

# De-escalating the interconnected conflicts in the Middle East

**Security Council**



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and Enlightenment

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## Introduction

The ongoing civil war in Myanmar represents a complex and multifaceted crisis that blends ethnic conflict, political instability, and humanitarian emergencies. Since the military coup of February 2021, violence has escalated to unprecedented levels, as various factions vie for power and autonomy. These include the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military), ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), and newly formed People's Defence Forces (PDFs), all of which contribute to the conflict's chaotic landscape.

This conflict poses numerous challenges to the international community. There are more immediate and intense civilian casualties due to it, and strains are created on regional economies, refugee management, and geopolitical stability. The UN Security Council has endeavoured to address these items by focusing on solving the issue, provision of humanitarian assistance, and other ways of avoiding further escalation of the conflict.

Devastating effects of the civil war in Myanmar can be witnessed on the livelihoods of poor civilians, whose lives are adversely affected by the continuous conflict. Overall, an estimated over a million people remain internally displaced, with thousands more crossing the borders to neighbouring countries hoping to be integrated into the temporary refugee communities-so far, this has happened in different parts of the region. Basic needs still critically restrict access to food, clean water, and health care, as many communities familiar with such own shortages of the few aid materials and infrastructures because of some of the attacks on aid workers and infrastructure. Moreover, there occur incessant accusations of human rights abuses such as arbitrary arrests or torture and indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets, again underlining the urgency that the outside steps in to avert the protection of the vulnerable population. The Security Council will be steering through these tough obstacles by not impeding the sovereignty of Myanmar when faced by the need versus the critical situation humanitarian-wise.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs)

Militant groups formed by Myanmar's ethnic minorities seeking autonomy, equality, or independence from central government control. Examples include the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Arakan Army (AA).

### Tatmadaw

Myanmar's military establishment, historically influential in politics and governance. The Tatmadaw has been accused of human rights abuses and plays a central role in perpetuating the civil war.

### **Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)**

A grassroots protest movement opposing the military coup, comprising strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations led by civilians across various sectors.

### **Federal Democracy**

A proposed governance structure advocated by anti-junta forces, where Myanmar's ethnic regions would gain significant autonomy under a decentralized federal system.

### **People's Defence Forces (PDFs)**

Pro-democracy armed groups established following the coup to resist military control, often cooperating with EAOs.

### **National Unity Government (NUG)**

A parallel government formed by ousted members of parliament and activists, which claims legitimacy over the Tatmadaw-led regime.

## **General Overview**

Civil War Myanmar is a deeply entrenched and multifaceted crisis framed in ethnic, political, and humanitarian terms that has evolved over decades of systemic marginalization and ethnic discrimination and authoritarian governance. Thus evolved the conflict from autonomy-seeking ethnic uprisings to the latest nationwide uprising against military rule following a forced change in government in 2021. It has led to the wide-scale erosion of basic governance, the forced displacement of a large portion of the population, and a gross humanitarian emergency. Myanmar is set to remain an uncertain place in search of sound futures as the international community struggles to intervene with the limited options available for brokering peace and stability in the country.

### **Historical Perspective**

It began during colonial times when the British used divide-and-rule tactics to effectively govern a diverse set of ethno-racial constituents. Socio-political conditions were established within these ethno-factions that perpetuated an enduring legacy of mistrust and competition for power. Minorities such as Shan, Karen, and Kachin were perennially marginalized under Bamar-dominated governments right from independence. Due to conditions applied by law, the above-named ethnic groups had little choice but to initiate resistance against the government, which did not materialize after the few words in the 1947 Panglong Agreement

From 1962, the military (Tatmadaw) solidified its control through a coup, imposing a repressive regime that stifled dissent and violently suppressed ethnic movements. Pro-democracy uprisings in 1988 and the Saffron Revolution of 2007 demonstrated widespread opposition to military rule but failed to bring about meaningful change. The partial democratic transition in 2011 briefly raised hopes, but the military's constitutional powers and influence ensured that ethnic conflicts and political instability persisted.

