



Scenario Plan

KACHIN STATE

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Executive Summary

This Scenario Plan presents Kachin State-based context projections for the purposes of response planning and strategy. At present, it appears that the most likely scenario over the next 6-12 months is one in which the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) continues its attacks on State Administration Council (SAC) positions, and displacement and prices continue to rise. Another possible scenario is one in which the KIA slows or stops its attacks on the SAC in order to facilitate a greater flow of goods into the state, but this is of lower likelihood. Within any of these possibilities, sub-scenarios that may arise include the KIA taking over extractive operations, growing interethnic tensions, and an increase in trade with India.

While this Scenario Plan provides general guidance, responders may make adaptations to suit the needs, priorities, and strategies of their respective organisations.

Context

Over the course of 2024, fighting has escalated in multiple parts of Kachin State, and there have been dramatic power shifts. Since the start of the year, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has allegedly overrun more than 100 State Administration Council (SAC) positions. While its attacks in the first half of the year took place across [much](#) of the state, in recent months they have appeared to focus mainly on the eastern border with China. Consequently, as of October, the KIA had ousted the SAC from at least six of the state's 18 townships and a majority of the state's border with China (in [Momauk](#), Waingmaw, [Chipwi](#), and [Tsawlaw](#) townships). The notable exception was Kan Paik Ti, a major border crossing in Waingmaw Township, but the KIA had also [overrun most points](#) between Kan Paik Ti and Waingmaw towns, suggesting that this border crossing might fall as well before long. In addition to border areas, the KIA had made major gains against the SAC in central and western parts of the state, seizing [multiple towns](#) and cutting off the SAC's ability to use major transport corridors through the state, including the [Irrawaddy River](#).

The fighting has led to massive displacement from urban areas and, to a lesser extent, rural ones as well. Thousands of people fled from Waingmaw town to Myitkyina city, and from Momauk town to Bhamo town, and many others fled from Momauk and Mansi towns to KIO-controlled villages nearby. Due to the fighting and SAC attacks around Laiza, and to a lesser extent other points near China, civilians have taken refuge along the river separating Kachin State from China, not able to either return home or enter China. According to UNHCR, as of [14 October 2024](#) there were 220,000 IDPs in Kachin State, including 136,100 people displaced since the coup in 2021. Furthermore, frequent re-displacement introduces additional needs and presents greater challenges for responders, and despite the more recent moves, people in all of these locations remain in close proximity to potentially hostile SAC troops, live fire, and explosives. For people who flee to urban areas, increased SAC inspections of IDPs has [undermined](#) their security. In the western part of the state, IDPs in Hpakant Township have faced barriers to return, including the [destruction](#) of their homes, and recent fighting in [Hpakant](#) Township has also increased displacement. Making matters worse, heavy rains in June and July caused [flooding](#) across the state, compounding needs and increasing displacement.

In addition to the impacts of fighting and a fluid security situation, the economy of Kachin State remains affected by border closures. Though China had reopened its border gates at the two main crossings in Kachin State — Kan Paik Ti and Lwegel — by January 2022, the state's economy has reportedly seen little improvement since the COVID-19 pandemic. For much of 2024, trade at Lwegel has been restricted by China, and trade at Kan Paik Ti severely disrupted by fighting; trade through Kan Paik Ti [totalled](#) just 36 million USD in April–September 2024, [compared](#) to 55 million USD in April–August 2023. Finally, in October 2024, China [shut down](#) all of the crossings. Locals have told this analytical unit that many communities situated along the border are more closely commercially connected to China than to the rest of Myanmar; the severe disruption of trade likely makes it more difficult for these communities to buy goods or receive humanitarian support. In addition, closures and increased securitisation on the China side have meant that fewer people, displaced from their homes in Kachin State, have been able to seek safety in China. Compounding security and economic woes, the state has been under a near-total [communications blackout](#) for much of 2024.

Finally, while there are still a variety of organisations in the state providing humanitarian and other assistance to communities, their operations have repeatedly been threatened by the SAC, whether by its revisions to the Organisation Registration Law, its disruptions of travel and access to specific locations, and its harassment of organisations' staff.

