



Scenario Plan

SHAN STATE

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Executive Summary

This Scenario Plan presents Shan 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 parties reach a temporary and fragile ceasefire agreement in Northern Shan State, allowing for a decrease in fighting and increased flow of goods. Other possible scenarios include the State Administration Council (SAC) attempting to retake Lashio by force or the Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BA) attempting to take more territory, but these are of low or moderate likelihood. Within any of these possibilities, sub-scenarios that may arise include increased fighting between ethnic armed organisations (EOs) in Northern Shan and a resurgence in fighting in Southern Shan.

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

Context

Shan State continues to undergo dramatic changes in light of Operation 1027, so called because it was begun on 27 October last year. In the year since its launch, the operation has led to major shifts in territorial control in Northern Shan State, as the SAC was beaten back from nearly all townships; the SAC is still present only in Muse town and parts of Nawnghkio, Hsipaw, Mongyai, and Tangyan townships. Having [lost](#) Lashio (the largest town in Northern Shan) in August, the SAC has allegedly [shifted](#) its base of operations in the area south, to Mongyai Township. Fighting has continued in parts of Hsipaw and Nawnghkio townships (e.g. [Taung Hkam](#) village in Nawnghkio), and the SAC has repeatedly [launched](#) airstrikes on [towns](#) and other places it has lost, often killing civilians and destroying property in the process.

Meanwhile, the SAC's losses in Northern Shan State have largely been the gains of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA): in broad strokes, the TNLA now controls everything northwest of the Mandalay-Muse highway (as well as Mandalay Region's Mogoke Township), while the MNDAA now controls everything northeast of Lashio town; the United Wa State Army (UWSA) still controls all of the Wa Self-Administered Division (SAD), [gained](#) some territory in Kunlong Township, and has increased its presence in [Tangyan](#) Township. The 3BA [claimed](#) to be pursuing multiple goals when it launched Operation 1027, including the removal of scam centres and the dismantling of the SAC, but its immediate aim appeared to be territorial control. The operation has involved cutting SAC road access to much of Northern Shan State — including by destroying bridges and rendering roads impassable — and routing SAC troops from hundreds of positions.

While China may have initially supported the actions of the 3BA to fight scam centres and criminality near the Chinese border, it has since [appeared](#) increasingly active in pushing the MNDAA and TNLA to desist from fighting — and possibly to cede territory back to the SAC. Politically, it has made public calls for peace, likely pushed for a negotiated ceasefire similar to the Haigeng Agreement — [made](#) in January but [moot](#) by June — between the 3BA and SAC, and allegedly [detained](#) the leader of the MNDAA. In practical terms, however, China's most consequential actions have likely been its restrictions on trade between its own Yunnan Province and Myanmar's Shan State, both preventing non-state actors from profiting from trade and preventing people living in areas under the control of these actors from accessing goods from China. Going beyond the trade gates controlled by the MNDAA and TNLA, China mounted heavy restrictions on trade through gates controlled by the UWSA and National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), and even those in Muse controlled by the SAC, likely in order to choke the flow of goods to areas captured by the 3BA in Northern Shan State.

Conditions for civilians in Northern Shan State have steadily degraded. Fighting and repeated SAC airstrikes have uprooted entire communities and made livelihoods more challenging. The destruction of bridges and roadways — by armed actors, by airstrikes, and by [massive](#) flooding and landslides in September — has stifled movement and transportation within the state, and restrictions by China and the SAC (escalated in [October–November](#) 2024) have severely impeded the flow of goods from all sides of Northern Shan State (leading to shortages and massive price increases). According to UNHCR, as of [18 November 2024](#), there were 45,700 IDPs in Northern Shan State and 143,000 IDPs in Southern Shan State (though many IDPs in Southern Shan may have also fled from Karenni State). Particularly in light of violence in larger towns, sizable populations have fled to Taunggyi and Mandalay. Despite the scale of

need, many of the same factors have made mounting and operationalizing a humanitarian response extremely challenging. Militarisation and barriers to movement have made it difficult for international groups to reach people in need, and for local groups to procure goods. Further complicating the situation, many humanitarian organisations and their staff members have relocated for safety reasons from places like Lashio, making it more difficult for them to facilitate assistance.

In Southern Shan State, in January 2024, the Pa-O National Liberation Army (PNLA) initiated a [series of attacks](#) on SAC and Pa-O National Army (PNA) — an SAC-aligned militia — positions in and around the Pa-O SAZ, primarily in Hopong and Hsihseng townships. Though fighting has subsequently slowed, there remain tensions in the area and both the SAC and PNA have continued to engage in attacks, coercive [recruitment practices](#), and [movement restrictions](#) that jeopardise civilian safety — and could be met with further PNLA attempts to eradicate their presences. Meanwhile, the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) have skirmished in [Kyethi](#), [Lawksawk](#), Laihka, Mongkaing, Hopong, and Kunhing townships.

