

Burma Democratic Futures Working Group - BDFWG
University of Virginia
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Introduction

In the month of September, the Military Council engaged diplomatically more with Russia and China. The Military Council met with Chinese government officials such as the deputy commander of the Southern Military District and representatives from the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Various interactions between Russia and the Military Council were also observed. Russia and Myanmar co-chaired the counter-terrorism operation training. Dr. Kan Zaw, the Minister of Foreign Economic Communications of the Military Council, went to the Russian Far East Economic Forum. A delegation led by Foreign Minister U Than Swe also visited Russia during the month of September.

Internal conflicts in the Military Council took place when two generals were removed from their positions. General Min Aung Hlaing was definitely aware if not behind the corruption charges against Lieutenant General Moe Myint Tun. This raises major implications about the internal state of the Military Council.

Fierce battles took place between the military council and the revolutionary forces in Tanintharyi region, Sagaing region, Kachin State, Northern Shan State, Kayah (Karenni) State and Karen State. The military council's human rights violations are still going strong.

The Relationship Between the Military Council and China has Improved

Chinese officials visited Nay Pyi Taw and met with Military Council officials. China's Special Representative for Asian Affairs, Mr. Deng Xijun, visited Nay Pyi Taw and met with U Than Swe, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Military Council. Chinese People's Liberation Army Vice Admiral Liu Zizhu, Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District Command, met with the Military Council Chief Coordination Commander (Army, Navy, and Air Force) General Maung Maung Aye. Minister of Immigration of the Military Council U Myint Kyaing met with Mr. Shu Gonglu, Vice Minister of the National Immigration Department of China in Beijing. These meetings between representatives of Myanmar and China are unique, and need to be observed further.

China's Special Representative for Asian Affairs, Mr. Deng Xijun, has visited Myanmar two times in the past month. On the 28th of July, Xijun visited Myanmar for the first time. Three days afterwards, the Military Council extended their state of emergency. There are suspicions whether or not his visit had a direct impact on the extension of the Military Council's regime. Xijun visited for a second time on September 18th. The second visit coincided with the time when the UN credential committee will make a decision on who will be allowed to represent Myanmar between U Kyaw Moe Tun, current Myanmar's permanent representative to the United Nations, and another representative nominated by the Military Council.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Military Council stated: "To further strengthen the existing relations between the two countries, we will be taking steps to speed up mutually beneficial cooperation. Cooperation will help to further promote peace and stability along the

Myanmar-China border. The latest developments regarding internal peace and national reconciliation process are that “they had a friendly discussion and an open exchange of views on issues... China will continue to provide positive assistance in Myanmar’s development efforts and... closer cooperation on regional and international fronts, especially in ASEAN and the United Nations,” the report said.

Since the Myanmar military coup, China has been cautious in its relationship with the Military Council. In interactions with the Military Council, the Chinese government usually only sends low-ranking officials to interact with high-ranking officials of the Military Council. On one hand, it is necessary for the interests of China to have a good relationship with the Military Council. On the other hand, the Military Council and the revolutionary forces are in direct conflict. One of China’s foreign policies on Myanmar is to maintain direct relations with Myanmar people from Chinese people, which means that the Chinese government does not want to completely break relations with revolutionary forces that represent the people. China regards Myanmar’s political problem as a domestic problem, and doesn’t wish for international intervention. China’s Myanmar policy seems to have been shaped by and reflective of that attitude. China focuses on building a balanced relationship between Myanmar’s political forces. On one hand there is policy to maintain relations with the Military Council, but China’s interests can only be served properly if there is stability in Myanmar. China’s main focus is to keep any armed force from destroying China’s interests within the country.

