

Burma Democratic Futures Working Group (BDFWG)

University of Virginia

July 2023 Report: Myanmar

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Introduction

In the month of July, there was an important development in Myanmar politics. There were news reports that Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai met with Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been imprisoned since the start of the Military Coup. They met in Nay Pyi Taw and raised concerns about Myanmar internal conflicts and Myanmar's relationship with the international community. This meeting caused ripples among political forces in Myanmar. Since the coup, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has not been allowed to meet with any diplomats. Minister Pramudwinai disclosed that they had met during an ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting. In the meeting, Minister Pramudwinai also revealed that Aung San Suu Kyi stated she "encourages dialogue in order to end the conflicts in Myanmar".

The fact that this meeting took place rejects the ASEAN common agreement established by constituent parties regarding the Myanmar issue. Without consultation with the ASEAN group, Thailand's foreign minister individually approached Myanmar affairs. The Thai government, in general, has had constant contact with the Military Council. Without the sponsorship of the Thai government, discussions on the Myanmar issue are rarely held, including informal friendly meetings with regional countries. The Thai government's approach with diplomacy is mainly through working closely with the Military Council. Democratic forces have strongly criticized the Thai government's approach to the Myanmar conflict, as there is little to no dialogue with revolutionary groups.

The Indonesian government, the rotating chairman of ASEAN, objects to the Thai government's method of dealing with the Myanmar issue. The Indonesian government stresses the principle that when engaging with Myanmar, all relevant parties should be included in the discussion, not just the Military Council. As such, the Indonesian government has been working closely with the Interim National Unity Government (NUG).

Ten ethnic armed groups met up with the Military Council and discussed some issues that were not disclosed to the public. It was reported, however, that agreements between the groups have been reached. Additionally, it was reported that the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, also known as the Northern Brotherhood Alliance, issued a joint statement.

During this month, the Military Council's human rights violations have been coming to light. More than 300 Rohingya Peoples have been sentenced to prison by the military. There was also a disappearance of more than 30 political dissidents into prisons. Arrests and killings of local people and the burning of villages continue to occur.

Timor Leste officially invites Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government to a Cabinet

Inaguration

Zin Mar Aung, the foreign minister of the National Unity Government (NUG), attended the cabinet inaguration of the country's premier Xanana Gusmão and other cabinet ministers in Dili, Timor-Leste.

Timor-Leste had only recently achieved independence from Indonesia in 2002. The current Timorese president, José Ramos-Horta, has expressed long-standing support for the democratic resistance in Myanmar. He has expressed this alliance through providing the delegation of the NUG with hospitality and generosity.

The military regime in Myanmar however has expressed strong objections to the Timorese government's invitation of the NUG delegation. The military regime still refers to its opposition as terrorists, and released a statement urging the Timorese government to refrain from maintaining relations with 'terrorist groups'. The NUG's deputy minister of foreign affairs Moe Zaw Oo responds to the military's statement by asserting that: "The SAC has no right or legitimacy to object the invitation of the legitimate government of Timor Leste to the legitimate National Unity Government, who truly represent the people of Myanmar". The Prime Minister of Timor Leste invited Minister Daw Zin Mar Aung to meet again the next day after the military's statement. This gesture indicates a commitment from Timor Leste to continue relations and recognize the NUG as the legitimate government of Myanmar.

In previous cases, the SAC has raised objections to ASEAN countries extending official invitations to the NUG. For example, in May 2022, Malaysia's foreign minister Saifuddin Abdullah met informally with Zin Mar Aung in Washington D.C. to discuss topics such as humanitarian assistance. However besides Malaysia, ASEAN's other nine member states continue to allow Myanmar junta officials to attend their meetings. The United States government doesn't recognize the SAC's legitimacy, however it also doesn't recognize the NUG as Myanmar's legitimate government. There are still many countries that are in between on whether or not to recognize the military government or the NUG as the legitimate power in Myanmar. However, in the case of Timor Leste, perhaps due to the similarity in the nations' struggles, it is clear that the Timorese government stands with the NUG.

China Looms Large Over Thailand's Move to Re-engage With Myanmar Junta

Thailand recently hosted talks with Myanmar's military junta on June 19. The outgoing Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha has been hosting informal talks with foreign ministers of ASEAN countries. Some of the top diplomats, such as from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, from the regional block however did not attend. The current Thai government is taking a similar

approach as the Chinese government in terms of relations with the military government. The Thai government has been conducting “business as usual” and also has not put much pressure on the junta military. Analysts say that the particular stance that the Thai government is taking is an attempt to create an alignment with China. Which is also revealed by the way the Prayut government tries to include China in any ASEAN negotiations concerning Myanmar.