Key Stakeholders

The SAC still has a significant presence in Southern Shan State, but it has lost massive amounts of territory and hundreds of positions in Northern Shan State. Over the past year, it has declared the [imposition of martial law](#) in 11 townships, all of which are now effectively under either TNLA or MNDAA control (with the exception of Muse town), preventing the SAC from enforcing any such measure. The SAC's ability to reach many of these areas by any means other than air transport — and thus its ability to exert its influence in any capacity other than by conducting airstrikes — is unclear.

The MNDAA, effectively expelled from its former territory in the Kokang SAZ in 2015, retook the area during Operation 1027, asserted control at international trade ports (with China), and gained significant influence over a wider territory that now includes Lashio town. In March 2024 it appeared to reach a deal with the SAC to [reopen](#) trade at Chinshwehaw that included a split on tariff incomes, suggesting that it had gained a significant degree of leverage over the SAC. In areas where it has taken control, including large urban areas, it has established at least nominal administrative mechanisms, suggesting that it is increasing its focus on governance; while continued fighting may have stymied progress in this realm, the group appears to have [begun](#) taking steps to consolidate its [governance](#) in [Lashio town](#) as well as around Laukkaing.

The TNLA has greatly expanded its size, capacity, and territory in recent years, and Operation 1027 catalysed its capture of territory from the SAC. It now appears to largely have control in Manton, Namhsan, Namhkan, and Namtu townships, where it has [increased](#) its administrative machinery and appears to be increasingly recruiting in order to further shore up its resources; and more recently in Nawnghkio, Mongmit, and Kyaukme, where it may do the same. However, the TNLA's expansion of territory and activities have also raised tensions with other ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), meaning that it must contend with these and the SAC at the same time that it seeks to consolidate control. For example, it has [skirmished with](#) the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in what the latter calls the "Kachin Sub-State", and with the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) [farther south](#).

The SSPP maintains positions in Northern Shan State and, while has been quieter than other groups since the launch of Operation 1027, it mobilised troops in [Mongyai](#) in July, suggesting that it may seek to be more assertive — and that it may be cooperating with the SAC. While it has long opposed the SAC and been a member of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) along with the 3BA members, it did not appear to join Operation 1027 or capitalise on the operation to expand its own territory — and, as a result, may have weakened its influence and hurt its bargaining position in potential future talks. In conversation with this analytical unit since October 2023, local sources in Shan State have regularly voiced disappointment with the SSPP for engaging in forced recruitment but not being able to “protect” Shan people, and effectively conceding territory to the groups taking part in the operation.

The PNLA is a signatory to the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), and until recently it had maintained a relatively neutral posture. However, in January 2024 it announced that it would exit the NCA dialogue process and began attacking the SAC and PNA. In January, it [announced](#) that it had taken control of Hsihseng town and surrounding areas — though the SAC [said](#) in late March that it had retaken the town. Fighting in the Pa-O SAZ and neighbouring Loilen Township appeared to die down after June, but occurred again in August; the SAC reportedly [launched](#) an airstrike on the PNLA's headquarters on 4 August, and then the PNLA fought with the PNA and SAC near Hsihseng town on 6 August. In September, a faction apparently [split off](#) from the PNLA and sought to resume participation in the NCA process.