The Military Council Continues Developing its Relationship with Russia in Economic, Diplomatic, and Military Sectors

In September, the Military Council and Russia improved their relationships in the economic, diplomatic and military sectors. Dr. Kan Zaw, Minister of Foreign Economic Communications of the Military Council attended the Russia Far East Economic Forum held in Russia from September 10 to 13. During an interview, he said that Myanmar and Russia, which are under sanctions in the global financial system, are ready to begin the process of directly exchanging their currencies. Instead of the dollar-dependent payment system, the Russian payment system MIR and the Burmese payment system MPU are planning to connect directly through the Russian ruble. With this arrangement, both countries hope to reduce their dependence on the dollar in their payment system.

Additionally, Russia and the Myanmar Military Council co-chaired the counter-terrorist operation exercise. The military exercise was held in Russia for five days from September 25 to September 30. Apart from Singapore, the rest of the ASEAN countries participated in the military exercise. The United States, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and most of the dialogue partners did not attend.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Military Council, U Than Swe, led a Myanmar delegation to visit Russia on September 12, due to the invitation of the Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Sergey Lavrov. During the visit, the two countries decided to develop their relationship beyond the

trade of military weapons to tourism, agriculture, the metal industry, and electrical energy. The Military Council also disclosed that they are cooperating in the culture and education sectors.

Being able to improve relations with Russia was a great success for the Military Council, who usually experiences isolation from international dialogues. The Military Council is not widely accepted in ASEAN, the United Nations, and in diplomatic relations with Western countries. Even after the military coup, the relationship between the Military Council and China was not as smooth as dealings with Russia. The only direct contact between China's high-level leaders and the military council's high-level leaders was when the outgoing Chinese Foreign Minister, Mr. Xin Jiang, visited Nay Pyi Taw. On the contrary, Russia's high-ranking leaders often interacted with high-ranking leaders of the Military Council, including General Min Aung Hlaing.

Two Lieutenant Generals Were Removed From Their Positions in the Military Council

In September, Lieutenant General Soe Thut and Lieutenant General Moe Myint Tun along with other members of the Military Council were dismissed from their positions. Their positions were filled, and the Military Council was reformed with new leadership. The family members of Lt. Gen. Soe Thut said that the dismissal was due to corruption, but otherwise there hasn't been an accurate or reliable statement regarding the decision. However, confirmed news emerged that Lieutenant General Moe Myint Tun was fired due to corruption. Lieutenant General Moe Myint Tun is known as a special confidant of General Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the Military Council. He led the Myanmar Investment Commission, the Trade and Trade Facilitation Committee, and the Foreign Exchange Supervision Committee which are all crucial roles within the Military Council. Lieutenant General Soe Thut was also a trusted leader of the Military Council and was in charge of the Ministry of Interior.

The Military Council announced that Lieutenant General Nyo Saw would be replacing Lieutenant General Soe Thut. Mya Tun Oo ended up replacing Moe Myint Tun, which came as a surprise to many. Already, the replacement of two lieutenant generals in the Military Council suggests political instability within the Military Council, which was regarded as weak in structure in the first place. Furthermore, a political analyst said: "There is a crisis in the Military Council because Moe Myint Tun cannot be removed from his position, as he played a critical role in leadership. Nyo Saw, who was a suitable replacement for Moe Myint Tun because he was previously in charge of the economy, was the person that was expected to take the place of Moe Myint Tun. However, Mya Tun Oo ended up taking the place of Moe Myint Tun, to the surprise of many. Ever since the coup d'état there has been no unity within the Military Council, and the conflict between different factions has already started. It is important to constantly monitor the situation".

Human Trafficking in Rohingya Refugee Camps

Wars in the Rakhine State, human trafficking in Forest Gourd Mountain, and human trafficking in Rohingya refugee camps are happening more and more frequently. The Rohingya refugee camps which have seen cases of human trafficking are located in Sittwe, Pauktaw, Buthidaung,

and Rathedaung townships in the Rakhine State. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of people emigrating the country looking for more employment opportunities. Because of the instability and movement of people in the region, human trafficking has been on the rise for a while. In addition to human trafficking, there have also been reports of kidnappings and deteriorating conditions for people living in Rohingya refugee camps.

