



Out with
the **OLD**
and in with
the **NEW**

DEFECTING TO MYANMAR'S SPRING REVOLUTION



PEOPLE'S GOAL
REPORT
October 2024

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ACRONYMS

CRPH	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
ERO	Ethnic Revolutionary Organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
PDF	People's Defense Forces
SAC	State Administrative Council

INTRODUCTION

Between February 2021 and late 2023, more than 15,000 soldiers, police officers, and militia members defected¹ to join the Spring Revolution in repudiation of military rule. ² This wave of defections was further bolstered by Operation 1027, launched in October 2023, which has precipitated at least 4,000 additional security forces surrenders.³

The scale of these defections and surrenders is unprecedented in Myanmar's fraught history, and they expose deep structural realignments between the military and the ethnically diverse public. Specifically, they provide evidence that the public's embrace of defectors can compromise the junta and broaden the revolution's base. Security force defectors carry unique perspectives on the ideologies and practices that pervade the military they left, the principles of the revolution that drew them in, and the practical possibilities and exigencies for a new, federal, rights-based, post-military Myanmar.

Since the 2021 coup, major international third parties, including ASEAN, China, and India, have called for "inclusive talks" with the SAC, asking victims to negotiate with their tormentors.⁴ As proposed, Myanmar's long-suffering people have seen such talks as a bridge too far. This does not mean, however, that the public and members of the military must remain permanent mortal enemies.

The People's Goal panel discussions analyzed in this report demonstrate how democratic and revolutionary leaders can engage directly in productive and congenial dialogue with former members of the security forces. Thus, these panels offer hope for the possibility of cooperation and healing in post-military Myanmar.

PEOPLE'S GOAL AND THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

Organization Background

People's Goal is a Myanmar-based civil society organization actively involved in the Spring Revolution. Initially founded as People's Soldiers in March 2021 by defected military officers, it was renamed People's Goal in 2022 to reflect its broader mission and more inclusive leadership and participation. On January 1, 2022, it launched its first Sunday Talk episode, styled as a "Thought Process Program." These episodes continue to this day.

In its current form, civilians are part of the leadership team, and the organization's goals have expanded beyond advocating for defections to promoting democracy, civic rights, minority inclusivity, and federalism.

<https://peoplesgoal.org>

There is now widespread optimism that the Spring Revolution will succeed in ending not just the current junta, but the entrenched power of the military which has crushed short-lived democratic governments over the past 70 years. The diversity of anti-dictatorship groups in Myanmar necessitates strategic cohesion to prevent internal conflicts and maintain external pressure on the junta. It is equally important to weaken the military from within through non-violent strategies, including defections. Thus, People's Goal's guiding thesis⁵ resonates with research indicating that resistance movements with substantial military defection are forty-six times more likely to succeed.⁶ In their important book *Why Civil Resistance Works*, Erika Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan explain,

Our central contention is that non-violent campaigns have a participation advantage over violent insurgencies, which is an important factor in determining campaign outcomes. The moral, physical, informational, and commitment barriers to participation are much lower for nonviolent resistance than for violent insurgency. Higher levels of participation contribute to a number of mechanisms necessary for success, including enhanced resilience, higher probabilities of tactical innovation, expanded civic disruption (thereby raising the cost to the regime of maintaining the status quo), and loyalty shifts involving the opponent's erstwhile supporters, including members of the security forces.

In their discussions of diverse topics over more than two years, many People's Goal panelists have supported these claims about the power of defection as a revolutionary strategy. By platforming these discussions, advocacy campaigns and support organizations like People's Goal act as liaisons between security defectors and revolutionary political institutions. They promote alignment between diverse democratic stakeholders by opening civic space and active dialogue. This ensures that defectors' insights and experience are not squandered, broadens the revolution, and helps prepare for Myanmar's more inclusive future.

Challenges Facing Defectors and Support Organizations

Transcripts from People's Goal panels indicate that the escalating number of defections, desertions, and surrenders presents logistical challenges to the revolutionary forces and political entities providing support.

Logistics

- **Basic Needs:** Defectors, often accompanied by their families, require essential provisions such as food and security. The lack of robust international support intensifies these needs.⁸
- **Vetting and Debriefing:** Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) must carefully vet and debrief defectors to ensure they are not agents of the SAC.

"You have to be careful."

On the importance of vetting, a defected captain said,

“Can new defectors be trusted? Of course, you have to be careful. There are no guarantees. Everyone should be checked out. There are spies, but they are not that common. I heard about a couple of men I worked with who joined the CDM as spies. In any conflict, there must be healthy suspicion. When I joined, they did not share any important information with me for quite some time, which is natural.”

Coordination and Policy Development

ERO Coordination: Each ERO has a unique agenda and history, which may affect their attitudes toward security force defectors who were their erstwhile enemies.⁹ By coordinating efforts between EROs and the NUG, and by leveraging the unique perspectives of defectors, the revolution can strengthen its impact and pave the way for a democratic Myanmar.¹⁰

On the need for such coordination, a defector said,

“Over the last two and half years, there hasn't been strong collaboration between different defection groups. There must be better coordination, collaboration, outreach, and advocacy. All stakeholders [the NUG, NUCC, EROs, international community, etc.] must be brought together to discuss defection and appreciate its value. If the military were to collapse from within, this would be a huge advantage to everyone in the revolution.”¹¹

Political Integration Challenges:

- **Anti-Democratic Backgrounds:** Defectors from the Myanmar military face significant barriers to political integration due to their past affiliations with anti-democratic institutions.
- **Limited Political Access:** These individuals have had minimal exposure to political institutions, even at the local level, let alone to influential bodies like the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and the NUG.
- **Future Inclusion:** Following the revolution's military victory, the people will face the challenge of building a new federal union that includes citizens who have never participated in the democratic process.¹²

- **Need for Transitional Justice:** While inclusion should be a priority, the National Unity Government (NUG) maintains that security agents who commit serious crimes while in military service must be punished during the transition period.¹³
- The legal status of lower-ranking junta staff will be subject to debate, but People's Goal panelists have argued that excluding hundreds of thousands of them from political participation would likely be counterproductive.¹⁴

“We cannot preach only forgive and forget.”

On the challenges of transitional justice, an official working on the matter had the following to say:

“We cannot just tell victims and offenders to get along. We cannot expect the people to accept all defectors. But people must be taught the core values of the defection movement. There must be truth-seeking, accountability, punishment, remedy, and transformation.

There are many different kinds of defectors. Some have no proper motivation. Some might be war criminals. In those cases, we cannot ask people to forgive them. The first question is who is the defector and what have they done? We need to be brave enough to look for the truth. Then the victims will feel some level of satisfaction. We cannot preach only forgive and forget. It is everyone's right to know the truth. We need to know who the defectors are. However, if we only punish, what would the incentive be for defectors?”¹⁵

Overcoming Obstacles:

- **Maintaining Contacts:** Despite these obstacles, many defectors maintain contact with their former peers in the security forces.¹⁶
- **Recruitment and Intelligence:** They often recruit their peers to join the resistance and share valuable intelligence to support the democratic movement.

These themes drawn from People's Goal panels suggest that by addressing these logistical and political integration challenges, revolutionary forces can better support defectors and enhance their contributions to the democratic movement in Myanmar.¹⁷

Data & Methodology

This report analyzes and synthesizes key points from approximately fifty-four online panels conducted between January 2023 and August 2024. The panels cover diverse topics related to the current political crisis in Myanmar, and they generally took the form of open brainstorming discussions rather than prepared statements. Just under 50% of participants were military defectors, though not every session was directly related to defection issues.

The primary language for each session was Burmese, and simultaneous English translation was provided by experienced translators. People's Goal staff then compiled and paraphrased the discussions, cutting out some of the redundancies and editing the translations for clarity.

Panels held before January 2023 have not yet been transcribed into English and await further analysis.

REPORT STRUCTURE

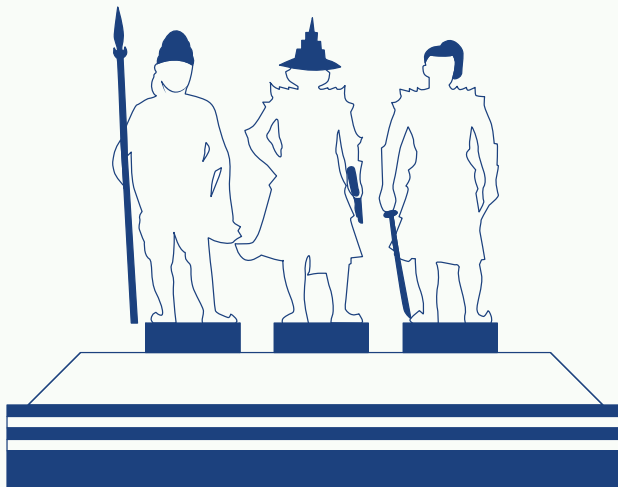
The report is structured under three main headings:

- I. The Myanmar's military structure and ideology and how attitudes among security force members have changed since the coup.
- II. The structure and ideology of the revolution and its relationship with security force defectors.
- III. Policy Recommendations.

Section I prioritizes defectors' descriptions of the world of the Myanmar military. These defectors held various ranks as soldiers and medical officers, and they offer insights into the structure of military institutions and the attitudes that prevail in military communities.

Section II synthesizes discussions between defectors and other panelists in diverse roles within Myanmar's democratic movement. They include members of the NUG, NUCC, labor and student unions, PDFs and EROs, teachers, and researchers. Since most defectors lack backgrounds in politics and public speaking, these other panelists serve as valuable interlocutors able to engage defectors about the structure and ideology of the revolution and defectors' potential to contribute to it.

Section III comprises People's Goal's policy recommendations to Myanmar's democratic stakeholders and international democratic governments. These recommendations are based on the discussions analyzed in this report, though they do not strictly represent the explicit views of all participants.



