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# ONGOING CRISIS IN MYANMAR & IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Dr Cchavi Vasisht





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## About the Author



Dr Chavi Vasisht is a Research Associate at Vivekananda International Foundation. She has completed her PhD from the Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her thesis is titled, "Women Entrepreneurs in Nepal: A Case Study of Kathmandu and Rautahat Districts". She has been awarded the UGC NET Senior Research Fellowship to pursue her research work. She completed her MPhil from the Centre for South Asian Studies, where she understood international surrogacy from a sociological perspective within South Asia. She completed her MA in Sociology from the same university. She has also done an UNCTAD Online Course on Trade and Gender Linkages UNCTAD in 2020 and an introductory course in Public Policy from the Centre of Civil Society. For the past three years, she has had a keen interest in Myanmar and has published articles and commentaries on the same. In 2023, she co-edited a book, "Revisiting Myanmar" which was published in July 2023. Additionally, her areas of interest are South Asia, Nepal, Media Analysis, Gender and Social issues.



## Abstract

*Myanmar's strategic importance for India stems from its shared land and maritime borders, acting as a gateway to Southeast Asia. The ongoing conflict since the 2021 military coup has significantly impacted this relationship. 'Operation 1027' and the aftermath attacks since then across Myanmar borders have been a cause of concern for India. Myanmar's internal conflict and presence of armed groups pose security threats to India, particularly its Northeast states, due to the rise in cases of drug trafficking and activities of insurgent groups. The ongoing conflict has also led to an influx of refugees into India, straining resources and posing a threat to border security. China, on the other hand, has increased its presence in Myanmar to reach the Indian Ocean region, building infrastructure and controlling borders, which is a strategic concern for India. India needs a nuanced strategy that adapts to the evolving situation in Myanmar. Although the prospects for restoring normalcy in the country are not bright, the paper below focuses on how India can support peace initiatives, build long-term relationships, and secure India's strategic interests in the region.*

## **Introduction**

In February 2021, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing seized power, and President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were arrested. These events led to widespread protests and international condemnation. The National Unity Government (NUG) was formed in April 2021 which provided a platform for ousted lawmakers to continue their resistance against the coup. The military used violence, including airstrikes, which intensified the conflict and led to further civilian casualties. Despite facing violence and repression, the NUG and its allies continue to resist the military dictatorship and advocate for a federal democracy.

The attacks since 27 October 2023 represent the biggest challenge faced by the military. On 27 October 2023, the Northern Alliance or “Three Brotherhood Alliance” comprising the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Arakan Army (AA) simultaneously attacked Myanmar military positions in their respective areas. The attacks called Operation 1027 set the stage on fire and soon spread to other parts of northern and northwest Myanmar. Myanmar ethnic armed groups seized many outposts and towns and the alliance claimed that they would not stop until the military dictatorship ended. This has led to continuous incidents of violence and attacks.

In this backdrop, the country is undergoing a political, security and humanitarian crisis. There has been an escalation in hostilities which the military never witnessed before. Analysts have opined the military is at its weakest. The resistance forces have managed to overtake hundreds of military outposts, including strategic border crossings with China,



Thailand and India. This has serious ramifications for both India and China. More than 2.8 million people are now estimated to be displaced in Myanmar, according to the latest OCHA's Asia and the Pacific Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot. Thrice China initiated the peace talks, but despite participating in these talks, the Brotherhood Alliance, declared their commitment to continue fighting against the regime.

Similarly, India is facing a large influx of refugees since the fighting intensified in the western region especially the Sagaing, Chin and Rakhine States. The military have intensified air strikes which have displaced thousands in Myanmar and pushed to neighbouring countries, especially India and Thailand. The AA and TNLA have also alleged that the military has deployed chemical weapons in Chin State. But the takeover of Paletwa town in Rakhine state has raised serious concerns in India. The paper attempts to outline the strategic importance of Myanmar for India, the current developments in Myanmar and the inherent problems within Myanmar. It also delves into the role of external players and its influence on military actions. Finally, the paper attempts to suggest key policy recommendations for India's future approach towards Myanmar.

