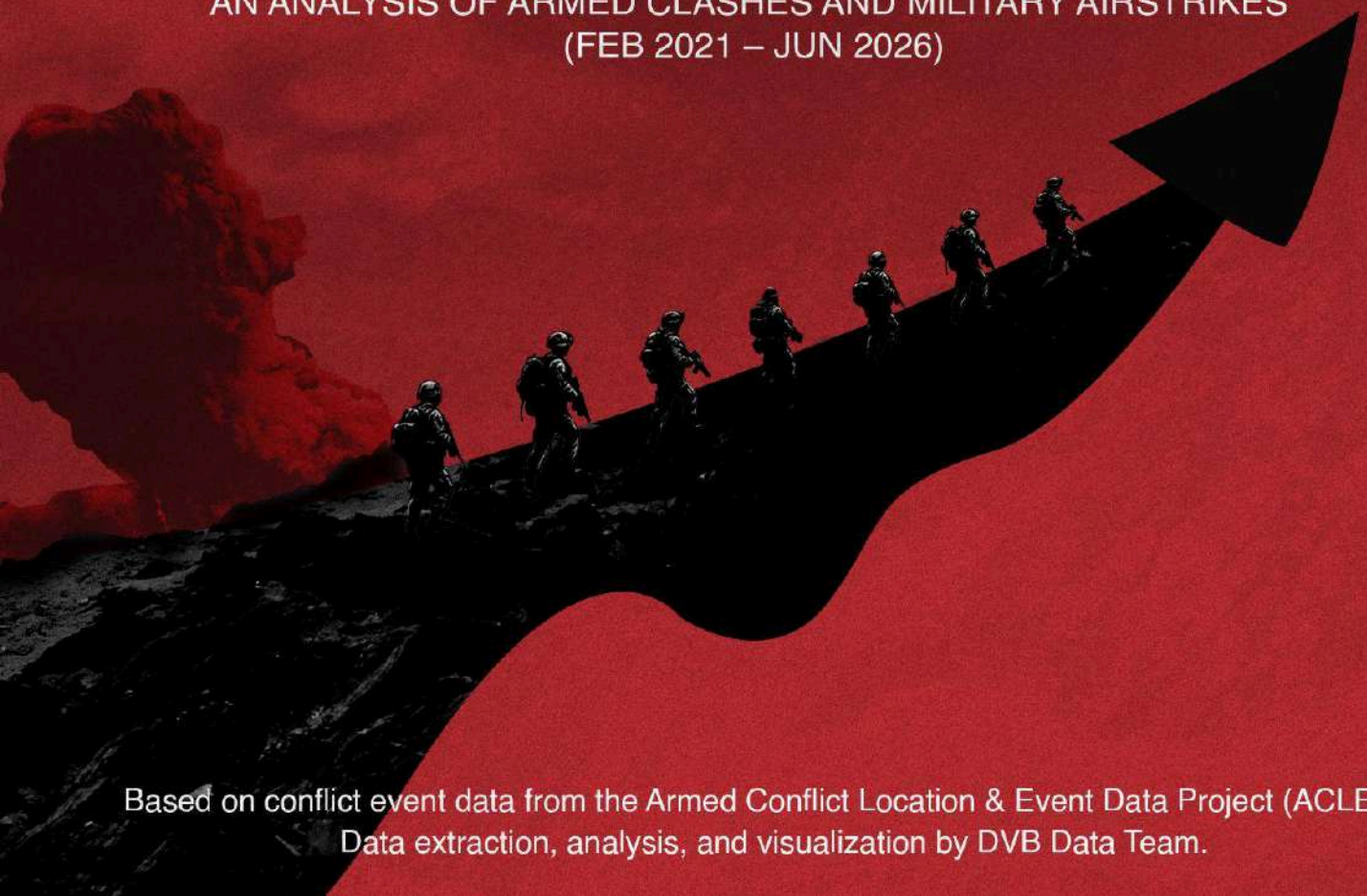
CHANGING CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN MYANMAR

AN ANALYSIS OF ARMED CLASHES AND MILITARY AIRSTRIKES
(FEB 2021 – JUN 2026)



Based on conflict event data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).
Data extraction, analysis, and visualization by DVB Data Team.

Introduction

Myanmar's conflict landscape has changed significantly since the military coup in February 2021. What began as localized resistance against military rule gradually evolved into a nationwide armed conflict involving junta forces, Resistance Forces, and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) across multiple states and regions.

Over the past five years, the conflict has expanded geographically and intensified in scale. While Sagaing Region, Kachin State, and northern Shan State remained major conflict hotspots throughout much of the reporting period, other areas including Magway, Mandalay, Tanintharyi, and Rakhine experienced significant increases in armed clashes at different stages of the conflict. These developments demonstrate that conflict has become increasingly widespread rather than remaining concentrated in areas with long-standing armed conflict.

