

A map of Myanmar is shown on a textured, light brown background. The northwest region of the country is filled with a dense layer of white rice grains, while the rest of the map is outlined in black. The text is overlaid on the map.

Scenario Plan

NORTHWEST MYANMAR

CHIN
SAGAING
MAGWAY

**MARCH
2025**

CONFIDENTIAL - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Contents

3 Executive Summary

4 Context

6 Key Stakeholders

11 Scenario 1: Little Change in 2025

11 Analysis

12 Impact

13 Recommendations

14 Scenario 2: Resistance Actors Capture Towns

14 Analysis

15 Impact

16 Recommendations

18 Scenario 3: SAC Retakes Significant Territory

18 Analysis

19 Impact

20 Recommendations

21 Sub-Scenarios

21 A Tense Peace Between Chin Actors

22 Fighting Increases in Mandalay Region

Executive Summary

This Scenario Plan presents northwest Myanmar-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 there is little change, with little progress on any side but continued violence that worsens humanitarian conditions. Other possible scenarios include resistance actors capturing additional towns and the State Administration Council (SAC) retaking significant territory, but these are both of low likelihood. Within any of these possibilities, sub-scenarios that may arise include a tense peace in Chin State and increased fighting in Mandalay Region.

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

Context

Since 2021, armed resistance activity across much of northwest Myanmar — a part of the country with relatively little fighting before the coup — has made the region among the most brutal conflict zones in Myanmar. Resistance activities have been mainly characterised by People's Defence Forces (PDFs) using guerrilla tactics to attack SAC positions and convoys, and these activities have resulted in the SAC losing control in many rural areas, where local resistance actors — many ostensibly affiliated with the National Unity Government (NUG) — have established varying degrees of administrative control, local security, and humanitarian relief efforts. For its part, the SAC has sought to counter these resistance efforts by conducting airstrikes, firing artillery into civilian areas, and launching raids on villages, where it has torched and looted houses, killed and detained civilians, and displaced hundreds of thousands more. As of December 2024, Data for Myanmar [reported](#) that at least 112,485 civilian homes had been razed since 2021, with the majority in northwest Myanmar; according to its report, 67 per cent of these were in Sagaing Region. UNHCR reported that as of [24 February 2025](#), there were 1,239,300 IDPs in Sagaing Region, 90,700 in Mandalay Region, 256,900 in Magway Region, and 86,300 in Chin State.

Since November 2023, when the Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BA) launched Operation 1027 in Northern Shan State, resistance groups have also — sometimes with the assistance of larger ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) — launched efforts to rout the SAC from entire towns in the northwest. The Arakan Army (AA), Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and PDFs [seized](#) Kawlin town, a district capital in Sagaing Region with a population of approximately 150,000, though the SAC later [retook](#) it in a brutal campaign that heavily damaged the town and reportedly further displaced over 10,000 people. Joint KIA, Chin Nationalities Defense Force (CNDF), and other forces took control of [Khampat town](#), along the Indian border in Tamu Township, and later did the same in [Shwe Pyi Aye](#) — Sagaing Region's gold mining hub. Resistance actors attacked SAC positions near Monywa town and in Gangaw Township, both in Magway Region. Chin resistance actors captured two trading hubs along Chin State's border with India, Matupi Township's [Lailenpi town](#) and Falam Township's [Rihkawdar town](#). Chin National Front/Army (CNF/A)-led forces later captured a [string of](#) SAC outposts and even towns, including two in [Tonzang Township](#).

Though the [end](#) of Operation 1027 part 1 gave the SAC greater space to reassert its control in parts of the northwest, the start of Operation 1027 part 2 (June 2024) gave way to a major intensification of fighting in Mandalay Region as well. The Ta'ang National Liberation Army's (TNLA) expansion into Mandalay's Mogoke Township seemed to enable (or embolden) the Mandalay PDF, in particular, to attack SAC positions in the northern part of the region, and by the end of 2024 resistance actors had taken Singu, Thabeikkyin, and Tagaung towns as well. Along with increased fighting, SAC attacks on civilians (including [several mass killings](#)) have displaced thousands of people and driven humanitarian needs upward. In addition to Pyin Oo Lwin District in the north, fighting, displacement, and needs have increased in the southwest of Mandalay Region, in Myingyan District.

The SAC is less present and less active in Chin State, but tensions and insecurity remain. The SAC is still present in several towns in the northern part of the state (Hakha, Thantlang, Falam, Tedim, and [border town] towns), where various resistance actors continue to launch attacks on its positions. In the southern part of the state, the SAC has reportedly lost all presence in Matupi, Mindat, and Kanpetlet townships, as well as Paletwa Township, which is now largely under the control of the AA. However, a major cleavage between two blocs of resistance actors (those associated with the Chinland Council or the Chin Brotherhood, respectively) has meant that there are periodic local disputes over control — and even over the [ability to fight](#) against the SAC. A major source of tensions is the presence of the AA in the southern part of the state, which the Chinland Council has decried and which has supported the Chin Brotherhood in fighting the SAC (and asserting its power vis-a-vis the Chinland Council). While the Chin Brotherhood and Chinland Council have [appeared](#) to make recent progress toward unity, it is unclear whether they will be able to find enough common ground to take further steps in this direction.

