

# ANNUAL PEACE & SECURITY REVIEW 2020

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ANNUAL  
**PEACE &  
SECURITY**  
REVIEW  
2020



**MIPS**

MYANMAR INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY



# **Annual Peace & Security Review 2020**



# ABOUT MIPS

The Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, “think and-do tank” devoted not only to objective policy research and analysis, but also to strategic collaboration and coordinated policy advocacy and capacity building activities with key stakeholders in Myanmar’s peace process and security sectors. MIPS strives to operate in a manner that conforms to democratic norms, supports the peace process, and fosters national reconciliation among the country’s numerous ethnic and political groups. Our team is committed to promoting evidence-based policymaking by providing reliable information and analysis about Myanmar’s conflicts and peace process.

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# FOREWORD

As a core component of its operations and mission, the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) has implemented the Conflict Monitoring & Analysis initiative since the organization's inception in September 2017. At the heart of this enterprise is an ongoing effort to thoroughly monitor and record conflict and peace-related events in Myanmar. Although other organizations have made valuable contributions in documenting Myanmar's internal armed conflicts, the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) is pioneering in both its sophistication and scope.

While documenting armed conflict is an important endeavor in and of itself, MIPS strives to utilize data produced by TCMS in a way that will help stakeholders end armed violence and move Myanmar toward a peaceful and democratic future. To achieve this goal, MIPS is committed to identifying key trends in peace and conflict as they emerge, and informing stakeholders of not only impending risk, but also prospective opportunities for engagement and dialogue.

As one way to accomplish this task, MIPS publishes the "Monthly Peace & Security Brief", an in-depth analysis featuring select data from TCMS that is made available to members of the government, Tatmadaw, political parties, ethnic armed organizations (EAO), humanitarian and development agencies, and the diplomatic community. MIPS strives to provide fair and impartial assessments that consider and reflect the multitude of perspec-

tives and experiences that exist within Myanmar's complex security environment. Our motto in analysis is "let the data speak".

Around the globe, researchers and practitioners in the peace and security field operate under a dual reality. Since all armed conflict is sensitive by nature, analysts are tasked with maintaining conflict sensitivity without compromising the integrity and nuance of their assessments. From here emerges the first reality, that some work is best suited to make an impact among a select audience of stakeholders. In any case, this first actuality cannot belie the second, which is that the general public has an important role to play in peace and reconciliation, and in this regard deserves access to informative data and analysis. This annual report represents MIPS's dedication to this second, albeit equally critical obligation.

Here, readers will find an all-in-one resource for understanding the key developments and trends of 2019 and early 2020, succinctly summarized and elucidated for those who are interested in Myanmar but may lack a background in security. For researchers and practitioners seeking a deeper account of developments in 2019, all 12 editions of the Monthly Peace & Security Brief from that year are offered in the annex. From all of our team at MIPS, we sincerely hope this report will prove valuable to stakeholders, academics, and the general public, and move the ball on Myanmar's security field one step closer to the goal of peace.



# ACRONYMS

AA/ULA.....	Arakan Army/United League of Arakan
ABSDF.....	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
ALP/ALA.....	Arakan Liberation Party/Arakan Liberation Army
ARSA .....	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
BGF .....	Border Guard Force
CNF .....	Chin National Front
COVID-19 .....	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPB .....	Communist Party of Burma
CSO.....	Civil Society Organization
CSSU.....	Committee for Shan State Unity
DKBA .....	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DKBA .....	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
DKBA-5 (KKO).....	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army Brigade 5 (Karen Klo Htoo Baw)
EAO .....	Ethnic Armed Organization
FPNCC .....	Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee
IDP .....	Internally Displaced Person
IED .....	Improvised Explosive Device
JICM .....	Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting
JMC .....	Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee
JMC-U .....	Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee Union-level

