**Analysis of Saw Ba U Gyi’s three strategies**

**By**

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The rights of minorities, such as ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity were adopted by the United Nations Minorities Declaration (UNMD) in 1992. Culturally, Martyr’s Day is also one of the honorable days for all minority Karen ethnic group across the globe to celebrate the founding father of Karen National Union (KNU), Saw Ba U Gyi, including Saw Sai Khay and other leaders who were assassinated by enemies on the remarkable day 12 August, 1950 in Htoh Kaw Koe Village, Kaw Karate Township, Karen State. As it is the historical day for all Karen people to preserve as Karen Martyr’s Day for every part of the world in the Karen community. In this essay, it is about the analysis of Saw Ba U Gyi’s possible political beliefs in the speech of general congress in Hpa Pun in 1950, “Armed Struggle”, “Political Dialogue and a Negotiated Settlement with the Burmese Government”, and “International Intervention and Arrangement on the Karen People’s Behalf”. These three statements are the undeniable ways of Karen revolution to our modern politics. In this essay, I am going to present both advantages and disadvantages to all the three statements above with my arguments.

Historically, Karen “armed struggle” was introduced with the Karen revolution on 31 January 1949 and led by Saw Ba U Gyi. He said **“***By right of military conquest.**The Karen revolution, being a**just revolution, shall eventually**be victorious. However, the**struggle will be long, difficult,**arduous, painful and distressing.**Many lives will be lost*”. Since there are armed conflicts, it has both negative and positive impacts. Negatively, it impacts a lot on innocent civilians, especially the vulnerable women and children. To approach this from a human rights perspective, my argument is we cannot protect the individual civilian on human rights violation under armed conflicts. According to Ashley South, when Karen headquarter, Marnerplay, in 1994, Marnerplaw, the fighting between Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA); alliance with the military government, caused 10,000 refugees to flee to Thailand. In 2009, the transition of Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) to Border Guard Force (BGF), the fighting caused thousands of IDPs along the border of Myawaddy township. Besides, in 2016, breakaway DKBA, Kyaw Thet group clashed with BGF and caused more than 5,000 IDPs in Myaing Gyi Ngu, HlaingBwe township. As a result, armed conflicts force the local people to move and leave their homeland. Officially, the refugee camps have been more than 30 years along Thai and Burma border are the good result of armed conflicts. Individually, according to an HRW report in 2005, armed conflicts impact humans, especially food security and livelihood, human rights violations, particularly land rights; land confiscation. The civilians in conflict areas face executing, torture, rape, sexual violence, displacement and demolition of entire villages. KHRG also claims that the daughters of thirteen years old and fifteen years old were shot by Tamadaw in 1979, during harvesting near Ler Kaw village. In 1992, Tamadaw forced the villagers to move, burnt the villages and killed or ate all the animals. One of the interviewees also felt unforgettable from her suffering experience when her daughter was shot, and intestines came out. Psychologically, the civilians got trauma from their painful experience of the brutal military.

In the aspect of macro level, positively, KNU could have specific territory control, cultural maintenance and administrative governance. It was unarguable that Karen armed struggle between the late 1940s and early 1990s was the most significant and the most influential ethnic armed groups in Myanmar politics until the collapse of Manerplaw, the KNU operated as a de facto government, controlling large swathes of territory across Karen State and adjacent areas. Although it was not internationally recognized, the KNU administration aspired to reproduce modern state-like structures, including departments for health, education, law, forestry and other aspects of civil administration, making claims to a legitimate monopolization of security and policing, as well as the right to extract taxes in its liberation zone. It even has its own constitution, for example land policies, which prevent from the military government’s land confiscation under its control areas. On one hand, it played the major role to support other ethnic armed groups or build ethnic alliances, for example, All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF) and alliance politics such as Thoomweh agreement in Marnerplaw. Therefore, there are a lot of positive impacts to Karen armed struggle in previous decades in political aspects.

“Political dialogue and a negotiated settlement with the Burmese government” is one of the ways to solve the political conflicts between Tamadaw and KNU. There is a lot of criticism of KNU top leaders in the Karen community, after they have signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). According to Saw Ba U Gyi “*As a voluntary gift given, in good will, by the enemy. We can always be sure that the enemy will never give us a country, a state, so this possibility must be ruled out*”. Obviously, there are many generations of our leaders from Saw Ba U Gyi, politically, Tamadaw has never been trustworthy. On one hand, the word peace building or peace negotiation sounds very positive, however it has both positive and negative impact under peace building. Academically, I would like to argue, according to Kevin Woods’ “Ceasefire Capitalism”, NCA is only the idea of Burmese military government’s strategy of counterinsurgency for military-state building. The “Ceasefire Capitalism” means to use “Military Territorialization'', “Resources Governance”, and “Ethnic Armed Group Partnership Business”. According to a KHRG report in 2019 between January and June, Tamadaw reinforced its military by sending more weapons and ammunition to its military camps across KNU control, especially Brigade 5 (Hpapun District) and Bridge 3 (Nyaunglebin District). According to Irrawaddy, Tamadaw built road constructions in 4 regions of KNU control areas: Papun, Nyaunglebin, Tougoo and Thaton districts. KNU’s Toungoo district spokesperson, Saw Thu Kabi said, “*What we understand is that they (Tamadaw) are building this road to improve their access to the area*”. Therefore, more than 2,000 local people in Papun displace to the forest. According to transnational business between state and non-state actors, there are two reports from KHRG in 2019. It said, there is a gold mining project, which is led by KNU local authorities in Nyaunglinbin, Mone Township. It impacts on the livelihood, such as paddy fields destruction from muddy, which leads to a lack of water for the villagers. Furthermore, there is also coal mining in Ban Chaung, the northern Tanintharyi by Thai company and KNU local authorities. It impacts on the livelihood of local people such as land grabbing and environmental impact of polluted water from toxic waste from mining. In addition, the transnational business network in the special economic zone of Shwekokeko also threatens civilian security since the Chinese crime network partner and ethnic armed groups are doing business such as hotels, casinos and condos. The transnational business causes the crimes and insecure the local people from weak law enforcement.