Chinese Nationals Arrested and Deported For Online Fraud

At the end of August, the Chinese embassy announced that police forces of the Military Council have been arresting and handing over Chinese nationals involved in online fraud. In total, 24 Chinese nationals were handed over to the Chinese police at the Yangon International Airport, in August.

The Chinese government is constantly putting pressure on the Military Council and Ethnic Armed Groups in the border region to arrest Chinese nationals who are operating the online money laundering business. When Chinese diplomats met with the Military Council, they discussed the missue of cross-border crimes.

It was reported that 377 Chinese nationals involved in online fraud were arrested in Lauk Kai, a city on the Myanmar-China border and Casino, Kokang Autonomous Region, which is famous for having online money laundering activities. This is the first time that hundreds of Chinese nationals have been arrested in Lauk Kai. In early September, the Wa People's Unity Army (UWSA) deported 1,207 Chinese nationals, who were involved in online fraud, from the "Wa" region back to China. This was the largest transfer of people from Myanmar on the basis of online fraud.

Military Conflicts

During September, military conflicts between the Military Council and the revolutionary forces intensified. In Northern Shan State, fierce fighting broke out between the military troops and the Taang National Liberation Army (TNLA) troops. In addition, the fighting between the Military Council forces and the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) in Kachin State has become increasingly fragmented. The Military Council Army has been reinforcing forces around Laiza, the KIA's headquarters, where fighting has also ocured frequently.

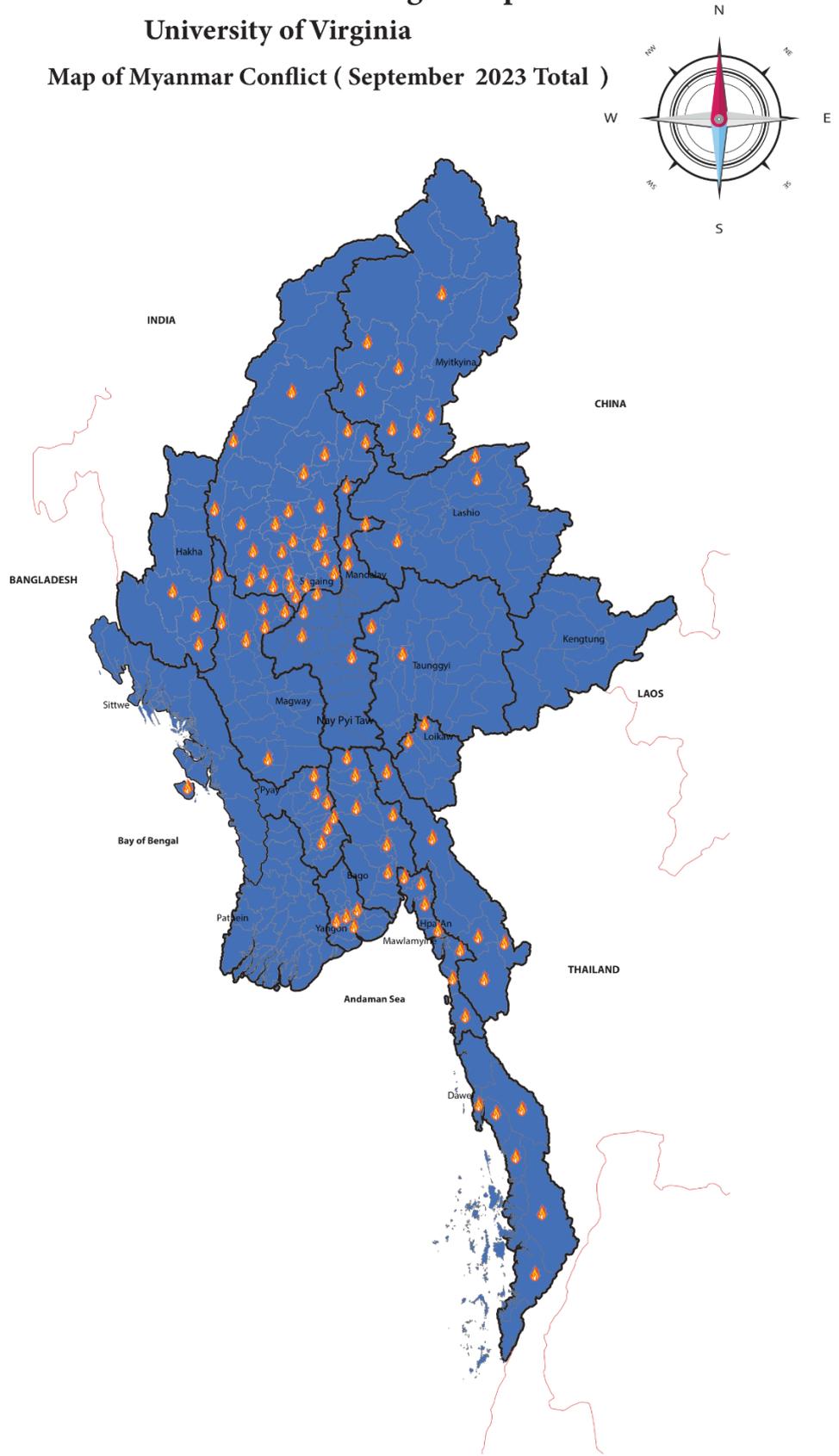
In the Sagaing region and Kayah State, the battles between revolutinary forces and the miliitary council troops have been continuous. The battle that took place in Kale township in Sagaing was intense, ending in heavy casualties on both sides. The most fighting took place in the Sagaing region, Bago region, and Kayah (Karenni) State. Fighting also took place in northern Shan State and Kachin State.

