

# Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)

## Sphere of Influence

### Background: Insurgency in Myanmar

Myanmar is a multiethnic country and was a colony of Britain until 1948. It practiced parliamentary democracy until the military took a coup in 1962. Since then, the country was under military dictatorship until 2011. Myanmar has also been in civil war with ethnic minorities including Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) who fight for autonomy in their home land.

Myanmar Military wrote a constitution which gives unprecedented powers to the military. The November 2010 election was largely seen as a “sham” by the international community. The de facto military party, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) claimed outright victory. A nominal civilian government led by ex-general Thein Sein came into power in March 2011.

To much surprise, Thein Sein administration initiated a number of reforms: release of political prisoners, relaxation of media censorship, economic reforms and peace talks with ethnic rebel groups.

The reform has improved government legitimacy both inside and international community. But despite the ongoing peace talks, wars continue with three ethnic rebel groups including KIO. This project determines the KIO spheres of influence, and this author predicts the encroachment of these KIO influenced zones as the legitimacy of government improved if the government continues the reform. As it has happened in the past, encroachment will be likely to occur where farmland available.



### Who is KIO?

Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) has been fighting for autonomy for the people of Kachin State since its establishment in 1961. Its military wing, Kachin Independence Army (KIA) is estimated to have around 10,000 fighters. The KIO is one of the ethnic rebels who originally fight for complete independence but later lowered to autonomy. Its areas of operations include northern Shan State as well (but this map does not include northern Shan State).

### Method

#### Step 1: Data Mining

Most of the GIS dataset in this map is from Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU). I manually encoded the towns/ villages which are under the influence of KIO, then rank them the degree of influence KIO has into four levels: Full-controlled, Half-controlled, Strong-influenced, and Influenced zones.

#### Step 2: Defining Zones of Influence

- **Full-controlled Zones**—the areas where there is little or no effective government administrative mechanism and the areas where the government jurisdiction is severely limited.
- **Half-controlled Zones** are the areas where the government and KIO administrative structures co-exist.
- **Strong-influenced Zones** are the areas where there is large or majority Kachin population live, and the distance is also proximity to KIO bases.
- **Influenced-Zones** are the areas where the geographic distance is greater than Strong-influenced Zones but where Kachin population is not majority but the community is significantly large. (The presence of Kachin population is weighted heavily because KIO enjoys overwhelming support from Kachin population.)

