



Borderland Battles and Global Supply Chains: Kachin Resistance and the Rare Earth Race in Asia

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Abstract

This article investigates the case of Kachin State in northern Myanmar as a critical node at the intersection of ethnic insurgency, resource nationalism, and global commodity flows. Controlled in part by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the region has become a major source of heavy rare earth elements (REEs) vital to high-tech and green industries worldwide. The article argues that Kachin serves as a paradigmatic model to understand how non-state actors assert de facto sovereignty over strategic resources and integrate into transnational supply chains, often in ways that bypasses or challenge national governments. Drawing comparisons with other conflict-resource regions in Asia, the study highlights the complex dynamics of unregulated extraction, environmental degradation, and geopolitical competition. It further explores how China and India have responded to Kachin's rare earth economy through informal trade, strategic posturing, and diplomatic ambiguity. By positioning Kachin as a frontier zone of both insurgency and globalisation, this research provides insights into broader patterns shaping Asia's resource-driven geopolitics and supply chain vulnerabilities.

Keywords: Kachin State; rare earth elements; ethnic insurgency; resource nationalism; China–Myanmar border; global supply chains; non-state actors; environmental governance; critical minerals; geopolitical strategy.

I. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected and resource-hungry world, the global race for critical minerals has become a defining feature of 21st-century geopolitics. Among these, rare earth elements (REEs) are indispensable to a wide range of modern technologies, including electric vehicles, wind turbines, smartphones, and military defense systems. As the global demand for these elements escalates, the sources of their extraction have gained immense strategic significance. Yet, many of these sources are located in fragile, conflict-prone, and

poorly governed regions, creating a nexus between resource extraction, political instability, and international competition. One such region is Kachin State in northern Myanmar, which has emerged as a key supplier of heavy rare earths, despite being partially controlled by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), a long-standing ethnic insurgent group.

Kachin State presents a compelling case study of the convergence of ethnic insurgency, resource nationalism, and transnational commodity flows in Asia. Since the resumption of hostilities between the KIA and the Myanmar military in 2011, the region has become both a battlefield and a lucrative extraction frontier. The KIA has consolidated control over several areas rich in rare earths where informal mining operations flourish under its watch. Despite its status as a non-state actor, the KIA exercises a form of resource sovereignty by levying taxes, issuing licenses, and regulating extraction. These activities not only finance its armed resistance but also connect the region to global supply chains through informal cross-border trade with China.

China's role in this context is central. Although it possesses the largest, rare earth processing capacity in the world, China remains heavily reliant on imports of heavy rare earth concentrates, nearly 40% of which are sourced from Myanmar, especially Kachin and neighboring Shan states.¹ This dependency has led to tacit cooperation with local Kachin actors and a willingness to overlook legal ambiguities in favour of supply stability. Simultaneously, environmental degradation linked to mining practices in the borderlands has triggered regulatory interventions from Chinese authorities, including temporary bans on imports.² Thus, China's engagement with Kachin reflects a pragmatic blend of strategic interest, environmental concern, and geopolitical calculus.

India, by contrast, has been slower to react but is increasingly alert to the implications of rare earth supply chains dominated by Chinese interests. In recent years, India has begun to articulate a



critical minerals strategy, positioning itself as a future player in rare earth extraction and processing. It views Myanmar not only as a potential source of raw materials but also as a strategic buffer in the broader contest with China for regional influence. New Delhi's interest in rare earths overlaps with security concerns along its northeast border, regarding transborder insurgent networks and Chinese influence in Myanmar's borderlands.³

The case of Kachin invites broader theoretical and comparative reflection. It shows how subnational insurgent groups can shape regional geopolitics and global economic flows through the control of high-value natural resources. Kachin's rare earth economy challenges conventional state-centric models of resource governance and introduces the idea of 'bottom-up resource nationalism' where armed groups claim not just autonomy but a stake in global markets. Similar patterns are observable in other Asian conflict zones and in all these contexts, the interplay of insurgency, extraction, and global demand generates complex, often opaque, supply networks.