## The 2021 Military Coup

The coup on February 1, 2021, occurred after the Tatmadaw rejected the results of the November 2020 elections, in which Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) achieved a landslide victory. Claiming electoral fraud without evidence, the Tatmadaw detained elected officials and declared a state of emergency. This event shattered Myanmar's fragile democratic progress and reignited widespread resistance.

- **Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM):** The CDM quickly became a symbol of defiance, uniting citizens across professions, from healthcare workers to teachers, in boycotting the junta.
- **Rise of Armed Resistance:** People's Defence Forces (PDFs), often collaborating with EAOs, launched armed campaigns against military rule. The Tatmadaw responded with heavy-handed tactics, including airstrikes, village raids, and indiscriminate arrests.

## Humanitarian Impact

The consequences of the conflict have been devastating:

1. **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** Over 1.6 million people have fled their homes, with many seeking refuge in makeshift camps along Myanmar's borders. These camps face shortages of food, medicine, and clean water.
2. **Civilian Casualties:** According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), over 3,000 civilians have been killed, and tens of thousands have been arrested since the coup.
3. **Restrictions on Aid:** Humanitarian organizations face severe access restrictions, with the junta imposing bureaucratic barriers and even targeting aid workers.

## Regional and Global Implications

The civil war has far-reaching consequences:

- **Regional Destabilization:** Refugee flows into Thailand, India, and Bangladesh strain resources and create political tensions.
- **China's Role:** As a major investor in Myanmar, China seeks to protect its economic interests while navigating complex relationships with both the Tatmadaw and opposition forces.
- **ASEAN's Credibility:** ASEAN's inability to enforce its Five-Point Consensus has exposed weaknesses in its conflict-resolution mechanisms.

## Military Strategies and Tactics

The civil war in Myanmar is marked by asymmetrical warfare, with the Tatmadaw employing large-scale offensives and the opposition relying on guerrilla tactics. The military has conducted scorched-earth campaigns, targeting villages suspected of harbouring resistance fighters and destroying homes, schools, and healthcare facilities. In contrast, PDFs and EAOs leverage their knowledge of local terrain to execute ambushes and sabotage operations. These tactics have prolonged the conflict, making it increasingly complex for any single party to assert dominance. Meanwhile, the use of modern weaponry, including drones and airstrikes, has escalated the violence, and led to greater civilian casualties.

## International Responses

Global reactions to the crisis have been mixed, reflecting the international community's struggle to formulate a cohesive strategy. Western nations, including the United States and the European Union, have imposed targeted sanctions on Myanmar's military leaders and key economic sectors. However, these measures have done little to weaken the junta's resolve. Countries like China and Russia have provided tacit support to the Tatmadaw, complicating efforts to pass binding resolutions at the UN Security Council. Regional actors, including ASEAN, have called for dialogue, and implemented initiatives like the Five-Point Consensus, but these efforts have failed to yield significant progress due to a lack of enforcement mechanisms and the junta's noncompliance.

## Major Parties Involved

### Tatmadaw

The military remains the central actor, seeking to consolidate power through brutal suppression. Its control over resources and institutions enables it to sustain operations despite international sanctions.

### National Unity Government (NUG)

The NUG represents the democratic aspirations of Myanmar's people. It operates in exile, advocating for international recognition and financial aid to sustain its operations.

### Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs)

Key players include:

- **Karen National Union (KNU):** Advocates for Karen autonomy and federal democracy.
- **Arakan Army (AA):** Seeks greater autonomy for the Rakhine state.
- **Kachin Independence Army (KIA):** Fights for the rights of the Kachin ethnic group.

### ASEAN and the UN

- **ASEAN:** Attempts to mediate through its Five-Point Consensus have largely failed, with Myanmar's military refusing to cooperate.
- **United Nations:** While the UN has issued condemnations and imposed sanctions, enforcement remains limited due to geopolitical complexities.