Key Stakeholders

The KIO/A, headquartered in Laiza (on the border of Momauk and Waingmaw townships), is one of the largest EAOs in Myanmar, and it has an administrative and military presence in much of Kachin State that has only grown in recent months. A ceasefire agreement between it and the Myanmar military was broken in 2011, and fighting has been intermittent since then — though certainly it has intensified since the coup. Since the coup, it has been an active participant in resistance against the SAC; besides fighting in Kachin State, it has supported smaller resistance actors in northwest Myanmar — providing arms and training — and has likely cooperated with the National Unity Government, though not always publicly. Such assistance confers multiple benefits on the KIO/A: it builds its relationship with a group that might emerge the strongest national stakeholder if the SAC is deposed; it builds good will among ethnic Bamar and others opposing the SAC; and, where its efforts result in removing SAC presence (or even increasing resistance to the SAC) near the Kachin State border, this provides a buffer from SAC attacks.

The SAC — a far more powerful actor nationwide, but steadily losing its footholds in Kachin State — retains its presence in multiple parts of the state and a near-monopoly on air power (though some other actors use drone technology). Its strongest position in the state is its Northern Command Headquarters in Myitkyina, the state capital, but it also has bases in Bhamo, Puta-O, Hpakant, and elsewhere. In these locations — where it is able to provide some semblance of security for SAC-linked personnel — it also has administrative staff, but the number of such locations has been largely reduced to the largest urban areas of the state. In some areas the SAC has greater control but there is a KIO administrative presence, and vice versa, often resulting in double 'taxation' of residents.

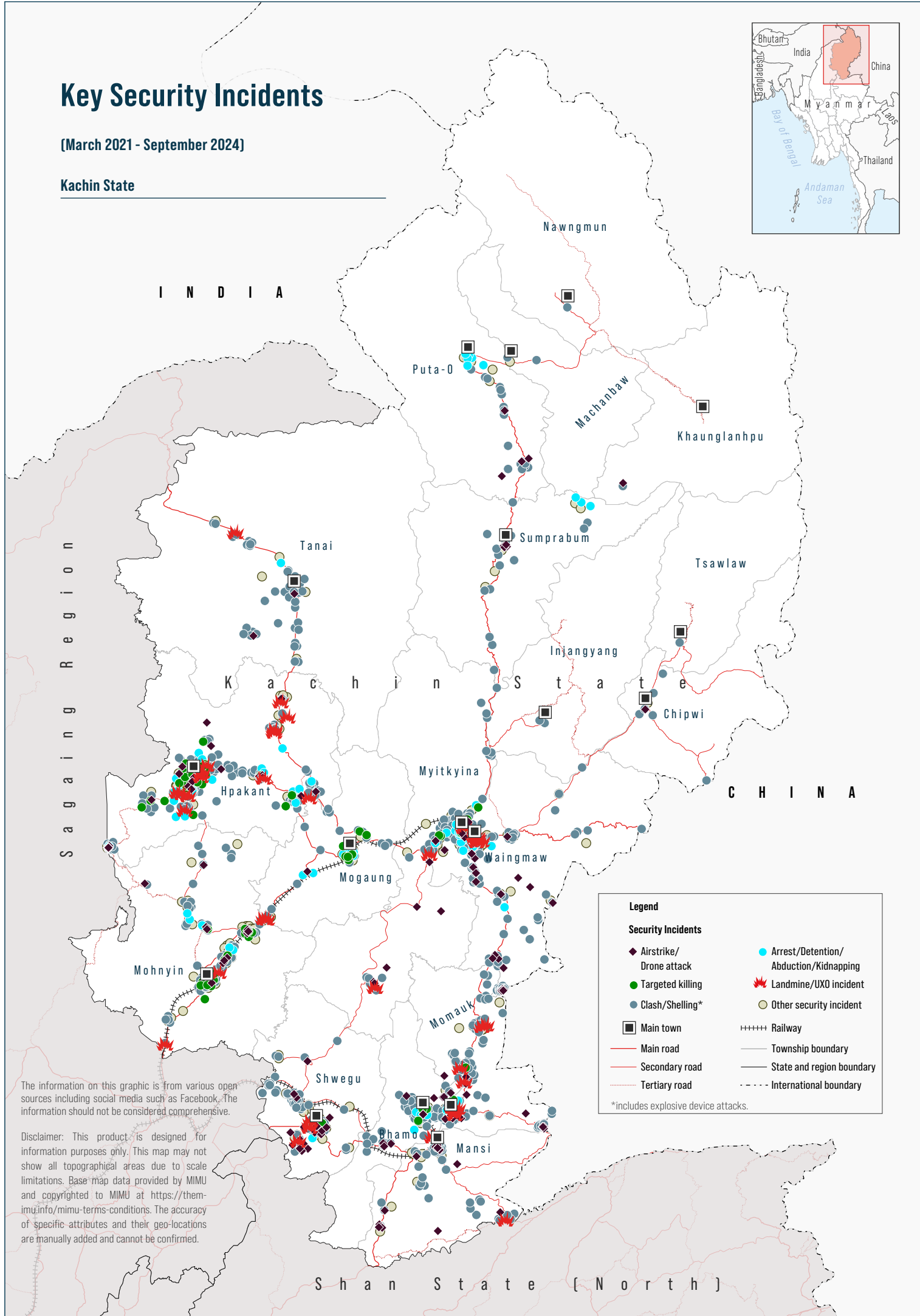
While the majority of armed incidents in the state since the coup have involved these two actors, fighting has also involved other armed actors, including newly-formed People's Defence Forces (PDFs) which in Kachin State are generally aligned with the KIA. The Kachin PDF (KPDF) is by far the largest of these in the state, and often fights in tandem with the KIA, benefitting from the latter's training, weapons, and guidance. Several other armed actors have smaller areas of territorial control, including: the Kachin Border Guard Forces (BGFs) (formerly the New Democratic Army-Kachin [NDA-K]), albeit in a severely weakened state after losing two of three bases in October; the Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA), which is active in Kachin State and Sagaing Region, which has had smaller skirmishes against the KIA; and over 30 smaller militia groups, including ethnic-affiliated militias like the Lisu militia, Rawang (Tanggutan) militia, and Lhaovo (Tsawlaw) militia, and local militias such as the Gway Htu People's Militia Force (PMF) (also known as Lasang Awng Wa militia), Lamung militia, Wu Yang militia, and Shahtu Zup militia. While each of these groups has its own interests, and many have at least nominal ethnic affiliations, some have functioned as proxies of the SAC in fighting against the KIA and PDFs.