To approach in political and cultural aspects, there are also some positives in the peace building process. Politically, after the fall of Marnerplaw in 1994, according to Ashley South, KNU did not have a very close relationship and get public support from the Karen Buddhist community. Positively, on 31 January 2019, KNU could organize multi Karen armed groups and celebrated Karen 70 revolution in unity. Furthermore, KNU could engage more with Karen youth organizations in the Karen community, such as youth forums in Irrawaddy and Yangon Division. Besides, it could engage more with the public by providing educational and healthcare training. Besides, Karen Martyr’s Day celebration in Yangon, 2019, organized by Naw Ohn Hla, Saw Elbert Cho and S’ Thein Zaw Min, could engage Karen across the globe from their charging by the government. In addition, there are more benefits in freedom of speech or expression especially in social media which can help Karen political propaganda.

The “international intervention and arrangement on the Karen people’s behalf” is one of the solutions for the Karen revolution according to Saw Ba U Gyi. He believed “*By force of circumstances. After a long war, the enemy could get into a quagmire of unending crises. However hard the enemy tried he would get deeper into the quagmire. That is the time when the force of circumstances will be most favourable for us. At that time, we must not fail to grasp the opportunities presented themselves and, by military and political means, force our will upon the enemy”*. In order to discuss this statement, I am going to present both negative and positive impacts. Negatively, it can only happen for two reasons: economic interests and ideological influence both historical and contemporary politics. Historically, our leaders used to struggle for Kaw Thoo Lei independent state by the expectation of international intervention and arrangement, introduced by Dr. San C Po. In the late 1940s, many Karen leaders, led by Saw Ba U Gyi, proposed for Kaw Thoo Lei independent state again. However, it was not accepted by the British government since it is not in their interest. It is agreeable that many scholars claim they are only interested in trading. Furthermore, during the cold war period, KNU also got international support from Thailand (indirect USA) for the revolution. Ideologically, KNU was used to protect against Burmese communist insurgents and to end the Soviet Union, by Thailand and the USA.

However, there were also advantages since the colonial period. Karen people who worked closely with British government in the army. Many higher positions of British government were gained by Karen people. Karen culture, for example, Karen new year was recognized during British government. Besides, many Karen people got good opportunities to study abroad or higher education in Rangoon, for example Dr. San C Po, Dr. T Than Pyan and Saw Ba U Gyi were the early educators of Karen. It was also considered as the Karen scholars could lead the Karen movement as the earliest ethnic movement in Burma history. To overview in the cold war period, Kare leaders, especially General Bo Mya, had a very good diplomatic relationship with Thai. Economically, KNU did logging for trading with Thai elites to support its revolution.

In analysis and conclusion, personally, I rather believe “armed struggle” has more possibility than “political dialogue and a negotiated settlement with the Burmese government” and “international intervention and arrangement on the Karen people’s behalf”. Positively, during the peace process, I personally would like to discuss three points; “to review or evaluate its governance system”, “to engage with the public” and “to promote youth empowerment”. Firstly, KNU needs to review or evaluate its governance, which means ensure the harmony among its organization’s members, for example, are we going “Kawthoolei independent state” or “federalism”. Secondly, it should try to engage with the public, which includes other armed groups such as DKBA, KNU/KNLA-PC and BGF. On one hand, the public such as civilians, especially youth conferences or forums as well as Karen civil society organizations to build trust and work together Besides, it needs to promote youth empowerment for young leaders. According to Yoko and Verkuyten, ignoring youth empowerment for young leaders was one of the biggest mistakes of General Bo Mya in Marnerplaw. The qualified leaders are essential for development, to approach politics with education, for example, Karen Education and Cultural Department (KECD). The qualifications of teachers are weak since it is only for volunteers. Indeed, KNU really needs to have a smart mechanism for the change. All in all “armed struggle” is the most possible alternative way for self-determination, exclude “political dialogue and a negotiated settlement with the Burmese government” and “international intervention and arrangement on the Karen people’s behalf”, because ceasefire only means for counterinsurgency for territorialization and resources governance, when international intervention only interests on economic and political influence. I also agree with Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung, *“We Karen only need to depend on ourselves, but not others”*. Therefore, I believe “armed struggle” is the most possible way for Karen people, if we can take the political opportunity during the peace process.