



Coup Year in Review Analyses Series

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SFB Research

Armed Conflicts and Its Impacts on the People

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1.0. Casualties

The loss of lives and destruction of properties after the February 01, 2021 coup began as the junta started using violence and firearms to suppress the ongoing opposition and resistance against military rule.¹ As time progressed, the stakeholders using arms or violence against each other grew, which led to higher casualties and destruction throughout the country. This paper will analyze the impact of armed conflicts and violence on various stakeholders in Burma since the February 01, 2021 military takeover.

1.1. Civilians

In the early days of protests against the coup, the military junta suppressed the demonstrations by arresting protesters, imposing curfews at night, banning gatherings of more than five people, firing water cannons and rubber bullets at protesters, as well as firing live rounds into the air.² On February 09, 2021, the junta used a live round and hit the head of a young protester named Mya Thwe Thwe Khin, who eventually succumbed to her injuries on February 19, 2021, marking the first civilian casualty of this coup. Soon afterward, the military forces increased their use of firearms on civilians during protests throughout the country.

On March 27, 2021 (the Armed Forces Day), a total of 107 people were killed across multiple cities thus surpassing the highest death toll since March 03, 2021, when a total of 38 people were killed during protests and demonstrations.³ In addition to using firearms, the military has also used vehicles to accelerate and ram into protestors.⁴

Over the last 12 months, the civilians faced increasing security threats ranging from junta's air raids to security clearance operations where civilians were tortured and killed. Stories of murders, indiscriminate killings, and violence against civilians committed by the junta's security forces throughout the country were common over this period. Women and children weren't spared from these atrocities during the violence. Local human rights organizations reported that children as young as one year old and youth (under the age of 20) as many as 183 have been killed by the military junta since February 01, 2021.⁵

¹ "Myanmar Coup Highlights in 90 Days," The Irrawaddy, May 1, 2021, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-coup-highlights-90-days.html#:~:text=Feb%2019%3A%20Ma%20Mya%20Thwe.shot%20dead%20since%20the%20coup.>

² "Timeline: The month since Myanmar's February 1 coup," Aljazeera, February 23, 2021, last accessed February 16, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/23/timeline-of-events-in-myanmar-since-february-1-coup>

³ "Myanmar forces kill scores in deadliest day since coup", AP News, March 27, 2021, last accessed February 19, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/aung-san-suu-kyi-min-aung-hlaing-myanmar-5bd5fd1e20adc5c5e16a0bb2a3db3102>

⁴ "A Chronology of the Myanmar Junta's Vehicle-Ramming Attacks on Peaceful Protesters," The Irrawaddy, December 8, 2021, last accessed February 19, 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/a-chronology-of-the-myanmar-juntas-vehicle-ramming-attacks-on-peaceful-protesters.html>

⁵ "What's happening in Myanmar", Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, February 25, 2022, last accessed February 25, 2022, <https://coup.aappb.org>

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, the civilian death toll stood at 1,507 as of February 01, 2022, a year after the attempted coup.⁶

1.2. People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and Local Defence Forces (LDFs)

In May 2021, the NUG created the People's Defence Force (PDF) with the sole mission "to defend and protect lives, properties and livelihoods of the people and the Federal Union of Myanmar."⁷ While the PDF is officially under the command of the NUG's Ministry of Defence, numerous armed resistance groups operate under the leadership of their respective leaders and localities. These groups are often considered local defence forces (LDFs) who operate autonomously from the NUG chain of command.⁸ Both the LDFs and PDFs have clashed with the junta forces all over the country. Often limited in resources including arms, they engaged in guerrilla warfare against the junta security forces in both urban and rural areas with minimal casualties.