This is the stance of the current government in Thailand, however a surprise win in the May 14th elections by the Move Forward Party in Thailand suggests a shift in government. The installation of the new government is scheduled in July. The front-runner to become Thailand’s next premier, Pita Limjaroenrat, has been vocal about shifting Thailand’s foreign policy direction in terms of Myanmar. His words suggest that he is worried about violence and instability in Myanmar also affecting Thailand. Limjaroenrat has also been known to have a natural affinity for the United States, having studied at both Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. However, no matter what political stance that Thailand might take with Myanmar following the shift in political power, Thailand will still engage constructively with China given its economic interests.

Myanmar Military Troops Shoot at Civilian Street Vendors in the Sagaing Region

On Thursday July 6, military troops opened fire on street vendors in Wetlet township, Sagaing region. At dawn, ordinary civilian vendors were heading to Shwe Pan Kone village from Tha Ma Yoe village when they were brutally attacked. It was reported that seven civilians were killed and another six were critically injured. As reported by the RFA the dead included four women and three men: 57-year-old Hnin Hlaing; 46-year-old Pwe Li; 40-year-old Aye Nu Win, 30-year-old Phyu Phyu San; 62-year-old Thein Hlaing; 55-year-old Poe Lwin; and 27-year-old Lwin Moe. Among the six critically injured, there was a 29-year-old pregnant woman and a 65-year-old man. The military column continued to move into Tha Ma Yoe village, arresting around 30 locals.

The injured civilians are being treated at clinics set up by the National Unity Government. The NUG has also compensated the injured and the families of the dead. The junta has not issued any statement regarding the unprovoked and violent attack.

The Myanmar Military’s Systematic Denial of Humanitarian Aid from the UN

Myanmar’s military rulers have engaged in a “systemic denial” of humanitarian relief to its population desperately in need of aid. There are legal, financial and bureaucratic barriers to receiving aid when around one-third of the entire population is in critical condition. Despite the military agreeing to the five-point peace plan, the Military Council has failed to uphold its side of the agreement to end violence and release political prisoners. In fact, violence has increased in the year 2023, compared to the year 2022. As reported by Aljazeera, indiscriminate killings

and bombings have directly forced 1.5 million people from their homes and the resulting insecurity has led to around 15.2 million facing food insecurity.

Not only has the military government been putting its civilians in danger of violence, it has also been putting potential humanitarian aid efforts at risk of violence. According to Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as many as 40 humanitarian workers had been killed and more than 200 arrested since the coup. All humanitarian aid related to Cyclone Mocha must be delivered by the military apparatus. The limits put on humanitarian aid by the military government impacts ordinary civilians the most. The Military Council must be held accountable for the amount of lives lost and the human rights violations from systemically denying humanitarian aid.

Military Conflicts

After the military coup, Myanmar's military conflicts are increasing day by day. In particular, the fighting between the democratic forces and the Military Council continues to intensify. Many military conflicts have occurred in the Sagaing Region, Magway Region, Karenni (Kayah) State, Karen State and Chin State.