This article argues that the Kachin case serves as a microcosm of wider trends at the intersection of conflict, commodities, and global power politics. By analysing how the KIA navigates resource control, how China and India respond strategically and economically, and how global rare earth supply chains rely on politically unstable frontiers, this study throws light on the often-overlooked geopolitics of the periphery. In doing so, it contributes to debates on resource conflict, non-state sovereignty, and the vulnerabilities embedded within global supply systems. Through a multi-scalar and interdisciplinary approach, the article highlights Kachin not merely as a zone of instability but as a strategic pivot point in the emerging architecture of Asian geopolitics.

II. Literature Review

Existing scholarship on rare earth elements (REEs) and conflict zones has increasingly highlighted the critical intersections between resource extraction, non-state governance, and global market dependencies. Studies by Le Billon⁴ (2011) and Ross⁵ (2004) laid the groundwork by linking natural resource wealth with the financing and prolongation of armed conflicts in under-governed territories. More recent research has expanded this to encompass the role of insurgent groups in establishing de facto systems of resource governance, as seen in works focusing on the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the United Wa State Army in Myanmar (Smith, 2023;

Transnational Institute,⁶ 2023). Environmental watchdogs like Global Witness have documented the ecological degradation associated with rare earth mining in Myanmar's borderlands, emphasising the lack of formal regulation and the complicity of transnational actors. Meanwhile, scholars of international political economy such as Saleem H. Ali⁷ (2021) and Klinger⁸ (2017) have underscored the strategic centrality of rare earths to global technological infrastructure and their embeddedness in precarious supply chains. However, there remains a gap in literature explicitly connecting the micro-politics of borderland insurgency with the macro-dynamics of global commodity flows, remarkably in the context of Asia's evolving geopolitical landscape. This study seeks to fill that gap by positioning Kachin not merely as a peripheral conflict zone but as a key analytical site for understanding how insurgency, resource nationalism, and global market pressures converge.

Kachin's Strategic Role

Kachin State, located in northern Myanmar, has emerged as a critical node in the global supply chain of rare earth elements (REEs), mostly heavy rare earths like Dysprosium and Terbium. These elements are indispensable in manufacturing high-performance magnets used in electric vehicles, smartphones, wind turbines, and military systems.⁹ The Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which controls key mining areas such as Kanpaiti near the China-Myanmar border, plays an indirect but substantial role in supplying these strategic minerals to the global market. While Myanmar accounts for only about 13% of global rare earth production, it contributes nearly 38% of China's heavy rare earth imports as of 2023.¹⁰

Although China possesses its own rare earth reserves, environmental regulations and resource depletion have led it to increasingly depend on imported concentrate for processing, particularly from Myanmar. China controls over 85% of global rare earth refining capacity and more than 90% of the global market for magnet production.¹¹ Kachin's rich mineral regions, therefore, function as upstream suppliers in this chain. The ore mined in rebel-held zones is typically transported across informal routes into China, especially Yunnan province, where it undergoes hydrometallurgical processing. This structure allows China to maintain its chokehold on global rare earth exports without bearing the full ecological cost of primary extraction.¹²

The trade between Kachin and Chinese processors is largely informal and loosely regulated. This opacity has made Kachin both a strategic

