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Karenni Revolution: the centrality of border territories in Myanmar's national insurgency¹

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the 2021 military coup, hundreds of non-state armed groups have been established across Myanmar to fight the regime, known as State Administration Council (SAC). The newly formed revolutionary forces, generically called People's Defence Forces (PDFs), have transitioned from poorly armed and uncoordinated small cells to structured, well-trained and semi-regular companies and battalions capable of operating through a wide range of guerrilla warfare tactics. After two years of war, the nation descended into a state of violence characterized by the collapse of legitimate central state authority, the regime's countrywide scorched-earth campaigns against the population, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and a failing economy. Myanmar has become a war-torn country in the heart of the fastest-growing region in the world: South-east Asia. Although, the dominant Western narrative frames the current national crisis as a never-ending conflict, political deadlock or a failed state, what's happening in Myanmar is a multidimensional Revolution that aims, not only to overthrow the military regime, but to redefine the socio-political structure of the entire country. By analyzing both the Karenni leading guerrilla force, the KNDF, and the interim Government of the ethnic State, the KSCC, this paper investigates how Karenni youth, coordinating with local Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and civil society groups, have established one of the most advanced anti-regime fronts in Myanmar.

All'indomani del colpo di Stato militare del 2021, centinaia di gruppi armati sono stati formati in Myanmar per combattere il regime, autoproclamatosi Consiglio dell'Amministrazione Statale (SAC). Le nuove forze rivoluzionarie, genericamente chiamate Forze di Difesa del Popolo (PDFs), sono passate da essere piccole cellule scarsamente armate e non coordinate a compagnie e battaglioni strutturati, ben addestrati e semi-regolari, in grado di operare attra-

¹ Parts of this essay were first published in *Journal of Political Studies*, quarterly of the Institute of Political Studies "St. Pio V" (Year XXXIV, January-June 2022: "Revolutionary movements in Myanmar: the centrality of border territories in the current popular insurgency. The case of Karenni State")

verso molteplici tattiche di guerriglia. Dopo due anni di guerra, la nazione è sprofondata in uno stato di violenza caratterizzato dal collasso della legittima autorità dello Stato centrale, dalla devastazione causata dalla tattica della «terra bruciata» condotta dal regime contro la popolazione, dalla proliferazione di armi leggere e di piccolo calibro (SALW), e da una crisi umanitaria ed economica senza precedenti. Il Myanmar è diventato un paese dilaniato dalla guerra nel cuore della regione in più rapida crescita del mondo: Il Sud-est asiatico. Sebbene la narrazione occidentale dominante inquadri l'attuale crisi nazionale come un conflitto senza fine, uno stallo politico, oppure rappresenti il paese come uno stato fallito, ciò che sta accadendo in Myanmar è una Rivoluzione multidimensionale che mira non solo a rovesciare il regime militare, ma a ridefinire la struttura socio-politica dell'intero Paese. Analizzando sia la principale forza di guerriglia Karenni, il KNDF, sia il governo ad interim del medesimo Stato etnico, il KSCC, questa ricerca indaga su come i giovani Karenni, in coordinamento con le organizzazioni etniche armate locali e con i gruppi della società civile, abbiano costituito uno dei fronti anti-regime più avanzati di tutto il Myanmar.

Keywords

Myanmar, military coup, Revolution, PDF, Karenni State

1. Introduction

The February 1st, 2021 illegal military coup triggered a new wave of insurgency across Myanmar. Within two months, the spontaneous anti-coup movement shifted from a peaceful phase, characterized by nationwide demonstrations, to the formation of armed revolutionary forces. This radical change has been caused by the junta's brutal counterstrategy in suppressing the opposition. The regime's crackdowns, and the following full-scale war against its own population, resulted in the deaths of at least 3,447 people and the arrest of 17,726 activists².

The new revolutionary groups, broadly called People's Defence Forces (PDFs), can be identified as local guerrilla forces. In this historical time, where the ethnic majority group, the Bamar, has fully embraced the path of Revolution, armed conflicts have spread across the entire country. As described by Shona Loong, "almost all of Myanmar's 330 sub-districts or "townships" – the country's basic administrative units – are now plagued by war"³.

Since mid-March 2021, tens of thousands of young people from urban areas and beyond have moved to territories controlled by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), after the coup referred to as Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), to undertake basic military training. In this way, hundreds

² For regular updates about the number of deaths and arrests: <https://aappb.org>.

³ Shona Loong, *Post-coup Myanmar in six warzones*, "The International Institute for Strategic Studies", July 5 2022, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis/introduction>.

of revolutionary forces were formed throughout Myanmar. Despite limited training, resources and experience, the new groups have inflicted severe losses on the military junta. Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sit-tat, the Burmese Army, finding himself completely unprepared to face an armed insurgency of this magnitude, vowed to “annihilate” the revolutionary groups and its supporters “to the end”⁴.

Given the degree of heterogeneity among armed forces that emerged over the last two years, this paper aims to delve only into the Revolution in the Karenni State, by focusing on the armed struggle of the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) and the state-building efforts of the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC). The Karenni State, despite covering 11,670 square kilometers, reflects the complexity and the main challenges of the whole country: “Political impasse, a multiplicity of conflict actors, contested natural resources, land grabbing, humanitarian suffering, and divided communities seeking to rebuild after more than six decades of civil war”⁵.

The Karenni State has positioned itself as one of the most advanced, well-organized, and cohesive anti-coup fronts in Myanmar. The KNDF, as the leading guerrilla force, engages the Sit-tat daily in fierce battles, contesting the military’s authority in over 90% of the ethnic State. By analyzing the structure, strategies, weaponry, and geographical distribution of KNDF forces, this article investigates the reasons behind its current on-the-ground success.

Although Myanmar’s newly formed revolutionary groups have improved remarkably over the last two years, a key issue emerged among the democratic forces: the difficulty in managing and coordinating such a plethora of independent non-state armed actors responding to different chains of command. The KNDF, established by merging multiple local armed forces into a single chain of command, could represent a model to replicate for anti-coup armed groups in Myanmar in order to shift the current national Revolution into a new, more coordinated and effective phase.

The Revolution in Karenni State, however, is not exclusively related to the warfare dimension. The KSCC has been playing a pivotal role in establishing a people-driven political and administrative body that provides access to humanitarian assistance, security protection and political representation to local communities within the ethnic State. The KSCC, together with pre-existing armed groups and civil society organizations (CSOs), is implementing a

⁴ Myanmar’s military ruler vows to ‘annihilate’ resistance groups, “The Guardian”, March 28 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/28/myanmars-military-ruler-vows-to-annihilate-resistance-groups>.

⁵ Tom Kramer, Oliver Russell, Martin Smith, From War to Peace in Kayah (Karenni) State: A Land at the Crossroads in Myanmar, “Transnational Institute”, July 2018, pp. 10.

bottom-up federal system that advances or retreats depending on the ground success of revolutionary forces.