## **I. Myanmar's Strategic Importance for India**

Myanmar's strategic importance for India stems from its geographical location, historical ties, and security concerns. Myanmar shares a 1,643 km land border with India. Four North-Eastern States viz. Arunachal (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km) and Mizoram (510 km) share borders with Myanmar's Sagaing Region and Chin State. Additionally, the two sides share a maritime boundary that runs through the Andaman Sea, Coco Chanel, and Bay of Bengal. Myanmar is the only Southeast Asian country with direct land access and therefore acts as a bridge between India and Southeast Asia, facilitating economic and political opportunities in the region.

In the past decades, the economic ties strengthened with the increase as well as diversification in trade. Bilateral trade between India and Myanmar

stood at USD 1.895 billion for FY 2021-22, as compared to USD 1.299 billion in FY 2020-21. India's exports were valued at USD 893 million and imports were USD 1001 million in FY 2021-22. However, since the coup there have been hiccups in building these economic ties further. Additionally, India's development assistance portfolio in Myanmar has reached about USD 2 billion, the bulk of which is grants. Major people-centric projects include the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, the Border Area Development Programme in Chin State and capacity building assistance in setting up institutions for higher learning and research have been provided by India.

Additionally, the two sides share land borders, with many ethnic groups such as Mizo, Kuki, Chins, collectively known as Zo people and Nagas, sharing a common ancestry and ethnic ties. But historical border delineations during the British colonial era, influenced by political considerations rather than ethnic affinities, resulted in the dispersion of Zo people across international boundaries. The Free Movement Regime has been there for decades, and through the bilateral agreement was signed in 2018, which allowed cross-border movement up to 16 km without a visa. The agreement was brought to facilitate local border trade, improve access to education and healthcare for border residents, and strengthen diplomatic ties.<sup>1</sup>

However, with such closeness of borders comes security concerns for India. Myanmar's internal conflict and presence of armed groups have raised security concerns for India, particularly in its northeastern states. The Golden Triangle region, encompassing parts of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, is now the world's top producer of opium in the world, posing a threat to India's northeastern states. The Assam Rifles, from January to

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1 Under the agreement, individuals were also allowed up to two weeks in the neighbouring country by getting a one-year border pass. A 1968 government notification limited the free movement of people up to 40 km on either side of the border, which was further reduced to 16 km in 2004.

October 2023, recovered 18 weapons, contraband items worth \$889,000, and drugs worth \$10.96 million. Law enforcement agencies have seized over Rs 1,000 crore worth of drugs, and arrested more than 200 individuals, including Myanmar's nationals, in connection with drug-related activities in 2023.

Apart from drugs, the Myanmar military has utilised the services of Indian insurgent groups taking shelter in Myanmar to counter the PDF's and the KIA actions in the Sagaing Division that borders India which adds to India's security concerns. The ongoing conflict in Myanmar has led to a refugee influx into India which poses a threat to our border security. According to estimates, approximately 40,000 refugees in Mizoram and 5000 in Manipur have entered from Myanmar. In addition, 700 Myanmar soldiers crossed over Indian borders in the aftermath of Operation 1027 and subsequent battles in Chin and Rakhine states.

Further, China's increased presence in Myanmar with a view to reach the Indian Ocean region has been a cause of concern for India. It has built up infrastructure and controlled the borders. China treats Myanmar as its backyard and has reportedly set up listening/observing posts at places like the Cocos Islands and the Tenasserim region that cover the Bay of Bengal maritime movements. These have security and strategic implications for India.

## **II: Developments in Myanmar since the Military Takeover (2021-24)**

On 01 February 2021, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing took over power and arrested President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other key leaders, which resulted in the breakout of civil disobedience movement on February 03, 2021, followed by large scale protests. The police were accused of using excessive and lethal force against anti-coup demonstrations. On 11 February 2021, the United States imposed first sanctions targeting coup leader Min Aung Hlaing and other senior officials. Others including the European Union and Britain soon followed the suite.

On 19 February 2021, first casualty, Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing, 20 was reported. Since then, violence has escalated and the military forces have started using airstrikes against civilian population, a tactic that continues even today.

The National Unity Government (NUG) was formed in April 2021 by the ousted lawmakers and other activists. Its armed wing, the People's Defence Force, was formed in May 2021 by volunteer civilian fighters. In September 2021, NUG announced a defensive war against the military regime. Whereas, to control the government functioning, Gen Min Aung Hlaing formed a caretaker government and appointed himself prime minister in August 2021.

