

# Capturing and Controlling Towns: The Trajectory of the Revolution



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## Research objective, methodology and limitations

In the 48 months between the coup attempt on 1 February 2021, and 8 January 2025, revolutionary forces fully captured and took control of 95 towns from the military junta. Of these, 93 towns were seized during “Operation 1027,” which was launched by the Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BHA) on 27 October 2023.

This research paper aims to identify and analyse the causes behind the town takeovers, the significance and long-term control of the captured towns, as well as the consequences of these events and the public concerns. In addition, it explores how these developments may impact the formation of a federal union.

The data and events included in this report were sourced from the BNI-MPM dataset. The figures for incidents like fighting and airstrikes are recorded as individual events, meaning the actual frequency of these occurrences may be much higher.

We took the time to conduct interviews for this research paper. In addition, we referenced news and interviews published by BNI member news outlets, other local and international media, as well as statements from relevant revolutionary forces.

The town takeover battles and events have strengthened the revolutionary forces in their struggle to end the military dictatorship, also known as the Spring Revolution. However, these battles have also led to an escalation in violence by the junta, particularly through aerial bombings and targeted attacks on civilians. All the people have witnessed numerous aerial bombings on towns that have been captured by the revolutionary forces.

This report aims to highlight key considerations for the revolutionary forces, active in various capacities during the people's revolution, based on the will and support of the people, the junta's acts of violence, and the concerns raised by the people.

## Introduction

According to BNI-MPM data, the town takeovers began in Mindat Township, Chin State, in July 2021. On 24 July 2021, The Chinland Defense Force (CDF)- Mindat launched an attack on the police station in M'Kuiimnu. The revolutionary forces captured the town without firing a single shot, as seven police officers and junta soldiers, including a captain, surrendered.

Mese was the second town captured by the revolutionary forces prior to the start of “Operation 1027”. A combined force launched an attack and successfully captured all junta camps in Mese Township, in the Thai-Myanmar border in Karenni (Kayah) State, between 13 and 24 June 2023. On the morning of 24 June, the revolutionary forces captured the town without firing a single shot, as 18 junta soldiers from the military council camp at Myanmar-Thai Border Post No. 13 (BP-13) in Mese Township surrendered.

After the launch of “Operation 1027” on 27 October 2023, town takeovers by revolutionary forces have become increasingly frequent across Myanmar, including in northern Shan State. Over the 15 months from November 2023 to January 2025, there was not a single month without town takeovers. The term “Sold Out” has even become a slang expression among the people. It is important to note



Chin National Army (CNF/CNA) and allied forces, six by the Karenni Revolutionary Force (KRF), four by the Karen National Union (KNU), four by the Chin Brotherhood (CB), two by the United Wa State Party/United Wa State Army (UWSP/UWSA) and one each by Chinland Defense Force (CDF)-Mindat, Mara Defence Force/Maraland Territorial Council (MDF/MTC), and the Zomi Revolutionary Army-Eastern Command (ZRA-EC). Looking at the events of each town capture, it is evident that joint operations between revolutionary forces are the most common approach.

For example, the KIO/KIA usually leads military operations and collaborates with local revolutionary forces, such as the Kachin People's Defense Force (KPDF) in Kachin State, NUG-affiliated PDF battalions and units, or other local revolutionary forces, depending on the specific area of operation.

Although the PSLF/TNLA and ULA/AA took the lead militarily in their respective regions during the town takeovers in northern Shan State, other groups that emerged during the Spring Revolution, such as the People's Defense Forces/Local Defense Forces (PDFs/LDFs), the Mandalay PDF (MDY-PDF), the Bamar People's Liberation Army

(BPLA), the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF), and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), also participated in the offensives. In addition, coordinated offensives led by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the armed wing of Karen National Union (KNU) in Karen State, by the Karenni Army (KA), the armed wing of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) in Karenni State, and by Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) in collaboration with local revolutionary forces were clearly observed.

On the other hand, disputes have arisen among the revolutionary forces pressuring the junta troops with offensives, depending on the areas of operation. Specifically, conflicts between the joint forces led by CNF/CNA in Chin State and the CDFs have escalated into armed confrontations. Therefore, the facts, reasons, and impacts associated with the town takeovers during the coup present a mixture of both advantages and disadvantages. Clearly, there are lessons to be learned and important factors to be mindful of moving forward.

Similarly, it can be observed that the junta's military pillars and administrative mechanisms, which took decades to build, can be dismantled in a relatively short period of time.



## Reasons behind the offensives to capture towns

Looking at the capture of M'kuiimnu in Chin State and Mese in Karenni (Kayah) State by the revolutionary forces before “Operation 1027,” it can be said that, more than the offensive pressure from the revolutionary forces, the junta soldiers themselves chose to surrender. These outcomes were the result of a strategic blockade on all sides and the revolutionary forces’ effective collaboration. On 24 July 2021, seven junta soldiers, including Captain Than Htike from Batch-55 of Defence Services Academy (DSA), and a police officer from the frontline police station in M'kuiimnu, surrendered and defected to the CDF.

Regarding this, an official from the CDF-Mindat said: “Our CDF went to their camp. We urged them to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and invited them to collaborate with us. They came and expressed a desire to join the CDM, stating that it was not good to fight each other. Some of them joined us, while around five junta soldiers refused to cooperate and fled the camp, taking their arms with them. However, seven junta soldiers did cooperate with us.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Seven junta soldiers including a captain defect to CDF-Mindat in Mindat Township in Chin State, KMG, 26 July 2021

The revolutionary forces led by the Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BHA) took complete control of Chinshwehaw, Hpawng Hseng, Kyu Koke (Pang Hsang), and Hsenwi in northern Shan State on 2 November 2023, just one week after the launch of “Operation 1027” on 27 October 2023. During this operation, the revolutionary forces captured over 90 strategically important junta camps, seized six armored tanks, and seized a large number of arms and ammunition.<sup>2</sup>

According to BNI-MPM data, the junta lost 19 towns in Shan State, Chin State, Karenni (Kayah) State, Kachin State, and Sagaing Region to the revolutionary forces in November 2023 alone. Additionally, since that time, the revolutionary forces have conducted between one and ten town takeovers every month. From 1 February 2021 to 8 January 2025, the junta lost 95 towns across nine regions and states, including Shan State, Kachin State, Chin State, Arakan State, Karen State, Karenni (Kayah) State, Sagaing Region, Mandalay Region and Bago Region.



Photo - ULA/AA

<sup>2</sup> 3BHA announces the complete control of four towns, Kachin News Group, 2 November 2023

Therefore, “Operation 1027” by the 3BHA is recognized as a key factor in the further expansion of town takeovers . This operation clearly demonstrated the collaboration and coordination between the revolutionary forces, which emerged after the military coup, and the 3BHA. The town takeovers that originally began in northern Shan State have now spread to Mandalay Region in central Myanmar.

“The main highlight of this operation is that instead of fighting the military council individually, it can be successful if we collectively attack the junta, like the 3BHA. If you really dare to do it, it will really happen. If we truly attack, we will truly win victory. The mental strength that any military base or position of the junta can be attacked can inspire and spread to every revolutionary organization and revolutionary fighter resisting the military council across the country,” said Dr. Nyo Twan Aung, the ULA/AA deputy military chief.”<sup>3</sup>

Khun Bedu, the KNDF chairman and military chief, said that town takeovers are part of the revolutionary forces’ efforts to fully capture all the territories. He also said that the junta has intensified its orders, directives, and threats against the villagers in Karenni State, all under the pretext of protecting the town. This prompted the resistance forces to launch attacks on junta positions, ultimately leading to the town takeovers.