Although there is currently no published casualty count for the PDFs and the LDFs, the civilian casualties count inevitably includes as members of the PDFs and LDFs are civilians.⁹

1.3. Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs)

Historically, the majority of Burma's ethnic groups have been in conflict with the military to gain autonomy. Prior to the 2021 coup, the Tatmadaw (Burmese military) and several Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) have been clashing.¹⁰ Although there has been some progress towards peace during the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015 and 2018, the coup had reversed this progress and paved the way for greater conflicts between the ethnic groups and the junta.¹¹

In addition to training the newly formed PDFs and LDFs in their respective territories, the EAOs have frequently clashed with the junta forces. A statement from the Chinland Defense Forces (CDF) shows that the entire Chin region had 58 EAO fatalities between April and December of 2021.¹² A point to note here is that the civilian casualties include the people residing in the ethnic groups' areas who are not members of the EAOs.

1.4. Junta Forces

With the formation of the PDFs and the resurgence of EAO attacks, the Tatmadaw had suffered heavy casualties.¹³ The total casualty count reported by the NUG for the junta troops was 2,941 as of

⁶ "Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup", Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, February 01, 2022, last accessed February 25, 2022, <https://aappb.org/?p=19961>

⁷ "People's Defense Force", the National Unity Government, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://mod.nugmyanmar.org/en/peoples-defence-force/>

⁸ "Seizing the State: The Emergence of a Distinct Security Actor in Myanmar", Wilson Center, Ye Myo Hein and Lucas Myers, November 2021, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/2021-11_SeizingTheState.pdf

⁹ "Bodies of five PDF members abducted by junta found in Htigyaing", Myanmar Now, January 19, 2021, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/bodies-of-five-pdf-members-abducted-by-junta-found-in-htigyaing>

¹⁰ "Myanmar's Coup Shakes Up Its Ethnic Conflicts," International Crisis Group, January 12, 2022, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/319-myanmars-coup-shakes-its-ethnic-conflicts>

¹¹ "About NCA-S EAO," NCA-S EAO, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://ncaseao.org/page/about-nca-s-eao>

¹² "Exclusive: Myanmar army defector recounts heavy losses inflicted by Chin rebels," Reuters, February 11, 2022, last accessed February 17, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-myanmar-army-defector-recounts-heavy-losses-inflicted-by-chin-rebels-2022-02-11/>

¹³ "Myanmar Junta Loses 1,300 Soldiers Killed Over Last Month: NUG," The Irrawaddy, November 11, 2021, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-loses-1300-soldiers-killed-over-last-month->

December 2021.¹⁴ This figure is inclusive of all branches of the junta's security forces including the members of the police, intelligence agents, security personnel, and government employees.

2.0. Security Situation

The coup had caused violence of several degrees in its wake. Numerous international embassies inside Burma have warned their citizens to be cautious inside the country due to the frequent shootings and bombings in major cities.¹⁵ Clashes between resistance forces and the junta have heightened the security risks in urban and rural areas. Civilians are often subjected to indiscriminate abuses and destruction of properties by the junta security forces. For example, Kin Ma village in Magway Township was burnt down by the junta forces because of the presence and attacks of the local PDFs in that region.¹⁶

Furthermore, civilians have received warnings from the PDFs to stay away from government-controlled offices because of targeted bombings and attacks carried out by the PDFs on those targets.¹⁷ Civilians also live in fear of the junta's attack and detention over accusations of having ties to the resistance forces.¹⁸

3.0. Junta's Use of Disproportionate Force

As early as May 2021, the junta had been using heavy artillery to bombard locations where the PDFs and EAOs are based.¹⁹ Artillery shells also fall on residential towns and cities setting destroying buildings and properties.²⁰ Additionally, the junta soldiers would purposely torch every building in their path even though the fire was not spreading across buildings, thus employing scorched earth tactics on opposing forces that are stationed in targeted cities and villages.²¹

In addition, the junta had been conducting airstrikes – a method to which the PDFs and EAOs cannot easily retaliate - in Karen and Kayah states where the leading EAOs operate.²²

[nug.html#:~:text=The%20junta's%20casualties%20are%20almost,the%20regime%20suffered%20in%20September.&text=Some%20313%20civilians%20were%20killed,casualties%20were%20members%20of%20PDFs.](#)