Conflict dynamics have also changed over time. Armed clashes increased steadily between 2021 and 2024 as fighting spread across multiple fronts. At the same time, the use of air and drone strikes became increasingly prominent, reflecting changes in the tactics employed by different conflict actors. Together, these developments illustrate how both the intensity and the nature of Myanmar's armed conflict have evolved since the coup.

This report examines conflict trends in Myanmar between 2021 and 2026 through an analysis of armed clashes and military airstrikes. Based on conflict event data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the report examines changes over time and across different states and regions to identify major shifts in conflict dynamics and the increasing role of air power. The findings provide an evidence-based overview of how Myanmar's conflict has evolved since the 2021 military coup.

Based on conflict event data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). Data extraction, analysis, and visualization by DVB Data Team.

Objectives and Methodology

Objectives

This report analyzes conflict trends in Myanmar between February 2021 and June 2026. The analysis focuses on how conflict patterns have changed over time and across different states and regions.

The report seeks to:

- Analyze annual trends in armed clashes across Myanmar between 2021 and 2026.
- Identify major conflict hotspots and examine changes in the geographic distribution of conflict.
- Examine trends in airstrike incidents across the reporting period.
- Explore the relationship between armed clashes and airstrike activity.
- Identify major shifts in conflict dynamics during the reporting period.

Data Source

This report is based on conflict event data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) covering the period from February 2021 to June 2026. Data extraction, filtering, analysis, and visualization were conducted by DVB Data Team using standardized ACLED event classifications. Unless otherwise stated, all figures, charts, and maps presented in this report are derived from ACLED data.

Methodology

This report analyzes conflict trends in Myanmar between February 2021 and June 2026 using conflict event data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

The analysis focuses on two key indicators: armed clashes and military airstrike incidents. These indicators were selected to examine changes in both ground combat and the use of air power over the reporting period.

The report combines temporal, geographic, and comparative analyses. Annual and monthly trends are examined to identify changes in conflict intensity, while state- and region-level analysis is used to examine the geographic distribution of armed clashes and military airstrike incidents. Comparative analysis is also used to assess how patterns of ground combat and military airstrikes evolved over time.

The report focuses on broad conflict trends and changes in conflict dynamics rather than providing a detailed assessment of military operations, territorial control, or political developments.

Unless otherwise stated, figures for 2026 cover the period from January to June 2026 and should be treated as partial-year data.

Data Selection

Indicator	ACLED Event Type	ACLED Sub-Event Type	Purpose
Armed Clashes	Battle	Armed Clash	Measures direct armed confrontations involving conflict actors, including junta forces, resistance forces.

Military Airstrikes	Explosions/Remote Violence	Air/Drone Strike	Airstrike incidents include all documented military airstrikes regardless of target type.

Methodological Note: Throughout this report, the term **"Resistance Forces"** refers collectively to Resistance Forces and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) involved in armed confrontations with the military, unless otherwise specified.

Data Limitations

The findings presented in this report should be interpreted with several limitations.

- ACLED data are based on reported conflict events and may not capture all incidents, particularly in remote or inaccessible areas.
- Reporting delays and verification challenges may affect the completeness and timing of recorded events.
- The analysis relies on ACLED's event classifications and actor coding. Some incidents involve unidentified or multiple actors, which may affect actor-based analysis.
- Unless otherwise stated, figures for 2026 cover the period from January to June only and should be treated as partial-year data.