In order to fully grasp the nature of the multidimensional Revolution unfolding in Karenni State, it is essential to look at the frontlines not only as demarcations of areas where Sit-tat troops and resistance forces engage in conflict, but where two different political and social systems clash. In the war-torn borderlands, federal and democratic values move at the same speed as revolutionary fighters' boots.

2. The transition of the resistance movement: from peaceful protests to armed revolution

The sudden spread of peaceful demonstrations in the aftermath of the military takeover brought millions of people into the streets across the whole country. The Sit-tat leadership, after a sterile initial response, ordered a countrywide systematic crackdown on pro-democracy protesters. Yangon, like many other areas of Myanmar, turned into a war zone: "Plumes of smoke rose [...] above a part of Myanmar's biggest city that has turned into a battle zone, with burning barricades and security forces firing at unarmed anti-coup protesters to enforce martial law"⁶.

In Karenni State, the demonstrations spread mainly to the cities of Loikaw, Demawso, and Hpruso. For weeks, protesters faced the military brutality armed only with slingshots and rudimentary defense systems, such as makeshift shields and barricades scattered around the city to slow down the advance of security forces.

After the first few months of anti-coup demonstrations, an increase in militarization was recorded in Karenni State. As described by Khun Bedu, Chairman of the KNDF and Deputy Minister of the National Unity Government (NUG): "Since the coup, the SAC [military regime] has removed local police from their stations, replacing them with soldiers from other parts of the country dressed in police clothes. Unlike local police, they started shooting at passers-by and into crowds"⁷.

Following the same trajectory as the rest of the country, in response to the military's dramatic use of lethal force on peaceful demonstrations, youth started to undergo basic military trainings with the support of local EROs.

⁶ Town a battle zone as Myanmar enforces martial law, "Asia Times", 7 March 2021, <https://asiatimes.com/2021/03/town-a-battle-zone-as-myanmar-enforces-martial-law/>.

⁷ Earning Credentials: A Karenni perspective on the future of Burma/Myanmar. A Myanmar Commentary by Khun Bedu, "Transnational Institute", 17 August 2021, <https://www.tni.org/en/article/earning-credentials-a-karenni-perspective-on-the-future-of-burmamyanmar>.

In Karenni State, a key event that transformed the anti-coup nonviolent movement into an armed resistance was the death of U Shan Pu in Loikaw on March 19th, 2021, the first local casualty since the coup.

In the second half of March 2021, thousands of Karenni youth began to move from the cities to the outskirts in order to join the armed struggle. One of the first military trainings took place in the Shadaw region, the stronghold of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Being the first of its kind in the territory, the recruits had to build the entire training camp from scratch in the middle of the forest. The same experience happened in other areas of Myanmar. As recounted by a young revolutionary who participated in one of the first PDF military trainings in Karen State: “Once I arrived in Kawkareik, a town halfway between Pa-an and Myawaddy, I was welcomed by a KNU representative. I was part of the first group of young revolutionaries who arrived in Karen State after the military coup. At first, we had to wait for the conclusion of negotiations between the CRPH and the KNU regarding our military trainings. I left my hometown, Pathein, together with three friends, but once I arrived in Kawkareik I met people from all over the country. In total there were forty-three of us. We received ten knives, four shovels, and a raincoat each to build shelters in a nearby bamboo forest”⁸.

Once the camp was built, three hundred youth began two weeks of basic military training under the guidance of the Karenni Army (KA), the armed wing of KNPP. Given the limited time available, the program was only based on physical exercises and gaining experience with rifles, mainly AK-47s and M16s, instructing how to shoot, disassemble and clean weapons⁹. At the end of the two weeks, the recruits were asked whether they intended to continue training for another three months in order to become official KA soldiers, or to go immediately to the frontline with the newly formed armed revolutionary groups. Over the course of the following months, tens of thousands youth joined the basic military trainings.

On May 5th, 2021, the NUG, the democratic government representing the people of Myanmar, announced the formation of the People’s Defence Forces (PDFs). In forming the PDFs, the NUG set three main goals: “1) To end the 70-year long internal conflict by extinguishing the terrorist acts and aggressive attacks of the State Administration Council (SAC) [military regime]; 2) To perform effective reforms in the security sector; 3) To participate as an essential forerunner for establishing the Federal Union Forces”¹⁰.

⁸ Interview with PDF member, Mae Sot, 13 March 2022.

⁹ Interview with Karenni Army (KA) soldier, Mae Hong Son, 25 September 2022.

¹⁰ People’s Defence Force, “National Unity Government”, <https://mod.nugmyanmar.org/en/peoples-defence-force/>.

After the NUG's announcement, PDFs were formed in almost every township, including: the Demawso PDF on May 5th and the Karenni People's Defence Force (KPDF) on May 7th. From May 20th, 2021, an armed escalation began between the military troops and Karenni Revolutionary forces: on May 20th, the KA clashed with the Sit-tat in Hpaswang Township; on May 21st, the KPDF destroyed three military outposts in Demawso and Bawlakhe townships¹¹; and on May 23rd, the Moebye PDF attacked a local police station¹².

One KPDF member, reflecting on the days that followed the formation of his armed group, stated: "When the People's Defence Force was formed, we started setting up township communication offices. We built our own strongholds to protect people. We warned [the junta's authorities] from the beginning not to cross the line"¹³.

As described by Ye Myo Hein: "Karenni theater has thus become an attractive haven for pro-democratic activists who have snuck into places held by civilian defense teams, obtained military training from the EAOs and local PDFs, and formed their own militia groups"¹⁴. Within this territorial framework divided between militarization and a flourishing youth resistance, one revolutionary group has been playing a prominent role: Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF).

3. Karenni Nationalities Defense Force

Following the NUG announcement, hundreds of PDFs were formed across Myanmar. To better understand the nature and the strategies of the new armed groups, it is important to note that they are guerrilla forces that, especially over the first year, used "three main tactics to wear down the SAC: bombings with improvised explosive devices, targeted assassinations and ambushes on military convoys. Their targets are not just soldiers, but assets or

¹¹ Karenni resistance fighters kill three police officers as military attacks residential areas with artillery, "Myanmar Now", 22 May 2021, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/karenni-resistance-fighters-kill-three-police-officers-as-military-attacks-residential-areas-with-artillery/>.

¹² Unfolding Moebye (Mongbye) youngsters' thorny road armed revolution, "BNI", 30 November 2021, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/unfolding-moebye-mongbye-youngsters-thorny-road-armed-revolution>.

¹³ Karenni resistance fighters open new front against junta, "Myanmar Now", 26 May 2021, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/karenni-resistance-fighters-open-new-front-against-junta/>.

¹⁴ Ye Myo Hein, One Year On: The Momentum of Myanmar's Armed Rebellion, "Wilson Center", May 2022, pp. 51.

people affiliated with the junta, including SAC-appointed village administrators, suspected informants and Pyusawhti members¹⁵”.

