



**Mathurin Hybrid Initiative**

**Global Advisory  
Report**

**The Aftermath of  
the Myanmar  
2021 Coup**

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On 9 October 2023, the Myanmar military attacked the Mung Lai Hyket displacement camp in Kachin State located in Northeastern Myanmar. Of the 29 fatalities, 11 were children and another 56 were injured with 44 admitted to the hospital for further treatment. The camp, home to 150 displaced families, is in close proximity to the headquarters of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), an ethnic insurgent group that has been fighting the Myanmar Military for self-rule for decades. Labelled “one of the deadliest attacks in the 63-year long conflict in Kachin state”, all victims were civilians. The attack on the displaced persons camp is one of the many indiscriminate attacks against civilians committed by the Myanmar Military since the 2021 coup. Amnesty International asserts that, from their analysis of crater size and observed damage, the Myanmar Military likely deployed an unguided bomb, an inaccurate weapon inappropriate for use near civilians. This attack on Mung Lai Hyket demonstrates the Myanmar Military’s increasing disregard for civilians lives in their attempts to reassert control in the nation, especially after the 2021 coup.

**Background:**

**2021 Myanmar Coup d'état**

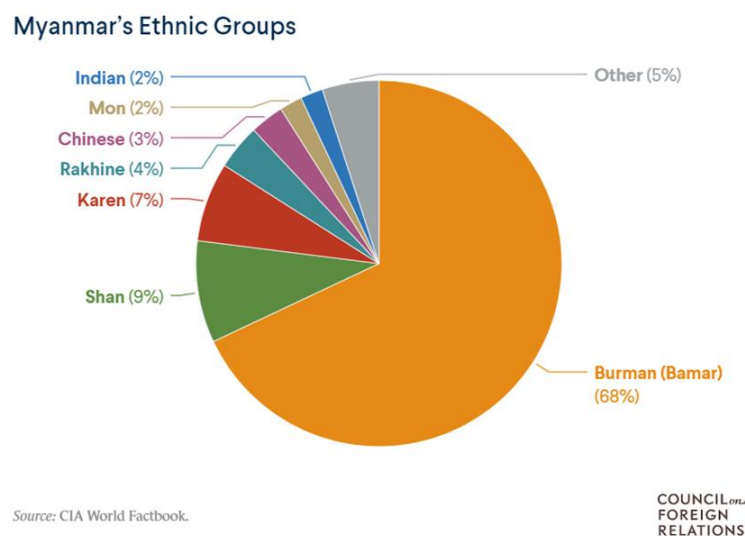
On 1 February 2021, the Tatmadaw, Myanmar’s military, staged a coup in which they detained and arrested de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The leadership transition was declared on a military media outlet, Vice-President Myint Swe was appointed as acting President whilst Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, holding the predominant power, assumed the role of Prime Minister and Chairman of the State Administration Council. An 11-member junta was established, and a year-long state of emergency was declared, upon which restrictions were imposed across the borders, travel and electronic communications. In the weeks following the coup, massive protests erupted, involving thousands of people, including teachers, bankers, and health workers. They abstained from work, advocating for the reinstatement of the elected government. In alignment with the cause, ousted members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), activists from various minority groups and protest leaders formed a ‘parallel government’ referred to as the National Unity Government (NUG). In September 2021, forming the People’s Defence force, the NUG declared war on the military junta in an effort to overthrow the regime.

***Increased Levels of Violence***

In the aftermath of the coup, extensive demonstrations and protests unfolded with many participating in a peaceful civil disobedience movement. Confronted by widespread opposition, from both ordinary citizens and ethnic armed organisations, the military responded with a brutal crackdown on dissidents and oppositionist organisations. For instance, during the 2021 Armed Forces Day celebration, the junta had threatened planned protests with violence. Following through with the threat, 140 people in 44 townships were murdered on Armed Forces Day. Additionally, in another separate incident, seven individuals, including a pregnant woman and her two daughters, lost their lives during shelling in Ka Law Day village in the Kayin State, reflecting one of the many attacks on civilians. The Myanmar Military has also become increasingly reliant on air strikes, using aircrafts provided by Russia and China. As a result, the use of air strikes has dramatically increased with at least 600 air attacks by