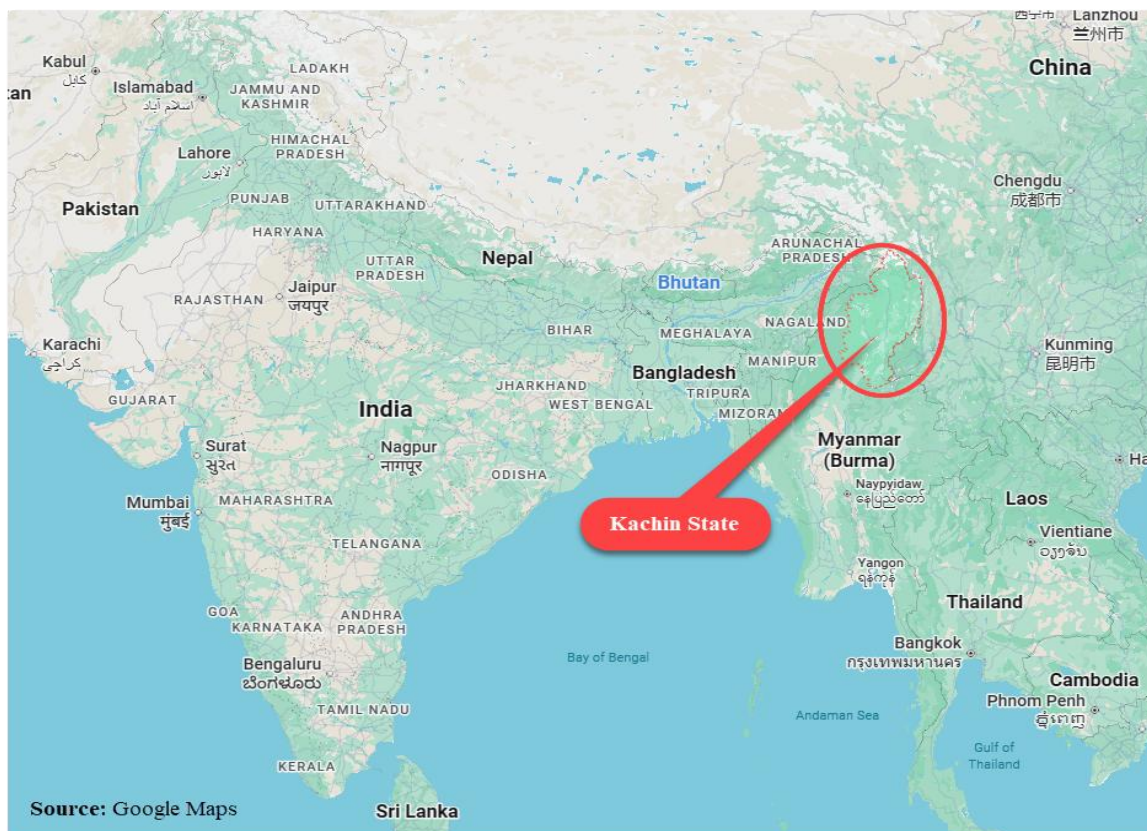


supplier and a volatile point in the supply chain. Following a major offensive by the KIA in March 2024, rare earth trade across the China-Myanmar border dropped by over 70% within two months, disrupting Chinese factories dependent on steady supply.¹³ Moreover, the extraction methods used—primarily in-situ leaching with ammonium sulfate—have led to severe environmental degradation in the Hukawng Valley and other mining zones, prompting temporary Chinese bans on imports from Myanmar due to ecological concerns.¹⁴ These disruptions ripple globally, causing price fluctuations and material shortages for multinational tech firms.

Kachin's rare earths feed into China's magnet-making industry, which supplies major manufacturers across Europe, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea. For example, over 60% of the world's neodymium-iron-boron (NdFeB) magnets, used in EV motors and turbines, originate in China with raw

inputs partially sourced from Myanmar.¹⁵ Disruptions in Kachin thus propagate through the supply chain, potentially delaying production of electric vehicles, defense electronics, and green energy infrastructure worldwide. This dependency underscores how a localized conflict in Myanmar can have outsized effects on global strategic sectors.

The instability in Kachin has prompted growing calls from global stakeholders to diversify rare earth supply chains. The European Union and the United States have identified the overreliance on China-linked supply chains as a strategic vulnerability, especially given the geopolitical risk associated with China's coercive trade practices.¹⁶ India, Australia, and the U.S. have begun forming critical minerals alliances to build alternative refining and extraction capacities. However, given the cost and technical barriers, Myanmar remains indispensable in the short term for heavy rare earth supply.¹⁷



Resource Control and Geopolitical Leverage:

The control of rare earth mineral (REM) deposits by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in northern Myanmar has significantly altered the geopolitical landscape in Southeast and South Asia. Kachin State, regions near the China-Myanmar

border such as Kanpaiti, contains substantial deposits of heavy rare earth elements (HREEs) like Dysprosium and Terbium, which are essential for advanced technologies such as electric vehicles, military hardware, and renewable energy systems.¹⁸ The capture of strategic areas by the KIA has



disrupted existing mineral supply routes to China, which relies on Myanmar for up to 38% of its heavy rare earth imports.¹⁹ This control gives the KIA strategic leverage far beyond its local insurgency, influencing bilateral and regional relationships.