Finally, power brokers in Kachin State include wealthy business people whose economic interests are primarily in Hpakant Township, known for its extensive jade mines, as well as in Waingmaw, Chipwi, Tsawlaw, Mansi, Bhamo, and Momauk townships, which all host some combination of cash crop cultivation, opium cultivation, and rare earth mining. A disproportionate number of these powerful economic actors are businessmen from China, but economic stakeholders (e.g. in jade mining) also include EAOs (or members of EAOs) such as the KIA, Arakan Army (AA), and United Wa State Army (UWSA), as well as the SAC. Invariably, outside actors involved in economic activity in the state maintain relationships with the KIO/A, the SAC, or both. With the KIA's recent capture of rare earth mining areas in Chipwi and Tsawlaw townships, and simmering tensions in Hpakant Township, these players and relationships are likely to evolve — as is the KIO's relationship with China, the only major customer for rare earth minerals from these areas.

Key Security Incidents

(March 2021 - September 2024)

Kachin State



The information on this graphic is from various open sources including social media such as Facebook. The information should not be considered comprehensive.

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Legend

Security Incidents

- ◆ Airstrike/Drone attack
- Targeted killing
- Clash/Shelling*
- Arrest/Detention/Abduction/Kidnapping
- 🔥 Landmine/UXO incident
- Other security incident

- Main town
- Main road
- Secondary road
- Tertiary road
- +++++ Railway
- Township boundary
- State and region boundary
- - - International boundary

*includes explosive device attacks.

Scenario 1:

KIA Continues Attacks in Next 6-12 Months

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, the KIA carries the momentum of its gains so far in 2024, and continues — alongside the KPDF — to attack SAC positions. It tries to secure control of: the border with China, both the crossing at Kan Paik Ti and parts of Mansi Township; jade and amber mining areas of Hpakant and Tanai townships; and southern parts of Kachin State that border Sagaing Region. The SAC's influence in the state is largely reduced to Myitkyina and Waingmaw, although the SAC keeps increasingly isolated bases elsewhere, including in larger towns. The SAC also retains the ability to use the largest roadways and the Irrawaddy River, though at great risk of attack and losses to personnel and equipment; in this way, it can continue to reinforce its bases in Myitkyina and elsewhere. Meanwhile, as KIA-led forces attack SAC positions, fighting temporarily displaces villagers, and SAC airstrikes cause massive destruction near its positions and around Laiza.