“ The situation reached a point where we had to capture the town after attacking the camps where the junta soldiers were stationed. This is the reason for the town takeovers. Through these town takeovers, the revolutionary groups are attempting to expand their territory and gain control over almost the entire country. These

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<sup>3</sup> Operation 1027 and the Direction of the Spring Revolution, Page-26, BNI-Myanmar Peace Monitor, April 2024

actions are part of a revolutionary process that works in an interconnected manner,” said Khun Bedu, the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC) vice chairman.<sup>4</sup>

Comrade Min Htay, a central executive committee member of the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF), said that among the reasons for capturing the town, military importance such as territorial connectivity and the blockade are taken into account. Politically, the goal of capturing and controlling towns is crucial, as it can contribute to bringing down the entire structure of the military council.

“The junta’s administrative mechanisms and economic sources will only be dismantled when the revolutionary forces continue to conduct offensives to capture towns. Therefore, we will continue to conduct the battles to capture towns,” said Comrade Min Htay, the commander of Column-3, which is active in the Anyar Region (Sagaing and Magway Regions).<sup>5</sup>

According to BNI-MPM data, fighting between the military council and revolutionary forces has been occurring in 232 townships across 14 regions and states, including the Nay Pyi Taw Council Area. The junta is facing offensives by revolutionary forces in 70 percent of all the townships in the country. As a result, the military council is struggling to maintain territorial control and full authority within these townships.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Khun Bedu, Chair of the KNDF, for the research paper, BNI-MPM, 8 November 2024

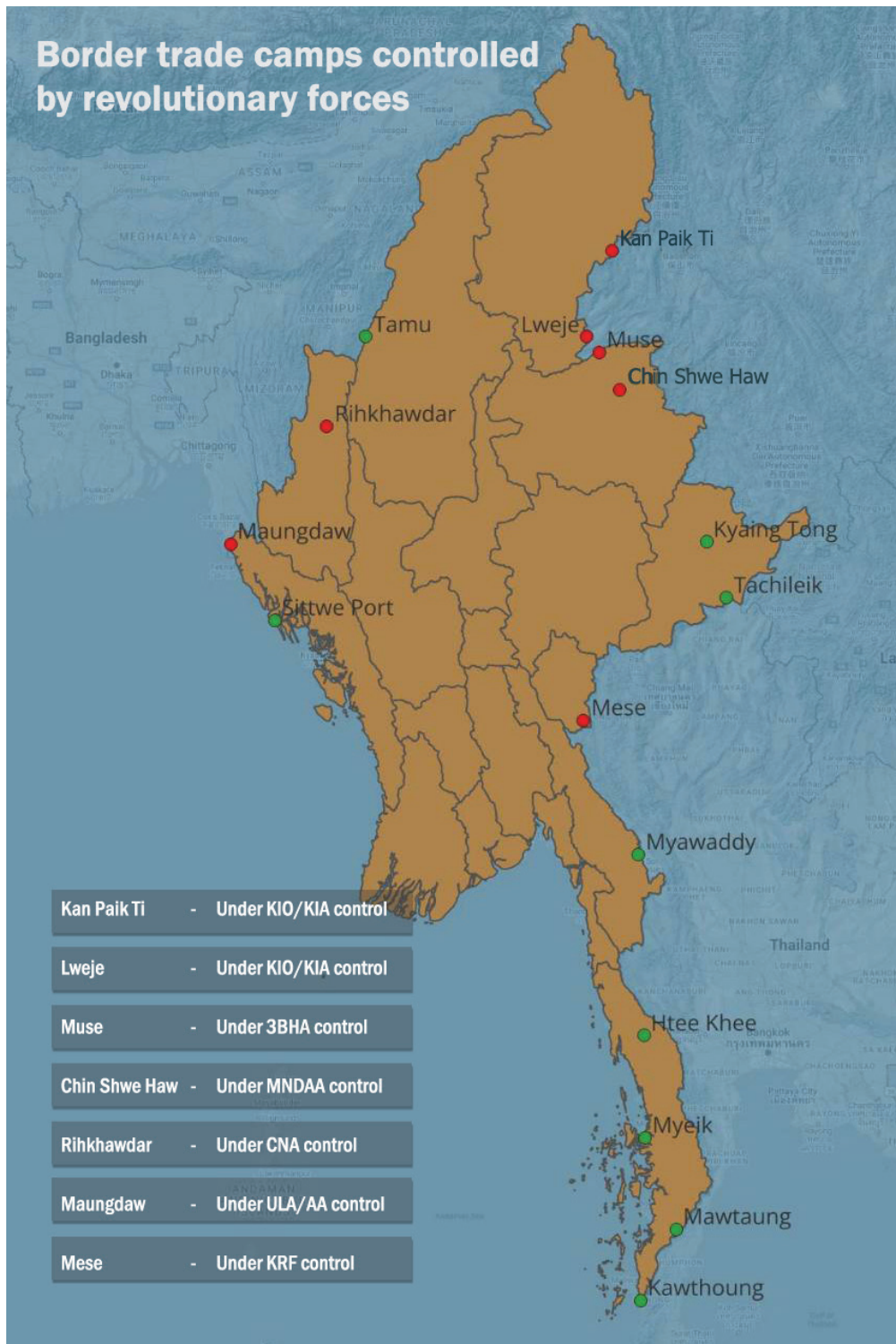
<sup>5</sup> Interview with Comrade Min Htay, an central executive committee member of the ABSDF for the research paper, BNI-MPM, 21 November 2024

## The significance of captured towns

It has been found that the towns captured and controlled by the revolutionary forces are of significant importance in terms of military, political, economic, and border affairs. This has dealt a major blow to the junta.

Of the 95 captured towns, 17 towns (18 percent) serve as headquarters for district-level offices, 33 towns (35 percent) serve as headquarters for township-level offices, and 45 towns are where town-level administrations operate. Even though the junta continues to control key towns and cities in important regions and states, such as Myitkyina in Kachin State, Loikaw in Karenni (Kayah) State, Sittwe in Arakan State, Monywa in Sagaing Region, and Mandalay in Mandalay Region, the 95 towns captured and controlled by the revolutionary forces are considered to be critically important in terms of politics and the economy. The revolutionary forces have gained control of seven out of 17 border trade camps across Myanmar. These border trade camps are crucial points of exchange between Myanmar and its neighboring countries: China, India, Thailand, and Bangladesh.

## Border trade camps controlled by revolutionary forces



In addition, a total of 23 Chinese economic projects in northern Shan State and Arakan State have been seized and are now under the control of the revolutionary forces. As a result, the Chinese government's trust in the junta has significantly diminished. In

response, the Chinese government has proposed to the military council the establishment of a security company to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens and businesses in Myanmar. On the other hand, the Chinese government is pressing the EROs to make a ceasefire and initiate talks with the military council.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Why Has China Chosen To Stand By The Crumbling Junta?, Bi-Weekly News Review, BNI-MPM

To safeguard their interests, including economic projects in Arakan State, the Indian and Bangladeshi governments have recognized the need to establish communication channels with the AA, which controls up to 14 townships in the state. Just as the Kaladan project is crucial for the Indian government, the Rohingya issue remains an urgent matter for Bangladesh to address, doesn't it?

Pang War, taken and held by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) on 18 October 2024, is an economically vital town because of its production of rare earth minerals, which are in high demand by the Chinese government. Similarly, the capture and control of Mogok town in the Mandalay Region, known as a gem land, holds considerable economic importance to the TNLA.