Since [February](#) 2024, the SAC has been carrying out conscription nationwide (at least in areas where it still has administrators or troops), with implications for both its military capacity and the security of young men. The impacts of this have been particularly significant in northwest Myanmar, where the SAC's ability to counter dispersed resistance activities has been augmented by an increase in manpower, and where there have been numerous accounts of SAC troops detaining young men for the purposes of conscription.

The humanitarian impacts of continued fighting in the northwest are vast, and relief efforts have markedly improved but remain insufficient to address widespread needs. Unlike ethnic states such as Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, and Karen, which have seen relatively consistent armed violence for decades, northwest Myanmar had seen relatively little military oppression, better economic opportunities, and little to no concerted resistance to centralised Myanmar rule in the years before the coup. Accordingly, there were few mechanisms for providing assistance to displaced populations and others in need. International aid actors have extended programming — largely remotely, through local CSO networks — into the northwest, but rising needs have far outpaced the response. Meanwhile, local response actors, including People's Administrative Organisations (PAOs), have helped displaced and otherwise-affected communities with relocation and reconstruction, but struggled with financial and security concerns amidst the constant threat of SAC attacks. The SAC's communications blackouts and attacks on civil society make it extremely difficult for such actors to operate, among other ill effects.

Cross-border displacement is also a notable dynamic, especially with respect to the border of India and Chin State. India is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, and it continues to eschew the term “refugee” to describe those who have crossed its border. In addition, the central Indian government has sought to deter migration, by calling for the collection of biodata from people displaced from Myanmar, seeking to return these people, and calling for the building of border fencing. Nonetheless, though not granted any formal recognition, displaced people from Myanmar have been largely welcomed into Mizoram state, largely due to a sympathetic state government and shared ethnic commonalities between Chin and Zomi (Mizo) communities — though years of support and repeated incidents of cross-border criminality may be eroding this goodwill. The same cannot be said in Manipur State, however, where there has been political push back against migration flows, angry political rhetoric toward migrants, and civil unrest.

Key Stakeholders

Despite severely diminished presence and capacity, the SAC is the largest and most widely present actor in northwest Myanmar by orders of magnitude. Sagaing and Magway regions have historically been areas of reliable military support and fertile ground for recruitment, and the SAC also maintains over a dozen weapons production facilities, multiple air force bases, and a regional headquarters there. Accordingly, despite concerted resistance efforts, the SAC has positions littered across the northwest, from which its troops can fan out to conduct raids and other activities. In addition, much of Magway and Sagaing regions have been fertile ground for the creation of SAC-aligned Pyu Saw Htee militia groups, which often assist SAC troops in conducting raids, collecting information about resistance actors, and terrorising communities. The presence of so-called ‘Pyu Saw Htee stronghold villages’ has also allowed for greater mobility and access for SAC troops, particularly in northern Magway Region and southern Sagaing Region, and Pyu Saw Htee groups have appeared to both contribute to and benefit from the SAC’s conscription efforts. It must be noted, however, that large areas of the northwest are no longer easily accessible for the SAC; data collected from an attempted [census](#) in late 2024 suggests that the SAC had entirely lost control of nine townships in Sagaing Region and [classified](#) another 29 townships as ‘partially-controlled territories’.

Across Sagaing, Magway, and — to some extent — northern Mandalay regions, there are a plethora of resistance actors, many (but not all) aligned with the NUG, and often with loosely defined areas of operation. Some of these PDFs are linked to the NUG’s Command and Control structure, while others are independent of NUG affiliation. There are also PAOs, People’s Defence Teams (PDTs), and People’s Security Teams (PSTs). This patchwork of resistance groups has variously sought to fight against the SAC, provide local security, administrate territory, deliver humanitarian assistance, and establish healthcare, education, judicial, and other mechanisms for the residents of mainly rural areas. While many of these groups nominally sit under the banner of the NUG, some receive support from EAOs (especially along the periphery of Kachin and Northern Shan states), some have sought to coordinate under regional or other groupings aside from the NUG (e.g. via the [Sagaing Forum](#)), and at times there have been disputes between these actors. Exerting control and accountability has been an ongoing struggle for the NUG, which has limited means to support, coordinate, or censure these groups.

Chin State has seen dozens of resistance groups — most called Chin (or Chinland) Defence Forces (CDFs), which can be either township- or region-based and typically fall along (sub-) ethnic lines — emerge since the coup, but efforts toward consolidation and coordination have had greater success in the state than elsewhere in the northwest. The CNF/A is Chin State’s oldest and most established EAO, and since the coup it has supported CDFs and led efforts to form a state-wide government. In January 2024, the CNF-led Chinland Council [promulgated](#) a Chinland Constitution and formed a Chinland Government, Chinland Parliament, and Supreme Court of Chinland. Despite this, dissension [persists](#) among several actors in Chin State, six of which are aligned with the rival Chin Brotherhood and Interim Chin National Coordinating Council (ICNCC). Though the Chinland Council appears to be the governance coalition with wider buy-in and greater control, the Chin Brotherhood’s recent capture of towns in southern Chin State suggest that its power is growing.