However, one structural challenge that immediately emerged after the coup was the difficulty in managing and coordinating such a plethora of independent armed actors responding to different chains of command. In Karenni State, a step forward has been made to form a more cohesive and efficient anti-regime front. On May 31st, 2021, five PDFs merged to create the KNDF: Loikaw PDF, Demawso PDF, Namkhone PDF, Moebye PDF and Phalthone PDF. As explained by the KNDF information officer: “The main point is, the chance of victory is slim if we fight against the military council in an uncoordinated scattered fashion. We have formed the KNDF to collectively fight against the military council”¹⁶.

Reflecting on the formation of its armed force, the KNDF Chairman explained: “After our group managed to obtain about a hundred weapons, people from other districts also wanted to join the revolution, and so we gave up our original name and ambitions. We chose the current name, KNDF, so that not only indigenous Karenni ethnic people but also people from other ethnic groups in Karenni State could unite in protecting the people. Today we have 21 battalions and more than 8,000 fighters who have signed up to serve in the army for two years”¹⁷. After two years of fighting, due to the rigid and challenging living condition in conflict-affected areas and a lack of weaponry for every single member, it appears that more than one thousand KNDF fighters have left the frontline to join the different KNDF departments, such as: Central Information, Explosion and Technique, Health Care, Fundraising, and Logistics.

3.1 Structure, Chain of Command and geographical distribution of forces

To date, the KNDF represents one of the most organized and well-structured revolutionary groups founded after the 2021 military coup. The main reasons behind its current success are related to the large number of fighters at its disposal, the territorial extent covered by its battalions, and its ability to

¹⁵ Shona Loong, *The Dry Zone: an existential struggle in central Myanmar*, “The International Institute for Strategic Studies”, 5 July 2022, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis/dryzone>.

¹⁶ An interview with the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) information officer, “Burma News International”, June 08, 2021, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/interview-karenni-nationalities-defense-force-kndf-information-officer>.

¹⁷ We are Getting Stronger to Complete the Revolution”: Karenni Resistance Leader, “The Irrawaddy”, 15 June 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/we-are-getting-stronger-to-complete-the-revolution-karenni-resistance-leader.html>.

follow a single chain of command. The KNDF, despite being an independent revolutionary group, is under the KA Chain of Command (CoC), given the ERO's experience and strategic capability gained over the 70-year long armed struggle against the Sit-tat. Although the KA Commander-in-Chief (CinC) Bee Htoo is also the CinC of the KNDF, the armed group is led by its Central Executive Committee (CEC), the most important decision-making body inside the KNDF, formed by five members: Chairman, Vice-chairman, Deputy Commander-in-Chief and three Secretaries¹⁸.

The KNDF consists of 21 battalions, each formed by at least three hundred revolutionary fighters. In terms of geographical distribution, the KNDF forces are divided as follow: Battalion 01 (B-01), B-05, B-06, B-07, B-09, B-10, and B-19 are based in Demawso township; B-02, B-12, B-14, and B-17 are based in Loikaw township; B-04, B-08, and B-15 are based in Hpruso township; B-03 and the B-11 are based in Pekhoh township in Southern Shan State; B-16, B-18, B-20, and B-21 are based in Bawlakhe township; and B-22 is based in Pinlaung township in Southern Shan State. For superstitious reasons, the KNDF B-13 does not exist. Each battalion is divided into companies, which usually consist of about 100 fighters each. It should be noted that units of different battalions can move to other locations according to strategic military operations. For example, given the territorial proximity, it is not uncommon to locate the B-17 in both Loikaw and Hpruso, or the B-07 in both Demawso and Hpruso.

Table 1: Geographical distribution of KNDF battalions in Karenni State and Southern Shan State

Township	Battalion (B)	Number of battalions for each township
Demawso	B-01, B-05, B-06, B-07, B-09, B-10, B-19	7
Loikaw	B-02, B-12, B-14, B-17	4
Bawlakhe	B-16, B-18, B-20, B-21	4
Hpruso	B-04, B-08, B-15	3
Pekhoh (Southern Shan State)	B-03, B-11	2
Pinlaung (Southern Shan State)	B-22	1

¹⁸ Maui, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of KNDF is also a Secretary member.

On the ground, KNDF forces operate through six different deployments: the 1st deployment is commanded by the former leader of the B-03 that oversees the operation of B-03, B-11 and B-22; the 2nd deployment is commanded by the leader of the B-02 that oversees the operation of its battalion, B-12 and B-14; the 3rd deployment is commanded by Secretary 3 that oversees the operation of B-09, B-10, B-15 and B-17; the 4th deployment is commanded by Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Secretary 2 that oversees the operation of B-01, B-05, B-06 and B-07; the 5th deployment is commanded by Secretary 1 that oversees the operation of B-04, B-08 and B-19; and the 6th deployment is commanded by Vice-chairman that oversees the operation of B-16, B-18, B-20 and B-21¹⁹.

In analyzing the new revolutionary groups in Myanmar, it is essential to emphasize, not only the young age of the leadership, but also the socio-political context in which individual leaders grew up. The period from 2011 to 2020 was marked by the historical opening up of the country, mostly for people living in urban areas, characterized by greater freedom, economic reforms, booming technological development, especially in the telecommunication sector, and stable interaction with the outside world.

As described by KNDF Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Secretary 2 Maui: “Before the coup, the KNDF leaders were human rights defenders focused on social and environmental justice, peace process, and land rights. We have always stood up against injustice, even before [the coup], without guns”. He goes on, clarifying an important point to remember despite the current armed struggle: “We strongly believe in non-violence, but, unfortunately, the military only uses weapons. It is not possible to dialogue with them. We have used non-violence strategies for a long time and they did not work”²⁰.

Within a national context of deep fragmentation and heterogeneity of armed groups where hundreds of non-state actors operate according to their own chain of command, their own ethical sensibilities, and their own political vision, defining a clear set of rules and objectives is an essential element for any armed group aiming to exert legitimate control over a specific territory. Linking the importance of the military discipline of individual revolutionary fighters with the social and political goals of the Revolution, the KNDF Deputy Commander-in-Chief explained: “We are aware of the negative effect of weapons on people. When you hold a weapon, the weapon can change you. Therefore, before starting the armed struggle, we have laid down a set of

¹⁹ Interview with KNDF Secretary 3, Mae Hong Son, November 2022, and KNDF telecommunication officer, Mae Hong Son, March 2023.

²⁰ Interview with KNDF Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Secretary Maui, Mae Hong Son, July 2022.

rules: 1) we will not become another ethnic armed group, our only purpose is to protect the people against the brutality of the Burmese Army; 2) we must eradicate the military system that penetrates every aspect of the country; 3) our goal is not to kill every soldier of the Burmese Army, we want to change the mindset of the current national army; and 4) we want to stop the cycle of hatred and violence. We are also aware that many people will have to sacrifice themselves, but we will do everything to make this the last battle. After that, issues will have to be solved only through dialogue”²¹.