China, the world's dominant rare earth refiner, has grown increasingly reliant on imports from Myanmar due to the environmental costs of domestic mining. With Kachin-held territories playing a key role in this import chain, any disruption caused by insurgency impacts Chinese industrial stability. Following the KIA's seizure of Kanpaiti in March 2024, rare earth shipments from Myanmar to China fell by nearly 70% over the subsequent two months.²⁰ This posed a significant risk to China's renewable energy and defense manufacturing sectors. In response, Beijing has increased diplomatic pressure on the Myanmar junta to regain control of border regions and even reportedly urged the KIA to halt hostilities temporarily to stabilise trade flows.²¹

The geopolitical implications of KIA control also underscore the weakening authority of the Myanmar central government, after the 2021 military coup. The junta's reliance on force to suppress ethnic groups like the KIA has only intensified the fragmentation of state authority in resource-rich borderlands. Despite China's vested interest in maintaining trade, its reluctance to fully back the junta militarily reflects the complex interplay between economic interests and regional security.²² The military regime's inability to secure strategic economic zones has further eroded its legitimacy domestically and internationally.

India views the conflict through a broader strategic lens. The growing presence of China along its eastern flank, coupled with instability in the India-Myanmar border regions raises national security concerns. India has expressed interest in diversifying its rare earth sources to reduce Chinese dependence, and the disruption in Myanmar's rare earth trade highlights the urgency of this strategic objective.²³ Moreover, India has been cautious in engaging with the Myanmar junta, opting instead to increase border vigilance and invest in domestic rare earth exploration as a long-term countermeasure.

At a broader level, KIA's control of rare earth-rich zones illustrates the growing importance of sub-state actors in international relations. The intersection of armed conflict, resource nationalism, and global supply chains creates a new geopolitical reality where traditional state-centric diplomacy is often insufficient. Multinational corporations and regional powers must now navigate a complex matrix of non-state actors like the KIA, whose

economic significance rivals their political ambitions.²⁴ As global demand for rare earth elements continues to rise, projected to grow by 7.5% annually through 2030, the role of resource-rich insurgent groups will become even more influential in shaping geopolitical outcomes.²⁵

Conflict, Resources, and Global Consequences:

Borderland conflicts in Kachin State, a remote and resource-rich region in northern Myanmar, profoundly influence not only domestic stability but also global strategic supply chains. The region's abundant rare earth elements (REEs), especially heavy rare earths like dysprosium and yttrium, are critical for clean energy technologies and defense industries.²⁶ Control over these mineral-rich areas has fluctuated between the Myanmar military and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an ethnic insurgent group. This persistent instability has made Kachin one of the most volatile links in the global rare earth value chain, with wide-ranging effects on international trade, foreign investment, and environmental governance.²⁷

The armed conflict has frequently disrupted the flow of REEs from Kachin into Yunnan Province, China, where the ores are refined. In March 2024, the KIA captured the strategic mining town of Kanpaiti, causing a 70% drop in rare earth shipments to China within two months.²⁸ This disruption triggered rare earth price surges of up to 34% for dysprosium oxide in international markets during April–May 2024.²⁹ The fluid nature of territorial control in Kachin has forced Chinese traders and processors to rely on informal networks, raising trade security risks, increasing insurance costs, and creating bottlenecks in the rare earth supply chain.

Kachin's status as a conflict zone significantly deters formal foreign direct investment (FDI). International mining corporations, especially from Australia, South Korea, and Canada, have refrained from entering the Kachin rare earth sector due to the lack of legal clarity, risk of expropriation, and violence.³⁰ Besides, Myanmar's post-coup legal framework is unstable, making contracts unenforceable and raising the risk of sanctions exposure for firms engaging with state or military-linked entities. As a result, international investors prefer sourcing REEs from politically stable, albeit less resource-abundant, regions—even at a higher cost.