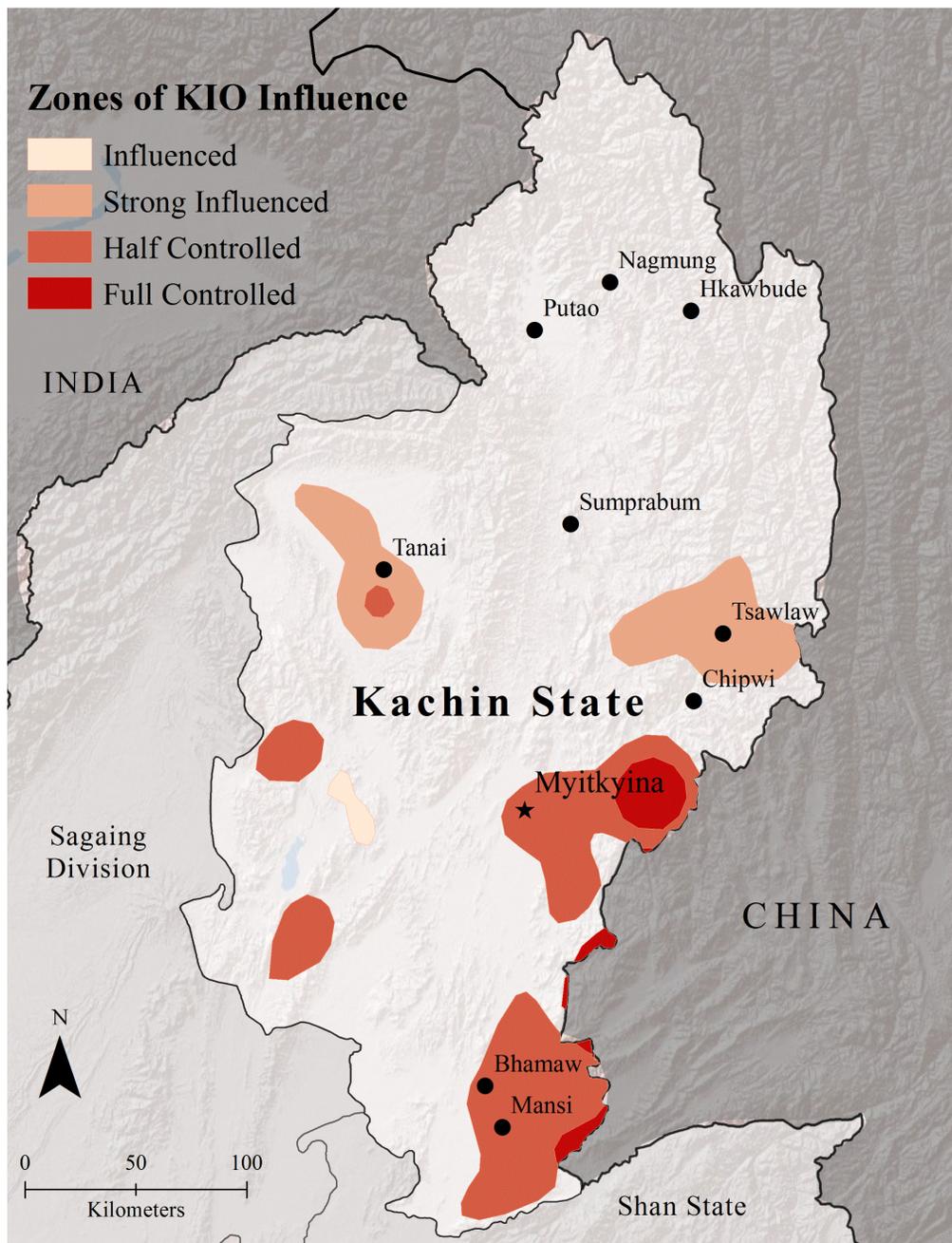
#### Step 3: Grouping Towns/ Villages

The towns and villages under KIO influence are grouped into zones and ranked. Then, each zone is converted into polygons and ranked with colors intensity according to the degree of influence.

#### Step 4: Land Cover Overlay

### About Cartographer

Yaw Bawm Mangshang is an ethnic Kachin, born and grew up in Kachin State. He has first hand experience of the protracted civil war.

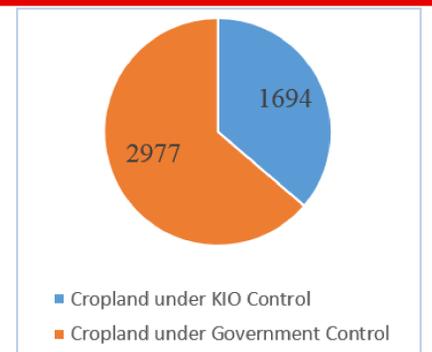


### Results

The global land-cover data map provided by ESA Climate Change Initiative (2010) is used to calculate the total area of cropland (in square kilometers) in Kachin State. For simplicity, (irrigated croplands, rain-fed croplands, mosaic croplands/ vegetation, mosaic vegetation/ croplands) are grouped as cropland. (closed to open broadleaved evergreen or semi-deciduous forest, closed broadleaved deciduous forest, open broadleaved deciduous forest, closed needleleaved evergreen forest, open needleleaved deciduous or evergreen forest, closed to open mixed broadleaved and needleleaved forest) are grouped as forest.

According to the land-cover data, Kachin State has a total of 4,671 square kilometers of cropland, and 36 percent of which falls in the KIO sphere of influence zones.

