

## China and the Wa

Tension seems to be building in Myanmar's border areas, as the end-of-year deadline set by the *Tatmadaw* for ceasefire armies to convert to a Border Guard Force expired.

With rumours of troop movements by the military, as well as the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in northern Shan state, some are suggesting that the uneasy peace will soon be shattered, as it was in nearby Kokang recently. See [this report](#) for details.

Any conflict would pose an interesting dilemma for Chinese authorities. The border between the Wa Special Region 2 and China has tended to be more open to Wa travelers, as well as business people, than has the Special Region with the rest of the Shan state. Indeed there has been a significant level of cooperation between Chinese authorities in Menglian, and the UWSA based in Panghsang on the other side of the river, as evidenced by the recent construction of a new port and customs buildings (see below).



The old bridge that connected the two towns was decommissioned two years ago and has now been demolished.



The new bridge, which lies behind the port building, rivals any along the China-Burma border and seems to be a tribute to the level of cooperation enjoyed between the two authorities. Indeed, according to some Chinese officials, UWSA members (*Wa-bang* in Chinese) are among their closest friends and are generally great guys. While in Thailand the Wa have a fearsome reputation as drug smugglers, the Chinese seem to have no such problem with them.

However, if it comes to choosing sides, Beijing must be reluctant to be seen to support anything that looks much like a separatist force in the region, for similar reasons that it avoided weighing in to the condemnation of the 2007 crackdown in Rangoon.