Finally, several EAOs have provided support to smaller resistance actors at the peripheries of their own territory. For example, the KIA has allegedly provided weapons and training to, and fought alongside, resistance actors in northern Sagaing and Mandalay regions, including

in Theibeikkyin and Indaw — and even Kale — townships. The TNLA has similarly provided support, and may have taken a more active role in fighting alongside resistance actors in the four northernmost townships of Mandalay Region. More recently, the AA has supported and fought alongside resistance actors in southwestern Magway Region, particularly after it routed the SAC from positions (including the Western Regional Military Command base) in Rakhine State's Ann Township. It has done the same in parts of Ayeyarwaddy and Bago regions adjacent to Rakhine State, as well as in southern [Chin State](#), where its presence appears to be [most contentious](#) to other resistance actors — and where it has been accused of perpetrating abuses against local communities. All of these EAOs' support appears to be limited to the military realm, though it may be extended to governance or other spheres in the future.

Key Security Incidents

Chin State [Northwest Myanmar]

April 2021 - January 2025



INDIA

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

— Township boundary

— State and region boundary

- - - International boundary

BANGLADESH

BAY OF BENGAL

Rakhine State

Paletwa

Matupi

Thantlang

Hakha

Chin State

Falam

Tedim

Tonzang

Mindat

Kanpetlet

Sagaing Region

Magway Region

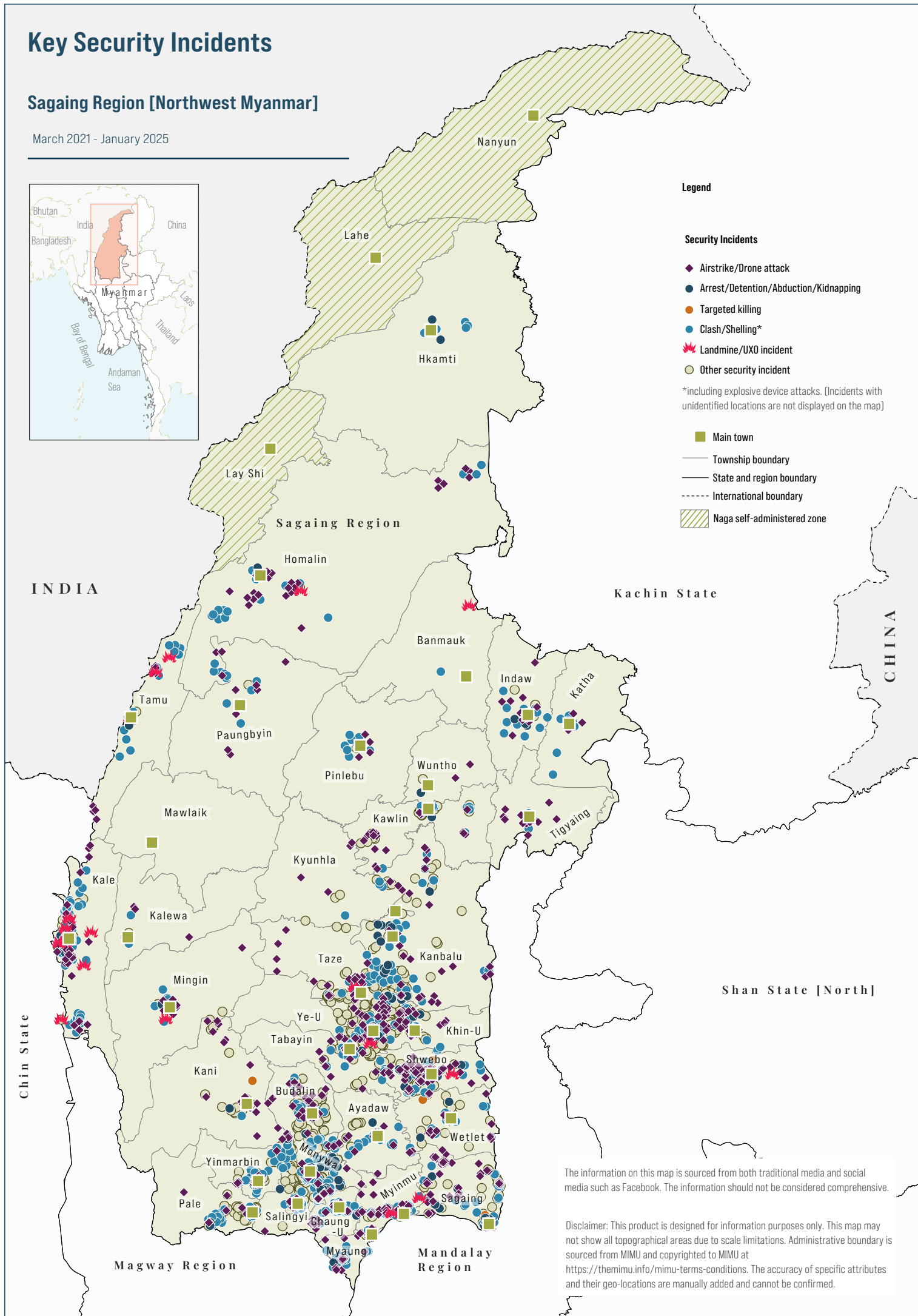
The information on this map is sourced from both traditional media and social media such as Facebook. The information should not be considered comprehensive.

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.

Key Security Incidents

Sagaing Region [Northwest Myanmar]

March 2021 - January 2025



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

— Township boundary

— State and region boundary

--- International boundary

▨ Naga self-administered zone

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.