3.2 A new revolutionary phase: the evolution of military strategy, weaponry and territorial control

Anthony Davis, security analyst for IHS-Jane’s, in an interview with Myanmar Now, described the basic steps of an armed revolution, with reference to the Myanmar context: “Myanmar’s PDFs are a very long way from achieving any conventional [military] capability. They are still in Phase One of what Mao Zedong famously defined as a three-phase revolutionary war. That means first a phase of “strategic defense” fought by poorly armed guerrilla bands; then a phase of “strategic balance” when resistance forces have developed larger, better equipped and more mobile units; and only finally an offensive phase in which revolutionary forces have achieved a conventional capability involving regular or semi-regular forces, and regime forces are increasingly confined to urban centres”²².

The KNDF is already in the second phase of the Maoist theory of revolution. In relation to the development of the armed group, the KNDF Secretary 2 says, “one year after the coup, conflicts have become more and more intense. Our soldiers have gained more battle experience and we have more weapons. Our tactical skills have also improved greatly. This year we fought against the military using many different strategies”²³. Although the current Revolution is often perceived as a static phenomenon, described as an impasse or a never-ending conflict, especially from the West, each year revolutionary forces expand their operational territory and gradually shrink what in the aftermath of the coup seemed an insurmountable military gap.

The armed group’s transition from the “strategic defense” phase to the “strategic balance” phase has been determined by the increment of the revo-

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Tin Htet Paing, Myanmar’s PDFs in ‘phase one’ of revolutionary war, “Myanmar Now”, 29 June 2022, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/myanmars-pdfs-in-phase-one-of-revolutionary-war/>.

²³ Interview with KNDF Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Secretary Maui, Mae Hong Son, July 2022.

lutionary fighters' experience, the strategic effectiveness of the military operations, the improvement of weaponry and the extension of territorial presence.

Throughout 2022, the KNDF's main strategy has been focused on disrupting the Sit-tat's links between cities and township outskirts. The short-term goal was to cut off the distribution of supplies to frontline troops and the dispatch of reinforcements²⁴. By analyzing the trajectory of the conflict, it is evident that the KNDF strategy worked. Most of the time, when the regime forces left territories under their control, mainly urban areas and military bases, to move to other parts of Karenni State, they clashed with local revolutionary forces. Ambush has been the main tactic implemented by the KNDF to pursue its objective.

Another relevant element connected to the impact of the KNDF strategy emerges from the changing behavior of Sit-tat soldiers on the battlefields. "In 2021, when a Burmese soldier was killed, the comrades would retrieve his body. In 2022, Burmese soldiers first took weapons and ammunition from their comrade's corpse and only later, if deemed possible, would retrieve the body. But often it did not happen, and the bodies of their comrades were abandoned"²⁵. This phenomenon underlines the challenge faced by the regime to adequately resupply its frontline units and the deterioration of physical and psychological condition of Sit-tat foot-soldiers.

The progressive improvement of the KNDF's strategic capability is not only related to the experience of individual fighters obtained in the battlefield, but also to the constant military training they undergo. The system of unit rotation within battalions allows non-frontline high-ranking members to study the battles they have fought during specific training²⁶.

The first few months of 2023 confirmed this positive trajectory. Although it is soon to indicate it as a consolidated practice, it appears that the KNDF, which often coordinate operations together with both KA and local PDFs, is gradually shifting its main military operation's target from cutting off the military supply channels to overrunning Sit-tat checkpoints, outposts, and artillery camps. From February 10th to March 26th, 2023, multiple guerrilla-style operations had successfully targeted regime troops all over Karenni State, especially in Bawlakhe and Demawso, and Southern Shan State, in Moebye and Pinlaung. If confirmed, the new strategy would indicate better intelligence, coordination, and military capability of the revolutionary front,

²⁴ Interview with KNDF telecommunication officer, Mae Hong Son, September 2022.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Interview with KNDF Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Secretary Maui, Mae Hong Son, July 2022.

shifting the posture of the Karenni strategy from defensive to a more offensive approach.

A second essential aspect to understand the KNDF's evolution is the weaponry. Like for many revolutionary groups in Myanmar, obtaining enough weapons and ammunition to adequately confront the Sit-tat is the most complex challenge for Karenni forces. However, within two years the situation has improved significantly. KNDF fighters have gone from carrying out early military operations mainly with hunting weapons, such as .22 Long Rifles, or traditional single-shot rifles, called *tumi*, to gradually acquiring assault rifles, mainly M-16s and AK-47s, rocket launchers (RPGs), 40 mm grenade launchers, 60 mm mortars, and, most recently, heavy machine guns.

Following the same direction of other conflict-affected areas in Myanmar, the Karenni State recorded an intense use of commercial drones for monitoring enemy positions and movements and agricultural drones capable of carrying multiple 60 mm bombs simultaneously, for assault and defense operations. The KNDF has one team specialized in drones called Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Department, supported by single drone unit deployed in most battalions²⁷.

Apart from the intra-State weapon suppliers, notably the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the remarkable arming efforts made by the KNDF over the last two years has been based on both acquiring weapons from the neighboring Thai black market, where the prices tripled since the beginning of the coup, raising the cost of an M16 to roughly 3,000 US dollars, and seizing arms and ammunition from the enemy. In this regard, especially over the last few months of 2022, the KNDF has managed to seize a large number of weapons, including assault rifles, grenade launchers and RPGs from the Sit-tat. However, given the high number of daily armed clashes, more than the lack of weapons, the main issue in Karenni appears to be the lack of ammunition. For this reason, the same RPGs seized cannot be used consistently in battles²⁸.

A key role in the development of the KNDF's weaponry has been played by its Fundraising Department. The Department, often coordinating with individual battalions or deployments, has successfully completed multiple campaigns. So far, the strategies implemented to raise funding are mainly focused on two different types of categories: "Challenges", with a deadline between 10 to 15 days, are often used to buy ammunition, and "Campaigns", with a longer and extendible time frame, are utilized to buy higher-caliber weapons, such as heavy machine guns, already deployed in the Karenni theater. The

²⁷ Interview with the coordinator of Karenni Civil Society Network, Mae Hong Son, September 2022.

²⁸ Interview with KNDF telecommunication officer, Mae Hong Son, September 2022.

last successful campaign, called “The Fence”, has been initiated by the 4th deployment and raised 353,000 US dollars within 30 days, from March 20th to April 19th, 2023. As suggested by its name, the campaign aims to improve the capability of each battalion from the 4th deployment to defend their own territory. “Behind “The Fence” we want to build our Karenni governance, from education to healthcare services. This campaign is not only focused on weaponry, but it is also focused on [defending] our government system”²⁹. The KNDF is going to buy 20 semi-automatic rifles for each battalion from the 4th deployment.