Two major issues in this scenario are food shortages and the KIO/A's ability to address this and other concerns. On one hand, fighting incurs major shortfalls in the availability of food in many parts of the state, not only because of destruction and displacement — but also because China blocks the flow of goods into Kachin State from the east, and the flow of goods from the south is largely dependent on control and the viability of transport routes through Sagaing, Mandalay, and Shan. On the other hand, the KIO/A may find new resources in the areas it has overrun that allow it to better support civilians, and may feel increasing pressure to alleviate civilian concerns that grow because of its continued fighting.





Analysis

The KIA has made significant gains against the SAC during the course of 2024, across Kachin State and even in parts of northwest Myanmar. This may encourage the group to continue fighting, at a time when the SAC seems weak — with large territorial losses across Northern Shan State and Rakhine State — and further gains would be difficult to reverse. For example, as with the border areas that the KIA has already reportedly captured, many parts of the state are only easily accessible by a single road, making it more difficult for the SAC to launch a major offensive to retake far-flung areas. The KIO/A has declared its intention to defeat the SAC, and doing so within Kachin State would certainly pay dividends to the group: it would improve security for civilians; it would provide greater sources of revenue to the KIO/A; and it would likely allow the group to shift resources from arms to state-building efforts.

At the same time, there are multiple factors working against the KIO/A. First, and perhaps most importantly, China has the power to shut off not only the flow of goods, but even power and communications access to areas near the border, which include the KIO/A headquarters in Laiza. While dialogue between these two sides appears to be ongoing, China has indicated both that it favours a centralised power (right now the SAC) over fragmented control and that it is wary of the KIO in particular because of its alleged ties to ‘the west’. Second, the SAC has massive military resources at its disposal, it still has the ability to move troops from central and northwest Myanmar, and it has already shown that it can fend off KIA attacks near its larger positions in Bhamo, Waingmaw, and Hpakant. Finally, with the Chinese border purportedly shut off, and with reported Chinese pressure on KIO/A allies, the KIA may find itself struggling more to acquire the weapons it needs to fight the SAC.

Impact

Humanitarian Needs				
Displacement	Food security	Protection	Livelihoods	Health
				
Displacement is likely to grow in this scenario, with many people fleeing toward larger urban areas or the Chinese border. Those displaced would join tens of thousands already displaced over the past decade.	Food security is likely to dramatically worsen in this scenario, as local cultivation is hurt and China effectively enforces an embargo on goods into Kachin State from the east (and possibly southeast). Local cultivation may help, but it is likely to be insufficient.	Protection is likely to worsen in areas with fighting, as troop movements, artillery fire, and airstrikes affect villages near SAC positions and near routes taken by KIA-led forces. As well, protection concerns are likely to grow around Laiza, including for thousands of IDPs.	Livelihoods are likely to suffer in this scenario, primarily as a result of reduced trade with China. This stands to affect both people who would sell goods to reach Chinese markets, traders who rely on cross-border activity, and people who need Chinese-made items or parts.	Health is likely to worsen slightly in this scenario, insofar as fighting worsens the health of those affected and increases the burden on already minimal healthcare resources. In addition, medicines sourced from China would likely be largely unavailable.
Key Takeaway Needs are likely to worsen in this scenario. While new (sustained) displacement may not be enormous, there is already a large population of displaced people in the state, and needs would rise. Likely most significant would be the closure of the Chinese border, which would prevent the flow of essential goods to those in need (and drive up prices).				

Humanitarian Support			
Permissions	Administrative risk	Physical access	Market functionality
			
The SAC is unlikely to change any of its formal restrictions.	The SAC would likely increase checkpoints and other efforts to control travel and transportation in areas where it retains influence and administrative capacity, inhibiting support in areas where it does not. It would likely take measures to undermine the ability of humanitarian responders to work with KIO-linked actors.	Physical access for local responders may improve in this situation, insofar as the SAC is less present and travel less often involves crossing SAC lines. However, fighting may temporarily disrupt access to particular locations, and roadways may be damaged by fighting, airstrikes, or explosives.	Market functionality is likely to suffer in this scenario, as a result of shortages of goods. Transport and access to markets is less likely to be hurt, but shortages and reduced financial resources are likely to hurt overall functionality.
Key Takeaway The ability of international responders to provide direct support would be further reduced in this scenario, because of the inability to go beyond a shrinking zone of SAC influence. However, local responders would still have physical access, and markets would continue to function, allowing for indirect support to continue.			