Key Security Incidents

Magway Region [Northwest Myanmar]

March 2021 - January 2025



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
- Township boundary
- State and region boundary
- - - International boundary

Chin State

Sagaing Region

Mandalay Region

Rakhine State

BAY
OF
BENGAL

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.

Bago Region [West]

Scenario 1: Little Change in 2025

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, violence continues across the northwest at a pace and scale seen since the coup. While this violence varies in intensity and shifts between locations, it continues to widely affect civilians everywhere. Resistance attacks are followed by SAC raids, airstrikes, and artillery shelling. However, the locations of such violence are largely contingent on individual resistance groups that see openings to overrun or weaken SAC positions near their areas of operation. SAC attacks in response — or aimed at undercutting civilian support for resistance actors — displace tens of thousands of civilians, destroy hundreds of houses (and sometimes agricultural land), and inflict civilian casualties. As well, SAC conscription efforts mean that civilians, particularly in urban areas and along roadways where SAC troops operate, face heightened risk of detention and other consequent abuses. Popular opposition to the SAC, and popular support for armed resistance against it, remain high despite continued suffering and diminishing capacity to make ends meet. In places — mainly rural areas — where resistance actors have removed the SAC, these actors continue to work toward implementing governance structures, including by strengthening the capacity of PDTs, PSTs, and PAOs. However, such bodies struggle amid frequent communications cuts, a lack of resources, fragmentation that sometimes pits them against one another, and the NUG's lack of capacity to ensure accountability and resolve disputes at the local level.

Analysis

Since the coup in 2021, continued resistance activity and SAC efforts to crush such activity has resulted in a tense and violent stalemate, without clear momentum in either direction and with little resolution in sight. On one side, the SAC has shown no sign of backing down in its efforts to tame what has historically been the part of the country with its strongest base of support — the so-called “Bamar heartland”, where before the coup there was relatively low resistance to national political actors (and the military), a majority of the population is Buddhist and ethnic Bamar, and the military has recruited to populate its ranks. The northwest is also an area that was uncontested militarily before the coup, and it hosts many of the SAC's most important military assets, including air force bases and military production facilities. On the other side, resistance actors — both those under the banner of the NUG and otherwise — have vehemently opposed the coup, pouring significant resources into fighting a national military now seen by many as brutal, politically illegitimate, and inimical to the national interest.

At the same time, the SAC is significantly better resourced than the often-local armed actors opposing it in this part of Myanmar, with greater manpower and equipment that includes aircraft that can both inflict massive damage and move material from one location to another

unmolested. While it is fighting an asymmetrical war across most of the northwest, pushing it to rely on brutal scorched earth tactics to undermine widely dispersed opponents that are less visible than a conventional army, it has the capacity to retain a presence across wide areas and it has shown itself willing to forgo popular support in order to put down its opposition; that is, it has shown itself willing to destroy entire villages and uproot entire communities in order to prevent or punish resistance. It also has the capacity to undermine critical communications infrastructure and trade routes, making life all but unbearable for the civilian population. Finally, the fragmentation and lack of unity between resistance actors undermine their capacity to mount a more effective movement against the SAC. For these reasons, it is possible that the SAC could maintain (or, in some cases, regain) enough control to dominate much of the northwest.

Impact

Humanitarian Needs				
Displacement	Food security	Protection	Livelihoods	Health
Displacement would likely worsen as fighting and troop movement continue and airstrikes, artillery fire, and violent raids empty villages and towns of their residents. Those already displaced would be unable to return.	Food security would likely worsen, due to fewer people being able to produce, move, or afford essential food items. While border trade with India could grow, this would likely only have marginal benefits, primarily for communities near the border.	Protection concerns would likely persist, as communities would still face constant threats from attacks, fighting, and conscription. In addition, likely continued (if shifting) communications blackouts would prevent early warning systems from functioning.	Livelihood opportunities would likely continue to diminish; displaced populations would be unable to sustain themselves, and insecurity of people and property would hamper people's ability to conduct agricultural activities. Barriers to movement and internet access would also continue to limit the ability of people to receive external funds.	Health outcomes would likely worsen for numerous reasons: more people physically, mentally, or emotionally traumatised; local health institutions, such as those linked to the PAOs, being strained, including because of SAC attacks on them; nutrition worsening; and displacement increasing exposure. This can be expected to increase further in the rainy season.
<div>Key Takeaways</div> <div>Living conditions would continue to deteriorate on the whole in this scenario, as fighting and SAC attacks undermined production, trade, social support capacity, and health and other infrastructure. Local resources would diminish at the same time that displacement and overall humanitarian needs continued to rise.</div>				

Humanitarian Support			
Permissions	Administrative risk	Physical access	Market functionality
The SAC would likely continue to deny permissions for international response actors, and to crack down on local civil society and response actors. In the absence of permissions, humanitarian groups would carry out relief activities unofficially. Fewer and fewer organisations would be able to operate formally, as registrations lapse.	Administrative risks would likely remain the same. International responders would not be permitted to work with local partners or directly implement activities, meaning that they must circumvent 'official' rules in order to be effective.	Physical access would likely continue to degrade, especially for international organisations with offices in larger, SAC-controlled towns. Roads would likely continue to be blocked and/or made insecure by the threat of attacks, limiting the ability of humanitarian actors to reach people in need.	Markets would likely continue to function, allowing access to essential goods for communities living nearby. However, resistance attempts to take over towns – and subsequent SAC attacks on such towns – would undermine functionality in these locations, hurting both urban populations and nearby rural populations.
Key Takeaways Markets would likely remain functional, and local response organisations would likely remain able to address the needs of at least some people in need. However, SAC roadblocks, overt restrictions on humanitarian response, and crackdowns on civil society actors would mean that international organisations must rely on partnerships with local actors to have an impact.			