Due to the limited resources available and the challenges in having a constant access to the black market bordering with Karenni State, the KNDF created the Explosion and Technique Department (ETD). Although its production capacity is still limited, it is possible that ETD production teams will grow in the medium-term. An increase of new recruits within the military training camps, not only to become revolutionary fighters or medics, but also to join the weapons and IED production teams has been recorded³⁰. Nevertheless, any improvement on this front will depend on the ability of the Karenni resistance to develop stable or semi-stable “liberated areas” where they can build their own small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition production factories without the constant threat of being identified and destroyed by the regime forces. Indeed, the last essential element that supported the KNDF’s transition to the new revolutionary phase is related to territorial presence.

In the current national context of full-scale civil war, authoritarian repression, instability and multiple armed insurgencies, assessing the level of territorial control exercised by the resistance, or by an individual revolutionary group, such as the KNDF, is an extremely difficult task. A useful document for developing a general idea about the situation in the country is “Effective Control in Myanmar”, published by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M). The report considers eight different degrees of territorial control by the resistance and Sit-tat. With reference to the Karenni theater, the document divides the area into three different types of influence. The first type, located in Hpasawng and Shadaw townships, local resistance forces appear to be present over 90 percent of the territory. “In these townships, the junta is able to maintain troops isolated in the heart of the main towns and a few select bases but with significant supply limitations and unable to conduct

²⁹ Interview with KNDF Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Secretary Maui, April 2023.

³⁰ Interview with a member of the KNDF Explosion and Technique Department, Mae Hong Son, September 2022.

regular operations”³¹. In the second type, located in Pekhon (Southern Shan State), Demawso, Loikaw, and Mese townships, a decline in the junta’s ability to control the territory due to the growing presence of resistance groups has been recorded. “In these areas, resistance forces are extending their reach where there are large vacuums of authority and are strengthening their public administration systems in response to popular demand”³². Finally, in Hpruso and Bawlakhe townships, the resistance, despite expanding the territory under its control, is not yet able to consolidate its presence.

In line with the above report, the KNDF estimates that the regime controls only 10 percent of Karenni State³³. Although it is still not possible to verify the above-mentioned data, it is evident that the junta is losing ground in most of the Karenni State. The Sit-tat’s convoys are constantly under attack outside the main cities and, over the last few months, also the military checkpoints and outposts are being targeted. However, in the absence of anti-aircraft weapons, such as man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), it remains extremely difficult for the resistance forces to defend the territories under their temporary control during the regime’s counter-guerrilla operations, especially when the offensives are supported by airpower.

In April 2023, the KNDF, in order to mitigate the Sit-tat airpower, has launched a fundraising campaign, called “Karenni point five”, that aims to reach 400,000 US dollars to buy new heavy machine guns (HMGs), possibly the M2 machine gun model. As explained by the Deputy Commander-in-Chief: “Since we are not able to purchase sophisticated air defense systems, the goal is to counter the military airstrikes, especially helicopters and fighter jets, by forcing the [regime Air Force] to fly at high altitudes [due to the deployment of HMGs]. So, they will not have a clear target on our positions”³⁴. Videos of HMGs in Karenni State have already started circulating on social media.

The Sit-tat has been relying heavily on airstrikes as one of the primary counterinsurgency tactics to contain the armed resistance forces. Challenging what has so far been unchallenged will re-shape the battlefield dynamics, not only in Karenni State but countrywide.

³¹ Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M), *Effective Control in Myanmar*, 5 September 2022, pp. 15.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Regime Controls Only Ten-percent Of Karenni State, KNDF Says, “BNI”*, 4 February 2022, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/regime-controls-only-ten-percent-karenni-state-kndf-says>.

³⁴ Interview with KNDF Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Secretary Maui, April 2023.

4. Karenni battlefield: between militarization and resistance

The post-coup Karenni revolutionary forces are embedded in a highly complex environment dominated by ethnonational conflicts, division and militarization. In fact, the contemporary evolution of Karenni State has always been strongly influenced by the conflictual relationship with the Burmese central governments. The first critical issue emerged in the aftermath of Myanmar's independence in 1948. The Karenni, having never been formally included within the territories under the British Empire, claimed their own status as a sovereign state. Although Myanmar's 1947 Constitution granted the Karenni State the right to secede, the post-independence Burmese government rejected the creation of the independent ethnic state. Thus, together with dozens of other ethnic minority groups, the Karenni launched its own armed struggle.

The historical complexity of Karenni State must also be framed within its ethnic heterogeneity. Despite being the smallest state in Myanmar, it is home to seven main ethnic groups: Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw, Paku, Yintale, Keba, and Manu Manaw. The high number of ethnic minorities, coupled with decades of the use of the *divide et impera* strategy by Burma's authoritarian governments that aimed to destabilize the fragile inter-ethnic dynamics, led to a highly ethno-politically fragmented territory. The formation of opposing political organizations caused social fractures among local communities and a deep territorial division among non-state armed groups.

In Karenni State, a large number of armed groups operate, such as KNPP, Kayan New Land Party (KNLP), Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), Karenni National Democratic Party (KNDP), Kayan National Guard (KNG), Karenni National Peace and Development Party (KNPDP), and Karenni National Solidarity Organization (KNSO). Furthermore, as a direct consequence of the decades-long campaign of the Burmese regimes to "pacify" the State's ethnic peripheries, several Karenni armed organizations, in exchange for a free hand to develop a range of illicit business activities, accepted to be transformed into Border Guard Forces (BGFs) and joined the Sit-tat Chain of Command. "Increasingly key to the generals' plans for suppressing the insurgency, the BGFs serve as a force multiplier particularly against major ethnic armed organizations, providing battlefield intelligence, logistics support and even troops"³⁵. In 2009, the KNPLF became a BGF and the KNDP, KNPDP, KNSO, KNLP³⁶ and KNG were transformed into *pyi-*

³⁵ Priscilla A. Clapp; Jason Tower, The Myanmar Army's Criminal Alliance, March 7, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/myanmar-armys-criminal-alliance>.

³⁶ Ashley South, The dream of Kayan homeland, "Frontier", April 19, 2020, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/the-dream-of-a-kayan-homeland/>.

thusit, literally “people’s militias”, which are local militias that are also allied with the Sit-tat³⁷.

Although the tension between armed groups close to or in conflict with the military junta is still highly relevant within the ethnic State, the 2021 popular uprising has also had an impact on the internal dynamics of the Karenni BGFs. For example, as described by a member close to the KNDF: “The KNPLF officially does not fight against SAC troops because it wants to maintain a good relationship with them. But some soldiers remove the patch from their uniforms, in order not to be recognized by the regime troops, and join resistance forces during battles against the Burmese Army”³⁸. In addition, the KNPLF has also conducted some basic military training for Karenni revolutionary youth.

