

## Internationalising the Kachin war



I think we are seeing the early stages of a much more consistent effort, in parts of the international media at least, to draw our gaze to [the war](#) between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burmese government. New [articles](#) are being written all the time.

This war -- for which there would appear to be no military resolution in sight -- will become more important to President Thein Sein when international actors start paying closer attention. With the by-elections [decided](#), relations with the National League for Democracy are settled for the time being. And other ethnic political movements, [to include](#) the Karen National Union, are getting behind the government's agenda to an unprecedented degree. This means the Kachin war could prove to be the most awkward element in the entire transition process, justifying all manner of policy acrobatics, if it is not brought to a mutually agreeable end.

Increasingly we see commentators arguing that because of fighting in the Kachin and Shan States positive political developments in other areas of the country can be heavily discounted, even disregarded. I'd suggest that is an analytical step too far but, as I have [argued](#) in the past, there is a clear, and unfortunate, contradiction in Burma's recent politics. Consistently positive moves in what could be described as "Burman" politics have been matched by at best haphazard progress in ethnic areas, and seriously regressive developments in Kachinland.

Recently, in response to the ongoing conflict, Sebastian Strangio has [reported](#) that "there's little sign of a democratic awakening" in war-torn parts of northern Burma. [Some](#) have posited that "insurgencies come and insurgencies go. But ethnic cleansing is forever". Others [contend](#) that, while the Kachin war continues, "heeding...calls" to remove sanctions "would be a serious mistake".

After the 17-year ceasefire it is remarkable that violent events in the Kachin State could now disrupt President Thein Sein's plans for a smooth transition to international respectability. What we are seeing suggests that day-by-day the [effort](#) to internationalise the conflict, and bring pressure to bear on the government, will only build.