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN KACHIN STATE SHOULD:

- Prepare to respond to sporadic displacements due to fighting in rural areas;
- Increase cash-based programmes to offset the rising costs of goods and destruction of livelihoods, as well as to maintain efficiency and flexibility;
- Be aware that transportation will remain a challenge; plan to source supplies from local markets, but be aware that budgets and/or targets may need to be adjusted to respond to high and increasing cost of goods;
- Facilitate the transfer of alternative power and communications systems, such as solar cells and radios, respectively;
- Strengthen relationships with local partners that have greater ability to reach populations in affected areas, and work with them to conduct rapid needs assessments;
- Support local partners in managing security risks and avoid risk-transfer as much as possible;
- Reduce administrative burdens (e.g. reporting requirements) and increase flexibility, allowing local partners to quickly adapt programs to respond to needs as they arise;
- Engage in technical support for the KIO's governance, coordination, and cooperation efforts, including by investing in humanitarian coordination; and
- Provide guidance to the KIA, especially efforts to comply with IHL and IHRL norms, including by protecting civilians and ensuring protection and humane treatment for those who surrender or defect.

Scenario 2: KIA Slows Fighting for Several Months

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, the KIA reduces its attacks and efforts to capture territory from the SAC, likely under pressure from China. It does not allow the SAC to return to areas where the SAC had been, except possibly along the road between Myitkyina and Kan Paik Ti in a deal that would allow the resumption of cross-border trade. This decreased fighting allows for greater transport of goods and movement of civilians, though checkpoints and disputed areas of control mean that much of this movement is subject to disruption. However, tensions remain high, particularly around Myitkyina and Waingmaw towns, along the roadways through Bhamo and Mohnyin townships, and in Hpakant. Fighting flares up occasionally, as the SAC makes efforts to re-establish its presence along major roadways. Despite the efforts of both the KIO/A and the SAC to not rankle China, each seeks to improve its position vis-à-vis the other; fighting inevitably resumes, in spurts if not in a larger wave, though likely not near the Chinese border. Accordingly, civilians continue to live with insecurity, preventing IDPs from returning home and stifling economic activity.

Analysis

Both the SAC and China appear to be pushing for greater SAC control in parts of Myanmar, including in Kachin State. This would allow the SAC to more easily facilitate elections, when (or if) they eventually occur, and to otherwise make the situation more simple, predictable, and manipulable. It would also likely simplify, both administratively and politically, cross-border trade. This cross-border element is likely to also be a factor motivating the KIA to temper its attacks on the SAC; by taking measures to improve the economic situation in the state, it may be able to improve its own resources (including the ability to run operations out of Laiza), improve the situation for people in Kachin State, increase support from its base, and simultaneously recuperate from its recent fighting.

However, it may be difficult for the KIA to slow its offensive against the SAC. Firstly, efforts to not fight could result in recent gains being lost, something that may not be palatable to the KIA or other resistance actors. This would likely be particularly unappealing if it meant the loss of control near major economic assets, such as resource-rich mining areas, or if it meant the SAC re-establishing its presence at well-fortified military positions. Second, it is highly likely that, even if the KIA tried to act less aggressively toward the SAC, the SAC's efforts to retake lost ground would result in actions that the KIA perceived as overly aggressive, or that local-level disputes give way to a resumption of larger-scale fighting. In this way it is likely that, even if this scenario were to take place, it would be very short-lived.

Impact

Humanitarian Needs				
Displacement	Food security	Protection	Livelihoods	Health
Displacement is likely to remain largely unchanged in this scenario. A decrease in fighting means that fewer people are newly displaced, but tens of thousands remain displaced, and both destruction and insecurity prevent people from returning or resettling.	Food security is likely to improve dramatically in this scenario, as the flow of goods into Kachin State increases on two fronts: from China and from elsewhere in Myanmar. With improvements to economic activity come greater food security.	Protection is likely to slightly improve in this scenario. A decrease in fighting means that fewer civilians are affected by violence. However, the presence of armed actors poses continued threats to civilians, particularly in urban areas.	Livelihoods are likely to improve in this scenario, as a lull in fighting allows for greater cultivation, trade, and other work. The flow of goods from outside Kachin State, and the ability to sell goods bound for markets outside the state, also improve livelihoods.	Access to health is likely to improve somewhat in this scenario, mainly in urban areas where there are healthcare settings. As well, the resumption of cross-border trade likely means a greater influx of medicines to communities near the border.
Key Takeaway Humanitarian needs are likely to improve but remain high in this scenario. As trade with China and elsewhere in Myanmar increases, greater economic activity and lower prices mean that livelihoods and food security get better. However, displacement remains static, and continued tensions stifle access to goods and services, particularly in rural areas.				