The Karenni BGFs’ main task remains to guide regime troops to fight against the resistance. It will be extremely difficult to see a radical change in the leadership of the BGFs, who have based their power on the system of privileges and economic interests guaranteed by their close ties with the Sit-tat. Nonetheless, it appears there is a difference between the BGFs elite and foot-soldiers, the latter, in some cases, being closer to the call of the Revolution. As recounted by a Karenni civil society member: “When I fled from Loikaw to reach the Thai border, I had to take shelter in a territory under BGF’s control. During the negotiation between the KNPP and the BGF to arrange my safe trip to the border, I met several young [BGF] soldiers. Some of them told me they wanted to leave with me, join the Civil Disobedience Movement and participate in the Revolution. But in the end, they did not run away, they told me: we know that our organization can reach us anywhere at any time”³⁹.

The heterogeneity of non-state armed forces is not related only to the history. From 2021 to the present, dozens of revolutionary armed groups have emerged across the Karenni territory. As noted by Ye Myo Hein in May 2022: “According to informed sources, there are no less than 20,000 fighters among the various anti-junta groups”⁴⁰. In September 2022, the Information Centre of Progressive Karenni People Force (PKPF), a local activist group, estimated a total of 15,850 fighters active in the ethnic State⁴¹.

Although, it is still a challenge to determine the accurate number of Karenni revolutionary members active on the ground, there are more detailed information about the overall groups fighting the regime’s troops in the eth-

³⁷ John Buchanan, *Militias in Myanmar*, “The Asia Foundation,” July 2016, pp. 8

³⁸ Interview with a member of the KNDF, Mae Hong Son, September 2022.

³⁹ Interview with a member of the Karenni civil society, Chiang Mai, September 2022.

⁴⁰ Ye Myo Hein, *One Year On: The Momentum of Myanmar’s Armed Rebellion*, Wilson Center, May 2022, pp. 52.

⁴¹ Progressive Karenni People Force (PKPF) statement published on September 10, 2022.

nic State. The most relevant forces formed after the 2021 coup, besides the KNDF, are the PDFs operating at township level, including Demawso PDF (DMO-PDF), Loikaw PDF (LK-PDF), Bawlakhe PDF (BLK-PDF), Moebye PDF (MB-PDF), and Pekhon PDF (PK-PDF). There are alliance attempts between different armed groups, such as the Karenni Revolution Union (KRU), composed by Karenni Generation Z (KGZ), Karenni Democratic Front (KDF), Fight for Justice (JPDF), and Southern Shan People Defense Force (SSPDF). It is also not unusual for outside forces to join temporarily Karenni groups during military operations. Two examples are Naypyitaw-PDF and Southern Shan Revolution Youth (SSRY)⁴², both repeatedly active in Moebye and Demawso ⁴³.

The last relevant factor in describing the militarized environment in Karenni State is represented by the territorial distribution of Sit-tat troops and their regional chain of command. On the ground, the military operations in Karenni State are overseen by Regional Military Commands (RMC) based in Loikaw. The RMC is in charge of the troops and holds political responsibility for the progress of the conflict. The RMC is overseen in turn by the Bureau of Special Operation (BSO) 2. The BSOs “are high-level field units in the Army formed with the original purpose of coordinating regional military commands in counter- insurgency operations”⁴⁴. The last local center of military power is represented by the Military Operations Command (MOC) No. 7, based in Pekhon (Southern Shan State). MOC No. 7 is in charge of implementing the strategic-military directions of RMC and supervises the Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) deployed across the region. MOCs are “comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each”⁴⁵.

In September 2022, before the major offensive launched by the junta at the beginning of March 2023 in Karenni State, the regime deployed 20 LIBs. Although, each LIB consisted of one hundred and twenty soldiers, only eighty

⁴²The Southern Shan Revolution Youth (SSRY) is a coalition formed by the SSRY Easel Force, the Dragon Force, the Tai PDF Cobra Force, the Dove Guerrilla Force, and the Southern Shan Irine Force. The SSRY is NUG No.1008 Infantry-Southern Shan.

⁴³ 90 soldiers killed in Demoso armed conflicts, “BNI”, March 28, 2023, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/90-soldiers-killed-demoso-armed-conflicts>.

⁴⁴ Htet Myet Min Tun, Moe Thuzar and Michael Montesano, Min Aung Hlaing and His Generals: Data on the Military Members of Myanmar’s State Administration Council Junta, “ISEAS”, Singapore, 23 July 2021, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ISEAS_Perspective_2021_97.pdf.

⁴⁵ Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Killing, torture and use of human shields and navigators by the SAC and BGF in Bilin Township, May to June 2022, “KHRG”, 22 August 2022, <https://khr.org/2022/08/22-182-d1/doo-tha-htoo-district-short-update-killing-torture-and-use-human-shields-and#ftn3>.

generally took part in counterinsurgency missions⁴⁶. Specifically, LIB 427 and LIB 102 are in Demawso township; LIB 531 in Hpruso; LIB 422 in Moebye; LIB 336 in Pekhoh; LIB 250 in Loikaw; and LIB 530 east of Loikaw⁴⁷. The LIBs form the Light Infantry Divisions (LIDs). The LIDs are known to be the most violent units in the entire military structure. A recent demonstration of their brutality occurred on Christmas Eve 2021, when soldiers from LID 66 massacred dozens of civilians in Hpruso district of Karenni State, burning them alive⁴⁸. Finally, there are two Artillery Battalions, one in Loikaw and the other in Demawso. The two battalions use Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), not only to attack military targets of the revolutionary forces, but mostly to bombard civilians in villages or refugee camps across the State.

It is relevant to note that in early February 2022, the commander of the Regional Military Commands and the deputy commander of Military Operations Command No. 7 were both replaced. The change of leadership in the most important centers of military operations on the ground was a clear sign of the Sit-tat's failed strategy to regain control of Karenni State. In other words, an attempt by the junta to respond to the "failure to contain the growing armed resistance"⁴⁹ in Karenni State.

5. The geography of the Karenni Revolution

An essential aspect that has led to the "growing armed resistance" in Karenni is defined by the specific geographical features of the territory. First, Karenni State itself represents a strategic area. The capital city of the Karenni ethnic State, Loikaw, is only two hundred kilometers away from Myanmar's national capital, Naypyidaw, the center of military power. For this strategic reason, to push back the revolutionary forces that got into the peripheries of the city in the early days of January 2022, the Sit-tat bombed Loikaw. "About 50,000 people reportedly fled Loikaw after military airstrikes destroyed areas of the city during recent attacks, bringing the number of displaced people to

⁴⁶ Interview with the coordinator of Karenni Civil Society Network, Mae Hong Son, September 2022.

⁴⁷ Given the difficulty in obtaining detailed information regarding the position of Sit-tat troops over the Karenni State, the list of LIBs is partial and reflects the situation on September 2022.