KDA .....	Kachin Defense Army
KIA/KIO.....	Kachin Independence Army/Kachin Independence Organization
KNPP.....	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU-PC.....	Karen National Union-Peace Council
KNU/KNLA.....	Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army
LID.....	Light Infantry Division
MNDAA/MNTJP.....	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army/Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party
MPC .....	Myanmar Peace Center
NCA.....	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCA-S.....	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatory
NDAA/PSC.....	National Democratic Alliance Army/Peace and Solidarity Committee
NLD.....	National League for Democracy
NMSP/MNLA.....	New Mon State Party/Mon National Liberation Army
NRPC.....	National Reconciliation and Peace Center
NSCN-K.....	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang
PNLA/PNLO.....	Pa-Oh National Liberation Army/Pa-Oh National Liberation Organization
PC.....	Peace Commission
PPCM .....	Peace Process Consultative Meeting
PPST.....	Peace Process Steering Team
PSLA.....	Palaung State Liberation Army
RCSS/SSA.....	Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army
REC.....	Rakhine Ethnic Congress

ROC .....	Regional Operations Command
SAZ .....	Self-administered Zone
SSPP .....	Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army
TCMS .....	Township-based Conflict Monitoring System
TNLA/PSLF .....	Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front
UNFC .....	United Nationalities Federal Council
UWSA/UWSP .....	United Wa State Army/United Wa State Party
UPC.....	Union Peace Conference—21 <sup>st</sup> Century Panglong
UPDJC .....	Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee
UPWC .....	Union Peace-making Working Committee



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the major trends that defined Myanmar's peace process and security landscape in 2019. It offers insider information together with in-depth analysis to expound the year's most significant developments, and to provide readers with a nuanced understanding of the history, perspectives, and realities that defined the behavior of more than two dozen key actors in 2019 and the beginning of 2020.

The baseline for this report is data from the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS), which tracks and records conflict and peace-related events in Myanmar. The data allows MIPS to identify significant patterns and trends, such as the acceleration or deceleration of armed conflict. This report is further made possible by information collected from MIPS's expansive network of sources, and by the various research projects MIPS undertakes.

Myanmar saw a major rise in the incidence of armed conflict in 2019, but this trend was primarily driven by two conflicts involving three actors: the Tatmadaw, the Arakan Army (AA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). The conflict between the Tatmadaw and AA was mostly confined to northern Rakhine State and Paletwa Township in southern Chin State, while the conflict between the Tatmadaw and TNLA took place almost exclusively in northern Shan State.

Both of these conflicts escalated as the year progressed. In Rakhine State, severe fighting began after the AA launched coordinated attacks on police posts on January 4, prompting an angry response from both the government and Tatmadaw. The AA went on to launch multiple rounds of large-scale attacks on Tatmadaw positions and units, while the Tatmadaw moved to dislodge AA bases and dug-in positions across the theater. By year's end, the AA

had largely succeeded in dismantling civil administration in Rakhine, and a new era of Tatmadaw capability characterized by sustained air and artillery power had emerged.

Although 2019 began with fresh hopes for stability in northern Shan State, bilateral ceasefire talks between the Tatmadaw and TNLA slowly soured. As tensions rose, the TNLA, together with the AA and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), launched a large-scale offensive up and down the main transportation route linking Myanmar to China in August. The alliance managed to disrupt the economic corridor for nearly two weeks, after which the Tatmadaw pushed the fighters back off the highway and pursued them deeper into the remote Shan hills. Residual fighting would continue into early 2020.

Despite leading the TNLA, AA, and MNDAA in the Northern Alliance, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) played no role in the August offensive in northern Shan State. Since June 2018, the KIA and Tatmadaw have maintained a tacit ceasefire across Kachin State. Despite periodic clashes in northern Shan State, both sides demonstrated a clear willingness to further deescalate tensions in Kachin, engage in bilateral negotiations, and cooperate in areas like internally displaced persons (IDP) resettlement. Kachin State comparatively remains stable today, a trend that will likely continue into 2021.

Near the southeastern border with Thailand, continued armed conflict neither died down like it had in Kachin, nor escalated into the severe strife witnessed in Rakhine and northern Shan. Instead, tensions between the Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) continued to simmer over the former's efforts to improve its network of jungle roads in two townships—Kyaukkayi Town-



ship in Bago Region, and neighboring Hpapun Township in Kayin State. Bouts of limited clashes in early 2019 were followed by a long pause in fighting, but by year's end had reignited and continued into mid-2020.

