overture announced nationwide to initiate a peace process to all armed groups since Gen. Ne Win had made a similar call in 1963.

To invigorate its peace call, the government assigned two teams (A & B) to reach out to ethnic armed groups. In general, Team A contacted those groups which had previously agreed to a ceasefire with the government under the Tatmadaw regime. Team B’s initial contact focused on groups that had not reached a ceasefire agreement previously. Both teams achieved early success and a new raft of secured ceasefire agreements. This success impelled the government to move forward wider reconciliatory measures. By mid- 2012, 13 groups had signed ceasefire agreements with the government bilaterally across the country.

While the peace process gained momentum, the government attempted to better institutionalize the process by forming two critical committees on 3

May 2012. The aim was to consolidate the government's side of the peacemaking process. The Union Peace Central Committee (UPCC), led by the president, was established with eleven members, in which nine were members of the National Defense and Security Council (NDSC). Later, the UPCC is essentially a replica of the NDSC especially in crafting policies on the peace process. The government also formed a 52-member-strong Union Peace Work Committee (UPWC), led by Vice President Sai Mauk Kham. At the implementation level, Myanmar Peace Center (MPC); a hybrid organization decreed by the president but run as a NGO funded by the Europe- an Union, was established in October 2012.

Soon after the UPWC and UPCC were formed, the government announced a three-tiered approach towards the peace process: state-level, union-level and parliamentary-level talks. It was the first time the government outlined its policy on the peace process. The state-level negotiations were intended to discuss preliminary ceasefires. Union and parliamentary-level talks were concentrated around eight- point principles that were announced in May 2012. These eight points called for ethnic armed groups to transform into political parties, and then contest in the coming elections to participate in the parliament and amend the constitution within the parameters of the parliament.

The first step is a state-level peace talk, followed by union-level agreements.

The first step aims to stop the shooting. The second step intends to foster broader dialogue, especially issues not included in state-level talks. Most state-level peace talks were primed by a number of informal discussions

prior to official peace talks. Informal ' pre-talk' discussions addressed <https://assignbuster.com/the-incompatibility-of-myanmar-ethnic-conflicts-essay-sample/>

concerns from ethnic armed groups and helped parties feel confident enough to join the peace process. Union-level peace talks aimed to address multiple types of issues beyond cease res. Usually, senior leaders from both sides participated in union-level talks and treated the event as a form of political dialogue to address immediate issues. Union-level talks have been characterized by a quasi-dialogue forum where the government demonstrated its ability to listen and address concerns raised by ethnic armed groups.

While the government is struggling to institutionalize the peace process among its major stakeholders, ethnic armed groups are also trying to coordinate among themselves to collectively negotiate with the government. Ethnic armed groups recently formed the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) to collectively negotiate with the government towards a nationwide ceasefire agreement.

The establishment of the NCCT occurred after the government agreed to the KIO's proposal to hold an ethnic-leader meeting in its headquarters in Laiza in early November 2013. The formation of the NCCT, to some extent, also helps overcome the alliance's politics, which saw some ethnic groups reject United Nationalities Federal Council's (UNFC) leadership, the latest coalition of ethnic armed organizations, to represent all ethnic armed groups in negotiation with the government.

The Laiza meeting brought together a team of representatives from 12 ethnic armed groups which the government recognized as 'dialogue partners', and four other groups which are part of the UNFC. Although this

first meeting between the government and the NCCT did not yield an agreement, both sides have now established a process to continue negotiating. The collective talk between the government and NCCT is another historic milestone, unprecedented in Myanmar's ethnic armed conflict.

As the outcomes of the ceasefire efforts by USDP, the government and 14 armed groups have already signed 34 ceasefire agreements at both state and union levels. The KIO signed two agreements with the government, calling them short of 'ceasefire agreements' despite the fact that elements included in these agreements were more comprehensive than most state-level ceasefire agreements signed between the government and other armed groups. Unlike the previous ceasefire agreements, most of the current talks were finalized in front of observers in public settings. Agreements were shared with the media and made public. Unprecedentedly, representatives from the UN and China were allowed to observe the peace talks held between KIO and the government. Compared to the past, the peace talks were transparent and widely reported to the general public. Nevertheless, the implementation of all agreements is still a challenging task.

Upon concluding many of these, the government agreed in February 2013 to multilateral negotiations over a single-document nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) that encompasses the majority of EAOs. Significantly, this was the first time that the government had agreed to negotiate a multilateral ceasefire. The culmination of negotiations under former president U Thein Sein saw eight ethnic armed groups signing the NCA on 15 Oct, 2015. Most



ethnic armed organizations-including powerful outfits the UWSA and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)-refused to sign the NCA.

By analyzing the ceasefire efforts under USDP government, the first one among seven mechanisms was used to dissolve their incompatibility. The nature of first mechanism are changing the goals and making the highest priority through reciprocity by means of leadership changes of the parties and also international pressures. Concerning with the goal targets, the differences between pre-2011 and after 2011 can be seen. Becoming quasi-civilian government and changing the leadership of Myanmar government were the root facts to change the goals concerning with these prolonged civil wars.