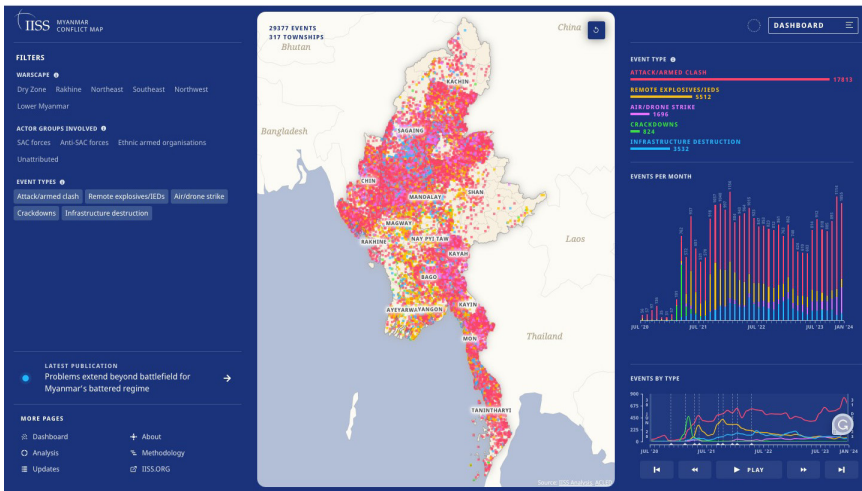
The resistance continued in the meantime and four Burmese political prisoners were executed by the military on 25 July 2022, drawing international criticism and condemnation. By December 2022, Aung San Suu Kyi's trial was concluded and she was sentenced to a total of 33 years in jail (reduced to 27 years in 2023). Between June and August 2022, the informal ceasefire reached in late 2020 between the Arakan Army (AA) and the military broke down, leading to escalated conflict in the Rakhine state.

In January 2023, Acting President Duwa Lashi La of the NUG delivered a speech, declaring 2023 as a turning point in the fight against military rule and outlining a one-year plan for revolution. And rightly so, on 27 October 2023, three Brotherhood Alliance (3BHA)<sup>2</sup>, namely the Myanmar National

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2 The three ethnic armed groups banded together in 2019. Initially, the alliance focussed on launching attacks on military troops in the MNDAA and AA strongholds of Shan and Rakhine states. Following the February 1, 2021, military coup and the crackdown that followed, the alliance released a statement condemning the killing of hundreds of peaceful protesters calling for the restoration of civilian rule. Since then, the alliance has launched several attacks, sometimes allying with the People's Defence Forces (PDF).

Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Arakan Army (AA), along with other allied forces launched the military 'Operation 1027'. The operations since then have inflicted significant challenges to the military's position by taking over more than 500 bases and 30-40 towns. The conflict has expanded to various states and regions, and spread to urban areas indicating a strategic shift.



January 2024 (ISP)

The ethnic armed groups, including Karenni, Arakan Army (AA), Chin, and Kachin, have gained significant territory, especially near China and India borders. For instance, the TNLA seized Namhsan and the 105-Mile Trade Zone, a crucial border trade area near Muse near the China-Myanmar border. The control of the trade zone is considered significant as it plays a crucial role in Myanmar's cross-border trade with China. Similarly, AA has seized all bases at India Myanmar border in Rakhine state, and most importantly the Paletwa town. This is significant for India as it is part of India's Kaladan Multi Modal Project. On 29 January 2024, the Karen National Union (KNU) said its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army, and resistance allies shot down the Eurocopter 365 helicopter heading to the Light Infantry (LI) Battalion 356 headquarters in Myawaddy, Karen State.

However, the military responded with increased artillery and aerial bombing. The TNLA, MDNAA and AA have also reported that the military has used chemical weapons. It must also be noted that the military is at its weakest with hundreds of soldiers reported to be surrendering and leaving outposts. For instance, to date, around 700 Myanmar soldiers have crossed Indian borders after leaving their posts. Furthermore, two fighter jets and one military helicopter had been shot down since the launch of Operation 1027 by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) and the Karenni Army (KA). Before the launch of Operation 1027, one jet fighter and three of the junta military's helicopters were shot down since the coup. Between December 2023 and January 2024, China attempted thrice to facilitate negotiations between the Myanmar military and the Three Brotherhood Alliance; twice in December 2023 and third time in January 2024. However, the talks failed as despite the cease-fire, clashes continued to occur.