The year also witnessed new dynamics within Myanmar's notorious drug trade, which plays an important role in financing a multitude of armed actors throughout the country. One key trend demonstrated by drug seizures was a pronounced shift in producer preference from Yaba, a tablet form of methamphetamine, to ice, the more profitable crystalline form. Coastal areas like Tanintharyi Region became increasingly important trafficking hubs for international-bound narcotic shipments produced in Shan State. Although it remained a major transport hub for smugglers, fewer drugs were funneled through Rakhine State after the Tatmadaw imposed a sweeping land and naval blockade against the Arakan Army (AA).

The majority of armed conflict in 2019 took place in or near populated areas, rather than the remote and rugged hills atop which some of Myanmar's other conflicts have transpired. In Rakhine State, where AA fighters operated out of ethnic Rakhine villages, civilians frequently found themselves caught in the crossfire of armed clashes. Civilians also found themselves in harm's way in northern Shan State when fighting spilled onto the highway that bisects dozens of villages and towns on its way to the border. Although the fighting in Kayin State did occur in remote areas, civilians faced the risk of injury and displacement because they live near the trails and roads fought over by the Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).

Civilians also faced risk of injury and death from other dangers, especially land mines and improvised explosive devices (IED). Many of the townships most affected by frequent armed clashes in 2019 were not heavily affected, or in some cases not affected at all, in 2018. When soldiers or fight-

ers move into new areas, they often plant mines for force protection, leading to more frequent harm to civilians. Beyond these dangers, civilians continued to face killings, arbitrary detention, abductions, extortion, and forced recruitment in 2019.

The peace process remained frozen throughout the entirety of 2019. Despite its efforts, the government was unable to restart formal peace talks after both the Karen National Union (KNU) and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) suspended their participation in October 2018. With the peace process halted, the government could not convene the Union Peace Conference—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC), where it hoped to reach an agreement on a new set of federal principles. It also continued to struggle with structural problems and technical shortfalls, as well as with strained civil-military relations.

The KNU's and RCSS's suspension of formal participation in the peace process threw the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST), the governing body of the ten signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), into disarray. Despite its leading role in the body, the KNU proposed dissolving the PPST in favor of a non-binding coordination meeting. An intervention by the RCSS, which assumed the lead role after the KNU's abdication, managed to save the PPST, but the formal proceedings nonetheless remained on hold for the majority of the year. After resolving internal discord, the KNU rejoined the peace process in August 2019, but plans to convene the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM) together with the government did not materialize until January 2020.

The relationship between the government and ethnic armed organizations (EAO) with which it maintains bilateral ceasefire agreements improved in 2019. Despite its original opposition, the powerful United Wa State Army (UWSA) softened its stance toward the NCA and signaled to fellow members of

the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) to move forward with bilateral negotiations or sign the NCA when ready. The UWSA's two closest partners, the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) and the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), demonstrated a willingness to improve their relationship with the government and possibly sign the NCA in the future.

The progress of negotiations between the government and EAOs that maintain no ceasefires were mixed in 2019. With relative stability returning to Kachin State, the KIA demonstrated a notable intent to reach bilateral ceasefire with the Tatmadaw. Despite initial interest, by mid-year the TNLA, AA, and MNDAA informed the KIA that they would no longer pursue bilateral ceasefire. After

escalations in both northern Shan and Rakhine states, bilateral talks did resume, but by 2020 faced a new, external challenge.

In mid-March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic put a firm halt to talks among the government, Tatmadaw, NCA signatories, and non-ceasefire groups. Already challenged by a slow pace of negotiations, the 4<sup>th</sup> UPC, originally slated for April 2020, will likely face delay until at least early 2021. Plans for a subsequent meeting between the government and Northern Alliance members, agreed to at the last meeting in December 2019, were also indefinitely suspended. Political dialogue and bilateral ceasefire negotiations will likely see little to no progress for the remainder of 2020 as a result of the ongoing pandemic.



# METHODOLOGY

The Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) is operated under the Conflict Monitoring and Analysis initiative at MIPS and forms the backbone of the organization's research and analysis capacity. In essence, TCMS is an advanced monitoring system and database that tracks and stores exhaustive data related to peace and conflict in Myanmar. TCMS currently holds comprehensive data for the period between January 2015 and the present, with ongoing efforts to retrospectively record events as early as 2011.