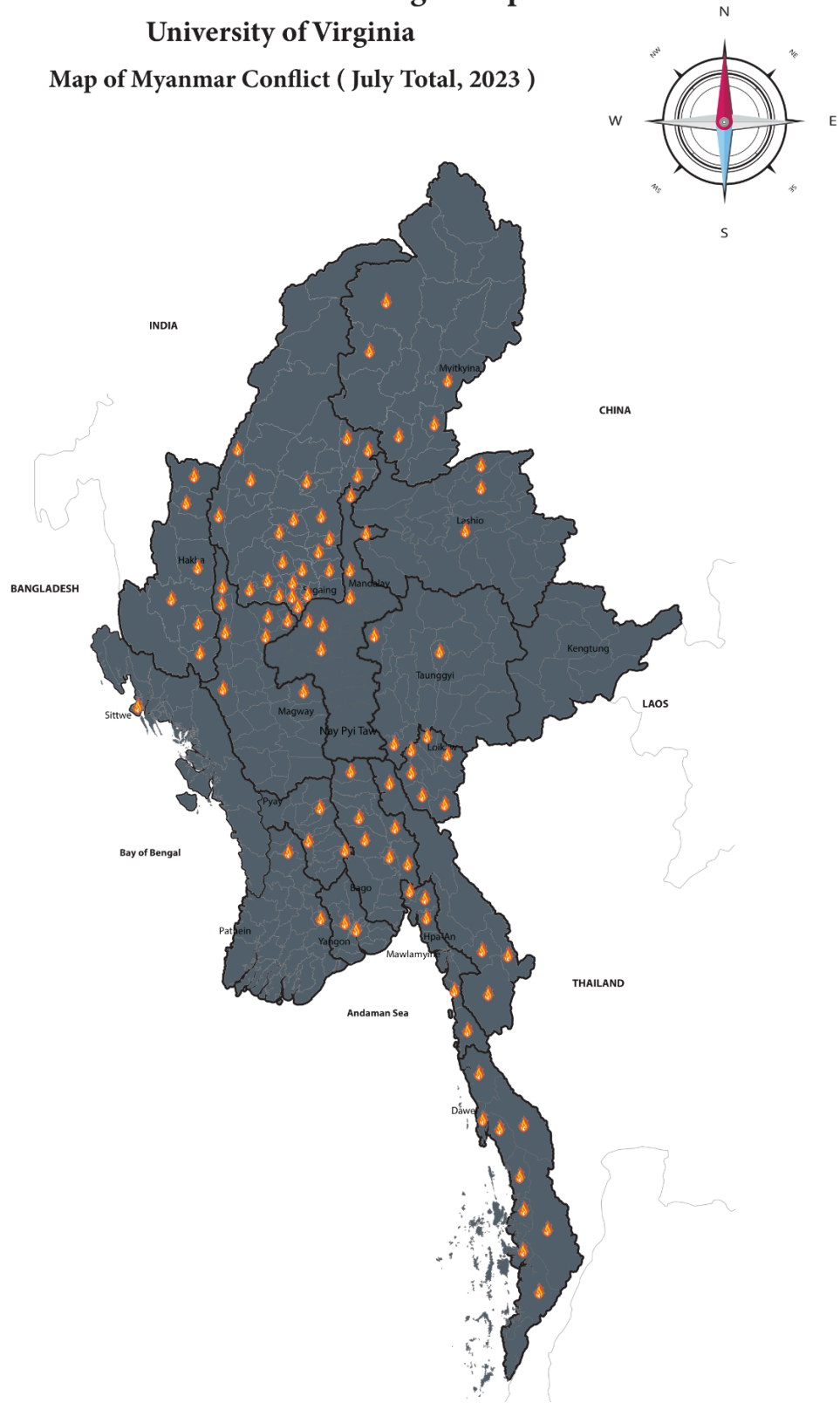
Table 1: Data on Military Conflicts

Table 1: Data of Myanmar Conflicts in July 2023			
States	Clashes between SAC and PDF/EOs	SAC's soldiers killed	PDF killed
BAGO	34	163	1
CHIN	18	76	6
KACHIN	13	30	
KAYAH (Karenni)	6	26	
KAYIN	19	49	
MAGWAY	30	171	9
MANDALAY	12	47	1
MON	11	24	
SAGAING	47	228	19
SHAN (North)	10	11	
SHAN (South)	2	4	
TANINTHARYI	22	83	4
TOTAL	224	912	40

Figure 1: Map of Conflicts

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Map of Myanmar Conflict (July Total, 2023)



Human Rights Violations

The Military Council continues to committ many human rights violations. People are still being severely oppressed by military forces. In Daik-U City there were reports of 37 political prisoners being detained in the Military Council’s Kyaikzako Prison. Some of them were reported to have been killed, the others are still missing or unaccounted for. In addition, more than 300 Rohingya people were arrested in the Irrawaddy Region, and have been sentenced to prison by military courts. Military Council troops have been burning down villages in the Sagaing Region, arresting and killing innocent civilians.

Table 2: Data on Human Rights Violations

Table 2: Data of Human Rights Violations by SAC in July 2023					
States	Children Killed	Civilians Killed	Civilians Arrested	Villages Set on Fire	Houses Burned Down
AYEYARWADY			20		
BAGO		10	49	1	59
CHIN	1	6			12
KACHIN		1	10	2	100
KAYAH (Karenni)	1	7		2	1
KAYIN		7	17		
MAGWAY		1	24	1	341
MANDALAY	4	1	65	1	
RAKHINE			60		
SAGAING	9	76	78	27	877
SHAN (North)			5		
SHAN (South)			2	1	
TANINTHARYI	1		69		6
YANGON			4		
TOTAL	16	116	424	35	1396

Acronymns

NUG - National Unity Government

SAC - State Administration Council

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