Due to continued threat to its control and growing violence, on 31 January 2024, National Defence and Security Council announced it would prolong the emergency rule for another six-month, just ahead of the previous term which was supposed to expire on 01 February. In response, the NUG released a statement, commemorating the resistance against the military coup. In the statement, the NUG stated that despite facing brutal violence, the NUG, alongside ethnic allies and revolutionary forces, would remain committed to ending military dictatorship and establishing a federal democracy based on equality, justice, and human rights. Despite the military's escalating violence and refusal to engage in dialogue, the NUG and its allies reported gaining ground and calling for international support against the military's attempts to legitimise its rule through sham elections.

### **III. Political Prospects**

The opposition forces, i.e. the NUG and EAOs are coordinating their attacks against the military to end their dictatorship. However, if these organisations are only coordinating to end military rule, what will happen

after the war has ended? Will the opposition forces come together to form a new government after rewriting the constitution or Myanmar will further divide? NUG does have a voice, but is not united enough. These opposition units have different political interests and administration goals; therefore, there is a high possibility for eventual balkanisation of the country. And if Myanmar gets divided into different entities, will it be beneficial for India? China definitely will gain if the country breaks up as it is engaging with both the military and the opposition forces. On 01 January 2024, the NUG came out with a policy document on its approach towards China, which majorly focuses on safeguarding the economic and strategic interests of China in the country. Additionally, the NUG has a limited presence on the ground as most of its presence is in the virtual/cyber world and outside Myanmar. While the military has lost control over key border towns and other towns where in some cases the EAOs have set up civilian administration; the military's main control lies along the Irrawaddy corridor and key cities like Yangon and Mandalay.

Further, the PDFs are growing in number and apart from the EAGs, there are over 700 PDF and other independent fighting groups that are small in size. Unlike a year ago, PDFs are now a capable force which is well-trained and equipped. The question arises as to which countries or organisations are supporting and supplying arms to these ethnic armies and PDFs. China here seems to be one of the major players as the MNDAA and TNLA are close allies of China. Whether China's interference is mere annoyance with the military leaders for failing to bring an end to online scams and slow implementation of the BRI or seriously the military is losing the ground. Even the Chinese brokered temporary ceasefire has failed to end the fighting. So, the question is whether the limits of China have also been reached? Even the western countries, especially the US are also supporting the NUG and to a certain extent may be supplying arms and technology. Especially with the latest use of drones from the side of the PDFs suggest that they are getting outside support. Also, there is a possibility that China and the US are coordinating efforts given the latest meeting between Jake Sullivan and Wang Yi.

It must be noted that the armed forces of Myanmar are weak. For the first time the military is facing a majority led revolution. The military does not have the capability to take back the bases lost to the opposition forces. Though the military constitutes about 3.25 lakh strong, its effective fighting strength is only about a lakh. Further there are divisions within the army; incidents of defections, surrendering and corruption cases being reported. Myanmar soldiers have crossed the Indian, Chinese and Bangladesh borders after being run out from their posts.

Traditionally recruiting from the Bamar majority, the military's association with safeguarding territorial integrity and national unity faced challenges from ethnic groups. However, the coup has led to a notable transformation in Bamar youth perceptions, challenging the military's role and aligning more with the ethnic groups' demand for a true federal democracy with sustainable autonomy for federal units. This shift has implications for the military's ability to recruit new soldiers. Additionally, the imposition of conscription law has created resentment and resulted in more of the Bamar youth to volunteer their services to the NUG to join the PDF's. Even the veterans seem to have a negative view of the ongoing developments in Myanmar and the way the military is addressing the same. Finally, there is growing suspicion among the military generals themselves, with the fast rotation of generals in the past months.

#### **IV. Inherent Problems in Myanmar and Current Uncertainties**

There is a pervasive distrust between the majority and minority ethnic groups in the frontier areas, particularly with the Karen population. This long-standing distrust has been exploited by the military leadership, projecting ethnic groups as seeking to fragment the state and undermining the Panglong Agreement. Myanmar's armed forces have played a pivotal role in the country's history since the nationalist movement seeking independence from colonial rule. Initially part of the freedom movement led by figures like Aung San and Ne Win, the Burma Independence Army (BIA) emerged and played a crucial role in achieving Burma's independence



in 1948. The People's Volunteer Organisation (PVO), formed as a guerrilla force, became an integral part of the ruling party under U Nu, highlighting the intertwining of the military and political spheres in Myanmar.