1. National-Level Armed Clashes Trends

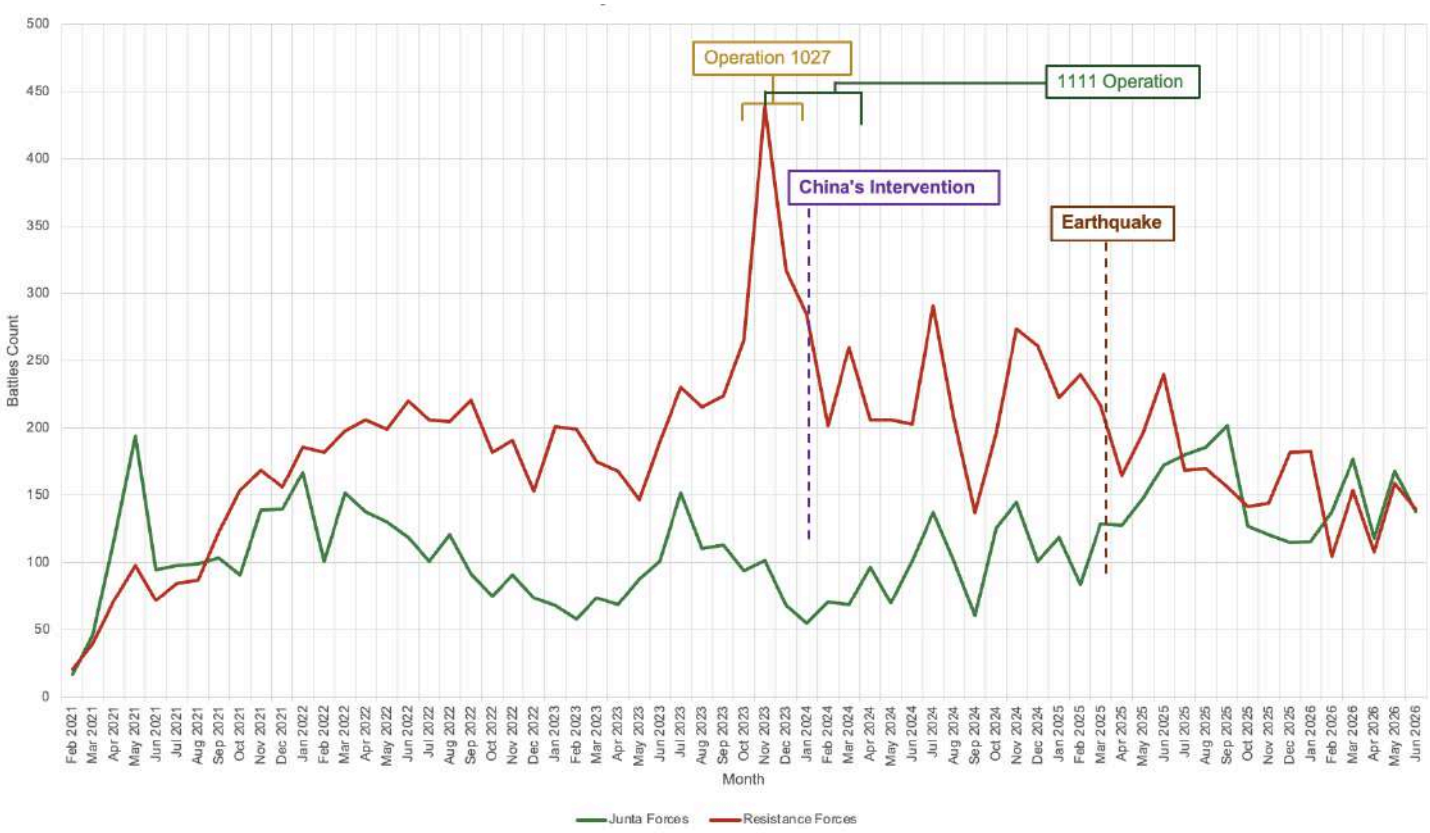


Figure 1. Monthly Armed Clashes Involving Junta and Resistance Forces, February 2021–June 2026

Note: "Resistance Forces" include resistance groups and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs).

Between February 2021 and June 2026, approximately 19,343 armed clashes involving junta forces and resistance forces, were recorded across Myanmar, highlighting the rapid expansion and prolonged nature of the country's post-coup conflict. The figures include clashes involving either side and reflect the overall level of armed confrontation between conflict actors.

Monthly trends show that armed clashes increased steadily from 2021 and intensified during 2022 and 2023 as fighting spread across multiple fronts. The number of clashes peaked in the final months of 2023 during Operation 1027, marking a major escalation in conflict intensity nationwide. Elevated levels of fighting continued into

2024, with Operation 1111 contributing to sustained conflict across several states and regions.

The data also show periods of temporary decline. Following China's intervention in early 2024, armed clashes fell, particularly in northern Shan State, before increasing again in other parts of the country. Another sharp decline was recorded after the March 2025 earthquake, when several conflict actors announced temporary ceasefires to facilitate humanitarian assistance. Fighting, however, resumed in several areas after the ceasefire period.

Despite these fluctuations, armed clashes remained at historically high levels throughout the reporting period, demonstrating that Myanmar's post-coup conflict evolved from localized resistance into a sustained nationwide armed conflict.

Note: Monthly armed clashes include ACLED events classified as Event Type: Battle and Sub-Event Type: Armed Clash. Figures for 2026 cover the period from January to June only. The chart shows the number of armed clashes involving each actor, regardless of which side initiated the engagement. A single clash may therefore be reflected in the counts for both junta and resistance forces.

