

**Burma Democratic Futures Working Group (BDFWG)
University of Virginia**

April 2023 Report: Myanmar

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UN Security Council Fails to Denounce Continued Atrocities by Military Council, Resulting in the Death of 186 Innocent Civilians.

On April 11, 2023, the Military Council authorized a military fighter jet to bombard a village in Kanbalu township. Hundreds of locals from neighboring villages had gathered at Pa Zi Gyi to celebrate the opening of a new village hall, which had been set up by the junta's domestic opponents. The celebration featured school children performing and dancing with families—from young toddlers and pregnant women to grandparents—in attendance.

Fighter jets dropped bombs directly on those attending the event. Then, following the initial bombing, MI35 helicopters opened fire on survivors who were desperately fleeing for their lives. The attack killed at least 165 people, including 28 children and 24 women, according to the National Unity Government (NUG).

United Nations Security Council Meeting

On April 12, members of the United Nations Security Council held a private meeting that included discussion of the massacre in Pa Zi Gyi. The Security Council was unable to condemn the Military Council for the massacre, reportedly due to the objections of Russia and China.

It should be noted that China and Russia are the only two permanent members of the Security Council that have a close relationship with the Military Council. After the military coup in 2021, a majority of the international community joined together to impose economic sanctions on the Military Council. However, Russia and China abstained and continued to have diplomatic relationships with the Military Council. Both countries also maintain significant business connections as well. In recent months, China has been increasingly engaging with the Myanmar Military Council.

Senior Representatives of the Communist Party of China Meetings with Former Coup Leader General Than Shwe and Former President Thein Sein

From April 16th to the 19th, Director General of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC), Asia Bureau, Peng Xiubin travelled to Myanmar to meet with former military dictator General Than Shwe and former President General Thein Sein. It is not clear whether the meeting was planned or whether Peng Xiubin had received an invitation. Regardless, such a meeting is unusual and indicates a larger political strategy. It appears that China is no longer hedging its bets on who will rule Myanmar but, instead, has decided to align

with the junta to protect its economic interests, such as the infrastructure project known as the Belt and Road. LAtely, China has been applying pressure on Ethnic Resistance Organizations that are either actively supporting National Unity Government (NUG) or quietly arming People's Defense Forces out of fear these actions are tilting the balance of power away from Naypyidaw.

Delegation Led by Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai Visits Myanmar

In the month of April, a delegation headed by Don Pramudwinai, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, visited Myanmar to meet with the Chairman of the Military Council, General Min Aung Hlaing. It was reported discussions focused on cooperating to eliminate the drug trade and the arms trade. There was also a focus on trying to promote more peace and stability in the border reagon of the two countries and the elimination of illegal human trafficking. The need for cooperation between Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos to reduce cross-border smog pollution was also discussed.

Although public reports of the meeting did not emphasize the current issue of Myanmar's political crisis, given the Track 1.5 program initiated by Thailand to find a way to solve the Myanmar crisis, the current crisis was surely discussed.

Former UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon Visits Nay Pyi Taw to Meet with the General Min Aung Hlaing and Former President U Thein Sein

On April 23rd, 2023, former United Nations Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon suddenly arrived in Nay Pyi Taw to meet with the military leader General Min Aung Hlaing. The Military Council officially announced that Ki-moon was visiting in his capacity as the Vice President of The Elders group and had been invited by the coup leader Min Aung Hlaing. During his visit, Ki-moon also met with former president U Thein Sein. Ki-moon's visit can be seen as a desperate diplomatic move by the Military Council to divert international attention from the intense international pressure being applied to the regime. It should be noted that Ki-Moon also visited the NUG during a trip to Thailand.

Track 1.5 Diplomatic Attempt Initiated by Thailand to Resolve Myanmar Crisis

In the last week of April 2021, ASEAN negotiated an agreement, the Five-Point Consensus, with the Myanmar military calling for an immediate end to violence, dialogue among all parties, the appointment of a special envoy from the regional bloc, the provision of humanitarian assistance by the Southeast Asian bloc, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet with all

parties. The junta has since steadfastly ignored this agreement and waged a multi-front war against Myanmar's civilian population. The result of this war has been horrific: 3476 people have been killed; 17,750 have been arrested; and more than 112 people have been tortured to death or died in government custody, according to data taken by the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners as of May 8, 2023.