The Borderland conflict has also led to the collapse of environmental governance in Kachin. Most rare earth extraction is carried out via in-situ leaching, using ammonium sulfate, which leaches



radioactive materials and heavy metals into the soil and water table.³¹ The KIA and affiliated groups permit or tax unregulated mining operations in exchange for revenue, but provide no environmental oversight. Chinese authorities, responding to cross-border ecological damage, temporarily suspended rare earth imports from Myanmar in late 2023, citing illegal and polluting extraction methods. The absence of international or national environmental enforcement mechanisms in Kachin has turned it into a textbook case of "resource extraction without regulation", with long-term transboundary ecological consequences.

As global demand for REEs rises, with projections estimating a sevenfold increase in demand for heavy REEs by 2035, Kachin's role in the rare earth ecosystem is increasingly vital.³² The region's persistent instability reveals a systemic weakness in global critical mineral supply chains: they are only as secure as their most fragile link. Investors and states are now forced to consider political risk, environmental cost, and trade security in their supply strategies. Kachin illustrates how localized conflict in an obscure region can ripple through international markets and policymaking institutions.

Strategic Engagement and Economic Leverage

Kachin State's rising prominence in the rare earth elements (REEs) sector for heavy rare earths like dysprosium, terbium, and yttrium has drawn the strategic attention of both China and India. As these resources are essential to electronics, renewable energy, and military hardware, control over their supply carries major geopolitical implications. The fact that a large portion of rare earth extraction occurs in rebel-held territory under the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) adds further complexity to regional engagement.³³

China has responded most assertively to Kachin-controlled rare earth activities due to its heavy dependence on Myanmar's supply of heavy rare earths, which accounts for around 38% of China's total imports as of 2023.³⁴ To ensure continued access, Beijing has tolerated informal, cross-border mineral trade and has quietly maintained ties with KIA-aligned intermediaries in Kanpaiti and Chipwi regions.³⁵ Chinese companies purchase ore through intermediaries to bypass formal state channels, a practice tacitly accepted by local Yunnan authorities despite the official stance of recognizing only Myanmar's central government. Strategically, China uses infrastructure projects and borderland development initiatives under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to increase leverage in

Myanmar's north, while also deploying People's Armed Police units near the border to prevent spillover violence.³⁶

Diplomatically, China has walked a fine line. While it supports Myanmar's junta at the UN and through arms sales, it has not condemned KIA offensives that threaten the junta's control, due to the KIA's utility in keeping rare earth supply routes open. However, growing concern over cross-border environmental damage due to radioactive contamination in Yunnan rivers which led Beijing to temporarily ban rare earth ore imports from Myanmar in late 2023, demanding stronger environmental standards and supply documentation.³⁷ This move was part of China's broader effort to clean up its supply chains without losing access to strategic materials.

India, although a late entrant in rare earth geopolitics, has started reassessing its position due to growing concerns over China's near monopoly on rare earth processing. In response to Myanmar's instability and China's dominance, India has included rare earths in its National Critical Minerals Strategy 2024, which lists Myanmar as a country of interest for sourcing.³⁸ The Indian government is particularly wary of Chinese encroachment near its northeastern border via economic and insurgent linkages in Kachin and Sagaing regions. Strategically, India has strengthened ties with Myanmar's central government while also cooperating with Japan and Australia under the Quad Critical Minerals Partnership to build rare earth processing facilities domestically.³⁹

Diplomatically, India has supported the idea of a federal Myanmar as proposed by ethnic groups like the KIA, without directly engaging with them. Indian officials have voiced concerns about the spillover of arms and narcotics from Kachin into northeastern India, prompting increased military surveillance and fencing along portions of the border. India's diplomatic overtures to the junta have included limited infrastructure investments, like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, to ensure alternative connectivity to Southeast Asia while keeping China's influence in check.⁴⁰