Section I
INSIDE THE MILITARY

INSIDE THE MILITARY

CORRUPTION

The Myanmar military's justification for the 2021 coup centers on claims of corruption within the National League for Democracy (NLD) that allegedly compromised the 2020 election.¹⁸ However, insights from numerous defectors participating in People's Goal panel discussions reveal a different story—one of pervasive corruption within the military itself.¹⁹

- **Misappropriation of Funds:** Officers frequently misappropriate soldiers' salaries and food supplies. In cases of desertion, these officers often fail to report the missing soldiers, continuing to collect their salaries and even applying for loans in their names.²⁰
- **Black Market Sales:** Seed money intended for soldiers' farming and self-sufficiency projects, along with regimental fuel and staple rations, is embezzled by officers and sold on the black market.²¹
- **Local Exploitation:** Regional and battalion leaders run their areas as personal fiefdoms, engaging in embezzlement and illegal trades such as teak logging and unregulated mining.²²

One panelist shared a metaphor commonly used among soldiers. They say that soldiers are like chickens, always looking for food. Colonels are like lions that roar and mobilize their subordinates to get food for them. Generals are like hippos or whales who just open their mouths, and food goes inside.²³

These accounts of systemic corruption and exploitation within the military challenge the junta's narrative of a coup justified by democratic corruption.²⁴ The revelations by defectors underscore the need for comprehensive reforms and establishing accountability mechanisms within Myanmar's military and political systems.

PROPAGANDA & NARRATIVES

People's Goal defectors also shed light on the junta military's propaganda machine, which systematically labels anyone opposing them as "terrorists" or "insurgents"²⁵ and depicts rebel forces as bloodthirsty and merciless.²⁶ The propaganda campaign is built around several key themes.

"We were all told that the NLD was dangerous."

One of the primary themes is the alleged conspiracy by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to dismantle the military established by her father to protect the nation, as well as the nation's electoral integrity. A former private's wife described what she was taught inside the military:

“We were told that she had married a foreigner and that it was her goal to turn the country over to foreigners and allow the “kalar,” or dark-skinned South Asians to take over everything. Around the election campaign, we were all told that the NLD was dangerous and would destroy the military and our way of life. The military was presented as something permanent and safe, whereas other parties were merely fleeting and unreliable.”²⁷

Additionally, the propaganda targets soldiers who defected to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), accusing them of stealing funds from military bases to give to foreigners and “terrorists.” Images of CDM soldiers are circulated with captions branding them as “thieves and cowards,” aiming to delegitimize their actions and discourage further defections.²⁸

These propaganda efforts underscore the regime’s reliance on disinformation and fearmongering to maintain control and suppress dissent, portraying themselves as protectors against internal and external threats.

Counteracting Propaganda

“We must keep studying the past.”

In the face of such aggressive disinformation, one former captain spoke of the importance of educating those in the military about Myanmar’s history and past democratic movements:

“In 1988, the military responded to the uprising with violence. This was a bit before my time, and this was not much talked about within the military in any coherent way. I had to learn about it through my own investigations. The main message they spread inside the military and throughout the country is that they are the saviors and protectors of the country and the Buddhist religion. For this reason, it is very important for us to keep commemorating the 8888 Revolution to counteract military propaganda. The military is very afraid that people will continue to unite against them and see through their propaganda. We must keep studying the past and applying those lessons to today.”²⁹

ELECTION INTERFERENCE

People's Goal defectors reported several instances of military interference during the 2020 election. Witnessing these incidents contributed to their disillusionment with the military and eventual decision to defect.

"They took our [soldiers'] ID cards."

One former private described these ordeals in detail:

"They took our [soldiers'] ID cards and told us that we did not need to go to the voting station because advanced voting had already taken place. They also sent out statements saying that candidates had broken COVID regulations and were therefore disqualified. They also manufactured fake ID cards to allow more votes to be cast for the parties they supported. On TV and radio, they announced that people could go to village administration offices to vote, but when people went there, they were told they were not on the voter list. The military then blamed the NLD for manipulating the voter lists, but it was the military that had manipulated the voter lists. When these measures were not enough, they said that there were vote-counting irregularities. As part of their strategy, they 'leaked' false reports saying that the military had been trying to achieve good-faith reconciliation with the NLD, but that the NLD had scuttled these efforts so that they could take over the election through fraud.

In short, soldiers suspected of voting for non-military parties were not allowed to vote, and soldiers they controlled were allowed to vote many times.³⁰

"We were not given a choice."

Another added,

"When my unit went to vote, we were asked our names multiple times and made to jump through many hoops regarding the voter list. We felt that we were being prevented from voting. At one point, we were told we had to participate in 'advanced voting.' We were not given a choice. Those who said they would prefer to vote in person for a party of their choice were told that their votes would be cast for the military party on their behalf. Any soldier who expressed sympathy for the NLD or non-military parties was abused. The teachers who had volunteered to carry out election protocols were also very angry to know that soldiers were not being given the right to vote for whom they wanted. This was ruining the integrity of the election and reflecting badly on them as volunteers. And it was these volunteers that the military tried to blame for ruining the election. They framed them for all the irregularities. It was during these debates that one of the generals hinted that a coup d'état had to be on the table to sort out the irregularities."³¹

These acts of interference reported by defectors highlight the military's attempts to subvert the democratic process and maintain their control over Myanmar's political landscape. The actions taken during the 2020 election underscore the need for comprehensive electoral reforms and robust mechanisms to ensure free and fair elections in the future.

MORALE AND READINESS TO FIGHT

Defectors report that the majority of soldiers are primarily concerned with securing basic necessities such as food and shelter. Their limited education restricts their economic opportunities and makes them vulnerable to indoctrination, resulting in slavish obedience to carry out orders.³²

“I was digging my own grave day by day.”

A defected captain described his desultory experience in the field:

“My commander told me to give up everything, give up my loved ones, and only think about battle. He said that the enemy’s spirits were high, and we had to give up everything to fight them. I didn’t like this. I felt like a slave. They never offered us any encouragement; they only told us to do what we were told. I liked to ask questions and think critically, but they didn’t like that kind of attitude. I felt like I was digging my own grave day by day. Many soldiers drank a lot, even on the front line. This included officers.”³³

“Do the impossible.”

A former Sergeant offered the following assessment:

“Most soldiers just care about getting a meal and a place to sleep. They really can’t think beyond that. They would leave the military in a second if they had something else to do. The soldiers they have now are really brainwashed. They will kill anything they are told to, but they barely know what they are doing. They have no spirit behind them, but the PDFs are full of spirit. Also, soldiers do not trust each other at all. Commanders have to make daily reports about the activities of their soldiers. Field officers usually just look at a map and then tell their soldiers to do the impossible in battle.”³⁴

- **Conditions of Reserve Forces:** Reserve forces enjoy better conditions, as they can pay to avoid frontline duties and receive more training. They mainly provide security at bases and around towns. However, due to a shortage of troops, reserve forces have recently been deployed alongside the infantry, increasing tension between the two groups.³⁵

“I did not know that this kind of thing went on.”

One defector described the unprofessionalism he witnessed as a young private:

After 2016, the EU was giving training to the army. I registered and completed six months of training. Many people I trained with had been trafficked there. They did not join voluntarily. I did not know that this kind of thing went on. Over time, I saw that some soldiers paid money to get out of training. I realized there were no standards. We were not paid or fed properly. We got something like

two eggs in a day, and there was no recourse. I learned that there were private catering companies serving soldiers who could pay for decent food.³⁶

“I have seen soldiers drop their packs and jump off a cliff because they were tired of that life.”

Another private described even more desperate conditions:

“When I was young, I had no direction. I was hanging out with friends at night, and my friends and I got arrested just for hanging out. At the police station, they told me I could go to jail or join the military. This was why I joined. I did not join because I wanted to. After one month, I was sent to the front line. I had no idea what I was doing. Out of five of my friends, three of them and my brother died. I didn't know about the CDM movement. I tried to run away one time from the front line and was captured. Luckily, I wasn't shot, as many others were. There are many old soldiers in bad shape. I have seen soldiers drop their packs and jump off a cliff because they were tired of that life. We had no food, no rations. All we had to carry was ammunition. Another soldier I saw jumped from a plane. He was sitting next to me and said, “I can't take this anymore,” and jumped out. Another soldier who ran was shot by his officer, who reported that he died in action.”³⁷

The reports from defectors highlight significant issues within Myanmar's military forces, including poor conditions, lack of trust, and rising defections. These dynamics underscore the need for the democratic movement to reach out to long-suffering soldiers by offering them the sustenance and opportunity they have not been afforded by the military.

RECRUITMENT

In February 2024, the junta military enforced full-scale conscription to address recruitment shortfalls.³⁸ As the conflict entered its second and third years, weakened by casualties and defections, the military employed various strategies to enlist more soldiers, including forcible conscription of youth and reduced penalties for deserters. Recruitment efforts particularly targeted vulnerable communities.

“They are always on the back foot.”

A former sergeant described the military's human resources problem in the following way:

“They have been weakened by casualties and defections. Now they are focusing a lot on recruiting. Before the coup, they did a large part of their recruiting in upper Myanmar, but now those same regions are major conflict zones with powerful resistance forces. The military cannot even launch offensives; they are always on the back foot. Because there are not enough troops, the ones they have are exhausted, and mutinies are becoming more frequent. Many officers have communicated with PDFs that they were welcome to take over their positions if they give them advanced warning and allow them to defect.”³⁹

“They can’t even pay people to join.”

A captain commented,

“The military has completely lost loyalty and morale. They can no longer recruit. They can’t even find new officers. What officers remain are nearly all planning to leave. The military has been offering amnesty to deserters, trying to entice them to serve again. This shows that they are really desperate. Never in the military’s history would they tolerate desertions or AWOLs. Now, they can’t even pay people to join. Nobody wants to.”⁴⁰

Recruitment Tactics and Community Impact

“Against the people.”

- **Village quotas and Local militias:** In areas with loose military control, such as western Bago, forced youth recruitment by pro-military militias is on the rise. Villages that fail to provide young soldiers face fines of 2–3 million kyats.⁴¹ About these militias, a former captain said,

“The junta always local communities they are fighting ‘insurgencies.’ There are some semi-loyal ethnic armed organizations, which I had to work with when I was in the military. They are supported by the military opportunistically... The primary role of pro-military militias is to collect intelligence for the military against the people. They speak the local language and the lay of the land. There are also weaponized militias, depending on how much the military trusts the group.”⁴²

- **Extortion and kidnapping:** Many recruits were threatened with imprisonment if they refused to join or were deceived with false job offers and taken to remote posts from which escape was impossible. Additionally, the military has offered amnesty to deserters, enticing them to return to service. A People’s Goal panelist noted that the military, which previously never tolerated desertions or absences without leave, has found that its former strategy of financial incentives is no longer sufficient.⁴³

“Mindless muscle to be exploited.”