While ASEAN continues in vain to advocate for the Five-Point Consensus as the basis for all talks, their advocacy has not produced any material results. ASEAN's annual rotating chairmanship complicates their ability to implement consistent policies. Under the current chairmanship of Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi, ASEAN has taken a more active role than her predecessors. Yet, ASEAN's policies have still disappointed those opposed to the military regime.

Within this context, Thailand hosted regional talks in December 2022 to discuss the crisis in Myanmar, which included rare appearances by junta ministers. Several key members of ASEAN were not invited to these talks, however.

The next time Thailand initiated a Track 1.5 dialogue, only like-minded member states and officials from the military junta appear to have been invited. Those in attendance included the authoritarian states of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam along with China, India, Bangladesh and Japan. Additionally, Thailand continues to not include the NUG in these conversations, which violates their stated intention of holding inclusive talks. This led to the dialogues being heavily criticized. For example, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore refused to attend and seemed genuinely concerned that Thailand was having direct talks with the junta and denying Indonesia its prerogative as ASEAN's 2023 chairman.

On April 25, 2023, India hosted the second Track 1.5 dialogue with Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Bangladesh, Vietnam and China. Indonesia attended as an observer in its capacity as chairman of the regional bloc. This meeting could be summarized as a gathering of the neighboring countries who were directly impacted by the violence in Myanmar.

Thai representatives were strategically smart to let India's representatives facilitate discussions since this deflected criticism that Thailand received from previous dialogue. Yet India was not an ideal facilitator. India cannot be considered a champion of democracy under the increasingly illiberal government of Narendra Modi, whose control over the eastern portion of the nation is restrictive. India also fears that the failing junta in Myanmar could become even more dependent on China. The last thing that New Delhi wants is greater Chinese presence on its border. Similarly, Bangladesh has strategic interests that shift the nature of the discussion. It is hoping to exchange normalized ties with the junta for the return of thousands of Rohingya to

their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Thailand, meanwhile, sees itself as a political model for the junta to hold elections and maintain power. As such, these talks appear to be consolidating around the belief the current junta will remain in power.

During the meeting, the attendees also planned to hold the next Track 1.5 meeting in Laos.

Military Control Over Myanmar has been Steadily Decreasing Since the Coup

As of April 2023, the military has less control over roads and cities than prior to the 2021 military coup. The Free Burma Rangers (FBR) have recently produced [maps](#) that use color codes to display military influence over the different regions and roads. These maps highlight that the Myanmar military's influence is now limited outside the country's core to only major roads, with limited influence in regions at the outskirts of Myanmar.

The decreasing influence of the Military Council over regions of Myanmar is the result of other authorities gaining strength, such as Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs) and local defense forces that collectively organize to defend their regions from the military. In addition, it is reported that a panel of senior diplomats called the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar released research last year that indicated that the junta only had stable control of around 20 percent of the country's townships.

The decreasing control of the ruling junta has implications for neighboring countries who fear instability. The countries may see the junta's losing control as a sign they will be an unreliable partner in all bi-lateral negotiations. The most recent Track 1.5 dialogues made apparent that many of Myanmar's bordering countries are looking for promises to secure their borders and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with one another politically as well as economically. With Myanmar's border military and police outposts losing control as well as becoming more isolated, India and Thailand may want to consider adding other regional authorities to the conversations. It is time to acknowledge that the junta's efforts to dress themselves as a "state authority" doesn't match the reality of their control over the nation-state Myanmar.

