

Withdrawn

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Abstract

This paper explores how governance interventions sanitize the violence inherent in state-building, and contribute to a range of factors in how and why conflict persists in Myanmar.

Following Myanmar's proclaimed "transition" in 2011, international donors poured billions into "good governance" interventions for the quasi-civilian state and the service delivery wings of ethnic armed organizations. Donors funded public administration and "rule of law" trainings, research and capacity-building on taxation systems, public service delivery, and local governance structures, while explicitly prohibiting most forms of support to security sectors. This categorical separation relied on a fiction: that civilian administrations were built independently from the armed forces sustaining territorial control.

Community-driven development and "good governance" approaches emerged from a Western, post-Cold War consensus to stimulate decentralization as a purported salve to autocracy. Liberal governance programming in Myanmar carried this same logic. In practice, interventions were geared towards administrative capacity-building for a multitude of actors simultaneously, both state and non-state, and thus also functioned as informal, or invisibilized, security sector engagements. Public financial management, infrastructure improvements, and service delivery all rely on the territorial enforcement mechanisms that underpin them, making "civilian" capacity-building inseparable from armed contestation and militarized governance.

Governance programming treated fundamentally political questions - about territorial authority and militarism - as technical capacity problems, obscuring how these interventions were interacting with the legibility and recognition of armed actors as governance providers. This dynamic challenges civil war duration theories focused on resource dependence or weak institutions by revealing how international interventions themselves create conditions for conflict persistence. This paper asks: How have governance interventions in Myanmar shaped security relations, and what logics underpin these interventions that normalize violence?