## Timeline of Events

**1947:** The Panglong Agreement was a historic pact between General Aung San, leader of Myanmar's independence movement, and leaders of several ethnic minority groups, including the Shan, Kachin, and Chin peoples. It promised full autonomy in internal administration, as well as the right to secede from the Union after ten years. The agreement laid the groundwork for unity but was undermined by mistrust and insufficient implementation following Aung San's assassination later that year.

**1948:** Myanmar (then Burma) achieved independence from British colonial rule on January 4, 1948. However, the new government, dominated by ethnic Bamar elites, failed to uphold the promises of the Panglong Agreement. Ethnic minorities, feeling excluded from power and marginalized, began forming armed groups to demand autonomy and self-determination. This marked the beginning of the country's ethnic conflicts, which have persisted for decades.

**1962:** The Tatmadaw, led by General Ne Win, staged a coup d'état on March 2, 1962, overthrowing the democratic government. The military justified its actions by claiming the need to prevent the country's disintegration due to ethnic tensions. Under Ne Win's rule, the country adopted the "Burmese Way to Socialism," leading to economic mismanagement, widespread poverty, and increased authoritarianism. Ethnic insurgencies intensified as the military sought to consolidate power through brutal suppression.

**2011:** After nearly five decades of military rule, Myanmar initiated a series of political and economic reforms. The military-backed government released political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and allowed partially free elections. The reforms raised hopes for peace and reconciliation, but the Tatmadaw retained significant control through the 2008 Constitution, which guaranteed 25% of parliamentary seats for the military and gave it veto power over constitutional amendments.

**2020:** In November 2020, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) achieved a resounding victory, winning over 80% of the contested seats. The election was widely regarded as a referendum on the civilian government's leadership, despite criticism over its handling of ethnic conflicts and the Rohingya crisis. The Tatmadaw, facing a diminishing role in governance, accused the NLD of electoral fraud without evidence, setting the stage for renewed conflict.

**2021:** On February 1, 2021, the Tatmadaw seized power, detaining Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD leaders. The coup sparked nationwide protests, with millions of citizens participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Strikes and boycotts paralyzed the economy, while the military responded with brutal crackdowns, killing over 1,000 civilians within the first year. The coup reignited armed resistance, leading to the formation of the People's Defence Forces (PDFs).

**2023:** The civil war has entered a protracted phase, with heavy fighting reported in regions such as Chin, Kayah, and Sagaing. PDFs have aligned with long-standing ethnic armed

organizations (EAOs) to intensify their resistance against the military. The Tatmadaw continues to use airstrikes and heavy artillery, displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians. Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis worsens as international aid faces severe restrictions, and the political stalemate shows no signs of resolution.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### 1. Ceasefire Agreements

While multiple ceasefires have been signed between the Tatmadaw and EAOs, they often collapse due to mutual distrust and violations.

### 2. ASEAN Five-Point Consensus

This initiative called for an end to violence, dialogue among stakeholders, and humanitarian assistance. However, its lack of enforcement mechanisms has rendered it largely ineffective.

### 3. International Sanctions

Countries like the US and EU have imposed sanctions targeting Myanmar's military leaders and enterprises. While these measures have isolated the junta, their overall impact has been limited.

## Possible Solutions

### Mediated Peace Talks

The international community could facilitate negotiations between the NUG, Tatmadaw, and EAOs to establish a framework for federalism.

### Targeted Economic Sanctions

Strengthen sanctions targeting military-controlled enterprises while exempting sectors critical to civilian welfare.

### Humanitarian Corridors

Establish UN-monitored corridors to ensure the delivery of aid to affected regions, with support from neighbouring countries.

## Useful Documents

- **UNGA Resolution 75/287:** Calls for an end to violence and international arms embargoes.
- **ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (2021):** Outlines a framework for addressing Myanmar's crisis.
- **Geneva Conventions:** Provide guidelines on the protection of civilians in conflict zones.

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