Diplomatic Activities Developing Rapidly in Myanmar

April 2023's increase of diplomatic initiatives to Myanmar is a major change, given the almost complete isolation of the country during the first year after the military coup. The willingness of nations to engage with the State Administrative Council (SAC) demonstrates a willingness to ignore the nearly daily horrific atrocities being committed by the military against its own people. Indeed, the military junta had been practically excluded from the international

community ever since the coup in 2023. Yet in April 2023, visitors included the Director General of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC) (Asia), the Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand and the former Secretary General of the United Nations Mr. Ban Ki-moon. In particular, It is unusual that the Director-General of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party (IDCPC) (Asia) and Mr. Ban Ki-moon both met with former President Thein Sein (Can we say anything about why they are meeting with Thein Sein – is he being seen as a mover behind the scenes, or as a potential ally in reducing the Military Council's military attacks on domestic opponents, which some military figures believe is not aggressive enough?). In addition, the Track 1.5 diplomatic campaign, which was sponsored by Thailand, was also attended by all Myanmar's neighboring countries. Indeed, Myanmar's neighbors are increasing their engagement with the military junta, ignoring the inhuman acts the military is committing against its own people.

Recent Armed Conflicts

In April, military forces faced catastrophic losses despite the fact that they tried changing their strategies, maneuvers, and tactics. Military conflicts intensified during this month, especially in Kayah (Karenni) State, Chin State, and the Sagaing region. All aspects of the military presence in the Kale region, the Sagaing region, and Hakha in northern Chin State were attacked by the Chin National Army (CNA) and joint forces. Military Council convoys were especially vulnerable along the road between Falam township and Hakha city in Chin state, having been attacked with various different weapons including drones and mines. One Bulldozer, two tanks, and more than 30 vehicles were destroyed. More than a hundred soldiers were also killed. In addition, the CNA also attacked a Military Council camp in Falang Township and seized more weapons.

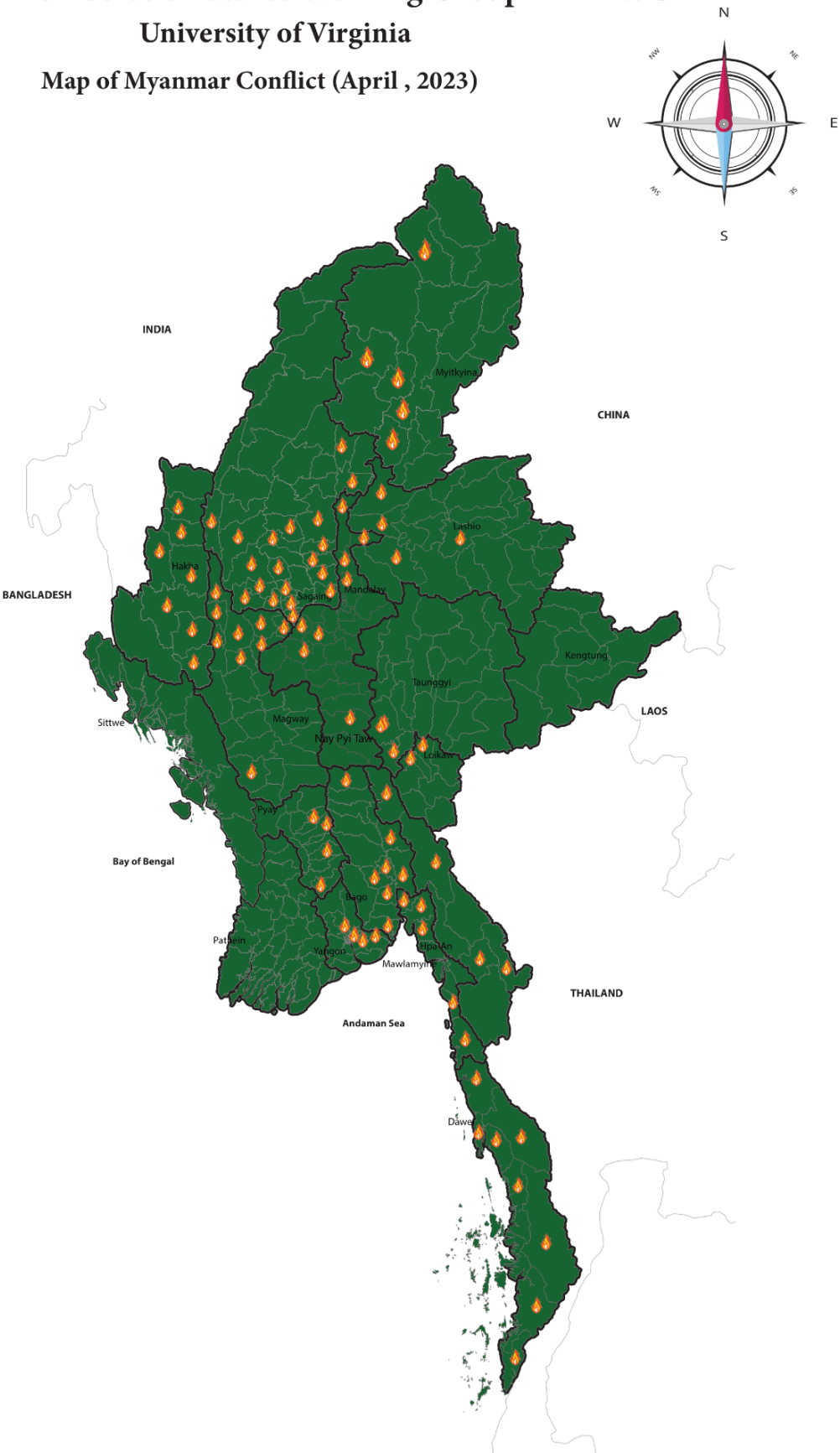
Additional fighting also took place in Kayah (Karenni) State and Shan-Kayah border in Pekon and Pinlaung townships. In these battles, the Military Council split into columns and launched offensives along Pinlong and Pekon areas in an attempt to gain control of the main access roads in Kayah. In order to gain control of the Loikaw-Demoso-Bawlakhe road in Kayah State, in response to the military incursions, the Democratic Resistance Organizations in Kayah State such as the KNDF and KA fought well and defended the territory under their control. There were significant casualties for the military junta's troops, with many of their weapons falling into the hands of the Democratic Resistance Organizations.