U Min Ko Naing, a leader of the 88 Generation Students, stated that there are many other important factors beyond the significant town takeovers during the Spring Revolution. He explained:

“The revolutionary forces have been active in many strategically-important road sections. Some areas can be used, while others have been fully controlled. It can be said that travel and transportation have resumed. The control and use of these strategically important road sections are the direct results of the revolutionary forces' offensives,” he explained.<sup>7</sup>

According to a statement from the Ministry of Defense (MOD) under the National Unity Government (NUG), on 4 January 2025 (Independence Day), the revolutionary forces have taken control of key road sections of Mandalay-Shwebo-Myitkyina road/railroad, Mandalay-Madaya-Thabeikkyin-Bhamo road, Pathein-Monywa road, Yangon-Mawlamyine-Thabyuzayat-Ye-Dawei-Myeik-Kawthoung

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with U Min Ko Naing, People's Spring, 3 January 2025

road, Bago-Thaton-HpaAn-Myawaddy road, Monywa-Kale-Tamu road, Minbu-Ann-Sittwe road, and Pyi-Padaung-Taungup road. In addition, the revolutionary forces also have controlled main water routes on the Ayeyarwady, Chindwin, Thanlwin and Sittaung Rivers.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding territorial control, from the beginning of the military coup until December 2024, 144 townships have been controlled and governed by the EROs and PDFs. Of these, 95 towns have been completely captured and controlled, while fighting continues in 79 townships. The NUG-MOD has said that, since the junta now controls only 107 townships, it no longer has authority over more than a third of the country.

The junta frequently employs various strategies to regain control of all the towns lost to the revolutionary forces, including the EROs.

In particular, it can be observed that efforts are being made according to priority levels, based on factors such as the region's strategic importance, its economic significance, the proximity of lost territories, and the strength and organization of the revolutionary forces in the area. However, in light of the junta's attempts to reclaim their lost territories and camps, the most common tactics include targeted attacks on civilians, arson, and aerial bombings of towns and villages. Although the revolutionary forces are working to establish and implement administrative mechanisms and build judicial systems in the towns they control, Comrade Min Htay, commander of the ABSDF Column-3, stated that the military council's air raids pose a significant threat. He also added the following.

“We are unable to carry out rehabilitation yet. In some areas, transportation is still blocked. The military council is causing

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<sup>8</sup> Military Progress Report 2024, NUG-MOD, 4 January 2025



disruptions in various ways. However, we are able to maintain control of these areas because the public is on the side of the revolution. Our main concern is the threat of airstrikes.”<sup>9</sup>

## The towns held for years

According to BNI-MPM data, as of 28 January 2025, 39 out of the 95 towns captured and controlled by the revolutionary forces (41 percent) have been under their control for one year. Some of these captured towns have been held for over a year.

The MNDAA has designated Laukkai, Kone Kyan, Kun Long, Monekoe, Hsenwi, Mawhtike, Hpawng Hseng and Kyu Koke (Pang Hseng) in northern Shan State, including Lashio, as Kokang Special



*MNDAA (Kokang Army) took control of the Northeast Command in Lashio in northern Shan State.*

<sup>9</sup> Exclusive interview with Comrade Min Htay, an executive committee member of ABSDF for the report, BNI-MPM, 21 November 2024

Region-1. Following the formation of the Special Region Administrative Committee, rehabilitation efforts are currently underway in these areas. 5 January 2025, marks the first anniversary of the restoration of Special Region 1. Similarly, on 10 January 2025, the TNLA announced that it will implement security, rule of law, education, health, and social life development initiatives in the 12 towns it controls, as well as in TNLA-based areas.

Additionally, on the 62nd anniversary of Ta'ang National Revolution Day, on 12 January 2025, the PSLF/TNLA announced its intention to establish a people's government as soon as possible. This will be based on the government measures approved during the revolution, with the support of political parties and civil society organizations, following the political roadmap developed by the Ta'ang Political Consultative Committee (TPCC).

KIO Chair General N'Ban La said that the KIO/KIA, which has captured and controlled 15 towns, has begun establishing strong administrative mechanisms to ensure territorial stability in the captured border areas.

In his New Year speech on 1 January 2025, General N'Ban La said:

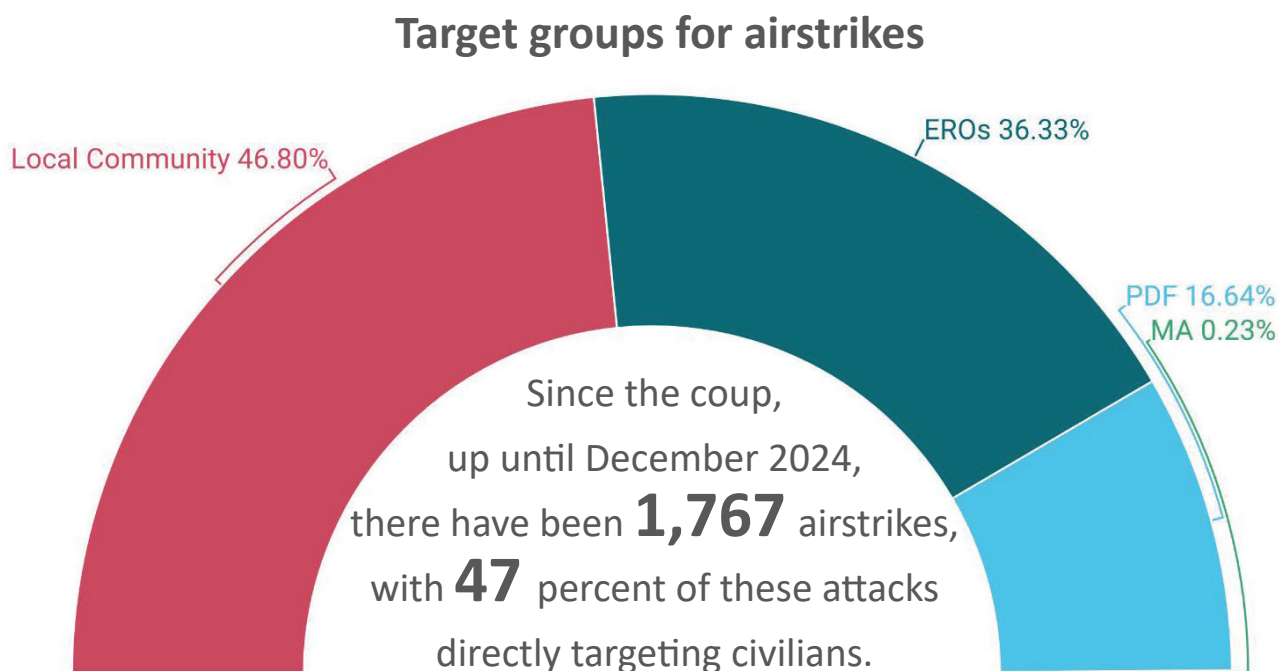
“In 2024, I think the people will witness the capture and clearing of junta camps and militia camps in Kachin State and along the Chinese border. Given the current political situation, the KIO/KIA is already working towards ensuring the restoration of peace in all border areas. The public is encouraged to participate in this important effort. I urge the youth, technologically proficient persons and healthy individuals to take part in the reconstruction of towns, with clarity of purpose and a spirit of love for the region.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> KIO chair invites the people to participate in efforts for the stability tasks in Kachin border, KNG, 2 January 2025