A former sergeant described the disarray in the ranks that the military is trying to address through conscription:

“The infantry and light infantry are certainly the most exploited forces. They are also the worst human rights violators. They are almost all completely uneducated. Many of them are criminals and will obey orders blindly. Those infantrymen who are single have to stay on the front line without a break for years on end, but they never get promoted. The other forces with more training look down on them as mindless muscle to be exploited. Reserve forces have it much better because they can give money to avoid the frontline and receive more training; they just provide security at bases and around towns. Because of these conditions, it is much more likely for infantry to defect because they enjoy no protection... Recently, however, because there are not enough troops, reserve forces are being deployed alongside the infantry and there is a lot of tension between these two groups.”⁴⁴

Conscription Law and Its Implications

“It will not affect their families.”

One former captain described the implications of the conscription law in the following way:

“High-ranking officials support the conscription law because it will not affect their families. Their own children will find high positions, and the new conscripts will prolong their status. On the other hand, low-ranking officials are terrified of the new conscription law. Most low-ranked soldiers are older than their commanding officers, who treat them abusively. Frustrations build up, and it leads to brutality in the field.”⁴⁵

- Under the new conscription law, soldiers are no longer permitted to marry. Married soldiers may be unwilling to go to the front lines or be effective there. Upper and middle-class families can send their children abroad or pay bribes to avoid conscription. Consequently, the military prefers to conscript from the poorest populations with the least agency or alternatives.⁴⁶

Recent Incidents and Community Responses

- A CDM captain reported in an April 2024 panel about a recent movie theater raid where soldiers detained all the young men, most of whom would be used as porters and cannon fodder.⁴⁷ At the village level, people pay to evade conscription, with soldiers extorting money at roadblocks, forcing people to pay to avoid being taken away.⁴⁸

Recruitment of Women

- Women are now officially subject to conscription. Initially, the junta claimed that women would not be placed in combat positions until the fifth wave of conscriptions. However, women are already seeing combat, primarily in drone units.⁴⁹ One woman described being trained at a facility known as Academy #4 in Hmawbi Township, where female medical personnel are also trained.⁵⁰

The implementation of full-scale conscription by the junta military highlights the severe recruitment challenges and the extensive measures taken to maintain their forces. The targeting of vulnerable communities and the conscription of women mark significant shifts in the military's strategies. These developments underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to address the exploitation and coercion of Myanmar's citizens as well as the potential for the democratic movement to offer services that would incentivize soldiers and police to leave their dismal circumstances within the security forces.

WEAKNESS IN THE FIELD

A former warrant officer painted the following picture of the military's limitations on the ground:

“When I joined the military in 1990, the regiments were not scattered all over the country. Each regiment was well-manned, with at least 400 able soldiers. Now, each regiment only has about 70 soldiers who can fight on the front line. After 1995, the military could not even fill the existing regiments, yet they continued expanding, even though they already lacked sufficient manpower.”⁵¹

Collapse of Regional Command and its Implications

“If these regional commands fall, then Naypyitaw will have no way to keep fighting.”

Prior to major defeats following the resistance's Operation 1027,⁵² a former captain presciently described the precarity of the military's strategic commands:

“The military is not taking losses on the battalion level. A battalion is ten regiments. They have lost operational tactical command at strategic camps where advanced artillery is stationed. Many of these posts have been abandoned or destroyed in twenty townships. In many of these sites, the regiment commander has wisely surrendered their whole regiment and arranged for their families to defect with them. Those who are on the ground are the regional commanders. If these regional commands fall, then Naypyitaw will have no way to keep fighting. There will be no logistics, no supply, and no way to execute a strategy. Most soldiers and even officers are just waiting for the resistance forces to give them the opportunity to surrender.”⁵³

The importance of these regional commands has been highlighted most recently by major defeats in the northern Shan State city of Lashio⁵⁴ and Mogoke in the Mandalay region.⁵⁵

“This is a historic event.”

On these more recent developments, another captain remarked:

“We just learned that the northeast command has fallen to the Northern Alliance. This is a historic event. Never before has a regional command fallen to resistance forces. Now, the whole town and base are in the Revolution's control and all their forces have been defeated. The reason they lost is that they do not pay close attention to their military strategy. The SAC is more interested in business, politics, and controlling the people. Therefore, they neglect their soldiers and battlefield competency. On top of this, they cover up their losses, so commanders are not informed of real conditions in the field. Their soldiers are not motivated, so they do not put up a strong fight on the front. It is like a domino effect: one unit falls, and this affects the morale of the next unit. They do not have the means to take back what they lost. The military's quality is getting worse and worse. They have never been a truly professional army. Now, even if they had Napoleon himself, they would not be rejuvenated.”

Sentiment Among Soldiers and Officers

- Echoing reports from the field,⁵⁶ one People's Goal Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) officer argued that there is a widespread attitude among soldiers and officers that they should prepare for an opportunity to surrender to resistance forces. This indicates a growing disillusionment within the ranks and a potential for further defections.⁵⁷

"Many soldiers are so angry about what is going on."

One former master sergeant described the following conditions:

"The commander of the air force right now is following Min Aung Hlaing's orders blindly and bombing anywhere he is told to bomb. There is no real strategy. He is just desperate to follow his orders. There are many watermelon informants in the Air Force.⁵⁸ These days, when I am contacted by soldiers who want to join the CDM as defectors, I usually try to convince them to stay in the military and share information. Many soldiers are so angry about what is going on that they share information of their own accord."⁵⁹

"It was too late."

Most soldiers, however, struggle to rebel within the military and driven to despair. One former soldier told of his depression and demise after being denied medical care:

"My roommate drank insecticide to commit suicide. We took him to the military hospital, but it was late at night, and because he was not an officer, he was not allowed in the VIP ward. The general ward was not staffed that late. We spent a lot of time calling people to get nurses and doctors to come, but it was too late."⁶⁰

ECONOMIC MISMANAGEMENT

The economy has significantly deteriorated under the SAC's leadership, impacting the military's legitimacy and perceived governing capacity. People's Goal discussions between defectors and civilian leaders identified the following problems in the military's mismanagement of the economy:

- **Discriminatory Provision of Electricity:** A former civil engineer under the previous government explained that electricity is now provided in a discriminatory manner. The SAC lacks the staff and expertise to effectively utilize the country's infrastructure. Before the coup, the government had five-year contracts with external companies to manage LNG plants. Post-coup, these contracts were dissolved, leading to a decline in production and access. The SAC is neither capable of nor interested in operating, renovating, or retrofitting the country's plants, as public service is not part of their agenda.⁶¹
- **Power Outages:** Power outages have become particularly frustrating for the public. Water pumps and fans, essential for daily life, especially for the elderly, sick, and those requiring advanced medical equipment, are rendered useless

without consistent electricity. This affects productivity and the well-being of working people and students.⁶²

- **Tourism and Investment:** Tourism has been nearly eradicated,⁶³ and international sanctions have driven away investment and business opportunities.⁶⁴ China, however, is one of the few countries continuing to supply significant tourism and investment to junta-led Myanmar.⁶⁵
- **Brain Drain:** Skilled labor, particularly in the education and health sectors, has fled the country, leading to a human resource crisis.⁶⁶
- **Weak Rule of Law:** The weak rule of law has allowed petty crime, gambling, and trafficking syndicates to flourish.⁶⁷
- **Mismanagement of Resources:** Natural resources, agriculture, livestock, and environmental issues have been grossly mismanaged. Most Myanmar citizens rely on agriculture, but basic inputs such as fuel, fertilizer, and pesticides have become prohibitively expensive. Irregular rains further necessitate agricultural engineering solutions.⁶⁸
- **Lack of Security and Economic Planning:** Without security, there is no long-term economic plan or stable revenue sources to fund essential services.⁶⁹
- **Dire Economic Conditions in Ethnic Areas:** Economic conditions are particularly dire in ethnic areas, where people struggle daily for survival. These regions lack proper transportation, water, or electric infrastructure. Seventy percent of the population relies on subsistence farming, with military attacks during harvest time discouraging large-scale farming.⁷⁰
- **Chinese-funded Myitsone Dam Project:** The SAC has signaled its commitment to continuing the Chinese-funded Myitsone Dam Project, which threatens the Irrawaddy River, a crucial natural and cultural asset of Myanmar. This project challenges the people to resist, potentially affecting the entire Irrawaddy Valley and Myanmar civilization.⁷¹
- **Inflation and Education:** Inflation affects not only food and commodity purchasing power but also families' ability to afford school uniforms and books, resulting in many children not attending school. This will have a lifelong impact on their lives.⁷²
- **Worker Rights Violations:** As a quid-pro-quo to the junta's business cronies, trade unions are banned,⁷³ and their leaders have been imprisoned or killed, leaving workers without representation. In the absence of regulation, employers have no incentive to respect workers' rights. For instance, pregnant garment workers are forced to meet the same quotas and work hours as non-pregnant workers, violating national laws.⁷⁴

During the quasi-democratic period of economic liberalization, Myanmar's economy was on a promising path, achieving 6–7% annual growth in line with World Bank and IMF standards. Post-coup, the economy is estimated to have contracted by about one-third. Functional governments rely on public financing through tax collection, which fosters government accountability. The junta largely ignores tax collection, preferring to sell off natural resources, the most vital economic sector.⁷⁵ However, ordinary citizens are excluded from this industry. Licenses are required, and only military cronies, regardless of qualifications, receive them. This reliance on commodities managed by cronies leads to monopolies, price gouging, and widespread precarity. Political and economic instability will persist as long as Myanmar's economy depends on natural resource commodities.

LIFE FOR SOLDIERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Contrary to its propaganda, the military does not adequately provide for its soldiers and their families. Defectors have reported on the control exerted by the military over the finances, spending, and movement of soldiers and their families, revealing a stark reality of neglect and exploitation.

“Robbing villagers to get by.”

A defected major's wife explained family conditions in the following way:

“Soldiers train and are sent to the front lines right away without any time to spend with their families. These conditions help trigger defection. One soldier who complained about not getting any family time was placed in military prison, and his wife in house arrest. When soldiers' families are left behind, they are not provided with rations and other necessities, which are often appropriated and sold by military staff. Because the soldiers are so poorly looked after, many of them have formed gangs that go around robbing villagers to get by.”⁷⁶

Movement and Mobility Restrictions

Reports from defectors reveal severe restrictions on the movement and mobility of soldiers and their families within the military framework. These constraints highlight the extent of the military's control and the significant toll on its personnel.