Table 1: Data of Myanmar Conflicts in Septemer 2023			
States	Clashes between SAC and PDF/EAOs	SAC's soldiers killed	PDF killed
BAGO	19	99	3
CHIN	2		
KACHIN	14	17	
KAYAH (Karenni)	3	40	
KAYIN	9	44	2
MAGWAY	16	67	
MANDALAY	19	65	
MON	9	35	3
SAGAING	54	228	36
SHAN (North)	12	2	
SHAN (South)	3	10	
TANINTHARYI	20	76	8
YANGON	1	1	
TOTAL	182	684	52

Figure 1: Map of Conflicts

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Map of Myanmar Conflict (September 2023 Total)



Human Rights Violations

The Military Council and its forces continue to commit human rights violations to this day. Ten days after being arrested by the Military Council in September, Daw Khin Ma Swe passed away. She was from Kachin State and the wife of entrepreneur U Moe Kyaw from Moe Kaung Township.

On September 22, 27 local defense forces and local villagers were massacred by military forces in Myoung Township, Myeng Mu Township, Khor Min Ywa and Sotaw Ywa in the Sagaing region. In addition, three members of the local defense force were also arrested from Nyangon village, Sagaing Pearl City District. The body parts of the victims were cut and killed. Additionally, other body parts that were dismembered by military troops were dumped on the streets of the village. Military Council troops have been violating just war, mutilating the bodies of their opposition and civilians alike in inhumane ways. The Military Council is guilty of war crimes against humanity.

States	Children Killed	Civilians Killed	Civilians Arrested	Villages Set on Fire	Houses Burned Down
BAGO	1	11		3	64
KACHIN		1	80	1	113
KAYAH (Karenni)		1			
KAYIN	4	3	2		
MAGWAY		6	8	1	14
MANDALAY	1	9	133	1	35
RAKHINE			1		
SAGAING		45	143	5	91
SHAN (North)		2			
SHAN (South)					
TANINTHARYI		6	111	1	26
YANGON			17		
TOTAL	6	84	508	12	343

Acronymns

KIA - Kachin Independent Army
MPU - Myanmar Payment Union
TNLA - Taang National Liberation Army
UWSA - The Wa People's Unity Army

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