Ethnic Insurgency and Resource Sovereignty

The Kachin region of northern Myanmar, controlled in parts by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), exemplifies the entanglement of ethnic insurgency, resource nationalism, and global supply chains. Its rare earth mineral (REE) reserves have made it a globally significant resource node despite its status as a conflict zone.⁴¹ In many ways, Kachin



represents a paradigmatic case of how contested sovereignty, subnational control over natural resources, and transnational commodity flows intersect in modern Asia. The combination of rebel governance, porous borders, and strategic minerals allows researchers to generalize insights from Kachin to other hotspots in Asia facing similar dynamics.⁴²

KIA's control over rare earth mining zones reflects a broader pattern in Asia where ethnic armed groups finance autonomy movements through resource extraction. Comparable cases include the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Myanmar's Shan State and Pattani insurgents in Thailand who informally tax rubber and smuggling networks.⁴³ These insurgencies assert de facto sovereignty, operate parallel administrations, and extract value from natural resources in lieu of state legitimacy. Kachin offers a unique case due to the strategic global relevance of the resource in question, positioning the region not just within national conflict zones but in global commodity geopolitics.⁴⁴

Kachin also demonstrates a rare phenomenon, i.e., resource nationalism practiced by non-state actors. The KIA has set up licensing systems, revenue-sharing arrangements with local operators, and informal trade networks with Chinese buyers. Although not internationally recognized, this constitutes a form of "bottom-up resource nationalism" where a subnational entity seeks to control and benefit from extraction independently of the state.⁴⁵ This parallels other cases such as Aceh's GAM movement in Indonesia and the Maoist insurgency in India, though Kachin stands out due to the global strategic importance of its resources.⁴⁶

Despite being a war zone, Kachin is deeply embedded in global rare earth supply chains. In 2023 alone, over 40% of China's heavy rare earth imports came from Myanmar, primarily from Kachin rebel-controlled areas.⁴⁷ This illustrates a critical paradox: global high-tech industries and green technologies indirectly depend on commodities sourced from areas of lawlessness, environmental degradation, and armed insurgency. Similar patterns are observed in the cobalt trade in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and jade extraction in Shan State, suggesting Kachin's utility as a comparative framework for studying illicit yet indispensable commodity flows.⁴⁸

The Kachin case offers a model framework to study the resource-conflict-development nexus in Asia. It brings together key elements:

1. Subnational armed control over global strategic resources

2. Cross-border trade networks shaped by political geography

3. The environmental costs of unregulated extraction

4. The geopolitical responses of regional powers like China and India.⁴⁹

This multidimensional complexity makes it a useful lens through which to examine similar dynamics in Nagaland (India) and Papua (Indonesia) regions where insurgency and resource politics overlap.

III. Objective

The primary objective of this research is to critically examine the intersection of ethnic insurgency, rare earth resource control, and geopolitical strategy in the context of Kachin State, Myanmar. Specifically, the study aims to explore how the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) leverages its control over rare earth mineral deposits to influence regional power dynamics involving China and India, and how this affects broader global supply chains. The research also seeks to investigate the implications of such borderland conflicts on international trade security, environmental governance, and the ethical dimensions of rare earth extraction. By situating Kachin within a wider framework of resource-driven geopolitical competition, the study endeavors to provide new insights into how non-state actors in contested territories shape and are shaped by transnational economic flows and strategic interests in Asia.

Importance

This research is significant as it provides a comprehensive analysis of the often-overlooked nexus between ethnic insurgency, resource nationalism, and global commodity flows in Asia, with a focus on Kachin State in Myanmar. By examining how the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) capitalises on control over rare earth minerals, the study expands our understanding of how non-state actors can shape not only local conflicts but also global supply chains and geopolitical relations. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates in political economy, geopolitics, and conflict studies, highlighting the strategic importance of resource-rich borderlands in Asia's evolving power dynamics. Furthermore, this research fills a critical gap in literature by illustrating the intersection of informal governance systems and global commodity flows, offering policymakers, businesses, and international organizations valuable insights into the risks and opportunities posed by resource extraction in conflict zones. The case of Kachin offers an



opportunity to reassess global resource governance, emphasizing the need for environmental sustainability, ethical trade practices, and conflict-sensitive approaches to securing critical minerals in regions of political instability.