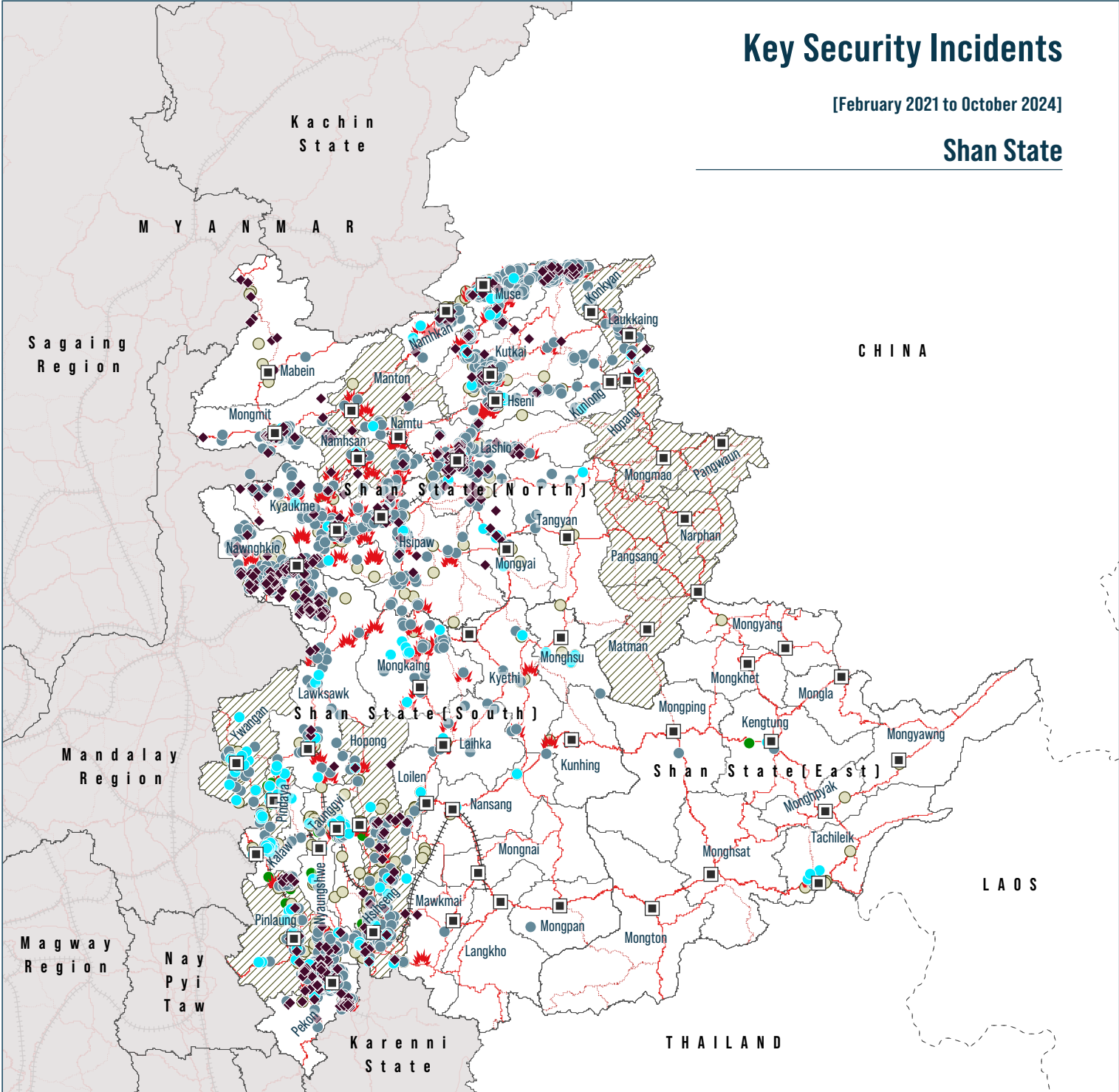
Numerous smaller actors have fought in tandem with, or in opposition to, the SAC. Those aligned with the SAC include the PNA and various other militias, as well as Border Guard Force (BGF) units. On the other side are many resistance actors that have sprung up since the coup, such as People's Defence Forces (PDFs). Some of these groups are tied to the MNDA and/or TNLA by virtue of receiving training, weapons, or other assistance from them; others have no clear affiliation with EAOs but maintain nominal ties with the National Unity Government (NUG).

China has shown itself to have a large stake in the fate of Northern Shan State. It has long maintained ties with EAOs operating there and appears to be a crucial factor in brokering relations between these and the SAC, though its [entreaties for peace](#) since June, and efforts to stymie trade, appear to have been dismissed so far. In addition to the security implications of peace or violence along its border, China has an interest in the smooth functioning of trade at multiple points on the border, though it may prefer to only deal with the SAC in such trade. Finally, the rise of scam centres in Shan State that prey on Chinese victims in financial fraud schemes, and that rely on trafficked labourers from China and elsewhere, has increased pressure on Chinese authorities to address extraterritorial criminal activity. Since shortly before the launch of Operation 1027, there has been a flurry of detentions — and extraditions to China — of Chinese nationals in Myanmar who were allegedly involved in scam operations.

Key Security Incidents

[February 2021 to October 2024]

Shan State



Legend

Security Incidents

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

*including explosive device attacks. (Incidents with unidentified locations are not displayed on the map)

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

- Self-administered Zone or Self-administered Division



The information on this map is sourced from both traditional media and social media such as Facebook. The information should not be considered comprehensive.

Disclaimer: This product is designed for information purposes only. This map may not show all topographical areas due to scale limitations. Administrative boundary is sourced from MIMU and copyrighted to MIMU at <https://themimu.info/mimu-terms-conditions>. The accuracy of specific attributes and their geo-locations are manually added and cannot be confirmed.

Scenario 1: SAC and 3BA Reach Temporary Ceasefire

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, China (again) brokers or influences a temporary or informal ceasefire agreement between the 3BA and SAC (at least applying to Northern Shan State), freezing the lines drawn by fighting up until the agreement. China allows the flow of goods at some official border crossings — likely where the SAC is able to station administrative personnel, such as Muse — and the SAC loosens restrictions on the flow of goods from elsewhere in Myanmar. Neither the 3BA nor the SAC seriously attempts to take (or re-take) territory in Northern Shan State, though there may be confrontations over lines of demarcation and use of roadways. The MNDAA and TNLA retain control of the territory they have captured up to this point, and in some cases civilians begin to return to their places of origin and restart livelihood activities. Likewise, areas that remain under SAC control — mainly parts of Mongyai, Tangyan, Hsipaw, Nawnghkio, and Muse townships — would likely see a slow return to pre-1027 conditions, albeit with continued low levels of violence. Humanitarian needs are highest in these areas, as well as in places with recent fighting (e.g. Kyaukme, Hsipaw) and places where many IDPs have taken refuge (e.g. Kyethi). In a broad sense, a fragile peace holds. However, a return to normalcy for civilians is slowed by the presence of armed actors, threats of coercive recruitment, and the threats posed by explosive ordnance and SAC airstrikes (which will likely continue in some form). At the same time, fighting continues between the SAC and other EAOs and resistance groups not party to the agreement, PDFs continue to stage smaller attacks on SAC positions throughout the state, and there may be sporadic incidents of fighting between EAOs (see sub-scenario below).