Recommendations

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN NORTHWEST MYANMAR SHOULD:

- Prepare to respond to sporadic and cyclical displacement due to ongoing armed violence in rural areas, with the understanding that durable solutions remain out of reach;
- Scale up funding in order to maximise the impact of existing access, and increase cash-based assistance to offset the rising costs of goods and the destruction of livelihoods;
- Be aware that transportation of food, NFIs, and other relief supplies, will remain challenging;
- 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;
- Continue to work with local civil society to the greatest extent possible in order to mitigate access challenges, including interruptions to travel and transportation related to restrictions, armed violence, poor infrastructure, and weather;
- Support local partners and other civil society actors in navigating the security concerns and pressures that arise from shifting areas of control; and
- Closely monitor contextual developments and consult frequently with local staff and partners to ensure conflict sensitivity best practices are adapted to shifting realities on the ground.

Scenario 2: Resistance Actors Capture Towns

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, resistance actors are able to capture — at least temporarily — smaller urban areas in the northwest, as defections, internal fracturing, and battlefield losses reduce the SAC's ability to hold territory. At the same time, the SAC's ability to carry out raids and artillery strikes is constrained by the reduction of territory that it can reach by land because of losing these nodes, and its presence in northwest Myanmar becomes progressively limited to towns and roads near Mandalay city and Nay Pyi Taw. Additional towns in Chin State, and in northern Sagaing Region, lose their SAC presence earlier, by virtue of their distance overland from central Myanmar. However, the SAC continues to launch attacks in order to re-expand its territorial control, and security and the provision of services in newly 'liberated' areas remains limited in light of SAC airstrikes and the historical reliance of such areas on trade and transport from central Myanmar and Yangon. Furthermore, 'liberated' towns may see violent SAC attempts (sometimes successful) to retake control despite the destruction this entails. In addition, there are likely to be concerns in these areas about resistance actors inflicting punishment on previously SAC-aligned actors and SAC supporters, and about fighting between resistance actors no longer united by their previously shared objective of defeating the SAC.

Analysis





This scenario is predicated on the ability of armed resistance actors to overrun urban areas and roadways linking parts of the northwest. NUG-linked PDFs, with the support of EAOs such as the KIA and AA, have been able to overrun towns in Chin State, as well as a smaller number in Sagaing and Mandalay regions, and it is possible that some combination of greater firepower, recalibrated strategy, SAC defections or surrenders, and local support could allow them to do so to a greater extent in 2025. Particularly if such groups receive greater financial, training, arms, or personnel support from EAOs, there could be a dramatic shift in their ability to achieve yearslong aims of eradicating the SAC in some areas. Continued — or increased — SAC preoccupation in other parts of Myanmar could help to facilitate this.

However, past trends and current conditions suggest that this scenario may not prevail. With the exception of towns taken at the start of Operation 1027 and the recent capture of Pinlebu, resistance actors have had minimal success in taking towns in the past. Furthermore, experiences of doing so only to quickly see the SAC undo these actors' gains — and cause massive

destruction and displacement in the process — may dissuade resistance actors from attacking urban areas without greater confidence in the ability to keep them. At the same time, there is little indication that financial or other support for armed resistance actors will increase over the coming year, meaning that these groups will likely remain constrained by their relatively low level of access to resources. Indeed, actors such as the TNLA may actually notably decrease support if this becomes important to agreements they reach with the SAC, or if facing heightened pressure to do so.

Impact

Humanitarian Needs				
Displacement	Food security	Protection	Livelihoods	Health
Displaced communities may begin to return to areas of origin that are freed from SAC presence. However, this should not be considered a long term solution, as these communities will remain in a precarious situation. At the same time, the SAC is likely to launch fierce attacks on urban areas lost, impacting tens of thousands of people.	As additional areas (including urban areas) see a decline in the number of SAC troops present, foodstuffs may be able to flow more easily, reaching farther-flung communities. However, SAC airstrikes and attacks are likely to continue undermining markets, as well as food production.	Though the immediate protection concerns associated with SAC presence (such as conscription) would decrease in 'liberated' areas, communities would remain vulnerable to risks, including airstrikes and the presence of explosive ordnance.	Livelihoods would likely worsen, as the instability of shifting control (and the fighting it entails) disrupt economic activity and sources of income. As well, means of income (e.g. agriculture) harmed in the past would take time to re-develop, particularly amid a poor overall economic situation in the country.	The fighting involved in resistance actors taking control of areas, and — even more so — involved the SAC seeking to retake these areas, is likely to damage health-care facilities and drive health needs upward. As well, shifts in control would likely mean highly disruptive changes between CDM and non-CDM health workers.
<div>Key Takeaways</div> <div>Humanitarian needs are likely to increase further in this scenario, as any improvement associated with decreased SAC presence are more than offset by the destruction and violence involved in efforts to capture (or re-capture) territory.</div>				

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 NUG-linked actors.	Access may worsen as fighting and shifts in control result in unpredictable ability to use transit routes. Furthermore, changes in control of areas may result in the need to undertake new negotiations with actors in control, and to be more complex where these actors are not the same from one location to another.	Markets would likely be disrupted, possibly multiple times, as control of these areas is contested. Particularly where damage or destruction occurs in urban areas, this is likely to affect both the urban markets themselves but also those in the wider area that rely upon larger hubs for access to goods.
Key Takeaways While a reduction in SAC troop presence across areas of the northwest could improve the ability of local responders to reach populations in need, the instability created by shifting control and SAC attacks on 'liberated' areas would likely render both physical access and market functionality dysfunctional and unpredictable.			