IV. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-scalar case study approach centered on Kachin State in northern Myanmar, aiming to explore the intersection of insurgency, resource control, and global supply chains. Primary data was collected through analysis of field reports, NGO publications, and investigative journalism that document rare earth mining and KIA activities. These were triangulated with official trade and policy documents from Chinese and Indian government sources, such as the Ministry of External Affairs (India), China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment, and UN Comtrade data on rare earth imports. A comparative lens was applied to contextualise Kachin alongside other conflict-resource zones in Asia. The methodology emphasises interpretive analysis, focusing on patterns of informal governance, geopolitical responses, and cross-border economic flows, while accounting for limitations due to data opacity in conflict zones.

V. Results

The analysis reveals that the Kachin region has become a crucial, though informal, node in the global rare earth supply chain, with significant implications for the geopolitical dynamics between Myanmar, China, and India. Despite ongoing conflict, the KIA has successfully maintained control over key rare earth mining operations, which has allowed it to generate substantial revenue through informal trade with China. This has resulted in China's continued dependence on Kachin for rare earth imports, particularly heavy rare earth elements like dysprosium and terbium, which are vital for high-tech industries. However, the KIA's activities also complicate China's environmental and regulatory policies, with mining-induced environmental degradation becoming a pressing issue for both local populations and cross-border trade. India's strategic interest in rare earth resources in Myanmar has grown, driven by its desire to diversify its supply chains and reduce reliance on China. Despite this, India's response has been somewhat cautious, focusing more on diplomatic engagement and regional cooperation rather than direct involvement in Kachin's resource economy. The findings suggest that Kachin's rare earth trade is

not only a reflection of local insurgency dynamics but also a key factor in the broader regional competition for resource control and global commodity flows.

VI. Discussion

The results of this study underscore the complex interplay between ethnic insurgency, resource nationalism, and global supply chains in Kachin State, illustrating how non-state actors like the KIA can leverage control over strategically important resources to influence regional geopolitics. The KIA's management of rare earth mining operations highlights the growing role of resource sovereignty in ethnic insurgency movements, where armed groups not only challenge state authority but also establish parallel economic systems. Kachin serves as a microcosm of a broader trend seen in other conflict zones across Asia, where insurgent groups finance their operations through the control of high-value natural resources, thus entangling them in global economic networks despite their non-recognition as states. Furthermore, China's dual approach, balancing its strategic need for rare earths with the environmental and ethical issues surrounding unregulated mining, illustrates the contradictions of economic pragmatism in authoritarian governance. Meanwhile, India's cautious stance signals its strategic awareness of the geopolitical stakes involved but also its reluctance to engage directly in a region fraught with instability. Ultimately, the Kachin case suggests that resource extraction in conflict zones has far-reaching implications not only for local economies but also for global supply chains, international trade security, and regional power dynamics. It calls attention to the need for a rethink in global governance models that address the intersection of conflict, commodities, and international relations, especially in resource-rich, unstable areas.

VII. Conclusion

This study has examined the complex dynamics at the intersection of ethnic insurgency, resource nationalism, and global supply chains, with a specific focus on Kachin State in Myanmar. It highlights the pivotal role that non-state actors, such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), play in shaping not only regional geopolitics but also global commodity flows, particularly in the rare earth sector. The findings reveal that the KIA's control over rare earth mining operations has allowed it to generate significant economic leverage, influencing both China's and India's strategic approaches to resource acquisition and regional security. This



underscores the growing importance of resource sovereignty in modern insurgent movements, where armed groups assert their authority over valuable resources, thereby integrating into global supply chains despite being outside formal state structures. The environmental and ethical challenges posed by informal mining practices in Kachin further complicate the region's engagement in the global economy, highlighting the need for sustainable and conflict-sensitive approaches to resource governance. Ultimately, this research contributes to our understanding of how conflict-resource interactions shape the broader geopolitics of Asia, urging policymakers and international organizations to reconsider how global trade in critical minerals is managed in unstable, conflict-prone regions. The case of Kachin serves as a critical reminder that resource-driven geopolitics in the 21st century cannot be fully understood without considering the roles played by ethnic insurgent groups, global demand for rare earths, and the environmental implications of unregulated extraction.

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