Over time, the Tatmadaw transitioned into a predominantly Bamar force after securing control over Rangoon in 1949. Ne Win, who later led the Tatmadaw and orchestrated a coup in 1962, emphasised the military's responsibility for maintaining national objectives like territorial integrity and unity. The 2008 Constitution formalised this role. Despite instances of democratic rule, the Tatmadaw, viewed as a political force, continued to be deeply embedded in Myanmar's governance.

The coup in February 2021 exposed a growing divide as the Bamar youth, traditionally supportive of the Tatmadaw, started challenging long-held beliefs. This shift, influenced by the federal democracy charter (FDC), indicates a changing sentiment in favour of a true federal constitution, accommodating the demands of ethnic groups for sustainable autonomy within a federal structure. The historic association of the Tatmadaw with safeguarding national interests faces new challenges, reflecting evolving dynamics within Myanmar.

Given the continuous defeats and failures at major fronts and problems within the system, the future of Senior General Min Hlaing, faces increasing strain. There are questions about the possibility of Min Hlaing being replaced. Furthermore, it is also important to assess the viability of a military solution, i.e., whether a situation has arisen where a military solution is no longer feasible. And if the military continues to be an important player, what would be the basis of settlement. It is crucial to evaluate whether the military leadership is now open to a negotiated settlement and the extent of change they are willing to accept. Exploring the basis of a settlement, especially concerning the NUG demand for abrogation of the 2008 Constitution and the military's political role. The idea of reconciliation seems far-fetched, and even the possibility of establishing a union of Myanmar is bleak, the EAOs are therefore, proposing collective leadership.

## **V. Role of External Powers**

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2669 on the situation in Myanmar with a vote of 12 in favour to none against, and 3 abstentions (China, India, and the Russian Federation) on 21 December 2022. The Council “demands an immediate end to all forms of violence throughout the country and immediately releases all arbitrarily detained prisoners, including President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.” This was the first ever Security Council resolution on Myanmar, nearly two years after the military coup.

The United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia have imposed coordinated as well as individual sanctions on Myanmar nationals as well as entities. The most significant were sanctions on Myanmar’s Ministry of Defence, Election Commission, two banks, Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) and Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank (MICB) and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). Notably, there were no sanctions on these banks under previous military regimes. And while MOGE was not added to the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list, denying access to the U.S. banking system, it marked the first direct U.S. targeting of the enterprise, crucial for Myanmar’s foreign currency earnings from natural gas revenues.

While the western nations have imposed sanctions, countries such as China and Russia have continued support to the military. Russia is supplying military equipment and key servicing. While supplies from China and Singapore remain largely unaffected, understanding the constraints from Russia is crucial for assessing the military’s operational capabilities. The delivery of the first shipment of two Russian Su-30 fighter jets was significant. The increased supply of fighter jets raises concerns about potential military actions against opposition forces and civilians, considering the military’s recent use of jets in operations against rebel forces. Furthermore, on November 5, the first Myanmar-Russia Maritime Security Exercise (MARUEX) took place in the Andaman Sea.

China will likely remain a fundamental external influence. While it has

maintained cordial relations with the Myanmar military and engaged economically and diplomatically and even supported at UNSC council veto, China has also engaged with the NUG. Recently NUG issued a 10-point China Policy promising to safeguard Chinese interests in the country. Additionally, China's close relations with few ethnic armies, especially providing them arms is not unknown. As stated earlier, there is an understanding that China has supported the recent attacks against the military for its own interests. Two of the three Alliance members, Tang and Kokang (Chinese-speaking), are under direct Chinese influence. The BA's actions in Northern Shan, challenging the military and seizing crucial border crossings, suggest a shift in Beijing's patience with the military. Also, China was supposed to hold the fourth round of Track 1.5 diplomatic talks, but given the trust deficit between China and military leaders and the recent engagements between US and China, the talks seem far distant.