Key Finding

> ***Armed clashes increased steadily after the 2021 coup, peaked during Operation 1027 in late 2023, and remained at historically high levels despite temporary declines following China's intervention and the March 2025 earthquake.***

2. Geographic Distribution of Armed Clashes

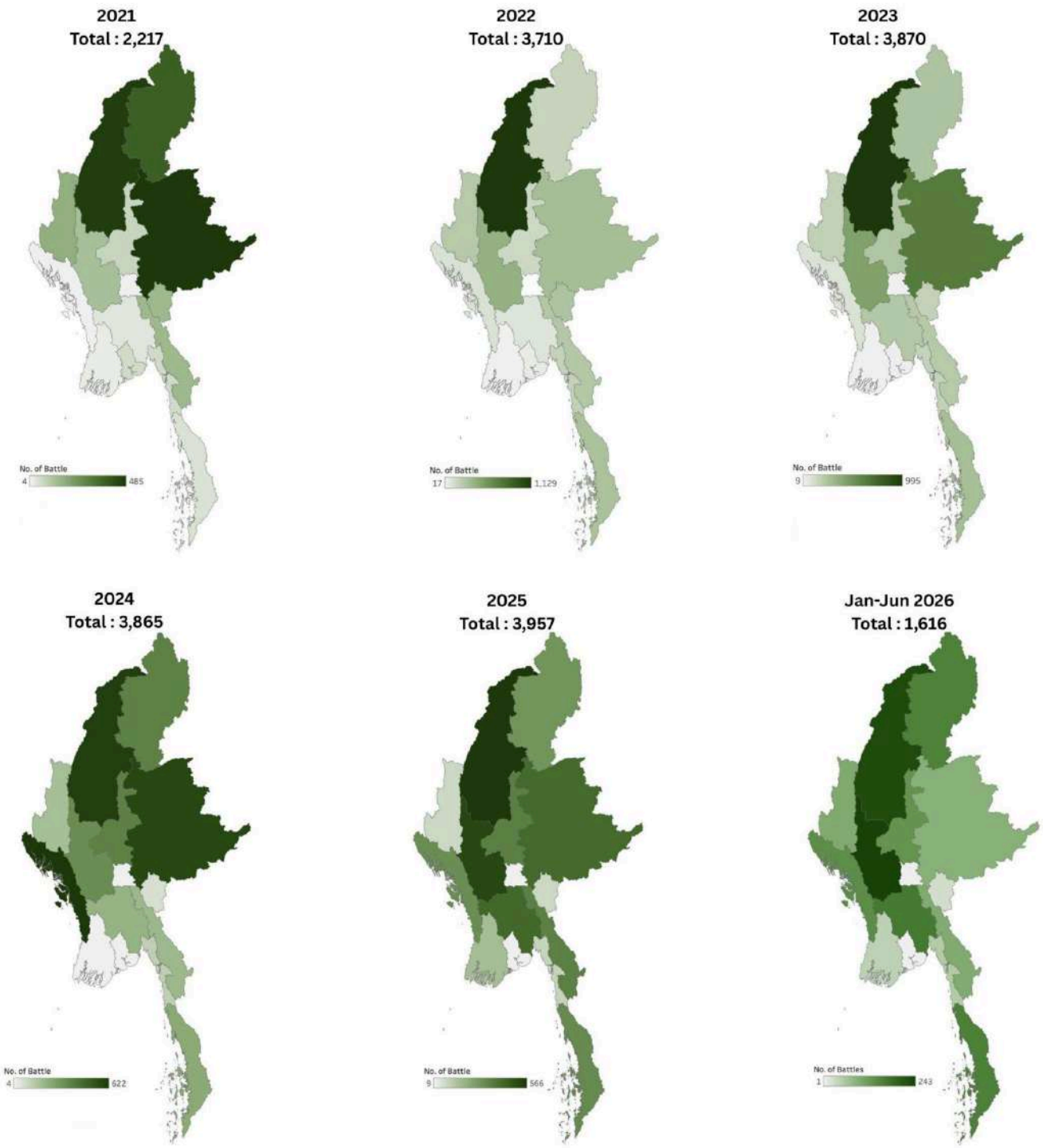


Figure 2. Geographic Distribution of Armed Clashes by State and Region, 2021–June 2026

The geographic distribution of armed clashes changed significantly between 2021 and mid-2026, illustrating how the conflict expanded beyond areas with long-standing armed conflict to become a nationwide, multi-front conflict.

In 2021, armed clashes were concentrated primarily in Sagaing Region, Shan State, and Kachin State, while much of central and southern Myanmar experienced comparatively lower levels of conflict.

The conflict expanded rapidly in 2022, with Sagaing emerging as the country's primary conflict hotspot. At the same time, fighting spread across central Myanmar, particularly in Magway, while conflict also intensified in Tanintharyi, Karenni, and Kayin. This marked a significant geographic shift as conflict spread rapidly into new areas, particularly across central Myanmar.

In 2023, the overall geographic pattern remained largely unchanged, but fighting intensified further across several fronts. The launch of Operation 1027 transformed northern Shan State into one of the country's most active conflict areas, while Sagaing continued to experience sustained levels of armed clashes. Conflict also remained widespread across central and southeastern Myanmar.

The conflict landscape shifted again in 2024 as Rakhine State emerged as a major conflict hotspot following the escalation of fighting involving the Arakan Army (AA). Rather than replacing existing battlefronts, the escalation in Rakhine added another major theater of conflict while intense fighting continued in Sagaing, Shan, Kachin, Magway, and Mandalay.