The MNDAA and TNLA turn their efforts toward governance: strengthening it in some areas and establishing it in areas newly captured. Where possible, they build out administrative units, likely with the help of Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) staff who have prior relevant experience, and possibly by incorporating SAC administrative personnel working in these areas before fighting began. Facing limited financial resources, they also grapple with important questions about outside assistance, for both short-term emergency assistance and longer-term rehabilitation, including: permissions and registration systems for INGOs and CSOs; coordination between local personnel to facilitate the movement of aid actors; provision of security for such actors; and prioritisation of particular populations. However, governance efforts are likely to be continuously challenged by inter-ethnic tensions, territorial disputes with other EAOs, and the ever-present possibility of SAC airstrikes or attacks.

Analysis

The three most relevant Myanmar stakeholders here — the SAC, TNLA, and MNDAA — all are under significant pressure from China to resolve the current fighting. All three have made recent statements suggesting that they would be open to discussing a ceasefire, though recent history suggests that such an agreement would not be likely to last long. The SAC seeks to retake all areas of Northern Shan State (and everywhere else in Myanmar) that it has lost, for economic, military, and other reasons. The TNLA and MNDAA, while likely not inclined to give up control of territory that they have fought so hard to capture, appear to be under significant pressure from China to stop fighting. Most notably, China has blocked cross-border trade, which along with the SAC’s restrictions on the other side of the region has resulted in shortages across Northern Shan State. These groups would also benefit significantly from a stop to SAC attacks, which have greatly undermined their efforts to administrate.

At the same time, there may be multiple sticking points that either derail dialogue or — in the case that an agreement is reached — make peace only temporary. It is unlikely that any side is willing to give up any major points: the TNLA and MNDAA have fought hard for their territorial gains, and are likely not inclined to allow any more SAC presence than possible, lest this result in later SAC military efforts. Indeed, while the MNDAA has suggested that it could possibly tolerate some SAC presence in Lashio, it is difficult to see how the presence of both parties could be sustainable. While the SAC may be appeased in the short term by the ability to send personnel to major trade corridors and hold elections in some parts of Northern Shan State, in the longer term is likely unwilling to accept anything short of its prior degree of control.

Impact

Humanitarian Needs				
Displacement	Food security	Protection	Livelihoods	Health
The displacement situation is likely to improve in this scenario, as a reduction in fighting allows IDPs to return home. However, there would be continued barriers to this — the destruction of bridges and roadways, the destruction of houses and land, and the presence of explosive ordnance — and the continued threat of fighting means that such returns should not be seen as sustainable.	Food security is likely to improve, mainly because of the greater flow of goods into Northern Shan State. As well, it is likely that more roads become usable again, and markets function better. Food security would also likely be improved by greater crop cultivation within the state, though this would remain stifled by prior displacement and destruction, and it would take time before crop yields benefit communities.	Protection concerns would likely abate in this scenario, as fewer people are impacted by fighting. As travel and transport become easier, it would also become more feasible for international and local actors to carry out protection activities over a wider territory. However, the protection landscape will also be shaped by how the MNDAA and TNLA govern (e.g. whether they continue coercive recruitment practices, whether they can operate effective civilian abuse reporting mechanisms).	Livelihoods would likely improve in this scenario, albeit with delays and continued barriers. Crop lands have been destroyed, and farmers displaced (rendering them unable to tend their crops), meaning that future cultivation will be more resource-intensive and take time to yield benefits. Other livelihood activities would also benefit in this scenario because of the reduction in trade barriers, but may remain stifled by instability and damage to infrastructure.	Health outcomes would likely improve in this scenario, as a reduction in fighting allows hospitals and clinics to resume functioning, and as greater ability to travel expands access to healthcare. In addition, humanitarian actors can access more communities, and a reduction in fighting means that fewer people are in need of life-saving care related to violence, freeing up healthcare resources for others.
Key Takeaways Humanitarian needs would likely decline overall in this scenario, as fighting-related harms abate, people begin to return home, trade barriers decrease, and income-generating activities resume. However, this improvement may be gradual, and is susceptible to backsliding in the event of a resumption in fighting.				

Humanitarian Support			
Permissions	Administrative risk	Physical access	Market functionality
Permissions may improve, but would likely remain restricted, in this scenario. In this scenario, permissions within much of Northern Shan State are no longer dictated by the SAC; they are now dictated by the MNDAA and TNLA and, while this could result in a more permissive response landscape, the contours of this landscape are as yet unclear. For INGOs with operations based outside of 3BA control areas, crossing between there and 3BA control areas is likely to remain a challenge.	Administrative risk is likely to change in form, but not degree, in this scenario. The SAC would likely continue to block the registration and movement of international responders through regulations, physical roadblocks, and overall securitisation. Meanwhile, for local organisations working in 3BA control areas, administrative questions would fall to the TNLA or MNDAA, neither of which has made clear yet how it will handle such issues.	While physical access to some areas – under SAC control – would likely improve in this scenario, areas under the control of EAOs would likely remain inaccessible for groups based in SAC-controlled areas. Within 3BA control areas, physical access is likely to improve but nonetheless be impeded by armed actors' presences, explosive ordnance, and the destruction of bridges and roadways.	Market functionality is likely to improve in this scenario, as a reduction in violence allows for greater civilian travel and transport, as well as greater security for urban marketplaces. If peace holds, it may become possible to transport goods along the larger highways through Northern Shan State, including goods originating in China. However, a full resumption in pre-1027 market activity would be contingent on the reconstruction of physical infrastructure.
Key Takeaways <p>Many of the same barriers to humanitarian activity would remain in this scenario for international responders, though it is possible that permissions and administrative risk could improve under the purview of the TNLA and/or MNDAA. Greater stability and ease of transport would allow for greater market functionality and provision of assistance by local groups/partners.</p>			