Recommendations

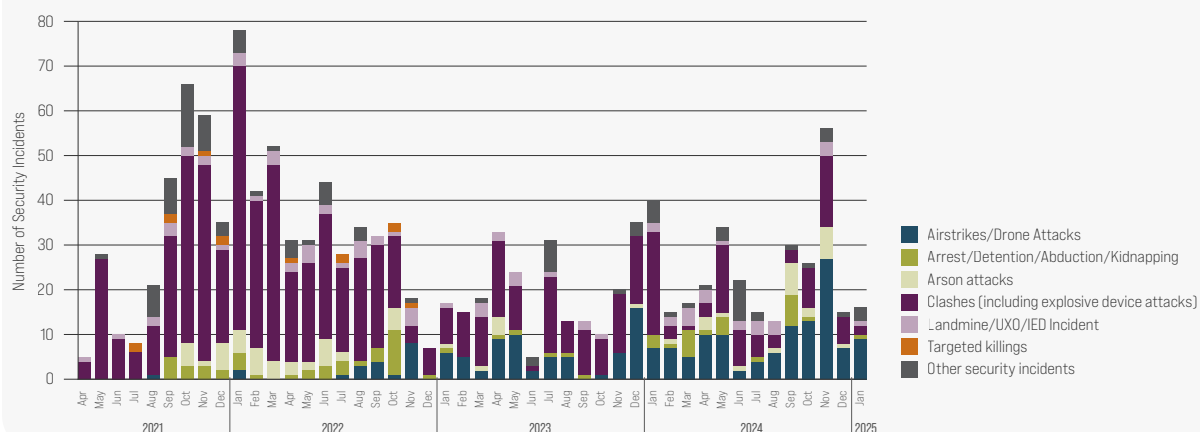
MANY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN SCENARIO 1 WOULD BE ADVISABLE IN THIS SCENARIO AS WELL. HOWEVER, IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN NORTHWEST MYANMAR SHOULD ALSO:

- Be prepared to respond to displacement from urban areas, resulting in dispersal to multiple informal displacement sites and relocation to other nearby towns;
- Support local partners in conducting localised needs assessments with widely dispersed IDP populations and other communities, in order to gauge the scope of needs and respond accordingly;
- Facilitate the transfer of alternative power and communications systems, such as solar cells and radios, respectively;
- 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;
- Anticipate the need to increase engagement with NUG-linked actors and develop strategies to navigate tensions that may arise 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.

NORTHWEST MYANMAR MARCH 2025

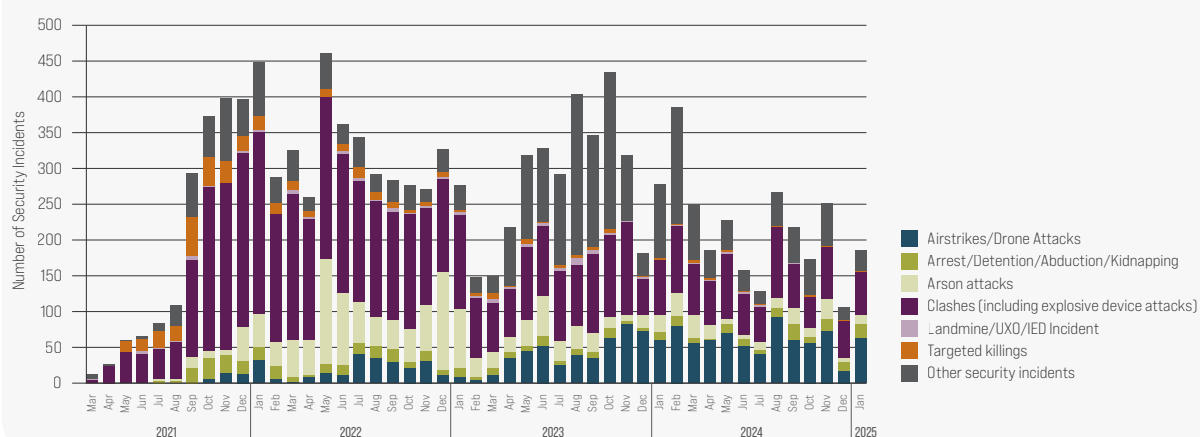
Key Security Incidents in Chin State

(April 2021 - Jan 2025)