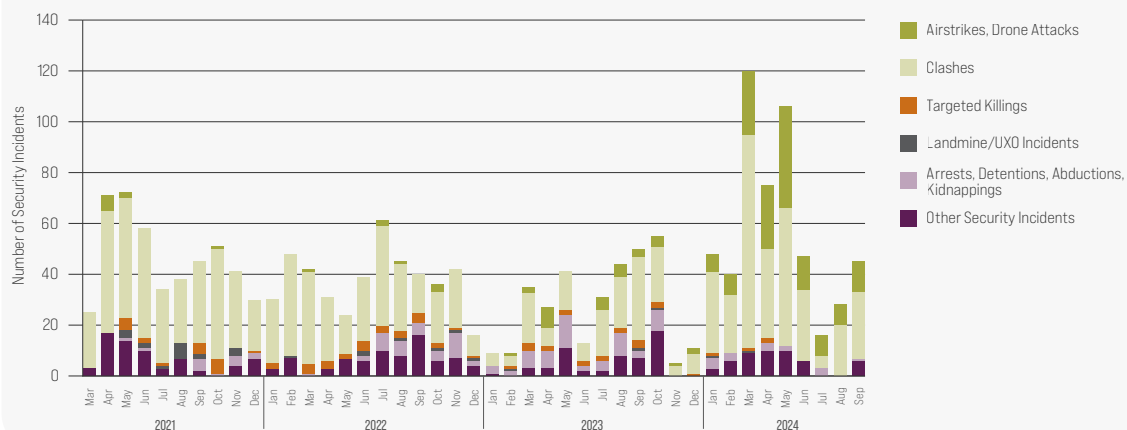
Humanitarian Support			
Permissions	Administrative risk	Physical access	Market functionality
Permissions are unlikely to change significantly in this scenario. The SAC may issue a small number of travel permissions, but the process will likely remain slow and complex. Humanitarian responders would likely be required to navigate overlapping and competing administrative systems for travel permits.	The SAC would likely increase checkpoints and other efforts to control travel and transportation in areas where its influence and administrative capacity are in question. It would also likely seek to impede the ability of an organisation to coordinate directly with the KIO.	Physical access is likely to improve in this scenario, as reduced tensions decrease scrutiny at checkpoints and there is less interference otherwise with the use of roads. However, the increased SAC presence may also create additional risks for local responders whose activities the SAC does not permit.	Market functionality is likely to improve significantly in this scenario, as greater connectivity allows both more people and more goods to reach markets. As well, a greater influx of goods from China and the rest of Myanmar results in prices dropping, which makes more goods financially accessible.
Key Takeaway The ability of international responders to directly implement activities would remain limited in this scenario, but improved transport, trade, and market functionality would allow for greater assistance to be provided through local partners.			

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN KACHIN STATE SHOULD:

- Develop programmatic streams dedicated to supporting returnees, with the explicit understanding that these are not durable solutions and further displacement is likely;
- Pre-position supplies where possible, especially in areas where armed violence is likely to resume, such as Bhamo, Waingmaw, Mansi, Momauk, Puta-O, and Hpakan townships;
- Shift to livelihood support programming, where possible, to take advantage of the lull in fighting;
- Develop strategies to navigate tensions between the KIO/A and SAC as they compete for control and potentially seek to instrumentalise the control of aid; and
- Initiate mixed modalities strategies to maximise the ability to circumvent SAC restrictions, working through direct access where possible, and through partners and remote modalities where relevant, particularly in areas under KIO/A control.