Finally, to address the crisis in Myanmar, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders and General Min Aung Hlaing agreed on a peace plan, known as the Five-Point Consensus, in April 2021. In October 2021, the military representatives were barred from ASEAN meetings. However, it is internally divided on its approach towards Myanmar. This became more evident during summit level talks in 2023. Thailand approached the Myanmar leaders with Track 1.5 diplomatic talks as well as met Aung San Suu Kyi which came as a shocker for other ASEAN leaders. The military has till date not allowed the ASEAN Special Envoy to conduct a meeting with Suu Kyi. Now with the change in government in Thailand, what could be this government's approach is something to watch carefully. Furthermore, ASEAN has now adopted a troika system to deal with the crisis in Myanmar. With Laos as the next chair, Indonesia and Malaysia will work together to bring resolution to the crisis. However, there are voices which suggest that Laos is not happy with the current system of troika. In January 2024, Laos appointed Alounkeo Kittikhoun, as ASEAN's special envoy, who visited Myanmar and met military leaders. And in the latest round of Foreign Ministers meeting held in January 2024, Myanmar for the first time has sent a non-political representative to attend the meetings in Laos.

## VI. India's Approach

Since the military took over power in February 2021, India-Myanmar relations are in a state of standstill. Though the Indian Foreign Secretaries have visited Myanmar in December 2021 and November 2022, these visits were aimed at securing India's Northeast region and protecting border security. It is however felt that India could have given more importance to Myanmar as it is a large neighbour. The Indian Defence Secretary's visit to Myanmar was aimed at addressing the ongoing violence in Manipur. Meetings with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and other military officials emphasised the commitment to preventing the use of their territories for illegal activities. Indian Deputy National Security Adviser Vikram Misri attended the eighth anniversary of the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement on 15 October 2023.

Recently, on 29 February 2024, an Indian delegation led by Rajya Sabha member K. Vanlalvena crossed into rebel-held territory in Myanmar's Chin State to meet with the Arakan Army (AA), indicating a potential shift in India's Myanmar policy amidst the ongoing conflict following the 2021 coup. The visit focussed on assessing the progress of the India-funded Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP), which aims to connect Northeast India to the sea through Myanmar but has been stalled due to the conflict. This meeting suggests India's recognition of the complex ethno-political dynamics in western Myanmar and the need to engage with various armed groups, including the AA and the Chin National Front/Army, for the security of the border and the success of the KMMTTP. The situation is complicated by historical territorial claims and the strategic importance of Paletwa. India may need to mediate between the AA and Chin groups to ensure the project's success and foster a peaceful and inclusive future for the region.

As a result of ongoing civil war, especially opposite the Indian borders, there has been a rise in the number of refugees coming in. By the end of 2023, India was hosting over 74,600 refugees from Myanmar, more than an estimated 54,100 of whom arrived since the coup in February

2021 (UNHCR accessed 15/07/2023). The problem of insurgency and drugs across borders is increasing. Indian insurgent groups collaborating with the Tatmadaw and PDFs in Sagaing Division pose security threats. Security concerns arise from the sophistication of weaponry and military tactics in the hands of Indian insurgent groups. Law enforcement agencies have seized over Rs 1,000 crore worth of drugs and arrested more than 200 individuals, including Myanmar's nationals, in connection with drug-related activities in 2023.

Since Operation 1027, 700 Myanmar soldiers have crossed Indian borders, most of them have been sent back by the Indian side. The Indian borders in the past few weeks have been controlled by the ethnic armies. Less than 30 per cent of Indian borders are now controlled by the Myanmar military. The Arakan Army claimed to have taken complete control of Paletwa town in Chin State after attacking and seizing all 24 junta bases including strategic bases and military command headquarters. (The Indian Government pays one per cent of KMMTP to the Arakan Army). Also, the ethnic armies are expanding their control not just militarily but also administratively.

## Policy Recommendations for India

India's approach to Myanmar's crisis requires a comprehensive evaluation, considering the evolving ground realities and potential security implications.

1. **Expand our Relations with other Stakeholders:** There is a need for policy recalibration as the military is losing control over significant territories, especially in Western Myanmar. Since the Indian borders in the past few weeks have been controlled by the ethnic armies, therefore it has been pertinent now to consider engaging with NUG and EAOs especially controlling our border areas - Sagaing, Chin and Rakhine states. Maintaining ties with the Kachin, Nagas, Chin, and Rakhine groups is vital. But the purpose and modality of this engagement needs to be worked out. India should also push for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi as she

still commands a clear majority.

