



Special Advisory Council for MYANMAR

New SAC-M Briefing Paper: Effective Control in Myanmar 2024 Update

30 May 2024

The trajectory of the conflict in Myanmar has accelerated rapidly in favour of the country's resistance actors, finds a new briefing paper published by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) today. The junta is not the de facto government of Myanmar as it is not in effective control of the state. International actors should immediately revise policies that are bound by that false assumption and instead massively scale-up support to Myanmar's many resistance actors, SAC-M said.

The briefing paper, 'Effective Control in Myanmar 2024 Update', presents a picture of the dynamics of contestation and control across all of Myanmar more than three years since the beginning of an historic national uprising in response to the Myanmar military's attempted coup of 1 February 2021. SAC-M finds that armed resistance to the junta has expanded across the country and that the junta has proven incapable of reversing, or even arresting, the rate of its military losses to resistance forces, which have accelerated considerably since October 2023.

"We had identified that the trajectory of the conflict favoured the resistance in 2022, when the prevailing narrative within the international community was that the military was in control and would soon be holding elections," said Yanghee Lee of SAC-M. **"Since then, the overall trajectory of the conflict has accelerated further in favour of the resistance. The junta is not a de facto government as it is not in effective control of the state. The international community must understand this reality and work directly with resistance authorities and civil society to deliver urgent aid and assistance to the Myanmar people."**

Several years of sustained pressure from acts of non-violent and armed nationwide resistance paved the way for a series of rapid military advances against the junta by resistance forces beginning in October 2023. Between October 2023 and April 2024,¹ the junta lost meaningful ground access to the majority of townships on Myanmar's international borders and 55 cities and towns were taken by resistance forces.

The junta has responded to its mounting military losses by escalating its commission of atrocities against civilians, increasingly through airstrikes and artillery. 2.7 million

¹ The data collection period for this paper is up until the end of March 2024.





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people have been internally displaced since the coup and 18.6 million people require humanitarian assistance as a result of junta attacks and junta blockades on vital humanitarian assistance. The majority of those in dire need are in areas outside of stable junta control, where the junta has limited capacity to address the humanitarian crisis it has deliberately created.

“The military junta is refusing to meet the demands of the democratic revolution, despite the historic advances being made by Myanmar’s allied resistance forces. The junta shows only a commitment to further violence and suppression,” said Chris Sidoti of SAC-M. **“The international community must act to protect people from the junta’s atrocities against civilians by ceasing all transfers of arms and imposing comprehensive arms embargoes, strengthening financial sanctions on the junta and referring the entire situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.”**

SAC-M’s analysis published today, an update to its 2022 analysis on effective control, features three maps² depicting illustrative visualisations indicating degrees of contestation and control across Myanmar’s varied geography. The qualitative assessments used to produce the visual models were guided by internationally accepted criteria for determining whether an entity has effective control as a de facto government of a state, derived from international case law. Those criteria include the acceptance of the population, the capacity to administer functions of government and degree of permanency, in addition to taking control of territory into account.

SAC-M finds that resistance groups collectively have greater control in more territory than the junta, but no one group exercises de facto power over the state itself. Governance capacity across the country remains weak, including for resistance authorities, who are straining to meet the growing humanitarian needs of the population and protect civilians from escalating junta violence.

“Fears of increased violence as inevitable should the junta collapse, fail to account for the fact that the main source of violence and instability in Myanmar is the junta,” said Marzuki Darusman of SAC-M. **“The path towards lasting peace and stability for Myanmar is through realisation of the unified federal democratic aspirations of the Myanmar people and their legitimate representatives: the National Unity Government, National Unity Consultative Council, ethnic revolutionary organisations and broader civil society. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the international community have a moral and political responsibility to the people**

² On 20 April 2024, the New York Times published a map based on SAC-M’s map, “Contestation and Control Across Myanmar: March 2024 (Figure 1)”. SAC-M was not informed of the New York Times map before publication and does not endorse the New York Times’ representation of SAC-M’s assessments.





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of Myanmar to do everything in their power to support this outcome as quickly as possible.”

The international community must respond to Myanmar’s fluid and complex crisis in a manner that accepts the dynamics on the ground and upholds obligations under international law to facilitate the clearly stated democratic aspirations of the Myanmar people. Included in SAC-M’s recommendations to States, the United Nations and ASEAN, are immediate actions that must be taken to undermine the military junta’s ability to commit atrocities and to massively scale-up provision of humanitarian assistance to people in need through direct coordination with resistance authorities and civil society. Longer-term support from the international community will be critical for resistance actors to build the capacity of government departments and services and to promote economic development in post-revolution Myanmar.

The international system has long failed the Myanmar people, but the crisis can no longer be ignored.



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