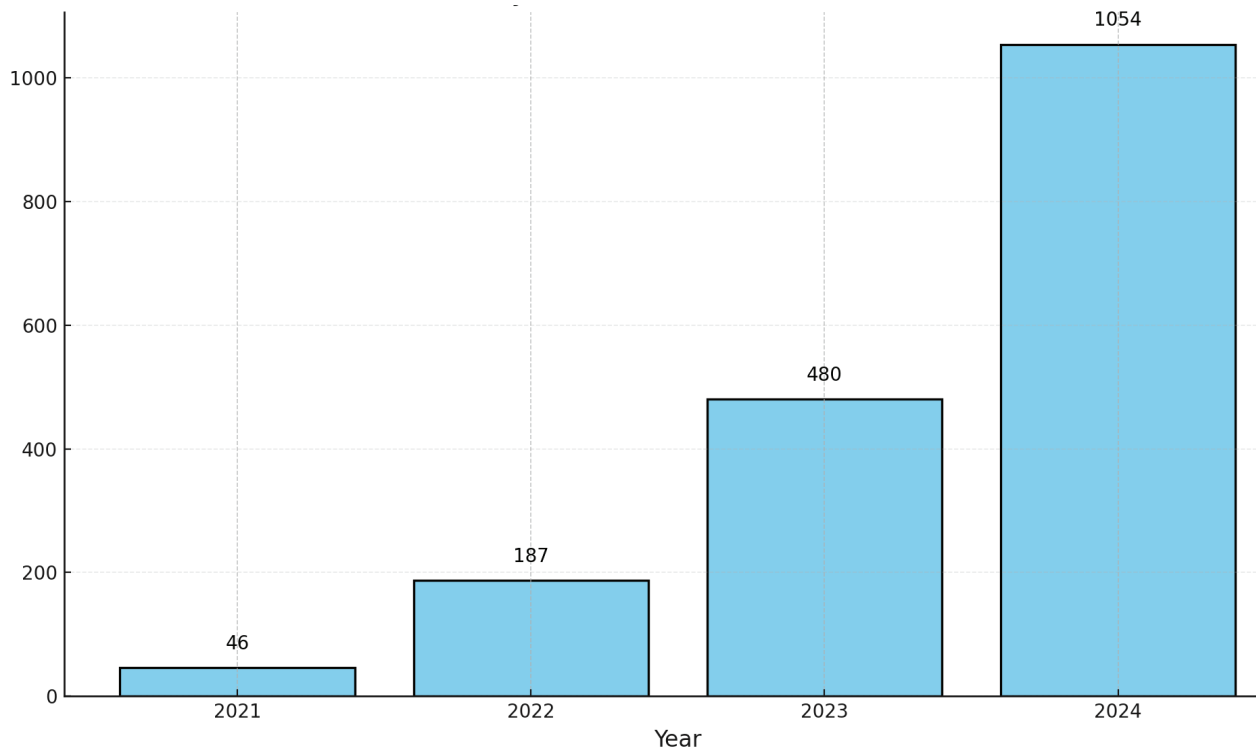
Whether it is the revolutionary forces in Karenni (Kayah) State, Chin State, the ULA/AA in Arakan State, or the NUG, all are working to implement administrative and judicial mechanisms in their controlled territories and active areas. They are also making concerted efforts to gain the public's participation and support. It can be said that, in response, the junta may resort to aerial bombings on the towns and villages they had lost.

According to BNI - MPM data on aerial strikes, from the coup until December 2024, the junta conducted 1,767 aerial strikes across the country. Of these, 47 percent targeted civilians, 36 percent targeted EROs, and 17 percent targeted PDFs/LDFs. In some significant incidents, there were cases where the junta mistakenly bombed its own members.<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Military Junta's Airstrikes in Myanmar, BNI-MPM, 31 Dec 2024

## Yearly Airstrikes



For almost 4 years, the military council's aerial bombings have increased year by year. The year 2024 was found to be the year with the highest number of aerial bombings, with 65 towns lost to the revolutionary forces in that same year.

During nearly four years between 2021 and 2024, the junta increased its aerial bombings year from year. The year 2024 is seen as the year with the highest number of aerial bombings. During that year, 65 towns were lost to the revolutionary forces. So, the military council's airstrikes aimed at reclaiming towns and military bases lost to revolutionary groups seem to be ineffective methods.

Ye Myo Hein, a visiting scholar on military affairs at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), said: “The main targets of airstrikes and bombings are civilians and civilian areas. So, the resentment among the people who have experienced aerial bombings grew deeper. In such a situation, it is almost impossible to get the upper hand in the war and recapture the lost territories.”

He added: “In the current situation, I would like to emphasize that it will not be easy for the junta to re-capture the territories captured by the EROs unless they relinquish them on their own.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The trajectory of Myanmar’s civil war, BBC, 19 January 2024



*Aerial view of Kawlin town on fire, February 2024 (Photo - Kawlin Revolution- KR)*

## The towns recaptured by the junta

On 6 November 2023, Kawlin town in Sagaing Region, which had been captured by the revolutionary forces, became the first town to be recaptured by the military council.

PDF District Battalions under the National Unity Government Ministry of Defense (NUG- MOD), alongside the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Arakha Army (AA), played a key role in the battle to capture Kawlin town. They worked in collaboration with other local defense forces to challenge the military junta's control.

On 3 December 2023, the NUG announced the launch of the people's administration in Kawlin. The Kawlin District emergency administrative coordination team began taking on administrative responsibilities, while PDF battalions under the NUG, along with the People's Defense Team, People's Security Team, and People's Police Force, worked together to handle defense tasks.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> NUG announces the launch of people's administration in Kawlin, RFA, 3 December 2023

Starting 23 December 2023, the military council blocked the Kyauktan intersection, the main road leading into Kawlin. As a result, all trucks and passengers traveling from Kawlin through the highway bus terminals in Indaw, Katha, and Mandalay were banned from leaving the town. Since January 2024, the military junta has launched a heavy offensive to recapture Kawlin, using heavy shelling, aerial bombings, and ground attacks. On 12 February 2024, the junta successfully recaptured the town. Following their takeover, junta troops reportedly burned down houses in various wards, claiming it was part of an area clearance operation, according to a local resident who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"In Kawlin, we have eight downtown wards. All of them were all burned down. What we believe to be left standing are, what I can say from looking at the photos, some solid structures. The junta troops have occupied all these areas and then burned all the areas that block their line of vision. To put it simply, they burned down everything except where they were staying."<sup>14</sup>

Located on the Mandalay - Myitkyina railway, Kawlin is a transportation hub for Kachin State, Sagaing Region, and Mandalay Region, as well as for Chin State, Magway Region, and Arakan State. As such, it is a strategically important town for both resistance forces and the military council.

On 8 April 2024, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), along with Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO) and allied local resistance forces, launched an offensive against Light Infantry Battalion 275, the garrison of Myawaddy. By 4:20 am on 11 April, they took complete control of the battalion.

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<sup>14</sup> Almost entire Kawlin town burned down by junta troops, RFA, 24 February 2024



*A soldier from Cobra Column, under KNLA, raises the Karen national flag at a junta camp in Myawaddy, near the Thailand-Myanmar border (Photo – Reuters)*

The junta troops attempted to regain control of Myawaddy by using Kawkareik-Asia road, Auk Bo Te (Old Road) and Hto Kaw Koe road. On 21 April, KNLA and allied resistance forces withdrew from the friendship bridge in Myawaddy. Subsequently, on 23 April, junta troops stationed on the bridge, with the assistance of the Border Guard Force (BGF) led by Col. Saw Chit Thu of the Karen National Army (KNA), re-entered LIB-275, raised the Myanmar national flag, and re-established their position.