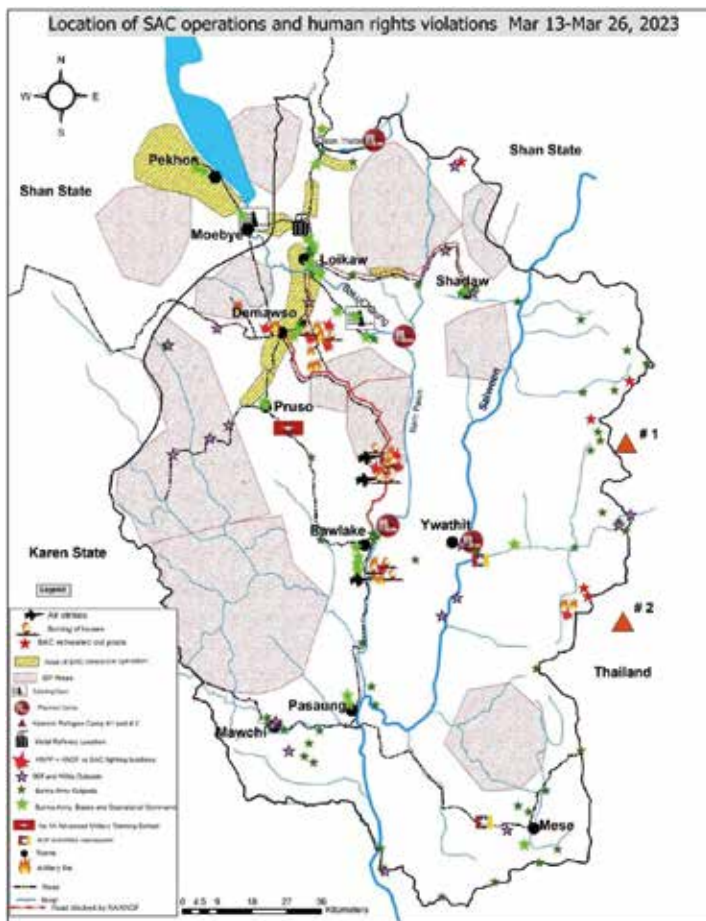
⁴⁸ Esther J, Junta soldiers implicated in Christmas Eve massacre occupy town of Moebye, "Myanmar Now", 17 February 2022, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/junta-soldiers-implicated-in-christmas-eve-massacre-occupy-town-of-moebye>.

⁴⁹ Ye Myo Hein, *One Year On: The Momentum of Myanmar's Armed Rebellion*, Wilson Center, May 2022, pp. 52.

about 200,000”⁵⁰. This was a relevant episode within Myanmar contemporary conflict dynamics, as it represented the first airstrike against, not only a developed urban center, but a capital city of an ethnic State.

In the insurgency and counterinsurgency strategy in Karenni State, the road section from Pehkon to Demawso represents the main geostrategic target of the conflict, where the effort of both resistance forces and regime is focused. In fact, armed clashes between the two factions take place along this very road that runs through the townships of Demawso, Loikaw, Pehkon and Hpruso.

Figure 1: Map of Karenni conflict published by the Karenni Civil Society Network, KCSN: Bi-weekly update, March 31, 2023.



⁵⁰ Sar Shi Mi, Myanmar junta launches air strikes on Loikaw as the battle continues to rage, “Mizzima,” January 12, 2022, <https://mizzima.com/article/myanmar-junta-launches-air-strikes-loikaw-battle-continues-rage>.

During 2021, the military used mostly the road from Taungoo, in Bago region, to Loikaw, entering into Karenni State from the south. However, since 2022, as the conflict in and around Karenni State has intensified, the military has only used the road from Pekhon to Demawso, north-west of the ethnic State. Although the reasons behind this strategic shift are unknown, the leading cause could be the growing presence of the anti-junta Karen resistance coalition, formed by Karen EROs, especially the Karen National Union (KNU), and PDFs, across the region.

With the Taungoo option excluded, the only road that allows the Sit-tat troops to enter into the Karenni State is the one from Pekhon in Southern Shan State. Emphasizing its implication within local dynamics, KNDF telecommunication officer explained: “The Pekhon-Demawso road is very important for transporting supplies and reinforcements. Whoever takes control of the main road, controls the whole Karenni State”⁵¹. Therefore, taking control of the above-mentioned road section is the current Sit-tat objective in the Karenni theatre.

On the other hand, the KNDF does not possess yet the military capability to defend territories from the Sit-tat’s air counteroffensives. As one KNDF member indicated: “For us, taking control of the entire road section, and being able to defend it from military attacks, represents another level of strategy, another level of organization, and another level of weaponry: Another phase of the Revolution”⁵². In other words, at present no actor is able to control the key strategic element of the conflict. Future game-changing efforts, on both sides, will be focused on this aspect.

An additional geographical element that shapes the Karenni theatre is the role played by its bordering country. In fact, Karenni State shares part of the long border between Myanmar and Thailand. This aspect is mostly relevant to local resistance forces, since Shadaw township, which connects Karenni State to Thailand’s Mae Hong Son region, is the KNPP’s historical stronghold. The KNPLF operates in Mese township, also bordering with Thailand.

The ability to interact with the outside world, although to a limited extent, represents an advantage for the revolutionary groups in both obtaining cross-border humanitarian aid and acquiring weapons and ammunition. It is relevant to note that no major armed clashes have yet occurred in Shadaw and Mese townships. It appears that both areas have been voluntarily left out of the conflict. If there will be increased support for Karenni revolutionary

⁵¹ Interview with KNDF telecommunication officer, Mae Hong Son, September 2022.

⁵² Interview with a member of the KNDF, Mae Hong Son, September 2022.

groups in the future, and for KNDF specifically, it will likely come through the Thai border.

6. Revolution is Federalism: building a new model of governance in time of war

Federalism has always been perceived as the solution to Myanmar's civil war, even before the country gained its independence. The first attempt to establish a society based on the shared principles of equality, self-governance and self-determination for every ethnic minority was the Panglong Agreement of February 12th, 1947, signed by Aung San, representing the Bamar, and the Kachin, Chin, and Shan leaders. The agreement remains the benchmark for many EROs to this day.

The Constitution, drafted the same year, confirmed the general direction of the Panglong Agreement. "As Josef Silverstein points out, although the Constitution did not mention the words "federal" or "federalism", it was clear that this was its main intention"⁵³. However, Myanmar's post-independence, dominated by the authoritarian turn of central governments, ethnocentrism, and oppression of ethnic and religious minorities, led the country to move drastically away from early attempts to implement a federal and inclusive system.