Additionally, international pressure also included as another factor to transfer the target. Under the military government, the main target was to establish Border Guard Force (BGF) and all the ethnic armed groups were invited to be involved in this BGF. The government mainly focused on this target to implement. On the other hand, USDP government changed the goal, unlike the military regime. The government also marked the highest priority based on the eight points with state level peace talks. These points showed the government's main priority; to ceasefire the wars under reciprocity. Thus, the ceasefire efforts under USDP can be regarded as applying the first mechanism as a conflict resolution.

Ceasefire efforts by NLD (2016-present)

When NLD took into power in 2016, the State Counselor Daw Aung San Su Kyi has altered the mechanisms of the peace process. The NLD government <https://assignbuster.com/the-incompatibility-of-myanmar-ethnic-conflicts-essay-sample/>

appointed members of ethnic minorities in parliament. In the context of political dialogue, the NLD government have constituted a new government peace monitoring body called the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), replacing the previous Myanmar Peace Center (MPC). The UPDJC committee is constituted by the ethnic armed ceasefire groups, political parties, and the Myanmar government; their role is to oversee the “ Framework Political Dialogue.”

Furthermore, the State Counselor framed a new seven-point policy of national reconciliation on October 15, 2016. The points are as follows: review and amend the political dialogue framework; continue convening the 21st Century Panglong Conference; sign a Union peace agreement based on the 21st Century Panglong Conference; amend the 2008 Constitution; hold multi-party democratic elections in accordance with the amended Constitution; and build a democratic federal union.

The second round of Myanmar’s 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference held in May 2017 was a historic milestone in the peace-making process. The conference produced a 37-point agreement out of an attempted 45 covering political, economic, social, and land and environmental issues. The agreement became part of the Union Accord as the fifth step in the NCA seven-step roadmap for peace and national reconciliation. As a result, the New Mon State Party and the Lahu Democratic Union agreed to sign NCA.

Concerning with Tatmadaw’s position on peace process under NLD’s government, Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing’s much publicized press conference that Tatmatdaw will support 21st Panglong peace conference.

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However, it has been conducting military offensives in the Shan and Kachin States. It can hope that NLD's next coming tenure, peace process will succeed.

By analyzing the ceasefire efforts under NLD government, the fourth mechanism; shared control is being used to succeed the peace process. NLD government cooperates with Tatmadaw as a coalition government to deal with the ethnic armed groups. The State Councilor's priority will be Ending decades of near-constant civil war and then establishing a federal union; the emergence of a democratic federal union based on democracy and federalism" through political dialogue. Thus, NLD will have a plan to divide the sovereignty with the ethnic armed groups by accepting their interest of federalism. If the relationship between NLD and Tatmadaw will be the same and smooth enough to have the consensus on civil wars, it will have the potential to get the peace in the coming years.

Ceasefire efforts under USDP

Ceasefire efforts under NLD

Ceasefires were embarked on bilaterally with individual groups but developed into a multilateral attempt to secure a nationwide ceasefire. Ceasefire are directly developed into a multilateral attempt to secure a nationwide ceasefire

Political dialogue is pivotal and called for by both sides. The government guarantees political dialogue in numerous statements.

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Former exiles and civilians play key roles in facilitating the peace process  
(UPWC and UPCC)

Constituting the ethnic armed ceasefire groups, political parties, and the  
Myanmar government (UPDJC)

The relationship between USDP government and Tatmadaw did not need to  
be considered for ceasefire efforts

The relationship between NLD government and Tatmadaw seriously needs to  
be smooth on the same side. That will easily decide which ceasefire efforts in  
certain.

The first mechanism; change goals and mark the highest priority

The fourth mechanism; shared control

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, I recommend third mechanism; horse trading, fourth  
mechanism; shared control and seventh mechanism; left to later or even to  
oblivion. The above three mechanisms can be applied by combining each  
other in the process or applied independently each of them. Both the  
government and ethnic armed groups have different interests and they have  
to compromise by operating the horse trading mechanism. The government  
wants to ceasefire while the ethnic groups ask for the federal government.  
According to this mechanism, both have to get 100 percentage of their  
interests respectively.

So, the ethnic armed groups will get the federal government but under the  
central ongoing government. They all have to support each other even not in

the same issues. In the United States of America, the army has to be only under the Commander in Chief and it means the US has only one army for all of its 50 states. Like the above, the federal army is part of the central army in Myanmar. As a result, the ethnic armed groups will get the federal governments for their states but not independently and the government will get absolute ceasefire.

Concerning with the fourth mechanism; shared control, NLD is currently operating this mechanism like, NLD government and Tatmadaw are on the same side and needs to cooperate with the ethnic armed groups to get ceasefire. By running as a coalition government in the conflicting areas, the ethnics will possess the federal government and the government will belong to peaceful state.

The seventh mechanism may also be a kind of the best way to resolve the conflict. As the hatred between Tamadaw and the ethnic minority is also one of the root causes of the conflict, it seriously needs to reduce their hatred and then eradicate their incompatibility. Under the saying of “ let by gone, be by gone”, forget the past and forgive everything to each other to create better future and then they can easily negotiate each other for their wants peacefully. These three mechanisms are the options that can bring an end to civil wars in Myanmar.