- **Prohibition on Leaving the Base:** Soldiers and their families are strictly prohibited from leaving the base, even in critical situations such as attending a parent's funeral. One defector recounted an incident where a soldier's wife had a motorbike accident and was not allowed to be visited by her husband in the hospital, where she subsequently died. This led to the soldier's defection.⁷⁷
- **Social Isolation:** While on or near the base, soldiers avoid wearing uniforms to escape hostile public stares. They resort to growing their hair longer and dressing like civilians. However, the military penalizes them for this.⁷⁸ Additionally, most soldiers' ID cards have been confiscated, preventing them from mingling in society where they might be exposed to counterpropaganda.⁷⁹

“Reach out to them.”

To counter military social isolation, a former private's wife emphasized the importance of outreach from the revolution:

“Since the coup, the soldiers have had less and less contact with the public. Their access to social media has been restricted. Their wives have a little more access to the world, so they are in a better position to communicate the option to defect to their husbands. They can also share with their husbands how the people feel and what the situation is across the country. Therefore, it is important to reach out to them. It is especially important to reach them with counterpropaganda so that they can make informed decisions about their lives.”⁸⁰

- **Psychological Consequences:** The lack of care and consideration for soldiers and their families has led to severe psychological and physical consequences. Many soldiers, driven to depression, turn to excessive drinking, resulting in motorcycle accidents. There have also been numerous cases of soldiers' wives committing suicide by poisoning or drowning.⁸¹

“Eventually, there will be nothing but empty barracks.”

A private's wife shared how it feels to be left at the base while husbands are out in the field:

“Inside, we hear about casualties. We even had a code for talking about it; we would say, “How many bowls of mohinga today?” referring to noodle soup made for funerals. We heard about cases when frontline commanding officers returned home having left their entire unit behind to be killed or captured. When our husbands go to the front, the wives have to provide security on base. They leave one soldier and tell them to command over a bunch of wives to patrol the base for security. We are given small arms and a few bullets. We would go around reciting suttas to try to feel safe. This military is like a sinking ship. Eventually, there will be nothing but empty barracks.”

The severe restrictions on movement and mobility, coupled with the lack of adequate care and consideration for soldiers and their families, underscore the oppressive conditions within the military. These reports from defectors highlight the urgent need for reforms to address these issues and improve the welfare of military personnel and their families.

Home Economics

- **Unpaid Duties:** Wives and teenage children of deployed soldiers are required to patrol military bases for security without any compensation.⁸²
- **Deductions and Supply Chain Exploitation:** The wife of a defected major described the following conditions:

“No choice but to buy from them.”

“Even if you have money, you cannot find cooking oil to buy. The only shops with supplies are owned by military officials, and they charge as much as they can. Often, officers' wives want to make extra money, so they set up informal shops, and soldiers' wives have no choice but to buy from them. They force soldiers' families to buy newspapers, but the papers are months out of date. They force us to pay into various funds, and sometimes they even say things like, “The soldiers need nutritious meals, so we will cook this particular dish for them,” and then they force us to buy the ingredients for that dish. When the salary finally comes, it has been reduced by so many deductions. Even when families cannot make ends meet, they are not allowed to make deductions from their savings accounts.”⁸³

- **Insurance Fraud:** In the event of a soldier's death, it is uncommon for the widow to receive the life insurance owed to the family. Only widows of high-ranking officers receive support.⁸⁴
- **Extravagant Expenditures:** High-ranking officers construct lavish pagodas and require soldiers' families to financially support and promote these structures through weekly visits.⁸⁵

The testimonies of defectors underscore the extensive financial and personal exploitation faced by soldiers and their families. The military's failure to provide basic support and its restrictive control over their lives highlight a severe disconnect between the perceived and actual conditions within the military, necessitating urgent attention and reform.

RELIGIOUS ABUSE AND ETHNIC TENSION

Defectors have described extensive religious and ethnic tensions within military communities. These issues have deep historical roots in Myanmar and are significantly influenced by state policies and actions of military administrations.

Historical Context

- **An Ethnocentric Vision:** In 1960, U Nu asserted state control over the sangha (Buddhist clergy) and promoted an ethnocentric vision of a Burmese Buddhist nation, alienating ethnic minorities.⁸⁶ This vision laid the groundwork for future conflicts and discrimination against non-Buddhist communities.
- **Growing Ethnic Subjugation:** In 1962, Ne Win's military coup led to the claim that subjugating ethnic minorities was necessary to protect Buddhism from Christian influences backed by foreigners. This policy significantly impacted regions such as Chin State and the eastern and northern highlands,⁸⁷ where communities were prohibited from educating their children in their native languages, and their religious rights were not equally protected.⁸⁸
- **Persecution of the Rohingya:** The Muslim Rohingya population in the western part of the country faced even more aggressive persecution. Anti-Rohingya propaganda exploited racial prejudices against darker-skinned South Asians⁸⁹ and denied them citizenship under the 1982 Burmese Citizenship Law.⁹⁰ Discrimination against the Rohingya intensified over the decades, leading to hostilities in 2012 and culminating in genocide in 2016 and 2017.⁹¹

Contemporary Ethnic and Religious Issues

Against this historical backdrop, People's Goal panelists have highlighted several ongoing aspects of the military's toxic religious attitudes.

- **Abuse and Coercion:** A soldier's Muslim wife reported enduring years of verbal and social abuse.⁹²

“I was not allowed to teach them Islam”

“When I had a baby, they told me I needed to go to prayer services immediately. When I told them I was not feeling well because I had just given birth, they said they thought I got pregnant just so I would not have to go to Buddhist prayer services. They told me I was required to attend, and they gave me cleaning duties to punish me, even though I had just given birth. My children were required to go to Buddhist school; I was not allowed to teach them Islam.”⁹³

- **Provocation and Repression:** The military bombs Christian churches in Chin State to provoke violence and justify further repression, exploiting crises to stoke religious tensions. This strategy of provocation and repression continues to perpetuate divisions and maintain control.⁹⁴
- **Systemic Religious Tensions:** Min Aung Hlaing and the generals do not need to spread divisive propaganda door-to-door because self-perpetuating systems of religious tension have been in place for decades.⁹⁵ These ingrained systems ensure the continuation of conflict and division without direct intervention from the military leaders.
- **Public Awareness and Hypocrisy:** With increased access to information, many people now recognize that the military is neither a Buddhist nor a Bamar force but a hypocritical entity oppressing the people.⁹⁶ It is becoming increasingly difficult to convince Buddhists that democracy opposes Buddhism, highlighting a growing awareness of the military’s true nature and intentions.⁹⁷
- **Workplace Discrimination:** A Christian defector who had worked in a military hospital reported that her managers always scheduled her to work on Sundays and Christian holidays. When she requested a different schedule, she was scolded and told to do her duty without expecting support for her religious observances.⁹⁸

“Total priority to Buddhism.”

A prominent defector described how religious chauvinism is aggressively cultivated within the military:

“They give total priority to Buddhism. There are monasteries and pagodas and Buddhist shrines at military bases, but there is no infrastructure for any other religions. They generally tolerate Christianity, but they actively prevent the practice of Islam. They have convinced themselves that Myanmar is the main protector of Buddhism in the world and that if they fail to protect Buddhism within Myanmar, it will disappear from the world. All soldiers, even non-Buddhists, are required to attend Buddhist services on base.”⁹⁹

These examples underscore the deep-rooted and systemic nature of religious and ethnic tensions in Myanmar. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms and a commitment to protecting the rights and freedoms of all ethnic and religious groups within the country.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Recent testimonies from female defectors have shed light on the extensive gender discrimination within the ranks.

- **Blame Shifting and Verbal Abuse:** One female CDM captain described the pervasive nature of gender discrimination within the military. Male officers commonly shift blame onto women under their command when they make mistakes. This practice not only undermines women's competence but also fosters a toxic environment where verbal and physical abuse is rampant.
- **Physically Demands and Abuse:** Women are often assigned physically demanding tasks. When they struggle with these tasks, it becomes an opportunity for further abuse. This not only places women at a disadvantage but also serves to perpetuate gender-based stereotypes and discrimination.
- **Menstrual Discrimination:** Women soldiers face additional discrimination during menstruation. They are often assigned difficult tasks, such as cleaning duty, specifically to prevent them from resting. This practice highlights a lack of understanding and respect for women's health needs and contributes to their overall mistreatment.
- **Stigmatizing Women Defectors:** Women who join the CDM are subject to defamatory accusations, such as being labeled adulterers or accused of fleeing their social responsibilities. These baseless claims serve to discredit their decision to defect and further stigmatize women within the military.¹⁰⁰

“Expect all forms of violence.”

When asked what kinds of discrimination female conscripts can expect, a former female captain said,

“Expect all forms of violence, including sexual. Trainers will be male and female, but the whole framework will be pervaded by sexual discrimination. Inevitably, women recruits will be sexually harassed and verbally and psychologically abused, and they will have no recourse to complain about it.”¹⁰¹

The testimonies provided by female CDM members underscore the deep-seated gender discrimination within the Myanmar military. Addressing these issues is crucial for creating a more equitable and respectful environment for all members of the armed forces. Comprehensive reforms are necessary to eliminate gender-based discrimination and abuse, ensuring that all soldiers, regardless of gender, are treated with dignity and respect.

ATROCITIES AND CRIMES

Recent discussions among panelists have highlighted the escalating violent atrocities committed by the junta, leading to widespread disillusionment with the regime. This report outlines specific incidents and systemic issues that underscore the regime's increasing brutality and violations of international law.

"The worst case I have heard."

A defector recounted a horrific massacre of an entire village on March 3, 2022.

"They had burned it down once before, then they returned and tied fifteen people up and hacked and beat them to death or shot them in sadistic games. They raped the women before killing them and putting onions inside their vaginas."¹⁰²

"It was confusing to know what is right and wrong."