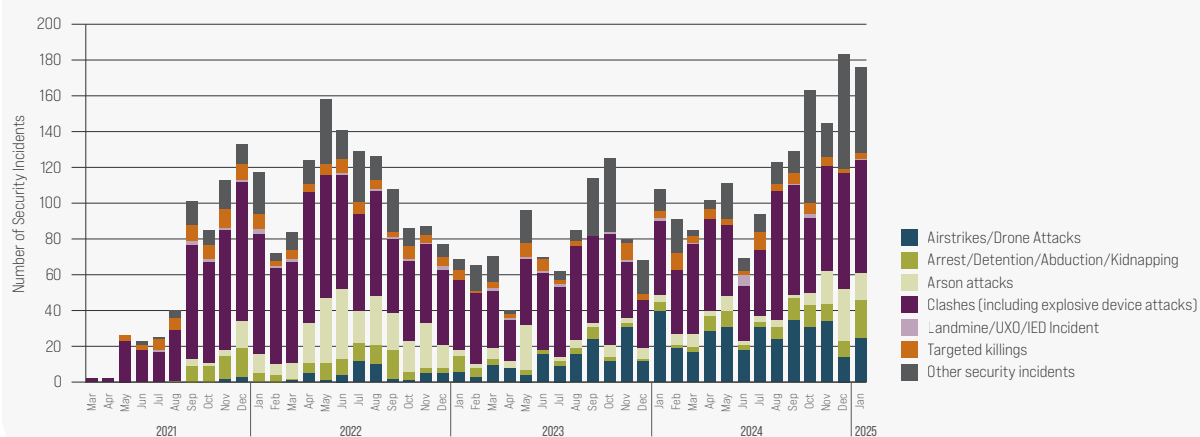
Key Security Incidents in Sagaing Region

(March 2021 - Jan 2025)



Key Security Incidents in Magway Region

(March 2021 - Jan 2025)



Scenario 3: SAC Retakes Significant Territory

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, the SAC is able to retake large parts of the northwest, starting from urban centres and roadways that it has lost control of, and radiating outward from there to smaller population centres. It shifts troops from elsewhere in the country, utilises new conscripts, and relies on a network of sympathetic actors — Pyu Saw Htee militias, current and former Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) members, families of SAC members, and influential, closely-aligned Buddhist figures. By reestablishing its presence across more of the northwest, it is able to significantly constrain armed resistance activity, and to retake control over major conduits of trade and transport. While this likely results in greater economic activity and operability of local markets, these and other locations remain vulnerable to resistance attacks, and civilians across the northwest remain vulnerable to arbitrary house raids, detention, extortion, conscription, and other abusive activity by SAC troops, undermining security.

In dispersing troops across wide, often rural areas, the SAC uses newly-recruited troops, whom it may place in or near villages of origin. The effects of this likely vary by location, but variously include castigation of conscripts by local communities, targeted killings of these people and local administrators, and defections.

Analysis

The “Bamar heartland” of northwest Myanmar is an area that the SAC has clearly prized since the coup and sought to prevent from falling under the sway of resistance actors. Though resistance activity has not abated by any means, the SAC could likely make significant gains in terms of presence, control, and governance capacity in this part of the country by increasing its focus and resourcing toward it. Granted, the northwest contains a patchwork of communities that vary from support of, to vehement resistance to, the SAC; the work required to regain control would likely vary significantly from place to place. However, through some combination of increased presence, measures to undercut popular support for resistance actors, and reliance on pockets of its own support, the SAC is likely capable of making major territorial gains. Particularly as it loses territory elsewhere in the country, and as its troops surrender or flee there but remain available for redeployment elsewhere, the SAC could shift its resources into this area.

However, there are major obstacles to the SAC retaking parts of the northwest, particularly in rural areas. For one thing, it may simply be too late for the SAC to change the minds of civilian communities that it has brutalised since the coup and which have poured sparse resources into supporting local resistance actors now providing local services. For another, a shift away from fighting in Myanmar’s ethnic states could — though this remains up in the air — be accompanied by an increase in EAO support for smaller resistance actors in the northwest, particularly at the edges of these EAOs’ territory, increasing the firepower (and potentially man power) of the SAC’s opposition. In any case, while cowing civilians across vast swathes of the northwest is one thing, establishing any semblance of control or governance is another; particularly in the face of continued defiance, any attempt by the SAC to station troops or administrators in formerly ‘liberated’ areas is likely to be met with nothing but violence.

Impact

Humanitarian Needs				
Displacement	Food security	Protection	Livelihoods	Health
Displacement would likely continue to grow as the SAC launches attacks throughout the northwest, particularly in areas near major roads. Where resistance groups make efforts to take urban areas, SAC attacks would likely continue to result in massive displacement. People currently displaced would be unable to return.	Food security would likely worsen as higher levels of violence further undermine production and the functionality of markets. While it is possible that increased SAC control of transportation routes facilitates greater trade, this is far from certain and it would likely only come after prolonged fighting that makes trade harder.	Protection would be further undermined by increased fighting and increased SAC presence. Where control is contested and fighting continues, civilians would remain at risk of raids, artillery fire, and airstrikes. Where the SAC establishes greater control, more civilians would be at risk of abuse by SAC troops.	Livelihoods would likely suffer as greater insecurity leads to decreased production, trade, and other income-generating opportunities.	Health outcomes would likely worsen as living conditions deteriorate, displacement increases, local health response actors are pushed further to the margins, and more permanent health facilities are destroyed.
Key Takeaways Increased violence would likely lead to the worsening of living conditions, access to support, and insecurity. The situation would likely remain the same in some areas, but worsen dramatically in other areas, increasing overall displacement and need, and decreasing overall availability of support and goods.				

