From Rebels to Rulers:  
The challenges of transition for non-state armed groups in Mindanao and Myanmar  

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• Comparing conflicts and peace processes in the southern Philippines (Mindanao) and Myanmar (Burma), through examining the experiences of two key armed groups:

– the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on Mindanao
– the Karen National Union (KNU) in Myanmar (Burma)
Mindanao context

• Centuries/decades of armed conflict
  • MNLF
  • MILF
  • [Communist insurgency]

• MILF 2008 agreement struck down by Supreme Court ['Ancestral Domain']
• October 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro
• March 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro [and Annexes]
• 2015 - Bangsamoro Basic Law ?
• 2016 - peace process under President Duterte? Renewed BBL and/or federalism ... ?

• Challenges of implementation, and socio-economic recovery
Myanmar context

• Armed conflict since independence in 1948
  • Multiple Ethnic Armed Organisations [EAOs]
  • [Communist insurgency collapsed 1989]

• 2010 elections and April 2011 U Thein Sein government

• 2012-13 bilateral ceasefires [not Kachin Independence Organisation]

• 2013-15 negotiations towards a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement - 8 put of c.21 EAOs signed on 15 October
Myanmar context # 2

• 2015 elections and April 2016 NLD government, led by State Councilor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
• January 2015 Union Peace Conference under outgoing military-backed regime
• Ongoing fighting in the North
• Negotiations towards a more inclusive Union Peace Conference – “21st Century Panglong Conference” (31/8 – 4/9 2016)
  • Process/Participation?
  • Substance of negotiations
  • Beyond political dialogue
similarities # 1

Contributing Factors

• Peripheral geographic location of ethnic minority communities in Myanmar (border regions) and insular Mindanao (Moro). Isolation and under-development of conflict-affected zones.

• Centralising state identified with alien (and predatory) ethno-religious majority community. Concerns over impact of government/majority community assimilationist policies on ethnic (and religious) and identities. Ethnic (and religious) identity central to the resistance agendas of minority groups.

• Decades of armed conflicts complicated by political economies, compounded by mixture of ‘grievances’ and ‘greed’ factors. Centrality of natural resource economic/politics and land issues.

• Histories of previous unsuccessful ceasefires. Legacy of authoritarian past (Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines; military government in Burma/Myanmar), and dilemmas of transitional justice.

• Self-reliance and resilience of conflict-affected communities and EAGs; limited international involvement. Enduring Ethnic Armed Groups, rooted in local communities.

• MILF and KNU (e.g.) significant - if contested - legitimacy among communities they seek to represent.
similarities # 2

Current Situation

• Leadership by Presidents (Benigno Aquino III, and now President Roberto Duterte; U Thein Sein).
• “The tyranny of elections” – peace processes out of sync with electoral cycles.
• Roles of legislatures (Philippines Congress, Myanmar Parliament) as potential spoilers. Risks associated with government, national army, majority community (Filipinos, Burmans) not accepting and/or not implementing peace agreements. Possibility that peace agreements will not be accepted or implemented by future governments.
• Communities have experienced the benefits of peace: freedom from fear, freedom of travel; partial rehabilitation of displaced people. Nevertheless, elite-driven peace in which civil society has sometimes felt inadequately consulted. processes
• Neither conflict has yet found a durable and just peace – between peace and war; ‘armed spoilers’ ...
similarities # 3

Ongoing Challenges

• Discrimination still experienced among minority communities. Economic underdevelopment in conflict-affected areas. Widespread drug use and lawlessness; impacts of illicit/shadow economies.

• Human security of ethnic and religious ‘minorities within minorities’. Sub-groups not identified with the dominant ethnic nationality in areas controlled or under the authority of EAOs.

• Challenges faced by EAO administrations, making the transition from resistance to legitimate, competent and corruption-free governance. Problems faced by EAGs in maintaining political coherence.

• Disarmament and security sector reforms. What are the roles of armed elements (particularly young men), post- ceasefire?

• Challenges in relation to international support for transformative peace-building.

• Violent conflicts not addressed in the two-peace processes: Abu Sayaff Group in the southern Philippines; inter-communal (anti-Muslim) violence in Myanmar.
contrasts # 1

- Bangsamoro’ shared identity of all non-Filipino (Muslim) groups on Mindanao (?); Myanmar’s diverse and heterogeneous ethnic communities.
- Importance of GRP recognising the Bangsamoro in principle, as a legitimate, autonomous political entity. (e.g. Annex on Revenue Generation and Wealth-sharing.)
- Historically, Myanmar military government has been reluctant to acknowledge political legitimacy of ethnic (particularly armed) actors, or to grant significant autonomy.
- Does the new NLD-led government in Myanmar recognise the legitimacy of EAOs, and ethnic communities’ grievances and aspirations? Will the Myanmar Army be willing to allow substantial federalism, along ethnic lines?
Contrasts # 2

- Historically differing political cultures: GRP openness to international engagement. Myanmar military government autarchy, and ‘xenophobia’ (including towards Muslims).
- Geographically, whereas Mindanao is an island, Myanmar’s International borders have implications for refugees and regional politics.
- The two countries have different geo-strategic positions and interests with China, USA, ASEAN, OIC etc.
- International mediation in Mindanao peace talks (International Contact Group - novel model, including states and INGOs).
- International monitoring on Mindanao (International Monitoring Group, and Civilian Protection Component). Limited nature of international support to Myanmar peace process.
So what? ...

- Engagement with civil society actors is a key element of success in the Mindanao peace process, which should be replicated in Myanmar.

- Degrees/types of international involvement a key variable.

- Changing nature of the state. Negotiation of comprehensive peace settlements are threatened by ‘the tyranny of elections’ in Myanmar (2015) and the Philippines (2016).

- The peace process between Manila and the MILF represents a rare example of a Muslim minority pursuing its political objectives through structured dialogue [c.f. GAM and Aceh].

- Challenges faced by armed groups moving from insurgency to re-invent themselves as credible political actors and governance authorities (transformation ‘from rebels to rulers’ - Zachariah Mampilly 2011).

- Challenges of ‘convergence’ or parallel governance authority. Recognition of armed groups’ political legitimacy (“hybrid governance” – Risse 2011”).