Key Security Incidents in Kachin State

(March 2021 - September 2024)



Sub-Scenarios

KIA Takes Over Extractive Operations

LIKELIHOOD:

In this sub-scenario, the KIO/A capitalises on its recent territorial gains in Tsawlaw and Chipwi (and northern Waingmaw) townships, which include areas rich in rare earth metals that are sold to China. It co-opts the personnel previously working at these sites, who had worked under the NDA-K/BGF and the SAC, using their knowledge of the industry to extract its own revenue through ownership and/or taxation. The financial benefits are a boon for the KIO/A, and potentially allow it to provide greater support and services to people in Kachin State amid continued economic hardship. As well, the introduction of a single actor in control of the sites and the wider area could allow for greater policy enforcement and governance otherwise. However, access to such lucrative resources increases the risk of fracturing within the KIO/A, which would reintroduce instability locally. As well, control of the mines would force the KIO to make important decisions about how to mitigate the [environmental and health risks](#) associated with rare earth mining — a practice that may not be endorsed by all people living nearby.

Another potentially major impact of such control is the way that it would change the KIO’s relationship with China. While China has appeared hostile to the KIA capturing these mining areas, which sit near the Chinese border, the rare earths mined there also account for a significant percentage of those used by Chinese companies to produce things such as magnets for electric vehicles. Accordingly, by shifting from control of territory to control of mining itself, the KIO/A is poised to increase its bargaining power with China, potentially allowing it to give up less in negotiations.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN KACHIN STATE SHOULD:

- Ensure that humanitarian operations encompass activities in affected areas, which may be newly accessible and which have been affected by recent fighting (and landslides); and
- Assist (and pressure) the KIO/A to implement responsible business practices and anti-corruption mechanisms.

Intercommunal Tensions Rise

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this sub-scenario, there is a significant increase in inter-ethnic tensions within Kachin State. The SAC capitalises on existing inter- and intra-communal tensions by arming and supporting smaller ethnic minorities to form militias, many of which ultimately act as proxies. Many ethnic minority groups in Kachin State, as well as ethnic Kachin minorities, act upon long-standing grievances against the Kachin majority and the KIO/A, holding them responsible for political marginalisation and lost territory. As a result, the conflict landscape is further fragmented and armed violence has the potential to rise considerably. The KIO/A is forced to engage in fighting not only against the SAC, but also against smaller militias and other armed actors in Kachin State and around its borders. This includes the Kachin BGF/NDA-K in Waingmaw, Chipwi, and Tsawlaw townships; Shanni people located on both sides of the Sagaing Region–Kachin State border, and Shan and other ethnic minority communities living near the Kachin–Shan state border. Kachin minority groups that have already formed militias, such as the Rawang, Lhaovo, and Lisu begin to actively fight against the KIA. The increasing attacks against the KIO/A by other actors allow the SAC to regain some control and influence, or shift some of its resources and efforts elsewhere. At the same time, possible recruitment of Jinghpaw Kachin people by these militias could provoke a stronger reaction by the KIA (and similarly abuses of non-Jinghpaw people by the KIA could provoke a stronger reaction by other groups), resulting in fighting — and a worsening of inter-communal dynamics — in some areas.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN KACHIN STATE SHOULD:

- Implement social cohesion programming to mitigate ethnic tensions where possible; and
- Closely monitor local partner interactions and affiliations to understand the socio-political context of partner portfolios.

Trade Expands at Pangsao

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this sub-scenario, the KIO is able to secure a passage through western Kachin State and northern Sagaing Region, and thereby to connect with Pangsao, a road crossing on the Indian border. This would require not only removing SAC troops from positions along the route, but also negotiating with stakeholders in the Naga Self-Administered Zone (SAZ) and within India, so as to facilitate the flow of goods. However, northern Sagaing Region is not as heavily militarised by the SAC, and securing the flow of goods from here could potentially relieve pressure from the KIO/A in Kachin State by making things cheaper and more readily available — also enabling greater humanitarian assistance. Establishing greater control in far northern Sagaing Region could also have the secondary benefit of helping resistance groups operating in northwest Myanmar. While there is no clear sign yet that India would be willing to tolerate cross-border activity here, it is generally more tolerant of the KIO/A and other resistance actors than is China, and — particularly as the SAC's presence along much of western Myanmar weakens — might welcome the idea of gaining favour with the KIO/A at the expense of China.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN KACHIN STATE SHOULD:

- Assess the feasibility of conducting programming from this part of northeast India; and
- Assess ways of sourcing goods, to be used in humanitarian activities, through this border crossing.

Scenario Plan

KACHIN STATE

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