MIPS employs a team of specialized 'coders' responsible for tracking and recording more than 300 peace and conflict variables, with workload divided by region, timeframe, and event type. Coders collect information primarily from open sources, including traditional media and social media, but are aided by input and verification from field monitors operating in conflict-affected states and regions. After passing a rigorous verification process, events are carefully coded into the database through a custom-built data entry portal. A senior data manager reviews the entries on a weekly and monthly basis.

Of the more than 300 variables tracked by TCMS, 75 indicate the acceleration or deceleration of conflict dynamics nationwide. Additional inputs include primary/secondary actors and targets, time, geo-coordinates, casualty estimates, and narrative descriptions of an event. 'Armed clashes', 'IED/mine-related incidents', and 'armed incidents' are the most frequently referenced variables throughout this report.

According to the TCMS codebook, an armed clash is a violent engagement wherein two or more organized groups use lethal weapons against other organized actors or civilians at a specific time and location. If mines or improvised explosive devices

(IED) are used in an armed clash, the event will still be coded as armed clash. Verifying the types of weapons used in an armed clash is often difficult or impossible. In 2018, TCMS recorded only three incidents involving the verified use of mines or IEDs in an armed clash. In 2019, it recorded 22 of such cases.

A mine/IED is defined as a violent engagement wherein parties to conflict use IEDs, remotely controlled explosive devices, and/or landmines to inflict casualties among an opponent. Mine/IED is coded when combatants use or deploy only these instruments without engaging in an armed clash as defined above. Throughout this report, such events are referred to as "mine or IED-related incidents". For brevity, "armed incidents" is used to describe incidents coded as either armed clashes, or mine- or IED-related incidents.

In the TCMS coding standard, both armed clashes and mine- or IED-related incidents are considered events. An event is a behavior or action of a party in conflict at a specific time and geographical location with an aim to cause a desired impact on another party. An event, which may escalate or deescalate conflict dynamics, may be composed of multiple actions where the break between any two consecutive actions is no more than 24 hours and occurs at a specific location with the same actors and targets. This time parameter affects the total count of armed incidents during any given period. For example, if armed group A attacks armed group B's base at 6 AM and again at 11 AM in an attempt to overrun the position, the incident is coded as one event.

Although TCMS may not identify every single conflict-related event in a given month, it enables MIPS to map out conflict dynamics and identify major trends, such as acceleration or deceleration.

It also provides hard evidence for the data-driven assessment MIPS produces each month, and for the advice provided to stakeholders during regular consultations and workshops.

The Monthly Peace & Security Brief is provided to stakeholders, members of the international community, and fellow researchers and offers critical analysis of current trends in peace and conflict. The brief includes a narrative analysis made possible by data from TCMS, information gathered from MIPS's extensive network, and additional inputs from other MIPS projects. Each edition also includes select data from TCMS, such as the number of armed incidents, affected townships, and significant meetings that occurred in a given month. All 12 editions of the monthly brief published in 2019 are available in the annex of this report.

The Annual Peace & Security Review is the year-long rendition of the monthly brief produced with the benefit of hindsight and a larger data pool. The

methodology used in the annual report is much the same as that used in the monthly brief, with the primary input being data from TCMS, information from MIPS sources, and quantitative and qualitative data collected during the implementation of the various research projects MIPS undertakes.

Although the data provided in this report mostly covers events in 2019, MIPS's regular engagement with key stakeholders enables us to review and assess developments in the peace process in real time. Therefore, our analysis in this report captures not only the major trends of 2019, but also the current status of the peace process in 2020.

Another particularly relevant activity is an ongoing study on the impact of social media in armed conflict. In summary, MIPS closely monitors social media content related to armed conflict in Myanmar to understand how it is used by armed actors and how it changes individual perceptions toward armed conflict.

# OVERVIEW



# INTRODUCTION

Myanmar's internal armed conflict is defined by several distinct features. For one, it is the longest running domestic armed conflict in the world, tracing its origins to the advent of independence from British colonial rule in 1948. Myanmar is also home to the world's longest lasting ceasefire between a government and non-state armed group.

Another distinguishing feature of Myanmar's conflict is its numerous armed actors who, at any given moment, are engaged or disengaged in varying degrees of hostilities or negotiations with the government and each other. Myanmar's peace and conflict landscape in 2019 was no different, with the year witnessing both the acceleration and deceleration of several conflicts, as well as new overtures for

peace and persisting political deadlock. This report sets out to examine the principal features of peace and conflict that shaped Myanmar in 2019.

