

Security Sector Reforms as a Conflict Driver? a New Look at Conflict Duration in Myanmar's Never-Ending Civil Wars

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Abstract

This paper considers the reasons behind Myanmar's long-running conflicts by looking at the connections between security sector reforms and the outbreak and resurgence of civil war violence in Myanmar. This study conceptualises security sector reforms in terms broader than in the conventional literature, viewing them as changes to security providers, both state and non-state. Through this lens, my study traces changes in the security sectors from the outbreak of conflict in 1948 to the present.

Among the questions considered in this paper are as follows:

- What roles have security sector reforms played in extending/perpetuating armed conflict in Myanmar?
- How useful is the term 'security sector reform' for discussing the duration of conflict in Myanmar? What assumptions underpin its usage? What are the alternatives?
- Under what conditions are security sector reforms likely to produce more conflict? What conditions can security sector reform contribute to peacebuilding?

Drawing on recent literature on illiberal peacebuilding, my study views ceasefires, militia transformations, disarmaments, and surrenders as instances of security-sector reform. It examines how security sector reforms can lead affected communities to adopt a self-help approach to security provision in response to heightened insecurity, which can result in the outbreak and resurgence of conflict, rather than promoting peacebuilding.

This approach helps address biases in the civil war literature by offering a novel way to address failures in existing literature that focus on regime type, ethnic antipathies, and resource wars to explain conflict patterns in Myanmar. Moreover, it aims to encourage discussion of earlier efforts to end the civil war in Myanmar - rather than focusing on the experiences of countries other than Myanmar - and to draw insights that can inform future peacebuilding efforts both within Myanmar and beyond.