Humanitarian Support			
Permissions	Administrative risk	Physical access	Market functionality
The SAC would likely continue to deny permissions for international response actors, and to crack down on local civil society and response actors. In the absence of permissions, humanitarian groups must carry out relief activities unofficially. Fewer and fewer organisations would be able to operate formally.	Administrative risks would likely remain the same. International responders would not be permitted to work with local partners or directly implement activities, meaning that they must circumvent 'official' rules in order to be effective.	Physical access would likely worsen markedly, especially for international organisations with offices in larger, SAC-controlled towns. Roads would continue to be blocked and/or made insecure by the threat of attacks, limiting the ability of humanitarian actors to reach people in need.	Increased fighting along major roadways and in towns would likely reduce the availability of goods and threaten the functionality of markets in towns which had served urban and nearby populations.
Key Takeaways The ability of local responders to reach populations in need would be likely to worsen significantly as more roadways are blocked, local economies are hurt, and security for such responders degrades. In addition, the availability of food, health-related, and other materials would likely drop.			

Recommendations

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN NORTHWEST MYANMAR SHOULD:

- Plan for prolonged displacement from both rural and urban areas, pre-positioning aid to the greatest degree possible;
- Increase financial and in-kind assistance to reach an ever-growing number of people displaced or otherwise in need;
- 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;
- 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;
- Shift to remote, zero-visibility modalities where not already existing;
- 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 contextual developments and consult frequently with local staff and partners to ensure conflict sensitivity best practices are continuously adapted to the shifting situation.

Sub-Scenarios

A Tense Peace Between Chin Actors

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this sub-scenario, Chin resistance actors continue to engage in dialogue aimed at cooperation and consolidation of governance efforts, but local-level tensions between smaller actors aligned with one or the other bloc of Chin stakeholders lead to sporadic flare-ups of violence in parts of Chin State. Despite conciliation efforts, the Chin National Army (CNA)-led Chinland Council and the CNDF-led Chin Brotherhood remain divided over local-level territorial control, statewide governance in the absence of the SAC, and — perhaps most obviously — the presence of AA troops in the southern part of the state. As the AA pursues its own goals in the southern part of the state, the Chin Brotherhood either welcomes or permits it to send troops and materiel, while this is unpalatable to the Chinland Council. Disagreements between the two sides — sometimes playing out as proxy fights between local actors — lead to armed violence that directly impacts civilians. As well, ongoing tensions undermine cohesion among key stakeholders and may lead to competing governance systems in some places, such as urban areas, and fragmentation of stakeholders capable of providing humanitarian assistance undermines coordination and effective distribution. Where support comes from Chin diaspora members, it is effectively limited to specific communities and is not shared. Where it comes from donors and larger humanitarian response actors, a lack of local coordination — and possibly the lack of ability to move easily between areas controlled by different groups — would have similarly limiting effects.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN NORTHWEST MYANMAR 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 Increases in Mandalay Region

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, fighting intensifies in Mandalay Region, where PDFs have been back the SAC (including from urban areas) with the support of larger EAOs. These PDFs have less capacity to defend these areas without such support, and the SAC is likely to feel particularly threatened by losses so close to the second-largest city in the country. While EAOs such as the KIA and TNLA have beaten back the SAC and likely sought to establish a buffer zone around their territory by supporting smaller resistance actors operating in adjacent areas, the coming months may find these EAOs — and the TNLA in particular — coming under increased pressure from the SAC and China to desist from doing so. This would leave the PDFs operating in such border areas particularly vulnerable to renewed SAC offensives. Meanwhile, the SAC may try to recoup losses in northern Mandalay Region with particular vigour, given its proximity to the largest city in central Myanmar, and may see a lull in fighting with EAOs in the north-east as an opportunity to do so. Accordingly, while the push and pull of SAC-resistance fighting continues across much of the northwest, northern Mandalay Region would see a marked increase in fighting between the SAC and PDFs that are better-resourced than post-coup resistance actors elsewhere, but still far smaller and less coordinated than longer-standing EAOs. SAC raids, airstrikes, and other violence uproots and displaces tens of thousands more people, though this displacement could be temporary or more permanent depending on the duration of fighting and the ability of IDPs to relocate permanently to other areas. A relatively nascent response environment in northern Mandalay Region also means that there are continued shortages and barriers to relief for the people affected.

Many elements of this sub-scenario mirror those in scenarios 1 and 3 above, and in addressing this sub-scenario international responders in northwest Myanmar should thus look to the recommendations therein. In addition, they should:

- Leverage existing networks in Kachin and Shan states, and adjacent parts of Sagaing Region, to reach populations in parts of the northwest adjacent to these areas; and
- Work to develop and strengthen partnerships with local groups working in northern Mandalay Region.

Scenario Plan

NORTHWEST MYANMAR

Contributing information sources to this document include public and non-public humanitarian information. The content compiled is by no means exhaustive and does not necessarily reflect the position of its authors or funders. The provided information, assessment, and analysis are designated for humanitarian purposes only and as such should not be cited.

© 2025

Contact: analyst.myanmar2020@gmail.com