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN SHAN STATE SHOULD:

- Anticipate the need to increase engagement with 3BA and other EAO actors, especially with respect to program approvals and coordination and develop strategies to navigate tensions that may arise as multiple actors compete for control;
- Consider increasing livelihood programming where possible, especially to facilitate a return to agricultural production;
- Facilitate the transfer of alternative power and communications systems, such as solar cells and radios, respectively, in areas that have been cut off from existing infrastructure;
- Support the construction and operation of healthcare centres to address the needs of large numbers of people injured by previous fighting, among other health concerns;
- Develop programmatic streams dedicated to supporting returnees, with the explicit understanding that these are not durable solutions and repeated displacement is likely;
- Continue working through local partners in order to provide assistance across areas under 3BA control;
- Support local partners in conducting localised needs assessments with IDPs and other communities, in order to gauge the scope of needs and respond accordingly;
- Provide technical and financial support to emergent actors' governance, coordination, and cooperation efforts, including by investing in development of good governance practices; and
- Provide technical and financial support for emergent actors' 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: SAC Attempts to Retake Lashio

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, the SAC embarks on an attempt to retake its northeast regional command headquarters in Lashio town, possibly as a precursor to further advances. The TNLA's past successes mean that the SAC cannot use the main highway from Mandalay, but it can use the road from Taunggyi and likely smaller routes as well. It sends thousands of troops overland from Mongyai and via Southern Shan State, and it airlifts hundreds more to offset the difficulty of reaching Lashio by road. It also significantly escalates its use of airstrikes, bombing areas around the town and potentially levelling urban areas. The SAC's overland movement is stymied by road destruction and rough terrain, as in the months following October 2023. However, its airstrikes — and concerns about its progress — displace tens of thousands of Shan State residents and cause massive physical destruction, and communities near the roadways along which SAC troops travel are extremely susceptible to gun and artillery fire, forced labour, and other abuses by SAC troops. Communities perceived as sympathetic to actors other than the SAC may be targeted for detention, physical abuse, or worse, either as punishment or as a means of deterring resistance. The 3BA chokes transport on major highways, further disrupting trade and movement.






Analysis





The Myanmar military has never taken losses — or threats to its power — lightly; it appears to prioritise territorial control over all else, including civilian well-being, physical integrity of land and infrastructure, and even its own access to resources. Historically, when facing down such threats, it has typically reverted to fighting. The North East command had been the backbone of its presence in Northern Shan State, underpinning its military operations — and thereby control — across this part of the country. Accordingly, in the face of what may be the greatest loss — one of its 14 regional commands — in its modern history, the military is likely to be considering how best to undo that loss. Indeed, since losing Lashio, the SAC is [said](#) to have shifted troops to nearby Mongyai Township and begun setting up a new Northeast Command there. Furthermore, under the current status quo in Northern Shan State, the SAC's ability to benefit from border trade with China, and access to resources now under the control of the MNDAA and TNLA, is compromised and made largely contingent on its relationships with these groups.

At the same time, the likelihood of this scenario is mitigated by several factors. First, the SAC's attempts to claw back territory in late 2023 and early January 2024 appeared to make little progress, and it is likely that any attempt to do so in the future would be extremely costly in

terms of military resources, and very drawn out. Second, a resumption of fighting would further deprive the SAC of economic and other opportunities. For example, under a [March 2024 agreement](#) with 3BA members, the SAC can collect income by taxing 30% of border trade with China at Chinshwehaw, while the 3BA gets the other 70%; fighting could undermine agreements like this, not least because road and border closures would prevent trade. The SAC has also [called on](#) China for a loan to build a new Mandalay-Muse railway — a development that would be extremely risky if fighting were to resume in Northern Shan State. Finally, if fighting were to resume, the SAC could stand to suffer even more humiliating defeats, and to lose even more territory — and territory even closer to central Myanmar.