¹⁴ "YEAR ROUNDUP 2021 - Conflict Situation in Myanmar's Ethnic States and Regions," Mizzima, December 26, 2021, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.mizzima.com/article/year-roundup-2021-conflict-situation-myanmars-ethnic-states-and-regions#:~:text=During%20the%20said%20period%20908,September%20690%2C%20and%20October%20668.>

¹⁵ "Foreign travel advice, Myanmar (Burma)," Gov.UK, last accessed January 25, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/myanmar#:~:text=The%20security%20situation%20in%20Myanmar,armed%20resistance%20to%20military%20rule.>

¹⁶ "Myanmar village of Kin Ma burns down after clashes," BBC, June 16, 2021, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-57506196>

¹⁷ "Yangon Resistance Fighters Step up Attacks on Myanmar Junta," The Irrawaddy, January 7, 2022, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/yangon-resistance-fighters-step-up-attacks-on-myanmar-junta.html>

¹⁸ "Families fear for nurses detained over accusations of PDF ties," Myanmar NOW, September 4, 2021, last accessed February 17, 2022, <https://www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/families-fear-for-nurses-detained-over-accusations-of-pdf-ties>

¹⁹ "Myanmar carries out air strikes after militia attacks - witnesses," Reuters, May 31, 2021, last accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/myanmar-carries-out-air-strikes-after-militia-attacks-witnesses-2021-05-31/>

²⁰ "Myanmar: Whole town flees amid fierce fighting," BBC News, September 22, 2021, last accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58650762>

²¹ "Myanmar military torches 100 homes in Sagaing Region village," Myanmar NOW, December 14, 2021, last accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/myanmar-military-torches-100-homes-in-sagaing-region-village>

²² "Myanmar junta's air strikes force thousands of people to flee to Thailand," Financial Times, January 22, 2022, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/656c84a1-ca69-4357-a1db-287313989aff>

4.0. Migration Issues and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The insecurities and dangers that arise from the violence and armed conflicts have forced thousands of people to flee the country and seek refuge in neighboring countries such as India and Thailand. Thousands more were internally displaced as they fled the violence. Neighboring countries have yet to officially open their borders to refugees despite the increasing number of Burmese civilians flooding through their borders. Burmese refugees in Thailand and India revealed that they are being pressured by the host governments to return to Burma even though the dangers and insecurities are still present in the areas they come from.²³ The level of humanitarian assistance provided to IDPs has been alarmingly low as the junta continues to restrict the international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) access to the people in need.²⁴

As of February 21, 2022, the estimated number of refugees in neighboring countries and IDPs inside Burma are 29,300 and 451,400 respectively.²⁵ In addition, there are now up to 900,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh who fled Myanmar following the Rohingya genocide in 2016.²⁶

5.0. Conclusion

The levels of destruction, loss of lives and properties, and violence that stemmed from the ongoing political and security crisis in Burma continue to climb each day. While the junta continues to commit extreme levels of violence and atrocities against civilians all over the country, the clashes between the local resistance forces and the junta as well as the fighting between the EAOs and the junta have led to a severe loss of lives and properties. Additionally, the violence has forced thousands of Burmese civilians from their homes, contributing to the rising number of those internally displaced and those seeking refuge in neighboring countries.

²³ "Dire Consequences: Addressing the Humanitarian Fallout from Myanmar's Coup," Refugees International, October 21, 2021, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2021/10/18/dire-consequences-addressing-the-humanitarian-fallout-from-myanmars-coup>

²⁴ "Myanmar's Internally Displaced Persons at High Risk Since Coup," The Irrawaddy, August 27, 2021, last accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/myanmars-internally-displaced-persons-at-high-risk-since-coup.html>

²⁵ "Myanmar Emergency Overview Map: Number of people displaced since Feb 2021 and remain displaced (As of 21 Feb 2022)," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, February 21, 2022, last accessed February 28, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/map/myanmar/myanmar-emergency-overview-map-number-people-displaced-feb-2021-and-remain-displaced-21>

²⁶ "Myanmar Situation," UNHCR, February 2022, last accessed February 25, 2022, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/myanmarsituation>