This report primarily deals with the Armed Forces of Myanmar, or Tatmadaw, and the 19 ethnic armed organizations (EAO) it currently engages with politically, militarily or both. Among these EAOs, ten have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), a comprehensive ceasefire agreement that outlines the peace process, while five others maintain bilateral ceasefire agreements with the government. The remaining four groups do not have ceasefire agreements with the government, and therefore are comparatively more involved in active hostilities.



**Table 1.** Significant non-state armed actors involved in at least one clash with the Tatmadaw in 2019 based on ceasefire status

Actor	At Least One Armed Clash with State Security Forces in 2019	Ceasefire	Ceasefire Category
AA/ULA	Yes	No	No ceasefire
DKBA-Splinter	Yes	No	No ceasefire
KIA/KIO	Yes	No	No ceasefire
MNDAA/MNTJP	Yes	No	No ceasefire
TNLA/PSLF	Yes	No	No ceasefire
ARSA	Yes	No	No ceasefire
KNPP	No	Yes	Bilateral ceasefire agreement
NSCN-K	Yes	Yes	Bilateral ceasefire agreement
SSPP	Yes	Yes	Bilateral ceasefire agreement
NDAA	No	Yes	Bilateral ceasefire agreement
UWSA	No	Yes	Bilateral ceasefire agreement
ABSDF	No	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
ALP	No	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
CNF	No	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
DKBA-5 (KKO)	No	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
KNU (Peace Council)	No	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
PNLO	No	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
LDU	No	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
KNU	Yes	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NMSP	Yes	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
RCSS	Yes	Yes	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

There are also, of course, a myriad of other armed actors that play a role in Myanmar, including militias, the Border Guard Force (BGF), and splinter groups formerly tied to particular EAOs. On their own, these groups were involved in only a handful of the armed incidents recorded in 2019. Actions by militias or BGF units were almost always defensive in nature or under the directive of the Tatmadaw. In any case, the defining feature of Myanmar's conflict landscape in 2019 was fighting between

the Tatmadaw and EAOs. The year also saw a significant decline in inter-EAO fighting, a trend that comprised a sizeable portion of armed conflict in 2018.

Within this context, the relatively new conflict between the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army (AA) proved most salient. Formed in 2009, the AA seeks greater autonomy for Rakhine State and has been building its presence there since at least 2015. Significant

clashes between the Tatmadaw and AA first began near the border with Bangladesh in southern Chin State in 2017, but a full-fledged conflict between the two sides did not erupt until January 2019.

The next big highlight of 2019 was the conflict in northern Shan State, which borders China's Yunnan Province. There, simmering tensions between the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Tatmadaw cooled in the opening of 2019 after the latter announced a unilateral cessation of military activities in the north. Subsequent talks between the Tatmadaw and TNLA, however, were quickly challenged by a disagreement over the extent of the TNLA's territorial claims. To address this issue, the Tatmadaw began forcefully removing TNLA positions in certain areas as it simultaneously pursued a ceasefire with the group, leading to renewed tensions. The TNLA ultimately responded by launching a large-scale offensive along the economic corridor linking Myanmar and China in August. Clashes between the two sides continued into 2020.

The escalating conflicts involving the AA and TNLA coincided with the de-escalation of conflicts in different areas with different actors. In Kachin State, for example, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), one of the four groups that does not maintain a ceasefire, and Tatmadaw were largely able to avoid clashes throughout the year, although the two sides did periodically clash in northern Shan State. The KIA, among the oldest and most well-established EAOs in Myanmar, signed a ceasefire with the government in 1994, but fighting in Kachin State resumed in 2011. The most recent Tatmadaw offensive against the KIA ended in May 2018, ushering in a new period of relative stability after seven years of sustained fighting.

Although the conflict between the TNLA and Tatmadaw escalated in northern Shan State, the conflict between the TNLA and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), one of the signatories of the NCA, largely subsided after the latter reached an agreement with the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), another Shan armed group closely allied with the TNLA. In July 2018, the TNLA and SSPP banded together in an attempt to oust the RCSS from northern Shan State, leading to nine months of sustained conflict. An intervention by Shan civil society and several prominent monks helped end the fighting, although the underlying causes of the conflict remain.