Impact

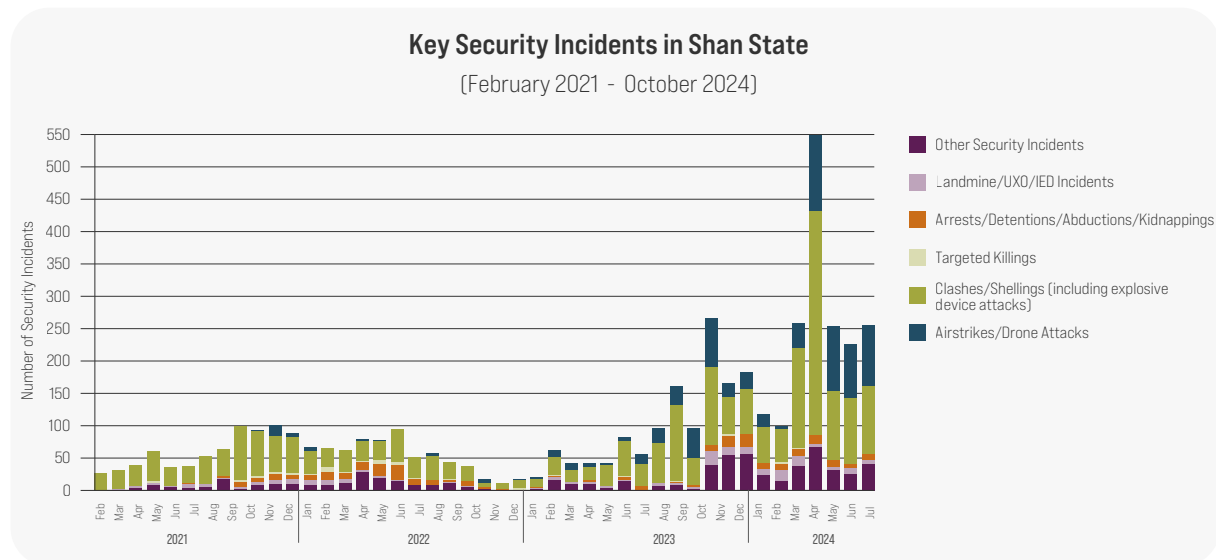
Humanitarian Needs				
Displacement	Food security	Protection	Livelihoods	Health
				
In this scenario, people displaced from Lashio — and those who fled through Lashio — during Operation 1027 would not be able to return, and additional people would be displaced by SAC airstrikes and other violence. People displaced from elsewhere may be able to return, but may be wary of doing so as fighting continues.	Food security, already poor in the wake of Operation 1027 in northeastern Shan State, would likely get even worse as road transport into and out of the largest urban centre in the region is stymied and local resources dwindle. It is possible that this can be offset by trade from China, but this has not been shown, and recent border closures make this less likely.	Protection concerns would likely grow worse in this scenario, with people near Lashio — and near roads running south from there — exposed to violence and abuses. In addition, it is possible that the SAC could scale up recruitment to support an offensive of such magnitude.	Livelihoods, already severely affected by fighting and insecurity during Operation 1027, would likely further degrade in this scenario, as trade through Lashio slows, agriculture becomes more dangerous (and impossible because of displacement), and goods become scarcer and more expensive.	Access to health is likely to grow worse in this scenario, as access to healthcare supplies from elsewhere in Myanmar dwindles, and it becomes more difficult to travel to larger urban areas to receive care there. At the same time, fighting and food insecurity cause health to worsen overall.
Key Takeaways A resurgence in fighting near the largest urban area of Northern Shan State and the roadway(s) leading to it would exacerbate poor conditions that already exist as a result of 1027, and would further impede the functioning of both local markets and local responders' activities.				

Humanitarian Support			
Permissions	Administrative risk	Physical access	Market functionality
			
SAC permissions are unlikely to change in this scenario. They have not been relaxed since Operation 1027 began, and they were already poor before that. However, permissions may improve within 3BA control areas, allowing local responders to better assist people affected by fighting around Lashio.	Administrative risk from the SAC is unlikely to change in this scenario, for so long as the Organisation Registration Law remains in place and SAC personnel do not allow the operation of international responders. However, as noted in Scenario 1, administrative risk may improve (i.e., lessen) under the purview of the TNLA and/or MNDAA.	While physical access is already poor in light of Operation 1027, it would likely grow worse in this scenario. For local responders, access may remain the same, except immediately around Lashio. For international responders, fighting would undermine even more means of accessing people in need.	Market functionality is likely to grow worse in this scenario. Markets in areas that were not affected by fighting in Operation 1027 would be under increased threat as fighting intensifies, and the flow of goods into markets would be undermined by transport blocks and insecurity.
Key Takeaways While permissions would likely not meaningfully change in this scenario, physical access would degrade, and markets would also be further undermined. Nonetheless, the importance of local aid actors would only grow as needs increase and access for international groups remains difficult.			