As a result, Myawaddy was only under control for a few days before it became the second town to be retaken by the junta. However, the junta is not in a position to fully control the town; the KNLA and allied resistance forces continue to surround the entire area, including the Asia Highway. Regarding this matter, KNU Spokesperson Padoh Saw Taw Nee said:

"The main point is that we had to withdraw to prevent falling into the military council's trap."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> KNU says withdrawing from Myawaddy to avoid falling into junta's trap, KIC, 24 April 2024



In early 2024, the Pa-O National Liberation Organisation/Pa-O National Liberation (PNLO/PNLA), which announced its intention to eradicate the military dictatorship, captured Hsihseng town in southern Shan State on 28 January. Due to its strategic proximity to the resistance stronghold of Karenni (Kayah) State, the junta intensified artillery and aerial bombing attacks to recapture Hsihseng, a militarily important town.

Hsihseng Township is located in the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone. The PNLO/PNLA confronted the junta troops and the Pa-O National Organisation/ Pa-O National Army (PNO/PNA) led by U Aung Kham Hti. Then, on the evening of 12 January 2025, the junta-aligned PNO/PNA recaptured Hsihseng town.<sup>16</sup> The junta attempted to reclaim Hsihseng through aerial bombings and by leveraging the locally strong PNO.

One displaced woman from Hsihseng said: "We want Pa-O armed groups to unite. Like before, we want clear territorial boundaries and peaceful governance. Hsihseng is likely to see more fighting. Even from the first displacement, we haven't been able to return home. A second displacement would make the situation extremely difficult for the people."

Analysing recapture of Kawlin, Myawaddy, and Hsihseng by the junta and its affiliated groups reveals their strategy of artillery shelling, aerial bombing, and burning towns. Furthermore, they effectively utilized their subordinate people's militia groups and border guard forces within these regions.

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<sup>16</sup> Junta-allied PNO retakes Hsihseng, Shan News, 14 January 2025

## Failed offensives to capture towns

The resistance forces initially captured Tabayin town in Sagaing Region on the morning of 18 August 2024, but the junta swiftly recaptured it within hours, making this a failed event to seize a town.



*Resistance soldiers capture Tabayin town after three days of fighting against the junta troops stationed in the town (Photo - 96 Soldiers PDF)*

The district battalions under the command of the NUG, along with the PDFs from Tabayin, Ye-U, and Budalin Townships and the 96 Soldiers, launched an attack on Tabayin on the evening of 15 August. They captured the town after three days of fighting, which is located only over 40 miles from Monywa, where the Northwest Regional Military Command is headquartered. In order to prevent losing Tabayin, which could threaten Monywa militarily, the junta quickly reinforced their troops, transporting soldiers via helicopter from the regional military command and LIB-704 in Mandalay Nandwin. At the same time, the junta conducted aerial bombings using jet fighters and Mi-35 helicopters.

During the battle for Tabayin, resistance forces captured over 120 junta soldiers who surrendered, including two members of Pyu Saw Htee militia, non-CDM civil servants, and their families. They also seized large quantities of weapons and ammunition. However, the resistance forces were forced to withdraw from the town in the face of the ground and aerial counterattack by the junta troops. Zeyar Lwin, leader of the 96 Soldiers, which collaborated in the operation, explained:

"After capturing the town, we didn't have a coordinated plan about how the different groups would defend or strategically control parts of Tabayin."<sup>17</sup>

Zeyar Lwin analysed that the primary challenges in maintaining the captured town for the resistance forces were the insufficient supply of ammunition and the airstrikes by the junta.

The battle for Pale town, which is only about 40 miles from the Northwest Regional Military Command based in Monywa, is the second unsuccessful attempt by resistance forces. Led by Bo Nagar, the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA) collaborated with the Generation Z Army (GZA) based in Wetlet Township and the Southern YSO-PDF based in Yesagyo Township of Magway Region. They launched the attack on 11 November 2024. This offensive was said to be coordinated with the Operation Chin Brotherhood as a coordinated operation.

In the BNRA statement on 17 November 2024, it mentioned that they managed to swiftly capture and control the General Administration Office and the police station in the town, which were the junta's last line of defense. Despite being well-prepared for

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<sup>17</sup> Junta retakes Tabayin after resistance capture, Myanmar Now, 19 August 2024

ground support and interdiction operations, they faced difficulties in countering the junta's aerial reinforcements and air support. As a result, they had to withdraw from the town on the evening of 14 November, the fourth day of the operation.<sup>18</sup>

On 7 July 2024, local defense forces launched attacks on the township offices and police stations occupied by the junta troops in Pale. They managed to capture and control the town for a few hours. The coordinated offensive was launched by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the Northwest Military Region, along with the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) Column 3, Battalion 14 (Chindwin Region), Burma Liberation Democratic Front (BLDF), Black Peacock Borderless Guerrilla, and other community-based resistance forces. As the battle dragged on, due to the decreasing supply of ammunition and heavy artillery fire by the junta troops, they had to withdraw from the town.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the military successes of the resistance forces' coordinated movements during the aforementioned unsuccessful attempts at



*Resistance members seen during the offensive to capture Pale town*

capturing the towns, the lack of sufficient ammunition and the absence of long-term strategies to maintain the control of the towns were identified as weaknesses on the resistance side. On the other hand, the military junta has been left to solely rely on

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<sup>18</sup> Statement on offensive to capture Pale, BNRA, 17 November 2024

<sup>19</sup> Joint defense forces launch attack on junta positions in Pale, Mizzima, 8 July 2024

aerial bombings, while their ground forces have been significantly weakened. It is evident that their controlled territories, towns, and military bases are highly susceptible to being easily lost to the resistance forces.

Comrade Min Htay, commander of the ABSDF Column-3 operating in the Anyar Region (Sagaing and Magway), said:

"The resistance forces are in a situation where they have to be considerate of the people. They are in a position to capture some towns quickly, but they choose not to in order to avoid causing harm to the civilians." <sup>20</sup>

## Offensives to capture towns and public security

According to data collected by the BNI-MPM, when examining the nationwide battles, attempts to capture towns, junta airstrikes, civilian casualties, and displacement situations, the military junta's consistent use of aerial bombings is revealed. Whenever they face the risk of losing towns, villages, or military bases, they resort to airstrikes at any time or place.