Table 1: Data of Myanmar Conflicts in April 2023			
States	Clashes between SAC and PDF/EAOs	SAC's soldiers killed	PDF killed
BAGO	5	33	2
CHIN	10	44	4
KACHIN	2	9	
KAYAH (Karenni)	4	38	1
KAYIN	13	123	5
MAGWAY	18	157	17
MANDALAY	6	112	2
MON	10	38	1
SAGAING	38	221	41
SHAN (North)	3	16	
SHAN (South)	4	20	2
TANINTHARYI	13	60	
YANGON	2	3	
TOTAL	128	874	75

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Map of Myanmar Conflict (April, 2023)



Atrocities and Human Rights Violations of the Military Council

The Military Council escalated military offensives by organizing several military columns to burn villages, arresting and killing civilians, and launching airstrikes on civilians. Human rights abuses and crimes against humanity were the most severe this month, ever since the military coup in 2021. In addition to the military atrocities at Pa Zi Gyi, the army's fighter jets also bombed the district hospital in Seetha village, Shwegu township, Kachin state. More than 20 houses and a school were destroyed. Another nine people were killed in Chin state due to military airstrikes on Waibula town in Falam township.

Table 2: Data of Human Rights Violations by SAC in April 2023					
States	Children Killed	Civilians Killed	Civilians Arrested	Villages Set on Fire	Houses Burned Down
BAGO			27		7
CHIN		14			71
KACHIN		73	342	4	1056
KAYAH (Karenni)					
KAYIN		1	1		10
MAGWAY		3	19	5	230
MANDALAY		14		2	103
MON		2	1	1	3
SAGAING	23	202	97	347	1848
SHAN (North)	2				43
SHAN (South)		1			
TANINTHARYI		3	32	7	12
YANGON			17		22
TOTAL	25	313	536	366	3405

List of Acronyms

CNA - Chin National Army

EROs - Ethnic Resistance Organizations

IDCPC - International Department of the Communist Party of China

KA - Karenni Army

KNDF - Karenni Nationalities Defence Force

NUG - National Unity Government

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