A former private described the chaos and moral vacuum in the field of combat:

"We fought in many battles and were often literally starving and without water to drink. I joined the military with my brother, but my brother was killed in action. Much of the fighting took place in villages, and we were told to burn them down and kill people who should not have been killed. I felt that much of it wasn't right. It was confusing to know what is right and wrong. That is why I joined the CDM, where I have received much more support than I ever did in the military."¹⁰³

Another panelist, who served time in prison, reported that during their imprisonment, at least eight individuals were either killed or disappeared after being taken away for interrogation sessions. These accounts contribute to the growing documentation of the junta's systematic use of extreme violence and torture to suppress dissent and instill fear among the population.¹⁰⁴

Systemic Violations of International Law

- **Collective Punishment and Penal Code Article 17.1:** The State Administration Council (SAC) has used Penal Code Article 17.1¹⁰⁵ to justify air and artillery strikes against civilian communities and the mass arrest of civilians. This article punishes individuals for being members of unlawful associations or participating in related activities, leading to the indiscriminate targeting of entire villages.¹⁰⁶
- **Violations of the Geneva Conventions:** The SAC has consistently violated the Geneva Conventions by failing to limit combat operations to specific military targets. Instead, it frequently involves entire civilian communities in the conflict without providing them the opportunity to flee, as mandated by international law.¹⁰⁷

Other common violations include:

- **Denial of Medical Care:** The SAC does not provide medical care to wounded enemy combatants and communities affected by conflict.¹⁰⁸
- **Gendered Violence:** The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.¹⁰⁹

- **Use of Human Shields:** Civilians are used as human shields during military operations.¹¹⁰
- **Destruction of Civilian Property and Cultural Heritage:** There is a systematic lack of protection for civilian property and cultural heritage sites.¹¹¹

The increasing violent atrocities and systematic violations of international law by the junta have led to widespread disillusionment among defectors and the general population. Addressing these issues is critical for the international community and human rights organizations to ensure accountability and justice for the victims of the junta's brutal regime. Comprehensive efforts must be made to document these violations and support the affected communities in pursuit of justice and reconciliation.¹¹²

DIGITAL REPRESSION

Peoples Goal panelists have described how, amid significant battlefield challenges, the State Administration Council (SAC) has intensified efforts to control digital networks, disseminate propaganda, and hinder the unification of resistance groups. Such digital repression is directed just as intensely toward soldiers and their families.¹¹³

Digital Repression of Military Members

“Only trusted officers have phone access.”

Digital repression begins with the deprivation of soldiers' basic phone access, which helps prevent soldiers from defecting. One former lance corporal explained,

“**T**hey want the opportunity to defect or surrender, but they do not have their own mobile phones. Only trusted officers have phone access. With no contact with the outside, it is difficult. It could be helpful to drop paper pamphlets to them explaining what they need to do to defect or surrender.”¹¹⁴

“It will only get more difficult.”

They are also employing biometric surveillance to track soldiers' movements. According to one former sergeant:

“**N**ow, all soldiers are receiving biometric IDs. Until now, most soldiers have had a civilian ID and a military ID. The civilian ID allowed them to travel around the country. But now, with the financial help of China, they are biometrically tagging soldiers and digitizing everything so that soldiers cannot slip through any checkpoints. It will only get more difficult for soldiers in the near future.”¹¹⁵

“I knew I could not stay any longer.”

A former military nurse recounted the following story of enduring harassment for alleged online activity and other forms of abuse:

“ I always thought of the hospital as a place where I could work for the public. After a while there, however, I saw that there was not even electricity or supplies. They were not even trying to take care of the public. We had to forage our own food. Children got many skin infections because there was no clean running water. Soldiers surrounded the hospital, and we were all forced to sign loyalty pledge letters and held in jail, accused of posting subversive content on the internet, even though I had not posted anything. While I was there, I contracted COVID. Once I was finally released from jail and returned to the hospital, even my colleagues there shunned me. I knew I could not stay any longer. I found a CDM contact and joined it without consulting my family or anyone else.”¹¹⁶

Digital Repression of Civilians

- **Acquisition of Surveillance Technology:** The military is increasingly acquiring advanced tracking and intercepting software, drones, and other surveillance equipment from international sources, including China and Israel. This investment enhances their capability to monitor and control opposition activities.¹¹⁷
- **Restrictive Cyber Laws:** New cyber laws have been implemented, further threatening internet accessibility. Security forces now require SIM cards to be registered, and licenses are mandatory for Virtual Private Network (VPN) usage. These measures are designed to monitor and control digital communication more effectively.¹¹⁸
- **Internet Shutdowns:** The SAC has frequently ordered internet shutdowns across the country, often justifying them by citing infrastructure damage. These shutdowns are especially prevalent in conflict hotspots like Chin State, where only 2G internet is typically available, severely limiting communication capabilities.¹¹⁹
- **Surge in Mobile Prices:** Nationwide, mobile prices have surged by approximately 60%, adding to the financial burden on citizens and restricting access to essential communication services.¹²⁰
- **Monopolization of Internet Services:** Independent mobile operators no longer provide internet services, which are now available only via cable. This shift facilitates easier monitoring of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and the military carrier, MyTel.¹²¹ Private companies face significant challenges in resisting the military’s interference and demands for user data.
- **Targeting Social Media Influencers:** The SAC has targeted social media influencers to instill fear among the public and discourage dissent. This tactic aims to suppress voices that could mobilize public opinion against the regime.¹²²

The SAC’s comprehensive strategy to control digital networks underscores its intent to suppress resistance and maintain its grip on power, including complete control over its own soldiers’ contacts with the outside world. These measures have significant implications for freedom of expression, access to information, and the overall digital landscape in Myanmar. They also contribute to the erosion of morale within the military. The international community and human rights organizations must continue monitoring these developments and advocate for restoring communication freedoms and digital rights in Myanmar.

PLANNED STAGED ELECTIONS

People's Goal panelists have warned that the junta's discourse on a forthcoming election is designed to decelerate the revolution's momentum by weakening its base.

- Historical patterns show the SAC's strategy of targeting and arresting youth via voter lists, anticipating minimal support from this demographic.¹²³
- By detaining and conscripting young voters and banning opposition parties,¹²⁴ the junta aims to ensure its continued political dominance through a new staged election.¹²⁵

Given these tactics, panelists argue that elections under the current conditions are unequivocally invalid and undemocratic. They advocate for rejecting such elections on several grounds, including:

- Participation is tantamount to complicity with the SAC's crimes.¹²⁶
- Constitutionally, only the elected president has the authority to call an election commission, not an illegal junta making unsubstantiated claims of prior election irregularities.¹²⁷ Likewise, only an elected president has the authority to call a state of emergency.¹²⁸

"Only the queen left to play."

A former private expressed his disdain for future sham elections, which will likely involve Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (DASSK) as a figurehead:

“There is a saying: “No more soldiers, no more monks, only the queen left to play.” They have used up their soldiers, who are like pawns, and their monks, who are like the rooks and bishops. Now they have to try to use Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to see if they can win over the people by releasing her. However, we did not join the CDM just for her. We joined because we refused to accept Min Aung Hlaing's authority. Playing the DASSK card is a sign of desperation.”¹²⁹

People's Goal panelist testimonies suggest that revolutionary leadership should prioritize engaging the public on the necessity of federalist reform and the unacceptability of elections under the SAC's terms and the discredited 2008 Constitution. The leaders elected in 2020 remain in contact with their constituents and are active in the CRPH. The NUG has already drafted a federal democratic charter to establish a new national assembly.¹³¹

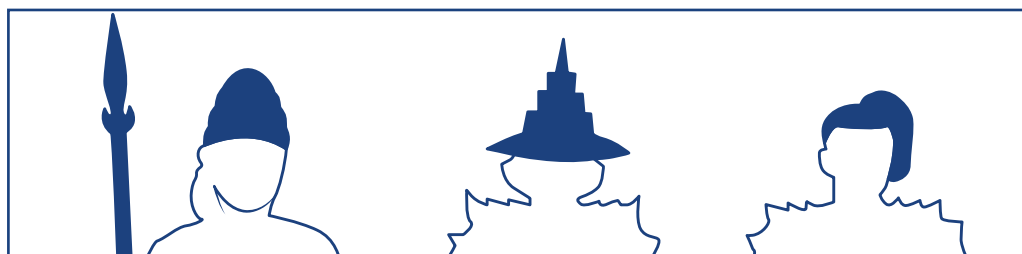
CONCLUSION

The systemic abuse and repression attested to above suggest that defection is on the minds of many, if not most, current members of the security forces. People's Goal panelists' statements also suggest that the democratic movement has the opportunity to accelerate defection as a military and political strategy particularly suited to current circumstances.

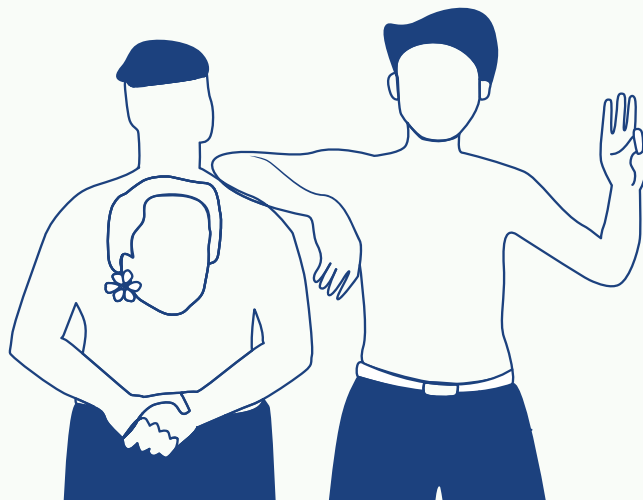
Generally speaking, desertion from the Myanmar military is not new. Thousands of military personnel have joined popular movements since the onset of military dictatorship under Ne Win in 1962. In particular, the 1988 and 2007 uprisings inspired large waves of security force defections.¹³² One prominent example of this was Tin Oo, the founding patron of the National League for Democracy (NLD), who was once a military commander-in-chief.¹³³

However, the 2021 coup and subsequent three years of revolution have precipitated more defections, desertions, and surrenders than any other past resistance movements.¹³⁴ In the 1988 Uprising, for example, military defections numbered in the hundreds, not thousands, and those who defected were mostly from the lower ranks of the Air Force and Navy, not the more powerful and politically entrenched Army.¹³⁵ Moreover, in 1988, the military effectively deployed non-Bamar troops to suppress Bamar protests.¹³⁶ Currently, however, non-Bamar recruitment has almost completely dried up,¹³⁷ and the mostly Bamar troops that remain are increasingly reluctant to kill their own.¹³⁸

Should the current trend persist, defections, desertions, and surrenders from junta security forces are projected to surpass 20,000 in the forthcoming year. However, defections are likely to accelerate as soldiers are put into more and more losing battles. With their unique backgrounds, these individuals may offer crucial insights into the Myanmar junta's inner workings. These insights are invaluable to pro-democracy political bodies like the National Unity Government (NUG), the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), armed revolutionary organizations, international donors, and analysts.