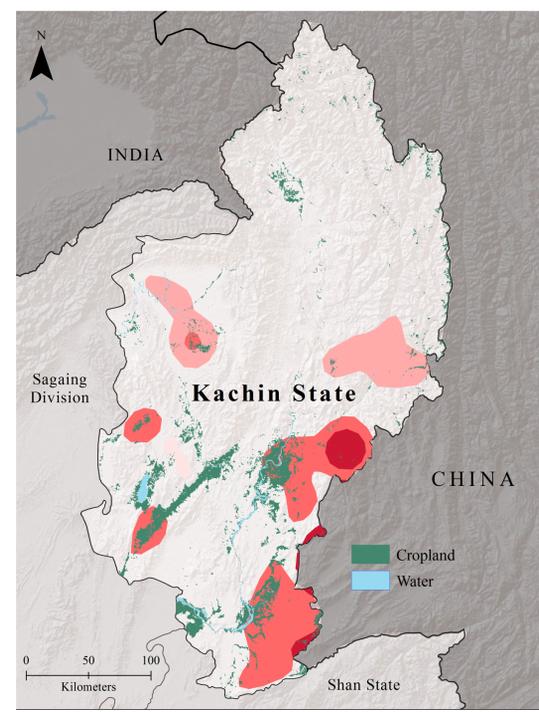
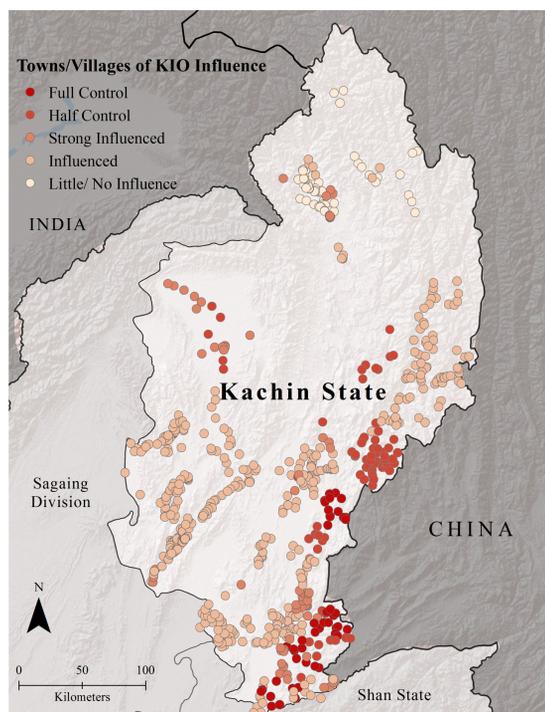
### Control of Cropland in Kachin State - Sq. Km.



Types of Controlled Zones	Croplands (SqKM)	Forest (SqKM)
Influenced Zones	1	137
Strong Influenced Zones	130	3,312
Half Controlled Zones	1,532	3,485
Full Controlled Zones	32	489
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,694</b>	<b>7,423</b>

### Limitations

This map is the personal assessment of the cartographer based on the town/villages represented by UNDP projects provided by Myanmar Information Management Unit. The towns and villages provided here are represented by UNDP projects, most of which are in the government controlled territories. Thus, many towns and villages under within the KIO sphere of influence are not represented in this map.



### Conclusion

The improving image of the Myanmar government both internationally and domestically especially among Bamar (ethnic majority) nationalists, suggests that the greatest challenges for the ethnic rebels are yet to come. Foreign Direct Investments rose to over \$8 billion in 2014-2015, according to The Irrawaddy news (9 April 2015). Myanmar already has widespread farmland conflict as business (the cronies of the military) expand their land grab across the country. As the FDI continue to pour in, the encroachment of farmland and forest is expected to continue.

The population especially in the Half-controlled and Influenced zones are likely to be affected the most when encroachment occurs because law enforcement in these zones is also the weakest. From the author's own experience, people in these gray-zones suffer more when conflict arise because the population is subject to both authorities—serving two masters.

### References

- Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, 16 July 2014.
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  - Sp15-DHP-P207-01-GIS for Int'l Applications Resources
  - Projection: Transverse Mercator
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- Data Sources:
- Myanmar Information Management Unit, www.themimu.info/.
  - The European Space Agency, ESA Climate Change Initiative, 1 October 2010.



Kachin Independence Army (KIA) soldiers



A Trademark of Kachin People, Traditional Manau Dance