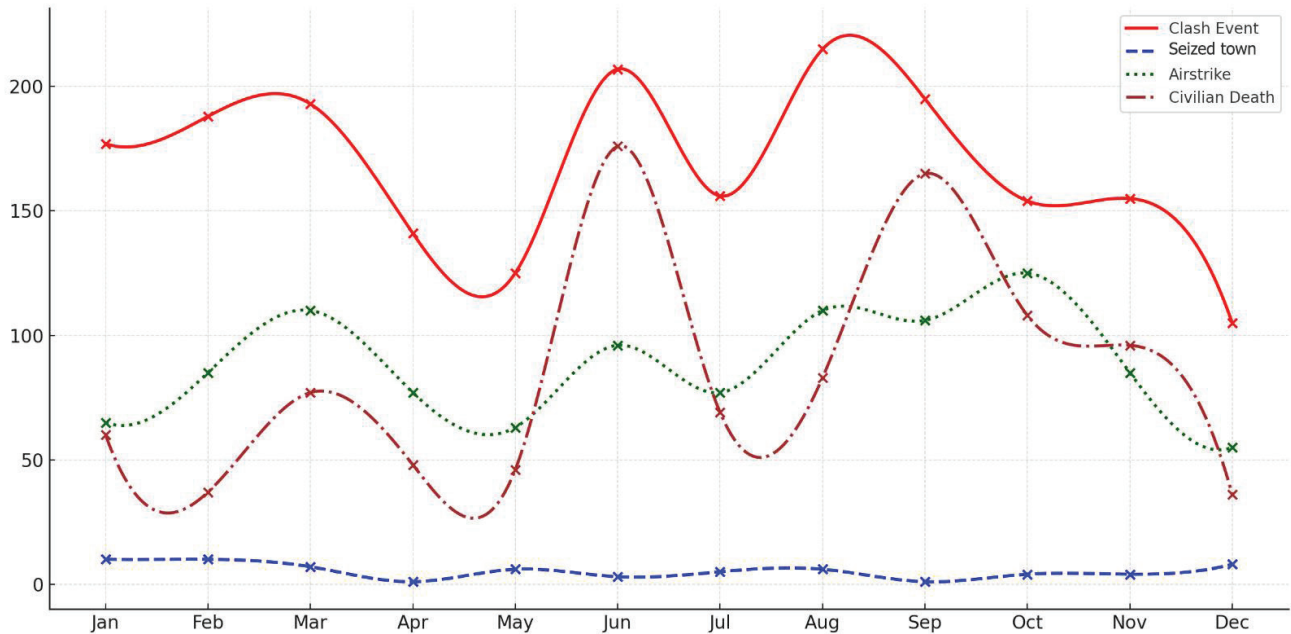
In 2024 alone, there were a total of 2,011 armed clash events between the junta troops and the resistance forces, with the resistance forces capturing and controlling 65 towns. During these battles, the junta troops conducted 1,054 aerial bombings, resulting in the deaths of 1,001 civilians. <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Exclusive interview with Comrade Min Htay, central executive committee member of ABSDF, for this report, BNI-MPM, 21 November 2024

<sup>21</sup> Military Junta's Airstrikes in Myanmar, BNI-MPM, 31 Dec 2024

## Junta airstrikes have become a major threat to public security



In 2024, there were **2,011** armed clash events between junta forces and resistance forces, with resistance forces capturing and controlling **65** towns. During these battles, the junta conducted **1,054** bombing attacks, leading to the deaths of **1,001** civilians.

Therefore, along with offensives to capture towns, the junta's airstrikes must be considered the most critical threat to the security of the civilian population.

On 3 August 2024, with the complete capture of the Northeast Regional Military Command, the (MNDAA-Kokang Army) also managed to take control of Lashio. While the MNDAA has begun its administration and reconstruction activities within Lashio, residents remain concerned about returning to their homes.

Nang Kham Khaung, a woman from Lashio who is still fearful of airstrikes after the battle, said: 'For now, I've decided not to return. The junta is currently losing at the moment, but we can't say for sure that they won't come back with their planes and bomb us.'

Another resident of Lashio, Nang Kham Aye, said: “I don't know when bombs will fall from the sky; I'm scared. It's the same in Theinni. They bomb as they please. Now, they say the junta will retake Lashio, so we're scared. We will only feel safe when one of the armed groups is completely powerless and unable to fight.”<sup>22</sup>

According to the Free Youth Organization (FYO), during the battle to capture Lashio that began on 3 July 2024, the junta's artillery shelling and aerial bombings resulted in the destruction of multiple homes and the deaths of over 300 civilians.<sup>23</sup>

On 11 and 12 November 2024, the military junta conducted airstrikes on Mogok in Mandalay Region and Nawngkhio in northern Shan State, which are under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). These airstrikes resulted in the deaths of 31 civilians, including four women.<sup>24</sup> In addition, on 26 September 2024, the junta carried out an airstrike on Arakha Army (AA)-controlled Thandwe in Arakan State, resulting in the deaths of 13 civilians, including displaced children, and injuring 25 others.

The AA spokesperson Khaing Thukha said: “Deliberately targeting civilians who are fleeing from conflict is a clear war crime. It's also a blatant violation of the Geneva Conventions.”<sup>25</sup>

Also on 9 September 2024, the military junta's two jet fighters carried out an airstrike on the AA-controlled Border Guard Police Headquarters-2 in Maungdaw. The attack resulted in the deaths of

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<sup>22</sup> Voices of returnees in Lashio under MNDAA control, Shan News, 5 September 2024

<sup>23</sup> Over 300 civilians killed during Lashio battle, Shan News, 22 August 2024

<sup>24</sup> Over 300 people including 4 women in junta airstrikes in Mogok and Nawngkhio, Mizzima, 13 November 2024

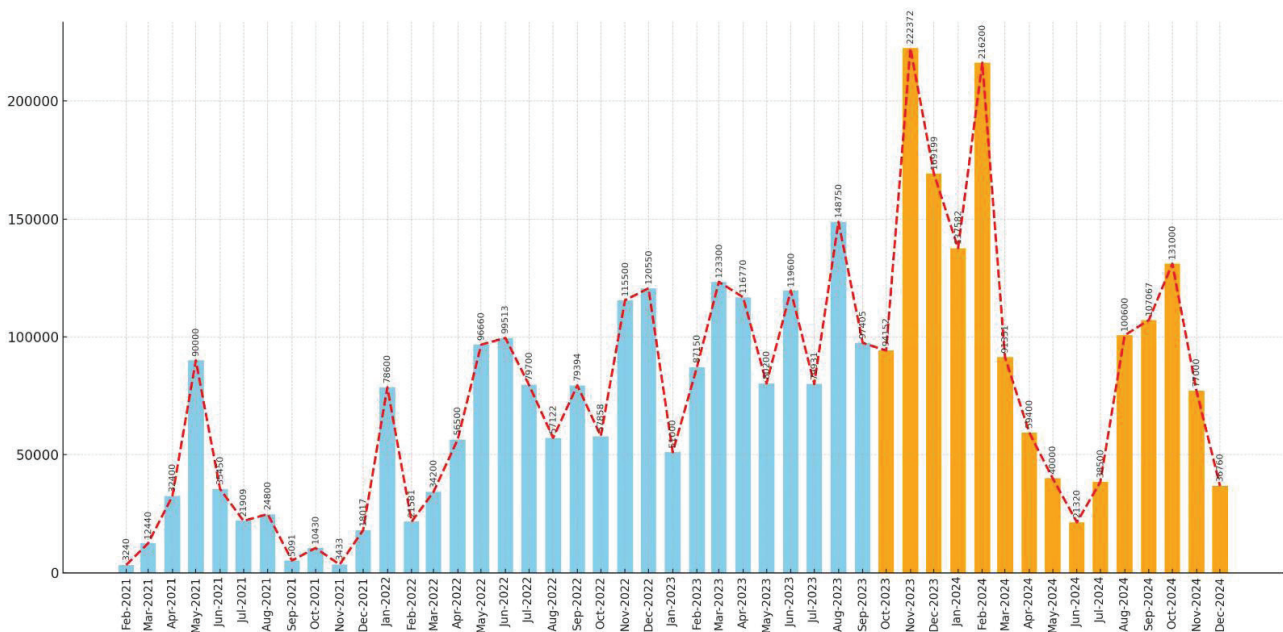
<sup>25</sup> Junta bombs Thandwe, killing 15 and injuring 13, Narinjara, 26 September 2024

over 50 people, including prisoners of war and civilian detainees, and many others were injured, according to an AA statement.

During a press conference on 4 March, Khaing Thukha said that the AA, which has managed to capture and control up to 25 towns in Arakan State and Chin State, is planning to install airstrike early-warning systems in the captured townships.