By 2025, armed conflict had reached its broadest geographic spread since the coup. Fighting remained intense across northern and central Myanmar while expanding further into Bago and Ayeyarwady, indicating that conflict had become increasingly dispersed across multiple regions rather than concentrated in a few hotspots.

The January–June 2026 data suggest that this nationwide pattern has largely persisted. Although conflict intensity varied between regions, armed clashes continued to be reported across multiple fronts, indicating that Myanmar's conflict remained geographically widespread during the first half of the year.

Overall, the maps demonstrate that Myanmar's armed conflict evolved from localized fighting in a small number of regions into a nationwide conflict involving multiple simultaneous battlefronts. While the location of the most active conflict areas shifted

Based on conflict event data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). Data extraction, analysis, and visualization by DVB Data Team.

over time, Sagaing Region remained the country's most persistent conflict hotspot throughout much of the reporting period.

Key Geographic Findings

2021	*Fighting remained concentrated in Shan, Sagaing, and Kachin.*
2022	*Sagaing emerged as Myanmar's primary conflict hotspot, while conflict expanded rapidly into central Myanmar.*
2023	*Operation 1027 drove a sharp increase in clashes across Shan State, while Sagaing remained the most active battlefield.*
2024	*Rakhine became the country's most conflict-affected state as fighting escalated with the AA.*
2025	*Armed conflict reached its widest geographic spread, with sustained fighting across nearly every state and region.*
2026 (Jan–Jun)	*The nationwide, multi-front conflict pattern remained largely unchanged.*

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3. National-Level Airstrike Trends