the military being recorded between February 2021 and January 2023. From air force jets bombing a concert in Kachin State to bombing a lead mine in southern Karen State, the impact of such warfare on civilians are unimagineable. This increased use of airstrikes has also led to indiscriminate targeting to become more frequent. The Myanmar Military has consistently failed to implement adequate precautions to safeguard civilians. For example, the lack of spotters for actionable intelligence hinders their ability to differentiate between civilians and military targets, or promptly cease an attack upon recognising its impact on civilians or civilian objects. Furthermore, their consistent disregard for civilian lives during indiscriminate attacks makes them complicit in war crimes, as death or injury to civilians during such attacks violates international humanitarian law. Additionally, the increased occurrence of checkpoints and unlawful detentions has resulted in individuals being subjected to violations such as “unlawful deprivation of liberty, extrajudicial executions, and torture”. It is evident that Myanmar has entered a new and violent phase characterised by military rule, coupled with unparalleled levels of violence towards civilians. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), Myanmar recorded the highest number of battles globally in 2022, excluding Ukraine, with nearly a 67% increase compared to 2021.

### *Heightened Tensions with Ethnic Minorities*



Source: (CFR, 2023)

Myanmar is home to several ethnic groups, among which the ethnic Burmans constitute around two-thirds of the population. The Burman majority have historically experienced numerous advantages, occupying a predominant share of government and military roles, and have long held a privileged position in society. On the other hand, numerous ethnic minority groups have consistently faced systemic discrimination over the years. In particular, the Rohingya people who have suffered from continuous persecution by the Myanmar military, resulting in the forcible displacement of thousands of Rohingyas. The denial of fundamental rights, inadequate government

representation coupled with the persistent brutality from the military has further exacerbated issues with ethnic minority groups, leaving many of these communities unsettled. As such, the disparity in treatment between Burmans and other ethnic minorities has led to a 75-year long struggle between ethnic minorities groups and the military since the nation's independence in 1948. The 2021 coup saw the disintegration of long-standing ceasefires which led to increased violent confrontations between the military and ethnic armed organisations. Additionally, due to rising hostilities between ethnic armed organisations and the military junta, many have begun to join forces with the NUG in an effort to overthrow the regime. Thus, it is clear that the military coup has intensified challenges with ethnic minorities, as persistent military provocations and ongoing marginalisation have resulted in an unprecedented surge of violence in the regions, causing the displacement of thousands.

### **Why is this an Issue?**

Since the 2021 coup, the Myanmar military has committed massive human rights violations, undermining international humanitarian law. For instance, their use of collective punishments on civilian communities assumed to support an armed group, or during protests, has led to them being complicit in war crimes as indiscriminate attacks is classified as such. An ACLED report highlights how civilians have become targets for the military as it states that the degree of violence against civilians by the military has notably escalated since the coup, with a 620% increase in such incidents reported in 2021 compared to 2020. Additionally, the violent actions of the military following the coup has led to the displacement of more than 74,000 people in Kayin State, 91,000 within the Kayah State and many more across the country. Without a viable solution, the situation has developed into a major humanitarian crisis, alarming the international community as it continues to spiral out of control.

### **What Does this Mean for Myanmar's Future Stability?**

With fighting spreading across the country and an absence of a solution, the future stability of Myanmar is put to question. The military government recently announced the extension of the state of emergency on August 2023 for the fourth time since its implementation in February 2021. This has caused further delays for the long-awaited general elections under the premise that security measures need to be implemented to ensure a free and fair voting process. This announcement was unexpected as the 2008 constitution stipulates that Myanmar's state of emergency can only be extended twice, yet the military has surpassed this. Despite promises of holding the general election, scepticisms persist regarding the potential manipulations to secure legitimacy. The Burmese people, having experienced democracy and freedom, remain hesitant to revert to military rule. Additionally, the renewed intensity of violence under the military also threatens to destabilise the region as it begins to spill over into neighbouring countries. Many individuals, aiming to escape the brutality of the Tatmadaw, have crossed borders seeking refuge in countries such as Thailand and Bangladesh. Myanmar's potential stability also heavily relies on quelling the dissatisfaction of the ethnic minority groups. The state's failure to address the concerns of ethnic minorities has resulted in an arms race, with each minority group fighting for greater rights and autonomy. It is apparent that these ethnic minorities play a crucial role in ensuring the

nation's stability once their needs are addressed; otherwise, neglecting them results in a recurring cycle of conflict. Therefore, it is clear that the aftermath of the 2021 coup has undermined the stability of Myanmar. The scale of violence observed, coupled with the absence of negotiations or ceasefires, may prolong the conflict and intensify pre-existing issues such as the mass displacement of peoples. It is important that an appropriate solution is reached, one that includes a ceasefire to ensure the protection of civilians.

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