“The enemy can’t reach the areas under our control either by land or water. But, they can still reach us by air and can launch attacks on us at any time.”<sup>26</sup>

Since the coup, over **3.6 million** people across Myanmar have been displaced due to the conflict. Of these, **over 1.5 million (43 percent)** have been further affected in some way by subsequent fighting and offensives to capture towns after Operation 1027, and the junta airstrikes. (Data: BNI-Myanmar Peace Monitor)



<sup>26</sup> AA plans installing airstrike early-warning system in captured townships, Narinjara, 4 March 2024



At the end of December 2024, over 3.6 million people across Myanmar had been displaced due to the conflict since the military coup. Of these, more than 1.5 million 43 percent were displaced as a result of battles, operations to capture towns, and airstrikes by the military junta following “Operation 1027”.<sup>27</sup> Most of the displaced civilians fled due to the threat of airstrikes, indiscriminate artillery shelling, and junta’s ground columns which routinely burn down towns and villages.

## Capturing and controlling towns: The trajectory of revolution

Among the 95 towns captured and controlled by the resistance forces, an analysis by state and region reveals that 89.5 percent (85 towns) are located in six states: Chin, Kachin, Karenni (Kayah), Karen, Arakan, and Shan. The remaining 10.5 percent (10 towns) are located in three regions: Bago, Sagaing, and Mandalay.

The MNDAA-Kokang Army and the TNLA, halted their offensives against the junta, including their operations to seize towns, due to the Chinese government’s mediation and pressure. They have opened doors for negotiations. Simultaneously, they are accelerating efforts to provide administrative and public service, including the rule of law, in the captured towns. However, they remain vigilant, adhering to their self-defence policy, and are closely monitoring the junta's military and political movements.

In Chin, Kachin, and Karenni States, resistance forces are striving to operate administrative, judicial, and social service activities in the

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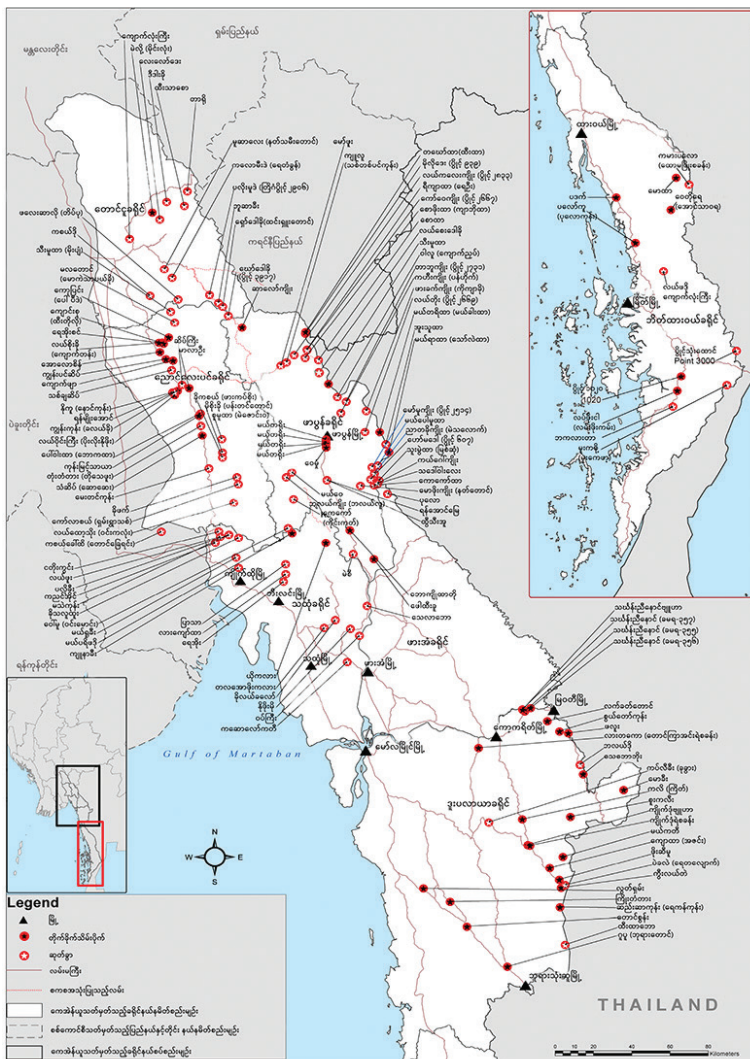
<sup>27</sup> Internally Displaced Persons Situation in Myanmar, BNI-MPM, 31 Dec 2024

towns they have captured and controlled. Simultaneously, they aim to completely clear the junta troops from their areas and continue to put military pressure on the military council.

Khun Bedu, the commander-in-chief of the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) and deputy chairman of the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC), said: “We’ll need to capture towns across the entire country. Each resistance force has its own plan.”<sup>28</sup>

The KNU, which has captured and controlled four towns in Karen State and eastern Bago Region, including Hpapun and Lay Kay Kaw, is now targeting the junta camps and columns in an “attrition warfare” rather than capturing towns. According to data collected from

**Names of junta camps that were either captured or abandoned**



(Photo - Karen Peace Support Network)

February 2021 to July 2024, the KNLA and allied resistance forces have captured a total of 138 junta camps in Karen State and Tanintharyi Region. Of these, 70 camps were captured between August 2023 and July 2024, within a span of 12 months.<sup>29</sup>

Regarding the KNU military strategy, spokesperson Padoh Saw Taw Nee explained: “Our military strategy isn’t about capturing towns right now. But if circumstances

<sup>28</sup> Exclusive interview with Khun Bedu, Chairperson of KNDF, for this report, BNI-MPM, 8 November 2024

<sup>29</sup> Regaining Control of Our Lands, KPSN, November 2024

and opportunities arise, we'll capture them. At the moment, we're focused on attrition warfare as our military strategy and battle guidance."

He added: "Regardless, this revolution remains in our hands. I can confidently say that no authoritarian regime, including this military council, can ever sustain itself." <sup>30</sup>

Even the Arakha Army (AA), which has taken control of up to 25 towns in Arakan State and Chin State, has extended its military operations to border areas connecting Arakan with Bago, Magway, and Ayeyarwady Regions, in collaboration with regional allies. The junta, having lost control of 14 townships in Arakan State, including the Western Regional Military Command, is now preparing to prevent potential military infiltration through these border areas. <sup>31</sup>

During the Chin Brotherhood-led offensives to capture the towns of Mindat and Kanpetlet, the Yaw Defense Force (YDF), Yaw Army (YA), Monywa District Battalion-3 under NUG-MOD collaborated with local Chin resistance forces, taking control of the towns in the third week of December 2024. During the operations, the AA also provided military support with weapons and military assistance. They claim that approximately 85 percent of Chin State's area, which comprises only 9 townships, is now controlled by the Chin Brotherhood (CB), Chinland Council (CC), and Arakha Army (AA)." <sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with KNU spokesperson Padoh Saw Taw Nee (Part 1), People's Spring, 17 October 2024

<sup>31</sup> Fierce fighting between junta and AA continues along Arakan Mountains border areas, DMG, 21 January 2025

<sup>32</sup> Chin Brotherhood says they control up to 85 percent of Chin State's area, RFA, 23 December 2024



The AA's operations to capture towns and military successes have demonstrated its potential to provide support to allied resistance forces in terms of weapons and military operations in neighbouring regions of Arakan State such as Chin, Magway, Ayeyarwady, and Bago Regions. "Operation 1027," which was initiated in northern Shan State, has not only led to shared combat experience and weapons with resistance forces but has also enabled them to launch their own offensives to capture camps and towns.

According to BNI-MPM data collected within one year from 1 January to 31 December 2024, a total of 2,039 conflict events were recorded across Myanmar. Of these, 2,011 were clashes between the junta troops and resistance forces. Notably, armed clashes between EROs and the junta forces accounted for over 60 percent. Compared to a similar period in 2023, the leadership and collaboration of EROs have become increasingly prominent.