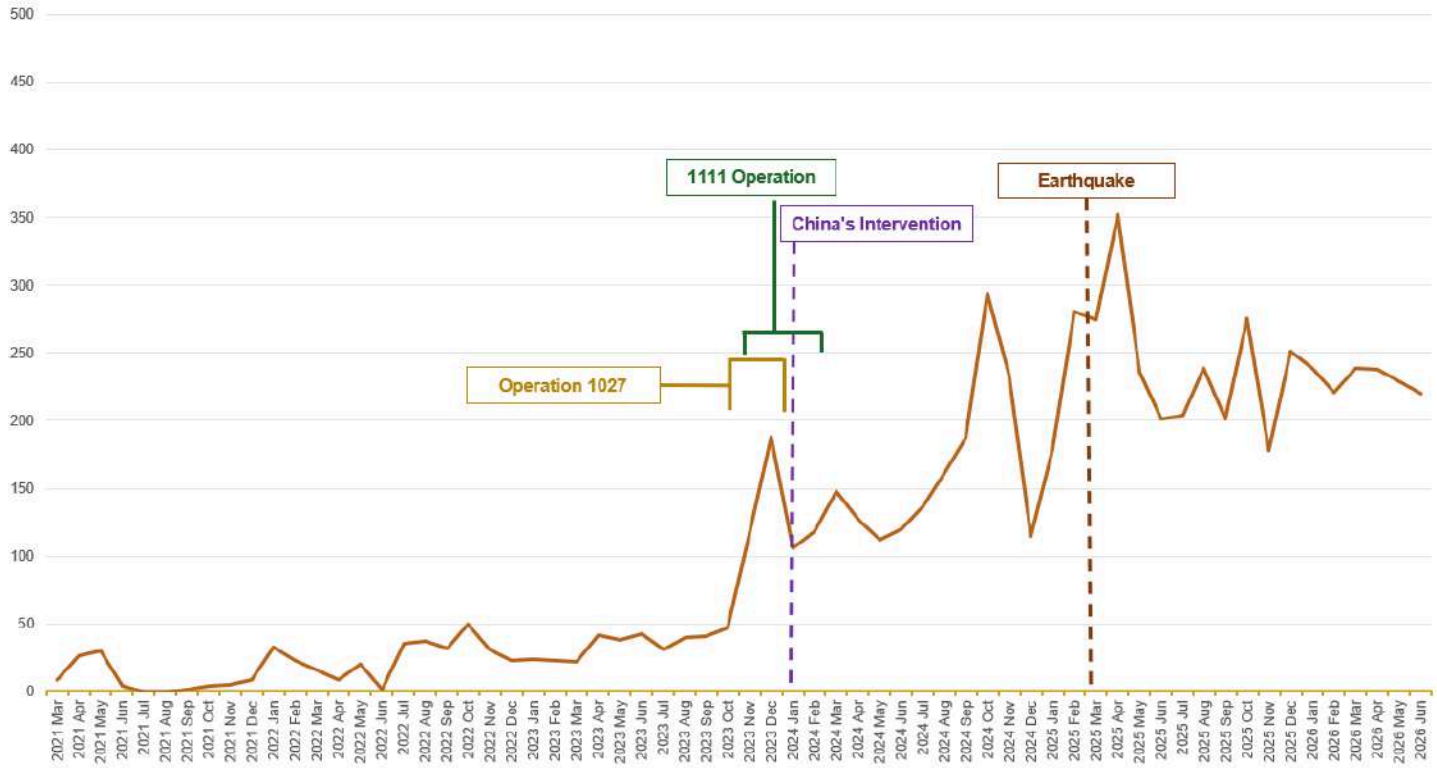

Figure 3: Monthly Military Airstrike Incidents, February 2021–June 2026

Between February 2021 and June 2026, military airstrike incidents increased sharply across Myanmar, reflecting the military's growing reliance on air power as the conflict evolved.

Monthly trends show a gradual increase in military airstrikes during 2022, followed by a sharp escalation in late 2023 alongside Operation 1027. Airstrike activity remained elevated throughout 2024, despite temporary fluctuations following China's intervention in northern Shan State. Unlike ground battles, military airstrikes continued at consistently high levels across multiple fronts.

The highest level of military airstrike activity was recorded in 2025. Monthly incidents peaked shortly after the March 2025 earthquake, despite temporary ceasefires announced by several conflict actors to facilitate humanitarian assistance. Rather than declining, military air operations intensified during this period before remaining consistently high throughout the rest of the year. By June 2026, airstrike activity had

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already reached substantial levels, indicating that air power remained a central component of the military's operational strategy.

The data also show changes in the platforms used to conduct airstrikes. While fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters remained the primary means of attack, the reported use of paramotors and gyrocopters increased markedly from 2025 onward, suggesting a broader diversification of the military's aerial strike capabilities.

Note: Monthly military airstrike incidents include ACLED events classified as Event Type: Explosions/Remote Violence and Sub-Event Type: Air/Drone Strike, filtered for military actors only. Figures for 2026 cover the period from January to June only.

Key Finding:

Military airstrikes increased steadily after late 2023 and remained at historically high levels through 2025. Unlike ground battles, which temporarily declined following the March 2025 earthquake, airstrike activity continued at a high level, highlighting the military's growing reliance on air power.

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4. Geographic Distribution of Military Airstrikes (February 2021–June 2026)