2. **Encourage the Northeast States** of India to coordinate with the Central Government with a view to work out a methodology to deal with instability in Myanmar with an aim to build on the close ethnic and people to people ties developed over decades. Building economic ties and close relationships with frontier communities are crucial for India's strategic and security interests.
3. **Free Movement Regime:** The GOI has announced it will fence; as a result, free movement will also be restricted and controlled. However, it is suggested that India should not abolish the Free Movement Regime. One, it is difficult to fence the borders given the terrain and second, it will adversely affect people to people ties. Though areas which are facing trouble can be fenced temporarily. Also, India can adopt modern technology, like drones to upkeep the surveillance.
4. **Recalibrate Development Assistance:** A comprehensive policy framework involving capacity-building and socio-developmental assistance should be developed.
5. **Appoint an interlocutor/special envoy:** Someone who is experienced in political and diplomatic realms should facilitate communication and cooperation with stakeholders involved. Unlike China, India lacks an evolved constituency in Myanmar but has goodwill, particularly among democratic forces. Also, close cooperation between experts in the field and government is essential. India should take a whole-of-establishment approach in its engagement with Myanmar. This should include apart from the MEA, other arms of the government like MoD, MHA, Finance, Commerce, Transportation etc. and also bordering state governments from the Northeast and non-governmental agencies like academics, think-tank and other individuals.

6. **Two dialogue formats/Peace Conclave** can be considered to build up a blueprint and even give a financial package:

- **Between ASEAN and QUAD countries**
- **Neighbour Plus Countries**

In conclusion, India needs a nuanced strategy that adapts to the evolving situation in Myanmar and accounts for security challenges. The focus should be on building long-term relationships, supporting peace initiatives, and securing India's strategic interests in the region. Even Myanmar wants India to play a key role especially for constitution building and institutionalisation of federalism. It is important to note that if India does not act upon, it will open gates for others. Already China is deeply present in Myanmar and treats Myanmar as its backyard.

## **Annexure**

### **Myanmar - Timeline from Independence to Military Coup in 2021**

1948 - Burma becomes independent with U Nu as prime minister.

1958-60 - Caretaker government, led by army Chief of Staff General Ne Win, formed following a split in the ruling AFPFL party.

1960 - U Nu's party faction wins decisive victory in elections, but his promotion of Buddhism as the state religion and his tolerance of separatism angers the military.

1962 - U Nu's faction ousted in military coup led by Gen Ne Win, who abolished the federal system and inaugurated "the Burmese Way to Socialism" - nationalising the economy, forming a single-party state with the Socialist Programme Party as the sole political party, and banning independent newspapers.

1974 - New constitution comes into effect, transferring power from the armed forces to a People's Assembly headed by Ne Win and other former military leaders; body of former United Nations secretary-general U Thant returned to Burma for burial.

1975 - Opposition National Democratic Front formed by regionally-based minority groups, who mounted guerrilla insurgencies.

1981 - Ne Win relinquishes the presidency to San Yu, a retired general, but continues as chairman of the ruling Socialist Programme Party.

1982 - Law designating people of non-indigenous background as "associate citizens" in effect bars such people from public office.

1988 - Thousands of people are killed in anti-government riots. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (Slorc) is formed.

1989 - Slorc declares martial law, arrests thousands of people, including advocates of democracy and human rights, renames Burma 'Myanmar', with the capital, Rangoon, becoming Yangon. NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, is put under house arrest.

1990 - Opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) wins landslide victory in general election, but the result is ignored by the military.

2000 October - Aung San Suu Kyi begins secret talks with the ruling council.

2003 August - Khin Nyunt becomes prime minister. He proposed to hold a



convention in 2004 on drafting a new constitution as part of the “roadmap” to democracy.

2004 January - Government and Karen National Union - most significant ethnic group fighting government - agree to end hostilities.

2004 May - Constitutional convention begins, despite boycott by National League for Democracy (NLD) whose leader Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest.

2007 January - China and Russia veto a draft US resolution at the UN Security Council urging Myanmar to stop persecuting minority and opposition groups.