Just as the resistance forces in Chin State and Arakan State have been actively campaigning for the complete removal of junta troops and liberation of the people from the junta's rule, similar military objectives have been set in Karenni (Kayah) State and Karen State, enthusiastically preparing to intensify offensive operations against junta troops. In addition, there have been more joint military operations between the EROs and PDF battalions under the NUG. Within Ayeyarwady Region, several developments seem to indicate the revolution's trajectory, including: the systematic formation of the regional military command with military columns, battalions, tactical operations commands; the relocation of the BPLA and PLA to the

Anyar Region for military operations; and the unification of defense forces in Mon State. These military operations to capture and control towns could expand the scope of the armed conflict and increase collaboration among the resistance forces.

## Looking towards a federal union amidst offensives to capture towns

An announcement issued by the NUG Central Committee for Interim Implementation of Local Administration on 20 March 2024 states: "People's administration bodies are the foundation of NUG's local administration and are present only in regions. It also states that state governments are currently conducting their administrative and service functions within their respective regions. It also mentions that federal arrangements will emerge soon and federal establishments will be set up nationwide."<sup>33</sup>

At the NUG press conference on 11 September 2024, regarding interim rule of law efforts of the NUG, Union Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration U Lwin Ko Latt stated: "We have developed a policy to primarily implement its administration in the Regions."

Khun Bedu, Deputy Chairperson of the IEC envisions the future federal structure as having NUG as the central government, with the NUG PDF battalions functioning as the central government's army, and states establishing their own armed forces capable of managing

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<sup>33</sup> Announcement on interim implementation of local administration and public services, NUG, 20 March 2024

state administration and public service operations. He mentioned that in 2024, all resistance forces in Karenni State were unified under a single chain of command (COC) system and they will position themselves as the state's army.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, considering the evolving military and administrative developments, Khun Bedu said: "In some areas, we will inevitably have to accept a confederate system."

The AA Commander-in-Chief Major General Twan Mrat Naing said that the administrative model in Arakha region (Arakan State) would employ a unitary state system, with the United League of Arakan (ULA) as the leading party. The Arakha Army (AA) will remain under the control of the party. "At first, we will establish a centralized government prioritizing centralized control. Later, based on competence and performance, there is potential to gradually decentralize administrative powers to different levels of the government," he explained.<sup>35</sup>

Regarding the future vision for the Arakha region, he added: "The primary objective of ULA/AA is to secure comprehensive self-determination for the Arakha region and its people. We aim to build a confederate state that will mutually benefit with other governments within Myanmar. We hope that other significant stakeholders in Myanmar will be able to participate in line with our objectives."

In other words, events involving capturing and controlling towns in ethnic regions such as Kachin, Karen, Karenni (Kayah), Chin, Arakan, and Shan State, including Kokang region and Ta'ang region, have

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<sup>34</sup> "We're preparing more intense and potentially more successful operations" – Khun Bedu, Myanmar Now, 12 January 2025

<sup>35</sup> Arakan Army Commander-in-Chief Twan Mrat Naing on the Future of Rakhine State, The diplomat, 6 Sep 2024

facilitated the consolidation of forces, the emergence of local governance mechanisms, interim administrative arrangements, and administrative bodies such as local administrative bodies and administrative councils in respective regions.

For example, the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC) in Karenni State, the Special Region Administrative Committee of MNTJP/MNDAA in the Kokang region, the Chinland Council and Chinland Government in Chin State, and the Arakan People's Revolutionary Government in Arakan State. Similarly, the KIO/KIA is working to establish a Kachin State government, while the PSLF/TNLA is determined to establish a people's government in the Ta'ang/Palaung region. The KNU has also declared its intention to work towards the emergence of the Kawthoolei State.

Although the envisioned government models vary depending on the regions and ethnic groups, they are all based on equality and self-determination. The events involving capturing and controlling towns by resistance forces during the military coup period therefore have given rise to essential precursors to a future federal democratic union.

## Findings and analysis

Comrade Min Htay, a central executive committee member of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), believes that the intensified offensives to capture towns and territorial control activities by the resistance forces are aimed at striving towards a future federal union.

"If we want to establish a federal system, we need territorial possession. Having territories determines how we'll form a union and proceed with a federal system. When we talk about the common goal of toppling the military dictatorship, we need controlled territories. You can't establish a federal system without territories. That's why ethnic armed organizations and resistance forces are primarily focusing on capturing and controlling territories," he said.<sup>36</sup>

Observing the offensives to capture towns, there have been instances of the junta soldiers abandoning their camps, surrendering their weapons, or raising the white flag. This reveals a decline in combat capability, exhaustion, and demoralization among the junta troops. In addition, the transition of resistance forces from defensive to offensive operations has created physical and psychological insecurity among the junta troops, making them afraid to leave their camps, essentially inviting further attacks from the resistance forces. While the military junta maintains superior air and naval capabilities, their inability to reclaim hundreds of lost military camps and control many villages and urban areas across the country indicates that the military junta is now facing sustained losses.

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<sup>36</sup> Exclusive interview with Comrade Min Htay, central executive committee member of ABSDF, for this report, BNI-MPM, 21 November 2024





*Kyauk Ni Maw village where over 500 houses were burned down due to junta aerial bombing (Photo - CJ)*

The military junta's losses are unsalvageable, with no possibility of counterattack, and losses will continue for years, said military analyst Ye Myo Hein. "If a junta's position is attacked, it will fall sooner or later due to insecurity. Rather than reclaiming those positions, the junta troops are mainly focusing on preventing further territorial losses," he said.<sup>37</sup>

The military junta, having lost control of towns, villages, and military camps, has increasingly relied on aerial attacks. Consequently, the airstrikes have become the primary threat to the security of local populations in areas controlled by resistance forces. The airstrike on Kyauk Ni Maw village in Ramree Township, Arakan State, is one such threat to public security.<sup>38</sup>

Looking at the events involving capturing and controlling towns and the trajectory of the revolution, it is observed that the resistance forces are striving to eradicate the junta troops and accelerate the offensive operations for liberation from the dictatorship. Furthermore,

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<sup>37</sup> The trajectory of Myanmar's civil war, BBC, 19 January 2024

<sup>38</sup> Kyauk Ni Maw residents struggle to rebuild after homes burned down from junta bombing, DMG, 18 January 2025

new forms of collaborative arrangements between resistance forces are being observed in regions such as Mon State, Ayeyarwady Region, and the Anyar region covering Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay Regions. Conflict-related data also indicates increasing leadership and support from Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) in offensive military operations against the junta troops, border guard forces, and pro-military militias, including the Pyu Saw Htee.

While there is not yet a comprehensive political consensus among all resistance forces for building a future federal democratic union, they are united in commitment to overthrow the military junta and end the military dictatorship. Therefore, it can be assessed that military pressure on the junta from revolutionary forces is likely to increase, and more offensive operations to capture military camps and towns are expected.

However, it is crucial to review the failed offensives at capturing the towns, the recapturing of towns by junta troops, and the offensive operations that have posed threats to public security, in order to find military strategies that minimize harm to the civilian populations. The resistance forces must learn from the junta's multi-faceted losses, which have occurred due to a lack of public support.

Comrade Min Htay believes that the unity among resistance forces and the civilian population is the key reason they have been able to sustain control over towns, villages, and territories taken from the military junta for years.

“We have the support of the people, while they don't. Even when they move their troops, we receive advance information from the civilians. Therefore, we can intercept them and prevent them from disturbing the towns we control, except for airstrikes,” said Comrade Min Htay.