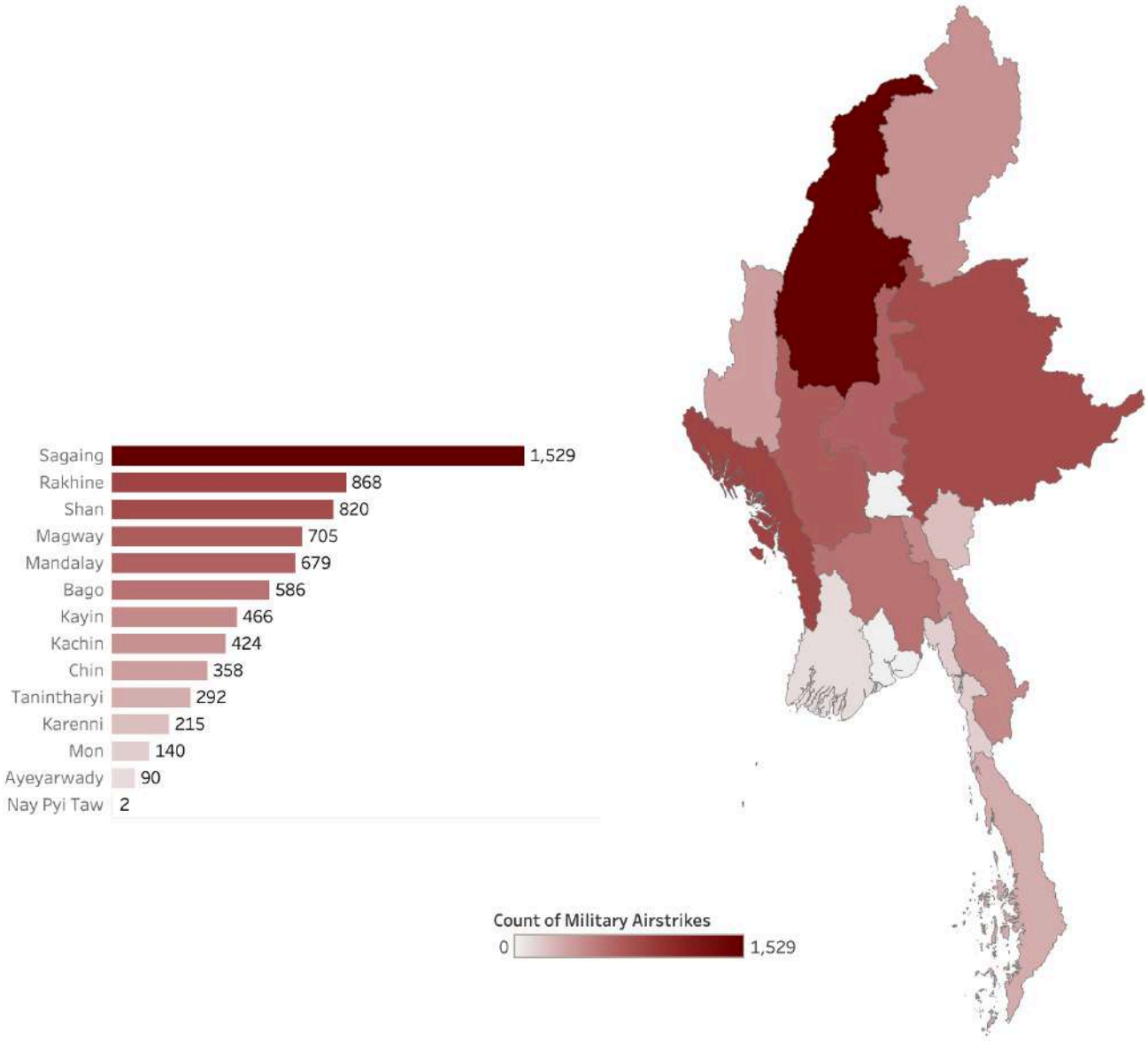

Figure 4: Geographic Distribution of Military Airstrikes (February 2021–June 2026)

Military airstrikes were concentrated in areas that experienced sustained armed conflict throughout the reporting period, although their geographic distribution was not uniform. Sagaing Region recorded the highest number of documented military airstrikes, followed by Rakhine State, Shan State, Mandalay Region, and Magway

Region. These areas also ranked among Myanmar's most active conflict theatres, reflecting the military's extensive use of air power to support operations against resistance forces and ethnic armed organizations.

The concentration of airstrikes in Sagaing and Magway corresponds with the emergence of central Myanmar as a major battlefield following the 2021 coup. In Rakhine State, airstrike activity increased markedly alongside the escalation of fighting in 2024. Meanwhile, Mandalay and Bago also recorded substantial numbers of military airstrikes as conflict expanded into new areas.

By contrast, relatively few military airstrikes were recorded in Ayeyarwady, Mon, and Karenni, where conflict activity remained comparatively limited during most of the reporting period.

Key Finding:

> ***Military airstrikes were concentrated in Myanmar's principal conflict theatres, particularly Sagaing, Rakhine, Shan, Mandalay, and Magway, indicating that the military relied heavily on air power in areas experiencing sustained and intense armed conflict.***