Section II
INSIDE THE REVOLUTION



INSIDE THE REVOLUTION

The following section synthesizes discussions between People's Goal defectors and interlocutors from diverse backgrounds within Myanmar's democratic movement. For the most part, these took the form of circuitous information-sharing and brainstorming sessions, generating content beyond the scope of this report. We, therefore, limit our analysis to specific defection-related issues discussed in the panels.

These discussions are valuable because defectors, immersed as they once were in the antidemocratic military, have had little access to political institutions, even at the local level, let alone to the most influential bodies like the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and the National Unity Government (NUG). These dialogues, therefore, shed light on the challenges and opportunities faced by the National Unity Government (NUG) and other revolutionary entities in the quest to establish a democratic, federal, rights-based Myanmar.

Instead of ostracizing the growing number of former security force personnel joining the democratic movement, the revolution stands to gain by integrating them to bolster its armed campaign, destabilize the dictatorship from within, and establish post-military institutions and policies.

"The NUG has been weak."

One prominent defector lamented that leadership has not yet done enough in this regard. In his view,

"The main reason that the defection campaign has not been effective is because the hosts lack awareness of defectors' value and why they should support them. EROs are doing a good job, but the NUG has been weak.¹³⁹

DIVERSE DEFECTOR PROFILES

The first thing to understand is that there is no single defector archetype. Defectors participating in People's Goal discussions attest that some defect alone, others with their families; some are driven by ideology, others by fatigue from violence or the desire to be no longer despised by the people.¹⁴⁰

A Research Organization that presented in the People's Goal Forum on Defection and Defiance in 2023 estimated that approximately 73% of soldiers wish to defect, and they outlined four main motivations:

- (1) Desire to gain purpose and community by joining their peers in the CDM.
- (2) Moral conviction and shame at the military's deeds.
- (3) Pressure from family members, spouses, and friends.
- (4) Weariness from exploitation, unfairness, and injustice within the military.

The first two motivations were more prominent in the first wave of defections, while the second two motivations are more common among those who defect later.¹⁴¹

"A good person never survives in this military."

One People's Goal defector articulated the military's moral bankruptcy and religious exploitation as a factor motivating defection:

"Now is the time to uproot the dictatorship. Intelligence tells us that the enemy is weak. I would like soldiers to reflect on how a good person never survives in this military. Please protect the people and see that this military is not the way to do it. So many within the military claim to be Buddhist, but these seventy years of dictatorship have been a shame to Buddhism. People are dying outside of hospitals with no one to care for them."¹⁴²

"I was ashamed"

A female defector, a former sergeant, shared the evolution of her attitude toward the military:

"I was in the army and attending university. I thought I would be able to finish my degree and learn another language and maybe become an officer attached to a foreign embassy. There were many things I didn't like about the military, but I thought it could help me accomplish my goals. But after the coup, I realized I could no longer be a part of the military. I started to study about 1988 and past resistances and I was convinced the military would not give up their power. I was ashamed to be a part of the military, but when I joined the resistance, I no longer felt that guilt."¹⁴³

“All nobility is lost”

Another former sergeant articulated the same disillusionment:

“When it was first established in the 1940s, General Aung San tried to make the military inclusive. But the military I experienced was abusive, misogynistic, fascist, and lacking dignity and decency. With Min Aung Hlaing at the head of the military, all nobility is lost. Before the coup, Myanmar was doing well; it was developing. Now it has regressed into an abusive mess based on the self-interest of the generals. There are some good people in the military, but now, it's becoming impossible for anyone in the military to be decent. Soldiers steal the clothes off of village women to give to their own families.”¹⁴⁴

DEFECTION STRATEGY

An influential researcher has proposed that three factors underpin the revolution's success:

- (1) Public support.
- (2) International support.
- (3) Dismantling the military.¹⁴⁵

The third factor can be significantly advanced by encouraging defections within the security forces. As mentioned in this report's introduction, extensive research argues that resistance movements with substantial military defection are forty-six times more likely to succeed,¹⁴⁶ and analysis of the 1988 Uprising traces much of its dissipation to its failure to trigger mass military defections.¹⁴⁷ In light of these findings, the NUG and NUCC stand to benefit immensely from the development of a coherent policy on promoting defection and incorporating defectors into the political process.

Obstacles to Defection

Researchers in People's Goal discussions have also identified four main obstacles preventing defection:

- (1) Communication surveillance.
- (2) Socio-economic hardship.
- (3) Concern for family safety.
- (4) Patriotism (often based on misinformation).

Overlapping with these are considerations of what they would lose if they left the military (savings, community, etc.) and what punishment they might face as military fugitives. Most of them said that they believed that more support would increase the likelihood of more people defecting. Almost 80% of them remained unemployed in liberated areas, and most of them said they would like to actively participate in the revolution.¹⁴⁸

“An avenue for joining the people.”

Helene Maria Kyed, a prominent scholar connected to this research, articulates the political power of defection in Myanmar’s current revolution:

“While soldiers have deserted from the military for decades, this has never led to the development of organized defector groups like we see today. These groups are an outcome of the development of a historically large, broad, and incredibly resilient revolutionary movement that, despite facing challenges regarding unity, spans across many ethnic, religious, geographical, and class-based divisions prevalent in Myanmar society. The CDM, as a large and highly popular movement spanning various public sectors, has constituted a significant exit option for soldiers, providing them with an avenue for joining the people and for gaining moral relief and support.”¹⁴⁹

Expanding Participation

“Assimilate as many people as possible.”

One former captain emphasized the need for the democratic movement to open diverse avenues of participation beyond the armed struggle.,

“The NUG should do more than just tell people to join the PDFs. It’s more complex. Some people don’t want to be part of the armed struggle. They can, however, create diverse sectors in which people can participate. Some might be open to teaching; some might be able to serve as medics. There needs to be a nationwide network that can assimilate as many people as possible.”

Echoing researchers,¹⁵⁰ other People’s Goal panelists have highlighted the need for a nationwide network that can assimilate as many people as possible.¹⁵¹

“They are utterly . . . broken.”

One defector emphasized that outreach to potential defectors must not be oversimplified or romanticized and that organizations must take responsibility for the difficult task of rehabilitating soldiers with little to no sense of civic life:

“Many of them cannot even think beyond immediate needs. They are utterly psychologically broken. I was lucky enough to have a bit more education, and I felt I could stand on my own, but very few have that privilege. So, these people will need a lot of support and reassurance to ever consider defecting. It’s not necessarily that they are not ‘interested’ in defecting; they have never even approached being able to think that way.”¹⁵²

“Not all of them are so bad.”

Another former sergeant felt strongly that revolutionary policies should not overlook the value of potential allies still within the military:

“Of course, there are bad soldiers, but not all of them are so bad. It does not help for us to use terms like “military dogs.” We have many “watermelons” who don’t leave because they have invested so much of their

lives into the military that they could not find a career outside. So many watermelon informers have provided us with valuable information. Many of them have been killed for their efforts to help the revolution, but we never hear about these people. It is important for us to acknowledge and celebrate these people.¹⁵³

“Loyalty shifts happen on a complex spectrum.”

A researcher added to this perspective, highlighting the subtlety of loyalty in the current conflict:

“The quantity of strictly defined “defections” should not be overemphasized. “Watermelon” disobedience, sabotage, and informing are extremely valuable. There is a Loyalty Shift Spectrum of invisible to visible, subtle to radical defiance. Defections are not discrete events. Loyalty shifts happen on a complex spectrum.”¹⁵⁴

“Defectors are new democratic actors.”

A Myanmar-based research group echoed the importance of overcoming resentment as much as possible on the road to healing and rebuilding Myanmar:

“Is it effective to use dehumanizing terms against the military? The military seems to thrive on such exclusionary discourses. Is it helpful to see the military as a whole and as us vs. them?

We can reevaluate our discourse about the military. We can see it as internally diverse and manipulable. We can emphasize its internal injustice and moral discourses. We can build solidarity with security forces who also suffer under the military system. Security forces have the knowledge and experience that the revolution needs. Current defectors are new democratic actors who will help with security sector reform, civilian leadership, democracy, and peacebuilding.”¹⁵⁵

Advantages of Defection Programs

- **Cost-Effective and Non-Violent:** Given the high costs of armed struggle and the lack of international financial support, defection programs provide an inexpensive and bloodless method to weaken the military.¹⁵⁶
- **Trust Building:** The long civil war has bred deep-seated animosity towards the military, especially among ethnic minorities. Despite this, all Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) collaborating with the NUG have adopted a policy of accepting and supporting all defectors. Defectors are required to adhere to a code of conduct and undergo background checks.¹⁵⁷

“They have the opportunity to raise the white flag.”

Regarding trust and forgiveness, one People's Goal panelist said,

“It is sad to see people rejoice in the killing of soldiers. On social media, people even mock the pain of soldiers' widows and families. This is not right. Instead, we should celebrate defections and surrenders because these strengthen the revolution. Soon, we will hold them accountable for their actions, but for the time being, they have the opportunity to raise the white flag. The military is the cause of all our problems. It is important to be on the right side of history and start a new life.”¹⁵⁸

“Drunk in a guest house.”

Despite the ideological appeal for harmony, an ERO fighter described the practical realities of trust between groups on the ground:

“Sometimes there is a lack of coordination between us (the coordinators) and our fighting forces that are supposed to pick up CDM defectors. Sometimes the SAC tries to trick our fighters by luring them to false defectors. Sometimes we need ten armed men to pick up one defector. One time, our people went to pick up a defector but found them completely drunk in a guest house. This put our people at risk and was very frustrating. It is all very difficult, and we cannot risk our people to help defectors who are not prepared to contribute in any way. Some of them, once they are safe and verified, demand to go to Australia or some other country! We EROs should only be temporary safe-keepers for defectors. We cannot take care of them permanently.”¹⁵⁹

- **Transitional Justice:** Defectors who confess to crimes will have their confessions recorded for consideration in future transitional justice trials. Prisoners of war (POWs) are guaranteed the right to life.¹⁶⁰

Local Efforts to Support Defection

While the democratic movement’s leadership has not yet provided a coherent defection policy, administrations in liberated areas have developed admirable ad hoc defection programs that have benefitted thousands.