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN SHAN STATE SHOULD:

- Plan for prolonged displacement from both rural and urban areas, pre-positioning aid to the greatest degree possible;
- Prepare for massive displacement to urban areas further south, such as Taunggyi, by strengthening local partnerships in these locations and ensuring that assistance materials — and the secure housing for such materials — is present there;
- Scale up funding, and increase cash-based programmes to offset the rising costs of goods and destruction of livelihoods, as well as to maintain efficiency and flexibility in a context that may change rapidly;
- 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;
- Engage with local authorities in border-adjacent areas of China, where possible, to facilitate the flow of assistance from the border inward;
- Strengthen relationships with local partners and civil society actors that have greater ability to reach populations in affected areas, in order to mitigate access challenges, including interruptions to travel and transportation related to restrictions, armed violence, poor infrastructure, and weather;
- Shift to remote, zero-visibility modalities where not already existing;
- Work with partners to manage security risks (avoiding risk transfer as much as possible), including those that arise from shifting areas of control, and to conduct rapid needs assessments;

- Reduce administrative burdens (e.g. reporting requirements) and increase flexibility, allowing local partners to quickly adapt programs to respond to needs as they arise; and
- Closely monitor developments and consult frequently with local staff and partners to ensure conflict sensitivity best practices are adapted to shifting realities on the ground.



Scenario 3: 3BA Attempts to Take More Territory

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, 3BA and smaller resistance groups continue to expand their territorial reach by attacking more SAC positions still standing, including in Mongyai and Hsipaw townships to the south, Muse town to the north, and parts of Mandalay Region — *possibly even Mandalay city* — to the west. The 3BA is able to leverage positions in upland areas it has already captured to launch attacks on the SAC, possibly through Pyin Oo Lwin and onward to Mandalay city. As fighting shifts west, it more prominently involves PDF and other resistance group members embedded with TNLA troops.






Within Shan State, an expanded presence also brings the 3BA members into closer proximity to — and therefore raises tensions with — other EAOs, as well as smaller, SAC-backed militias. This is particularly the case in Muse town, where the disappearance of the SAC upsets the balance of power between dozens of groups that have profited from border trade and various illicit activities. Around Muse town and the international trade port with China there, fighting impacts densely populated areas and threatens to further stymie trade. In some areas, 3BA victories may be easier in light of a less entrenched SAC presence, but it is difficult for the MNDAA and TNLA to effectively administer here because of village-level relationships with other, formerly (or still) present armed actors. Even more so than in the past, Northern Shan State becomes a patchwork of control, with minimal presence of any wider governing authority. This creates greater insecurity as actors vie for greater control vis-a-vis one another, and it creates greater stress on local populations that are ‘taxed’ by multiple entities and must navigate competing interests.

Analysis

The success of Operation 1027 — in beating back the SAC — may give way to continued efforts by the 3BA and aligned resistance groups to capture more territory. Particularly where these groups are able to push west, building on recent [resistance victories](#) against the SAC in Mandalay Region, such efforts could not only immediately increase their power but also pay longer-term dividends in the form of allegiance and good-will from anti-SAC forces, including the NUG. Furthermore, though the MNDAA and TNLA may not be interested in governing an ever-expanding territory that includes areas with less obvious financial value (e.g. from trade or natural resource extraction), victories against the SAC in these areas could both increase leverage in future negotiations with the SAC and provide a greater buffer against attacks by the SAC on territory that they value more highly.

At the same time, this scenario is relatively unlikely. The TNLA and MNDAA — which possess far more meaningful military assets than smaller resistance groups in opposing the SAC — are likely to see diminishing value in waging attacks farther away from the territory where they are based and their key constituencies live. First, despite military successes and continued allegations of recruitment by these groups, they have finite human resources to expend on defending, much less administering, ever-wider territory. Second, it is unclear that the groups place a high value on controlling territory far from their bases of operation, particularly where the capture of this territory brings them into greater conflict with other EAOs — or where, as in the case of areas closer to Mandalay or Taunggyi, the SAC is more capable of (and likely more intent on) mounting a fierce response.

Impact

Humanitarian Needs				
Displacement	Food security	Protection	Livelihoods	Health
				
Displacement is likely to increase, in this scenario, in the areas where fighting continues. In other areas that have seen fighting, people may begin to return, but such returns should not be considered sustainable.	Food security is likely to worsen in this scenario. In areas where fighting continues and areas to which it spreads, displaced people can be expected to struggle in conducting livelihood activities and procuring food. Barriers to transport, including the closure of border trade ports, may hinder food availability.	Protection concerns are likely to increase in this scenario. In areas with fighting, arms fire and armed personnel increase the threats to civilians. In areas where fighting is stopped, these threats may decrease, but recruitment and other threats from EAOs remain.	Livelihoods, and sources of income, are likely to worsen in areas where fighting continues or spreads as fighting and insecurity displace people and disrupt agricultural and other work. In areas where fighting has stopped, it may take time to redevelop livelihood activities — particularly in urban areas such as Muse.	Health outcomes, and access to healthcare, are likely to worsen in this scenario. In areas with fighting, the burden on healthcare providers and the challenges to effective provision of services both increase. This is particularly the case in Muse town.
<p>Key Takeaways</p> <p>The full gamut of humanitarian needs can be expected to rise in this scenario. Displacement, destruction, and other damage in Muse town (and potentially Mandalay city) is likely to affect a large population and to disrupt trade for much of Shan State. Meanwhile, fighting in less densely populated areas increases displacement and needs for thousands of people.</p>				