5. Comparative Analysis: Armed Clashes vs. Military Airstrikes

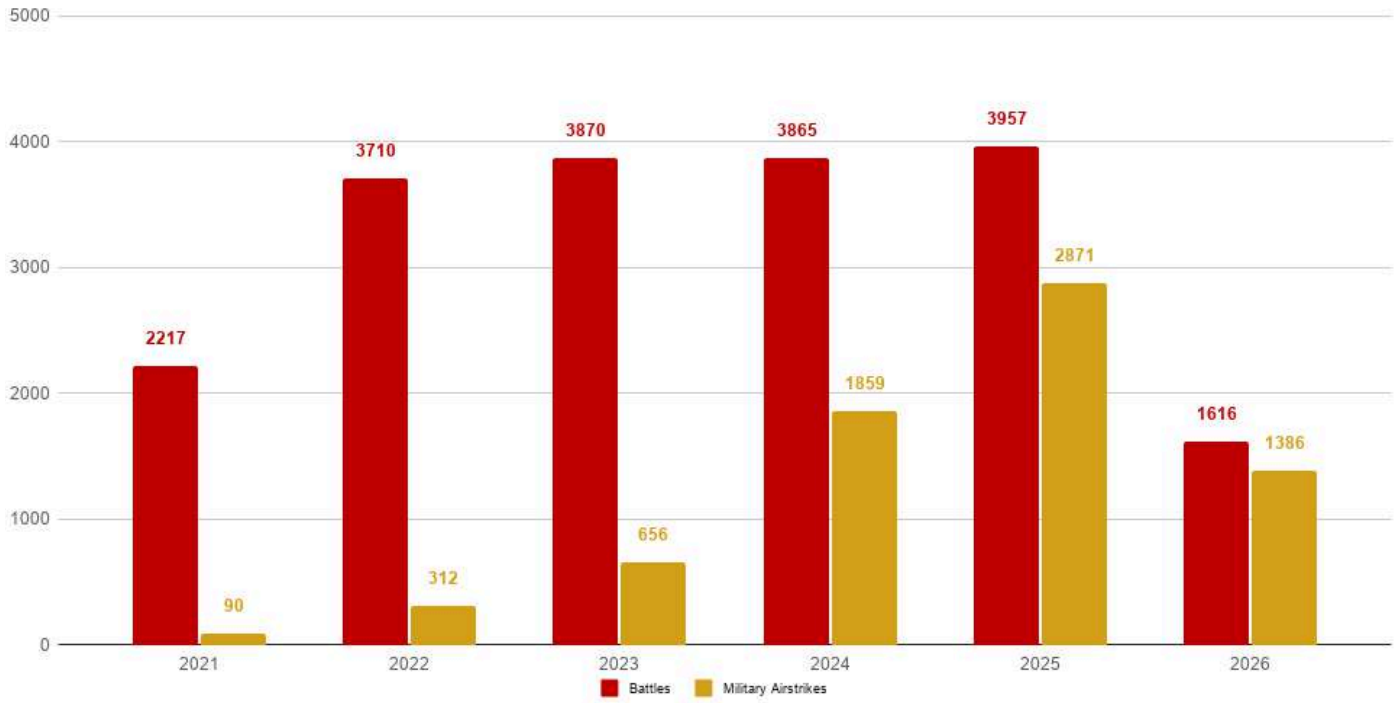

Figure 5. Annual Armed Clashes and Military Airstrikes, 2021–June 2026

A comparison of annual armed clashes and military airstrike incidents highlights an important shift in Myanmar's conflict dynamics over the reporting period.

Between 2021 and 2023, both armed clashes and military airstrikes increased steadily as the conflict expanded across multiple fronts. The rapid growth in armed clashes reflected the spread of armed resistance and the opening of new battlefields, while the military increasingly relied on air power as part of its operational approach. The escalation of fighting during Operation 1027 in late 2023 marked a significant increase in both indicators.

From 2024 onward, however, the two trends began to diverge. Although armed clashes remained at historically high levels, battle activity showed signs of stabilizing rather than continuing its rapid growth. In contrast, military airstrikes continued to increase, reaching their highest level in 2025. This divergence suggests that the

military relied increasingly on air power even as the pace of ground confrontations no longer rose at the same rate.

The contrast became particularly evident following the March 2025 earthquake. While temporary ceasefires announced by several conflict actors contributed to a short-term decline in recorded armed clashes, military airstrike activity remained elevated during the same period. This indicates that humanitarian pauses on the ground did not result in a comparable reduction in the use of air power.

Overall, the comparison suggests that Myanmar's conflict has evolved not only in its geographic scope but also in the way military operations are conducted. As the conflict became more prolonged and dispersed across multiple fronts, the military increasingly relied on air power as a key component of its operational strategy.

Key Comparative Findings

Finding	*Evidence from the Analysis*
Ground battles and military airstrikes followed different trajectories after 2024.	***While armed clashes stabilized after 2024, military airstrikes continued to increase and reached their highest level in 2025.***
Military air power became an increasingly prominent feature of the conflict.	***Military airstrike incidents continued to rise despite temporary declines in ground battles, particularly after the March 2025 earthquake.***
Major conflict areas also experienced the highest concentration of military airstrikes.	***Sagaing, Rakhine, Magway, Mandalay, and Shan recorded both sustained armed clashes and high numbers of military airstrike incidents.***
The March 2025 earthquake highlighted the divergence between ground and air operations.	***Armed clashes temporarily declined during humanitarian ceasefires, while military airstrikes remained at elevated levels.***

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6. Conclusion

Between February 2021 and June 2026, Myanmar's armed conflict evolved from localized resistance following the military coup into a sustained nationwide conflict involving the military, resistance forces, and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Over the reporting period, armed clashes expanded across much of the country, while the geographic distribution of conflict shifted significantly as new fronts emerged and existing conflict areas intensified.

The analysis shows that conflict activity remained concentrated in several key regions, particularly Sagaing, Magway, Shan, Rakhine, Mandalay, and Tanintharyi, although the intensity and location of fighting changed over time. Major military operations, including Operation 1027 and subsequent offensives, reshaped the geographic pattern of conflict and contributed to the emergence of new conflict hotspots. While periods of temporary decline in armed clashes were observed following China's intervention in early 2024 and the humanitarian ceasefires after the March 2025 earthquake, these fluctuations did not alter the overall trajectory of sustained armed conflict.

The report also identifies an important shift in the conduct of military operations. Although the number of armed clashes stabilized after 2024, military airstrikes continued to increase and reached their highest level in 2025. The comparison between ground battles and military airstrikes suggests that air power became an increasingly important component of the military's operational approach as the conflict became more prolonged and geographically dispersed. The continued use of airstrikes during periods when ground fighting temporarily declined further illustrates this changing pattern of conflict.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Myanmar's conflict has evolved not only in its geographic spread but also in the military's increasing reliance on air power. Examining armed clashes alongside military airstrikes provides a more comprehensive understanding of changing conflict dynamics between 2021 and 2026.

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