“Victory depends on people’s participation.”

A resistance leader described the way the people of Kachin State have embraced defectors despite lacking economic resources:

“There are many people taking refuge in Kachin State. They face difficulties, but it is important that we continue to welcome them. The speed of the revolution’s victory depends on people’s participation.

The first difficulty, of course, is financial. Almost everyone is sympathetic to the idea of defection programs, but when it comes to material support, there is almost none. I believe it is easy for individual soldiers to defect in Kachin State because of its isolation and geographical security. However, if a soldier has their family with them, it will be difficult. Once they defect, it is a challenge to find employment for them. We continue to receive high-rank defectors and defectors with foreign training. We find this encouraging.”¹⁶¹

“Even he was allowed to live.”

A Karenni leader has similarly described local communities’ magnanimity to defectors and how this is the first step toward the development of a defection policy in the absence of a centralized policy from the NUG:

“In the Kayin area, we are receiving more and more defecting soldiers. In the future, we don’t want to be scarred by hatred and discrimination. We want to heal society, so we need the soldiers to be able to stand with the people in

the future. For this to happen, we need to give soldiers as much access as possible to a new life. I encourage other parts of the country to have this kind of program too. For reconciliation, soldiers must feel that they have the right to live. there must be some degree of forgiveness. Just the other day, they bombed civilians. One jet was shot down by revolutionary forces and the pilot was captured. Even he was allowed to live, even after he had just dropped bombs on the people.”¹⁶²

Urgent Demand for a Coherent Defection Policy:

People's Goal panel participants have gone further to articulate the urgent need for a coherent defection policy around which EROs and local administrations can organize to help place defectors in roles where they can best assimilate and contribute.¹⁶³

“We need a coordinated effort.”

Encapsulating People's Goal panelists' widely held belief in the need for coordination to integrate defectors. A former captain said,

“It would make the most sense for a potential defector to defect to the nearest revolutionary force, but the nearest force might not be in the best position to accept defectors. This is why we need a coordinated effort. There should be a system for channeling defectors to where they are most easily assimilated. The NUCC should develop a coherent policy and implementation system. A committee should be dedicated just to this. Soon, there could be thousands or tens of thousands of ex-military on our hands. There must be a coordinated system for handling them. Killing on the battlefield requires so much investment. Accommodating defectors is much more efficient.”¹⁶⁴

“How will we support them?”

A former major offered the idea of commissioning a documentary about the defection process. This could serve to educate potential defectors and to raise awareness about defection programs for outside donors and allies:

“Most soldiers think, “If I join the CDM, how will I support my family?” But they, of course, are susceptible to media and social media, so how can we best reach them? It is very important to continue addressing their concerns. How will we welcome them? How will we support them when they join the CDM? We have to help them find work according to their skills. It would be good to make a documentary for them to observe this process. This could be on BBC or any accessible outlet.”¹⁶⁵

“Even a small pool of resources could help.”

A former captain echoed the need for more fundraising for defection programs:

“We need more coordination to handle group defections. We have ways to bring people out, but it is another matter to interview them and assess their motivation, attitude, psychological state, etc. If they do not seem very motivated, we need to address this mentality and monitor them. Our revolutionary organizations are not governments. They are doing the best they can with the resources they have. It would be helpful for the NUG and new government to step in and offer leadership and resources to the defection program. Even a small pool of resources could help many groups.”¹⁶⁶

Countering Military Defection-Deterrence Efforts

- **Dispelling Fears of Execution:** The military's penchant for executing activists,¹⁶⁷ its own soldiers for failures,¹⁶⁸ and battlefield adversaries¹⁶⁹ is a significant deterrent to defection since soldiers are led to believe that if their own colleagues do not kill them, EROs and PDFs will as soon as they are in their sights. People's Goal defectors have expressed the need for the NUG and EAOs to counteract this by ensuring defectors believe they will be accepted and protected.¹⁷⁰

"Told to dig their own graves."

A defected private described his grim first-hand experience of executions in the field:

“I've seen teenage soldiers summarily executed for running. In the group I saw, three were children and were sent to their families; the other five were forced to work as porters in the jungle. After five days, they were executed after being told to dig their own graves. I saw a video of this that another soldier showed me. When I ran, I didn't have a plan. It was do or die. I was hiding for five days. I found some corn to eat. Then I ran across PDF soldiers. I could not speak their language. I spoke to them in Burmese, and they gave me food and shelter and didn't harm me at all.”¹⁷¹

Support for Medical Professionals

- **Blacklisted Professionals:** People's goal panelists have pointed out that medical professionals, including those from the military, must also receive assistance from the NUCC and NUG. Some have been able to escape the country to make a living, but most inside are blacklisted and unable to earn.¹⁷²

The Importance of Defectors' Families

Wives of defectors have described their active support of their partners' decisions and how many soldiers stay in the military only because they are worried about providing for their families. In one panel discussion, a captain's wife declared,

“Today, people inside the military cannot even get proper education and health care for their children. It is important to continue reaching out to them to encourage them to defect.”¹⁷³

"Everything they ever told us was a lie."

A corporal's wife recounted her realization that her family was on the wrong track in the military:

“They used to tell us very passionately that the people in the liberated areas would kill us at any opportunity, and that if we ever tried to defect there, we would be raped and killed. When my husband deserted without me, I was accused of encouraging him and threatened with trial. Now that we are free, I know that everything they ever told us was a lie.”¹⁷⁴

"They would kill our families."

A former private painted a dark picture of family life in the military. This picture reflects the systemic abuse meted out to those of lower rank:

"Back in the military, if our children ever got into a quarrel with officers' children, our children would automatically be punished. Being a soldier provides no security. When you are out on duty, most likely, your family will be abused while you are gone. Even when you are there, you cannot really resist whatever abuse the officers want to give. If you stand up for your wife when they verbally and sexually harass her, you will be beaten and ostracized. They always told us that if we joined the CDM, they would kill our families."¹⁷⁵

"We have much more peace of mind."

Contrasting with the despair inside the military, a sergeant's wife shared her experience after joining the CDM, along with words of encouragement for other families facing difficult decisions:

"I never pressured my husband to join the CDM. He joined of his own accord, and at first, I was angry about the trouble it would cause our family. But then I realized he did the right thing, and people in the safe houses treated us very well. I learned more about the military's crimes, which I never got to hear about within the military. We struggled to find work, and for a while, we had to get by gathering snails to sell. Finally, People's Goal and other programs helped us, and now we are able to get by selling food online, and my husband works as a mason.

When you are in the military, you are paranoid about your security. Even going to the market is tense. Now that we are out, we have much more peace of mind. Everyone is equal, and we don't have to always think about hierarchies.

When it comes to education for children, inside the military, there is a lot of discrimination and bullying. On the outside, the conditions are much more friendly. We have only one child, and we were afraid of jeopardizing his future. But now that we are out of the army, we feel that his future is better than before. I encourage any mother in the military not to worry about joining the CDM. It is better. Do not think that if you leave, you will starve."

"We don't have to worry."

A sergeant's wife similarly described her family's life after defection.

"Now we don't have to worry about being killed by the very institution we work for. Once we reached the Kayin area, we were warmly welcomed and given all the basic necessities. These very communities that have been terrorized by the military welcomed us. We are now much better informed about things like human rights. We really never heard about those things before."¹⁷⁶

“We need to be reintegrated.”

Despite the freedom to be enjoyed away from the military, another soldier’s wife warned about the difficulties that remain:

“Living in the liberated areas has not been easy. I could not find a steady job. I was exploited by an employer. When friends asked me if they should come join the CDM too, I could not really encourage them, since I could not assure them that they would be ok. We felt that we were left out of aid disbursements and discriminated against in the camps. We need training; we need education in human rights; we need to be reintegrated into the community.”¹⁷⁷

CONSCRIPTION LAW AND RESPONSES TO IT

People’s Goal panelists have offered the following insights and strategies for navigating the perils of conscription and entering the revolution’s embrace.¹⁷⁸

- **Conscription as a Sign of Weakness:** People’s Goal panelists concur that the State Administration Council (SAC) has implemented the conscription law out of desperation, and it is likely to trigger a new wave of defections to the resistance.
- **Communicating Options:** Revolutionary organizations must provide clear guidance on the steps to take if individuals face conscription. People need to be fully aware of their options on the ground.¹⁷⁹

Guidance for Those at Risk of Being Conscripted

- **Avoiding Conscription:** Panelists stress that the most crucial action for young people is to avoid being conscripted altogether, as escaping once under the military’s control is extremely difficult.
- **Alternatives to Joining Combat Groups:** Options for young people are not limited to joining People’s Defense Forces (PDFs) or other combat groups. In liberated areas, there are numerous opportunities to work in education and other public services.¹⁸⁰
- **Contributing to the Struggle:** People can join the armed struggle or contribute nonviolently. All liberated areas have organizations that offer education and other public services, providing various ways to support the revolution.¹⁸¹

Guidance for Those Who Are Conscripted

- **Distrust Military Contracts:** Panelists advised young people not to trust any promises related to military contracts. These contracts are meaningless, and there is no legal recourse when they are inevitably violated.
- **False Optimism:** A CDM captain cautioned against any optimism that conscripts might have about their ability to resist from within the military. Once inside, mutiny or resistance is nearly impossible. Therefore, they emphasized that young people must escape the country or reach a liberated area and not assume they will be spared from the first waves of conscription.
- **Prepare for Isolation and Share Knowledge**

“They will cut you off.”

A former captain shared the following warnings with young people eligible for conscription:

“Some might think they can go to their conscription assignment and will be able to become a “watermelon,” but, unfortunately, this is virtually impossible. Once you are inside, it is almost impossible to fight against it, mutiny, or resist. Of course, theoretically, it is possible if you are incredibly brave and strong, especially strong enough to resist their propaganda. You also must somehow find a way to stay in touch with the outside world. They will take your phone; they will cut you off. You have to remember the phone numbers and contacts of important people or store them in some encrypted way. If you somehow find a way to contact people, then you can share information.”¹⁸²

FUTURE REFORMS

People's Goal panels' wide-ranging discussions have identified a myriad of ways in which defectors can contribute to the construction of a federal democracy in Myanmar, including the drafting of a new federal democratic constitution. The details of such a complex political process are beyond the scope of this report. However, at two areas of reform will absolutely require input from former security forces. These are (1) military reform and (2) police reform.