Humanitarian Support			
Permissions	Administrative risk	Physical access	Market functionality
Permissions from the SAC are unlikely to change in this scenario, because they have not been relaxed since Operation 1027 began, and they were already poor before that. In 3BA control areas, permissions may improve for local response actors.	Administrative risk is unlikely to change in this scenario, for so long as the Organisation Registration Law (and SAC-imposed martial law) remains in place and SAC personnel do not allow the operation of international responders. However, as noted in Scenario 1, administrative risk for local groups may improve within 3BA control areas.	Physical access is likely to worsen in this scenario, as even more areas (including densely-populated Muse town) become difficult to reach, and as the distance grows between humanitarian responders' (especially international responders') bases of operation and populations in need of assistance.	Market functionality is likely to diminish in parts of Shan State affected by continued fighting, and this may also disrupt transportation of goods to markets in other parts of the state, including Lashio. In particular, disruption of markets and trade in Muse town is likely to have significant consequences for Muse residents and markets elsewhere, as a crucial connection to China (even if already limited) is severed.
<div>Key Takeaways</div> <p>Though formal restrictions and administrative risk are unlikely to meaningfully change in this scenario, both physical access and market functionality are likely to be impeded in some areas by fighting, and in other areas by impediments to travel and trade. Significantly, fighting in Muse town (and potentially Mandalay city) affects access and markets there, and it disrupts market functionality elsewhere in Shan State.</p>			

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN SHAN STATE SHOULD:

- Follow the recommendations from Scenario 2, which would be similarly applicable here but relevant to other parts of Northern Shan State, Southern Shan State, and Mandalay Region; and
- Develop contingency plans for the event that fighting moves closer to Mandalay city, including:
 - Relocation of offices and bases of activity;
 - Anticipating SAC restrictions on activity in and near the city;
- Pre-positioning of goods in neighbouring parts of Sagaing Region, Mandalay Region, and Southern Shan State; and
- Preparation for large-scale displacement from this urban area.

Sub-Scenarios

EAOs Fight in Northern Shan State

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this sub-scenario, tensions between the many EAOs in Shan State erupt into fighting, most likely due to disputes over territorial control, ‘taxation’, or recruitment. This is not likely to be characterised by a sustained engagement, but rather by intermittent incidents spurred by the grievances of ethnic populations ostensibly represented by these armed actors, in the face of actions by other armed actors. Most likely, such incidents take place between the TNLA and either the SSPP (or RCSS) or the KIA where the TNLA’s expansion has brought it closer to areas in which other actors operate. However, such incidents could also involve the MNDAA, as [seen](#) in March.

As a result of such fighting, tensions are strained between ethnic communities, and between ethnic communities and EAOs. Particular incidents also result in village-level displacement, damage to property, and potential abuses against civilians. However, such fights do not escalate significantly, as it is in none of these EAOs’ interests to spend resources fighting EAOs when the greatest concern for all is the SAC.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN SHAN STATE SHOULD:

- Implement social cohesion programming to mitigate ethnic tensions where possible;
- Closely examine all programmes, and monitor local partner interactions and affiliations, to understand the socio-political context of partner portfolios.
- Exercise heightened vigilance with respect to inclusion and monitor for any potential new discrimination or exclusion on the basis of ethnicity or other factors within programmes;
- Support civilian protection actors to increase capacity to successfully engage and build relationships with armed actors and other actors; and
- Invest in strengthening lines of communication between CSOs, HRDs, and armed actors so that community voices may be better represented and considered by armed actors.

Fighting Escalates in Southern Shan State

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this sub-scenario, fighting increases in geographical scope as anti-SAC actors increase or resume their efforts to remove SAC positions, and as the SAC fights back in order to keep these groups farther from Nay Pyi Taw. Expanding on the success of the PNLA in largely clearing PNA members and SAC troops from [Hsihseng](#) town (though the SAC claimed to have subsequently retaken the town), PDFs and the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) — already operating in Southern Shan State — intensify their attacks on the SAC, and the SAC responds with more frequent artillery fire and airstrikes. Fighting most likely centres around Pekon, Pinlaung, and Nyaungshwe townships, where there has been significant resistance activity already and the SAC likely perceives the largest threats in terms of proximity to Nay Pyi Taw and connections to Taunggyi. Indeed, the SAC has already [appeared](#) to make a post-rainy season push against resistance groups here.

Tens of thousands of civilians are displaced, including some living in Southern Shan State because they are already displaced from Karenni State. Humanitarian needs escalate sharply, but there is poorer humanitarian access and infrastructure than in Northern Shan State, and humanitarian access from Taunggyi becomes increasingly difficult in light of road closures and insecurity.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN SHAN STATE SHOULD:

- Develop partnerships with local responders and CSOs in Southern Shan State;
- Increase funding to support mass displacement, potentially concentrated in large, informal camps;
- Support local partners in conducting needs assessments, including in situations where IDPs are widely dispersed across villages, religious facilities, and other areas;
- Assess the feasibility of direct implementation in areas under SAC control, while also working through local partners;
- Anticipate the need to increase engagement with EAO- and NUG-linked actors and develop strategies to navigate tensions as multiple actors compete for control;
- Provide technical and financial support to emergent actors' governance, coordination, and cooperation efforts, including by investing in development of good governance practices; and
- Provide technical and financial support for emergent actors' 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 Plan

SHAN STATE

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