The outbreak of the first peaceful and then armed uprising of 2021, with the collapse of legitimate central state authority, brought federalism back to the center of political discussion. On February 5th, 2021, a group of parliamentarians elected in the November 8th, 2020 general election, led by Daw Phyu Phyu Thin, established the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). On March 31st, the CRPH launched the Federal Democracy Charter. In addition to the formation of the NUG, composed of members with diverse ethnic and political backgrounds, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) was established: an inclusive political dialogue platform that brings together diverse actors, including some EROs, political parties, and civil society organizations, with the aim of laying the foundation for the country's future political and administrative system. "NUCC's aspiration for a "Democratic and Federal Union" emphasizes "federalism" as a priority"⁵⁴.

While it is important to pay attention to the top-down political initiatives already mentioned, this last section will focus on analyzing the politi-

⁵³ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, London and New York, Zed Books Ltd, 1999, pp.79.

⁵⁴ Htet Myet Min Tun and Moe Thuzar, Myanmar's National Unity Consultative Council: A Vision of Myanmar's Federal Future, "Fulcrum," January 5, 2022, <https://fulcrum.sg/myanmars-national-unity-consultative-council-a-vision-of-myanmars-federal-future/>.

cal efforts of Karenni communities within the current national revolutionary framework. Indeed, as expressed by Ashley South: “Although constitutional change is necessary, federalism can also be seen as an “emergent” phenomenon, developing from the bottom up from the existing structures and practices of ethnic minority communities and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs)”⁵⁵.

Within this vision of a bottom-up federalism, the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC) was formed in Karenni State on April 9th, 2021. The KSCC is composed of parliamentarians elected in the 2020 general election, political parties, ethnic revolutionary forces, and civil society and youth organizations. On April 18th, 2021, in its first official statement, the new representative body declared: “The KSCC will take the political leadership role in Karenni State and guide the formation of an interim state government and implementation of the state’s executive, legislative, and judiciary sectors”⁵⁶.

As set out in the Federal Democratic Charter Part-II, approved by the People’s Assembly, the KSCC has been working on the Interim Constitution of Karenni State. The Constitution, although still in the making, lays the foundation of the future federal and democratic State of Karenni. It includes purposes, responsibilities, and principles of the KSCC, focusing on women’s participation, equality, justice, and non-discrimination; the formation of the interim state administration and the division of powers; an inclusive and multilingual educational system; a political roadmap; a coordination system with existing ethnic revolutionary administrative departments; and a multi-dimensional transitional plan from the current armed struggle to the post-revolutionary period, including security sector components: management of weapons, dissolution of anti-dictatorship armed forces, and rehabilitation and reintegration process for former revolutionary fighters⁵⁷.

The KSCC also aims to bring together different local ethnic political-armed organizations within the same interim government. At first, the main armed organizations that accepted to join the Council were the KNPP, KNPLF and KNLP. Two years after its formation, the representative members from National League for Democracy (NLD), the KNLP and the KNPLF withdrew their participation from the KSCC⁵⁸.

Despite the attempt to establish an inclusive interim government open to all armed organizations and political parties representing different local

⁵⁵ Ashley South, Towards “Emergent Federalism” in Post-coup Myanmar, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 43, No. 3 (2021), pp. 439-60, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute.

⁵⁶ Karenni State Consultative Council, Statement No. 1/2021, April 18, 2021, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2021/04/18/karenni-state-consultative-council-statement-no-1-2021/>.

⁵⁷ Interim Constitution of Karenni State.

⁵⁸ KSCC works to finalize the Karenni State Administrative Council, “BNI”, February 27, 2023, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/kssc-works-finalize-karenni-state-administrative-council>.

ethnic minorities, it remains challenging to reach agreements, policies, and a shared vision of the future Karenni State. As expressed by a KNPP Central Committee member: “One of the main goals is to unite the Karenni people and groups. However, the problem of cooperating with Karenni armed groups close to the Burmese Army is defined by the lack of mutual trust. If some sensitive information, shared exclusively within the government, were to be leaked to the military, we would risk endangering our troops and people, giving an advantage to the Burmese Army. The circle of trust must be 100 percent secure, but this inevitably slows down the unification process with all Karenni groups. Despite this difficulty, the KNPP chairman is clear: we want to move forward not backward”⁵⁹.

Since its formation, the KSCC has sought to build a local administration while maintaining a stable relationship with democratic forces across the country. Currently, under KSCC control there are 400 schools, from kindergarten to tenth grade, one on-campus university, with in-person classes, five hospitals, 74 clinics and 426 healthcare personnel (HCP), including doctors, nurses and volunteers⁶⁰. In addition, KSCC works closely with the NUG and directly participates in the NUCC.

In relation to the governance capacity of the KCSS, considerable progress has been made in the security sector. On one side, the KNDF is a security force that reports to the KSCC, besides having representative members within the interim government. On the other side, the Karenni State Police (KSP) was formed in August 2021 under the supervision and guidance of KSCC. The KSP consists of 320 policemen who have left the ranks of the national police force to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)⁶¹. In less than two years, the KSP has opened seven police stations and two police outposts, “providing law, order, security, and other services to the Karenni people through community-based police work in these areas.”⁶² From August 25th 2021 to July 3rd, 2022, the KSP had arrested a total of 235 people: “SAC informers (13), SAC instigators (76), drug-related crimes (31), rape (1), theft (11), Non-CDM (43), military deserters (13), police deserters (4), drug trafficking (27), domestic violence (8), and prisoners of war (8)”⁶³.

⁵⁹ Interview with members of the Central Committee (CC) of the KNPP, Mae Hong Son, July 15, 2022.

⁶⁰ Interview with Khun Bedu, leader of the KNDF, October 25, 2022.

⁶¹ Anti-junta police force formed in Karenni State by striking police officials, “Myanmar Now,” August 26, 2021, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/anti-junta-police-force-formed-in-karenni-state-by-striking-police-officials/>.

⁶² Annual report of Karenni State Police, (25-8-2021 to 31-7-2022).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

For these concrete state-building efforts, the Karenni Revolution must be framed not only through its goal of overthrowing the current military regime, but within a broader political and social project of transforming the current State of Myanmar into a federal and democratic country that guarantees political aspiration, equality, social justice, and self-determination to all ethnic minorities. This is a multidimensional Revolution where the implementation of the federal system is not postponed into the uncertain future, but it is an urgency of the present: federalism in times of war.

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La Rivista semestrale *Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società* intende la *Sicurezza* come una condizione che risulta dallo stabilizzarsi e dal mantenersi di misure proattive capaci di promuovere il benessere e la qualità della vita dei cittadini e la vitalità democratica delle istituzioni; affronta il fenomeno del *Terrorismo* come un processo complesso, di lungo periodo, che affonda le sue radici nelle dimensioni culturale, religiosa, politica ed economica che caratterizzano i sistemi sociali; propone alla *Società* – quella degli studiosi e degli operatori e quella ampia di cittadini e istituzioni – strumenti di comprensione, analisi e scenari di tali fenomeni e indirizzi di gestione delle crisi.

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