2007 August - Wave of public dissent sparked by fuel price hikes. Dozens of activists are arrested.

2007 September - Military government declares 14 years of constitutional talks complete and closes the National Convention.

2008 January- A series of bomb blasts hits the country.

2008 April - Government publishes proposed new constitution, which allocates a quarter of seats in parliament to the military and bans opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from holding office.

2008 May - Referendum on new constitution proceeds amid humanitarian crisis following cyclone. Government says 92% voted in favour of the draft constitution and insists it can cope with cyclone aftermath without foreign help. Junta renewed Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest.

2009 March- Senior US State Department official Stephen Blake visits for talks with Foreign Minister Nyan Win in what the US calls a routine visit. Myanmar says it was notable given his seniority.

2009 April - The National League for Democracy (NLD) main opposition group offers to take part in planned elections if the government frees all political prisoners, changes the constitution and admits international observers.

2010 March - Government announces that long-awaited election laws have been passed, with provisions for an electoral commission hand-picked by the junta. NLD votes to boycott polls. A splinter party - National Democratic Front (NDF) - later gains legal status and plans to compete in polls.

2010 November - Main military-backed party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), claims resounding victory in the first election for 20 years. Opposition groups allege widespread fraud and the election is widely condemned as a sham. The junta says the election marks the transition from military rule to a civilian democracy. A week after the election, Aung San Suu

Kyi was released from house arrest.

2011 December - US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visits, meets Aung San Suu Kyi and holds talks with President Thein Sein. The US offers to improve relations if democratic reforms continue.

President Thein Sein signs law allowing peaceful demonstrations for the first time; NLD re-registers as a political party in advance of by-elections for parliament due to be held early in 2012.

Burmese authorities agree to a truce deal with rebels of the Shan ethnic group and orders the military to stop operations against ethnic Kachin rebels.

2012 April - NLD candidates sweep the board in parliamentary by-elections, with Aung San Suu Kyi elected.

2012 May - Manmohan Singh pays first official visit by an Indian prime minister since 1987.

2012 November - US President Barack Obama visits to offer “the hand of friendship” in return for more reforms. He urges reconciliation with the Rohingya minority.

2013 May - President Thein Sein visits Washington. President Obama praises Myanmar’s political and economic progress, but criticises violence against Rohingya Muslims.

2015 March - A draft ceasefire agreement is signed between the government and 16 rebel groups.

2015 November - Opposition National League for Democracy - led by Aung San Suu Kyi - wins enough seats in parliamentary elections to form a government.

2016 March - Htin Kyaw sworn in as president, ushering in a new era as Aung San Suu Kyi’s democracy movement takes power after 50 years of military domination.

2017 August - Rohingya militants attack police posts in Rakhine. The response by security forces prompts an exodus of Rohingya and allegations that their actions amount to ethnic cleansing.

2017 October - The number of Rohingya Muslims who have fled military action in Rakhine state and sought refuge in Bangladesh is estimated at one million.

2018 March - President Htin Kyaw resigns on health grounds and is replaced by Win Myint, a fellow Suu Kyi loyalist.

2018 August - A UN report accuses Myanmar's military leaders of carrying out genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity against Rohingya Muslims, calling for six generals to face trial at the International Criminal Court. It also accuses Aung San Suu Kyi of failing to prevent the violence. Myanmar rejects the findings. Suu Kyi later defends Myanmar against genocide charges brought at the Hague.

2019 - Fighting begins in Rakhine between government troops and the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic Rakhine group seeking greater regional autonomy.

2020 - The NLD claims a resounding victory in parliamentary elections taking more votes than it did in 2015. The USDP demands a rerun of the election and calls for military help to ensure fairness, alleging irregularities.

2021

26 January: Army military spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun warns the armed forces will "take action" if the election dispute is not settled and declines to rule out staging a coup, asking the election commission to investigate voter lists it said contained discrepancies.

28 January: The election commission rejects allegations of vote fraud, saying there were no errors large enough to affect the credibility of the vote.

30 January: Myanmar's military says it will protect and abide by the constitution and act according to the law.

01 February: The military imposes a state of emergency and says power has been transferred to military chief Min Aung Hlaing, after Aung San Suu Kyi and other senior government officials were arrested in a series of early morning raids.

## **About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION**

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