1. Military Reform

“Professionalism and dignity.”

Defectors have clearly expressed that Myanmar's democratic political reform must include radical reform of the military's structure and its relationship with the people. One defector said,

“The military should be imbued with professionalism and dignity. When Aung San Suu Kyi went to UK, she gave a speech at the military academy. She asked the general why the British people love the British army. He said that the British military stays completely out of politics, so people feel that they are only there to serve the people. In a proper system, the military serves a civilian government elected by the people. Each branch of the military—the army, navy, and air force—should have its own chief of staff who communicates with the government. Administration and operation must be separated. We must study and respect the nations that maintain this proper balance. Our branches of the military should be separated, as they were before Ne Win consolidated them.”¹⁸³

“Military law must be transparent.”

Another former captain added,

“We must understand the military chain of command and the mechanism in place for judging crimes and enforcing punishment. Usually, it seems that disputes within the military are handled in a summary manner, with no transparency. In a new Myanmar, military law must be transparent and as fair as civil law. In a well-run military, court martials are organized and documented so that they can be studied later for precedent. Currently, there is nothing like this in Min Aung Hlaing’s military.”¹⁸⁴

1.2. Gender Reform Within the Military

Gender discrimination is pervasive in Myanmar society and must be actively countered by the new system. People’s Goal panelists have described how, historically, both the military and civil service restricted women to roles in offices or medical staff positions, assigning duties purely based on gender.¹⁸⁵

“Men will refuse to serve under a woman.”

Another woman, a former medical officer, shared the following insights:

“Historically, there have only been women nurses and a few medical officers. Now, because recruitment is down, the military is actively recruiting women. Military daughters of low-level soldiers have to do so much work that they cannot go to school. For example, they have to clean the houses of the officers. But now, women are allowed to become cadets and officers, and if you have a university degree, you can become a surgeon. In 20 years in the military, I only met four women overseeing hospitals, even though much of the medical staff are women.

Most men will refuse to serve under a woman, even a woman much more qualified than them. There are also no accommodations for women on their own. They are put into mixed family accommodations and social problems arise.”¹⁸⁶

- **Revolutionary Gender Inclusivity:** In contrast to the junta military, defectors have described how in liberated areas, women serve essential roles in administration, public health, education, and combat. They emphasize how past revolutions, which were not inclusive, the current movement must ensure that women play an integral role in all aspects of the revolution.¹⁸⁷

“Women will be a huge part of it.”

One female defector, a former sergeant, shared her impressions of the difference between gender attitudes in the military and the revolution:

“The military undermines and oppresses women. They always assumed women could not do anything, and this is what they try to teach the nation. In the PDF, women are needed. We do administration, leading, medical work, and combat. Women can no longer be left behind. Our past revolutions were not successful. But since then, there have been major ideological changes and changes in ethnic attitudes. Because of these, we are ready to finally win, and women will be a huge part of it.”¹⁸⁸

2. Police Reform

“We pledge to serve the people.”

A former police officer described establishing an extensive and successful police force in a liberated area. Developments like this have so far received little attention but will provide crucial knowledge for reforming Myanmar's police forces in the future:

“We have many departments under the people's police forces. We have two offices, but I won't say where they are. We have 50-60 new police defectors every month. We work closely with defection organizations, and we train our police on the ground about how to make arrests and follow sound policies. We sacrifice our lives to make a difference. Many of our defectors serve as valuable comrades. We still face trust issues, though we pledge to serve the people. The defection movement can be much stronger.”¹⁸⁹

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

There are still no significant international donors to Myanmar's democracy movement. EROs received limited support from the NUG and NUCC and must rely on diaspora donations and ad-hoc fundraising.¹⁹⁰ As the potential contributions of ex-security forces to a democratic Myanmar become clearer, neighboring countries may reconsider their stance toward defectors as refugees. Moreover, international organizations and sympathetic states might be more inclined to offer non-violent support to defection programs in their reluctance to back the armed struggle directly.

“Emboldened to defect.”

One defector expressed the importance of international support for sustaining the revolution, saying,

“We are already receiving support from the US National Defense Authorization Act, a.k.a. the Burma Act, to take care of defectors' basic needs and security. This is very encouraging. As it is made clear that defectors will be cared for, more will be emboldened to defect.”¹⁹¹

“Helping defectors has great impact.”

Another emphasized that the international community need not fear those who have defected:

“I would like to reassure the international community that defectors are not war criminals. They want to help make the Myanmar military a professional one. They want there to be justice for war crimes. They want to serve the public. Thus, helping defectors has great impact. Providing support to defectors is one of the most effective ways to weaken the Myanmar junta. The international community can help us strengthen and organize the defection movement. This is extremely important for establishing democracy in Myanmar.”¹⁹²

“It is up to us to convince them.”

A member of the NUG who has worked on defection issues described the challenge of productive engagement with other countries:

“We cannot have a coherent asylum policy, because it is really up to the host countries. What we can do is provide information to interested parties. For example, Czech Republic will accept a small number of refugees, but they will not bear any costs for them. Other countries do not make their policies public and do everything in a deliberately opaque way. If more countries can be convinced that defection programs can turn the tide of the revolution, then they would likely be more supportive. It is up to us to convince them.”

Regarding the potential of appealing to China and India, a researcher who participated in a People’s goal forum remarked,

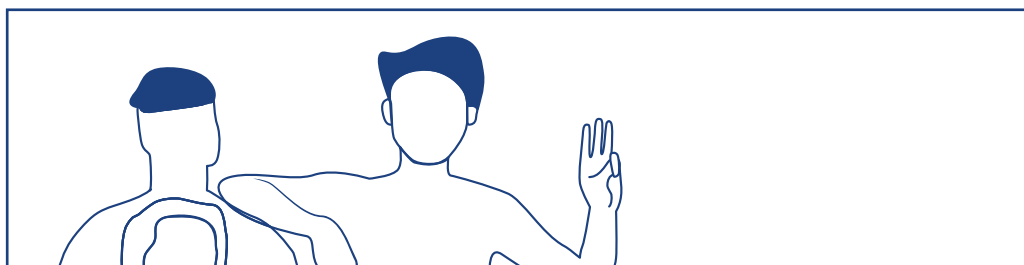
“International support’ is not reducible to governments. Civil society groups are just as important. Government sanctions and people-powered sanctions should work together. I would also not foreclose the possibility of reaching out to the Chinese and Indian publics. Despite appearances, the Chinese and Indian states are still susceptible to public opinion, which can be strategically appealed to.”

CONCLUSION

This report, based largely on the testimonies of defectors from the Myanmar military, highlights the critical role these individuals play in exposing systemic issues within the junta and contributing to the democratic rebuilding of Myanmar.

The report underscores the necessity for the National Unity Government (NUG) to act with urgency to expand public political participation in the democratic movement. Since defection programs present a cost-effective and non-violent method to weaken the military, the NUG and NUCC must develop coherent policies to support defectors on the way to future comprehensive security force reform.

By leveraging defectors’ insights and addressing the systemic issues highlighted in this report, the NUG, revolutionary forces, and their allies will be better equipped to build a more inclusive, democratic, and prosperous Myanmar.





POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Since People's Goal was founded, international and domestic stakeholders have regularly asked its committee members what is to be learned from the organization's engagement with defectors and its attempt to bring them into the federal democratic political process. After analyzing more than two years' worth of panel discussions and related research, People's Goal, as an organization, offers the following policy recommendations.

Policy Recommendations for National Unity Government and National Unity Consultative Council

- **Strengthen Support for Defectors:** Establish Comprehensive Defector Integration Programs: Develop robust programs to assist defectors from the Myanmar military, including psychological support, skills training, and integration into the democratic movement. This will help leverage their insider knowledge and strengthen the armed campaign against the junta.
- **Ensure Gender Inclusivity:** Address gender discrimination within defector programs by implementing gender-sensitive policies and creating opportunities for women defectors to assume leadership roles. This approach will promote diversity and enhance the effectiveness of the democratic movement.

By implementing these recommendations, the National Unity Government and National Unity Consultative Council can effectively leverage defectors, enhance democratic processes, and gain crucial international support to advance Myanmar's transition to a federal democratic nation.

Policy Recommendations for International Governments (U.S., EU) and ASEAN

- **Provide Support to Defectors:** Offer support to defector integration programs, including financial aid, training, and resettlement assistance. Facilitate partnerships with NGOs and international organizations to enhance the effectiveness of these programs.
- **Increase Targeted Sanctions:** Implement and enforce targeted sanctions against key members of the Myanmar military and associated economic interests. Ensure these sanctions are comprehensive and effectively disrupt the junta's financial resources.

By taking these actions, international governments, particularly the U.S. and EU, along with ASEAN, can significantly contribute to addressing the Myanmar crisis, supporting democratic transition efforts, and promoting stability in the region.

Endnote:

1. This is a conservative estimate based on a variety of reports, most of which are already dated by many months. We know of no definitive recent study on these numbers. This is not surprising given the rapidly shifting dynamics on the ground, including weekly mass surrenders and increasing defections. See Irrawaddy, “Myanmar Military Suffers Spike in Defections as Resistance Gains Ground,” (Irrawaddy.com, August 25, 2023), <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-military-suffers-spike-in-defections-as-resistance-gains-ground.html>; Helena Maria Kyed, “,” New Mandala (May 10, 2024), <https://www.newmandala.org/defection-and-revolution-in-myanmar/>; James Shwe, “Soldiers of Conscience: Myanmar’s military defectors,” DVB (Dec. 4, 2023), <https://english.dvb.no/soldiers-of-conscience-myanmar-s-military-defectors/>; Gary Rocchio, “Defector Stories: Inside the Exodus from Myanmar’s Military,” The Irrawaddy (July 5, 2024), <https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/defector-stories-inside-the-exodus-from-myanmars-military.html>; Irrawaddy, “Twenty Myanmar Junta Troops Defect Amid Fierce Fighting in Resistance Strongholds,” The Irrawaddy (September 21, 2023), <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/twenty-myanmar-junta-troops-defect-amid-fierce-fighting-in-resistance-strongholds.html>; Miemie Winn Byrd and Daniel K. Inouye, “Unifying efforts Against The Military Junta,” Indo-Pacific Defense Forum (December 18, 2023), <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2023/12/unifying-efforts-against-the-military-junta/>.
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Out with
the **OLD**
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