In March 2018, a major episode of fighting between the Tatmadaw and Karen National Union (KNU), an NCA signatory, erupted in Hpapun Township, Kayin State. The fighting was sparked over the Tatmadaw's efforts to clear and upgrade an old network of roads that link its numerous bases in the area. Although the two sides were able to avoid a wider confrontation like the one in 2018, sporadic clashes in Hpapun and neighbouring Kyaukkyi townships persisted throughout 2019 and into 2020. The incidents overshadowed the KNU's participation in the peace process and its factional dynamics within.

While salient, the actors involved in the aforementioned conflicts represent only a fraction of the pieces that make up Myanmar's peace and security puzzle. Of the 19 relevant EAOs, it is important to note that ten did not have any armed clashes with the Tatmadaw in 2019, while another three did not engage in any significant military confrontation with the Tatmadaw. Among the latter are the RCSS and SSPP who, despite periodic clashes with the Tatmadaw, maintain relatively stable ceasefires.

In fact, nearly 95% of all clashes recorded between state security forces and non-state armed actors were between the Tatmadaw and the four EAOs that did not have ceasefire agreements with the government. Among those, almost all clashes were between the Tatmadaw and the TNLA or AA.

These latter two conflicts also accounted for the majority of combatant and civilian deaths. In

2019, between 934 and 1,711 combatants were killed during armed incidents across the nation. Between 800 and 1,500 combatants died during fighting between the AA and state security forces, while 80 to 120 died during fighting between the TNLA and state security forces. Of the 151 civilians who lost their lives as a direct result of armed conflict in 2019, the majority were killed in these two conflicts.

**Table 2.** *Conflict dyads among major armed actors in Myanmar in 2019*

Actor 1	Actor 2	Ceasefire Category	Ceasefire (Yes/No/NA)	Number of Clashes in 2019
Tatmadaw	AA	No ceasefire	No	654
Tatmadaw	TNLA	No ceasefire	No	254
Tatmadaw	KIA	No ceasefire	No	35
Tatmadaw	MNDAA	No ceasefire	No	24
RCSS	SSPP	Not applicable	N/A	24
Other	Other	Not applicable	N/A	24
Tatmadaw	KNU	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement	Yes	12
RCSS	TNLA	Not applicable	N/A	11
Tatmadaw	RCSS	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement	Yes	10
Tatmadaw	Unknown	Not applicable	N/A	10
Tatmadaw	SSPP	Bilateral ceasefire agreement	Yes	8
KNU	NMSP	Not applicable	N/A	5
Tatmadaw	NMSP	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement	Yes	3
Tatmadaw	DKBA-Splinter	No ceasefire	N/A	3
NMSP	DKBA-Splinter	Not applicable	N/A	2
RCSS	PNLO	Not applicable	N/A	2
Tatmadaw	NSCN-K	Bilateral ceasefire agreement	Yes	1
SSPP	SSPP	Not applicable	N/A	1

# OVERALL ARMED INCIDENTS

In 2019, the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) recorded 1,083 armed clashes and 185 incidents involving mines or improvised explosive devices (IED), for a total of 1,268 armed incidents nationwide. In comparison, TCMS recorded only 492 armed clashes and 158 mine or IED-related incidents for a total of 650 armed incidents nationwide in 2018. The armed conflicts involving the Arakan Army (AA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA),

which together involved 81% of all armed clashes in 2019, contributed to a significant increase in armed incidents from 2018 to 2019.

Throughout all of Myanmar's conflicts in 2019, MIPS estimates that between 934 and 1,711 combatants were killed during active hostilities. At least 151 civilians died as a direct result of armed conflict in Myanmar the same year.

**Table 3.** *High-low estimates of combatants killed during dyadic conflict in Myanmar in 2019*

Fighting Pairs	Low Estimate	High Estimate
AA vs State Security Forces	800	1500
PSLF/TNLA vs State Security Forces	80	120
RCSS/SSA vs State Security Forces	8	15
KIA vs State Security Forces	7	12
Unknown vs State Security Forces	11	11
MNDAA vs State Security Forces	6	10
SSPP/SSA vs State Security Forces	5	10
KNU vs State Security Forces	3	8
RCSS/SSA vs PSLF/TNLA	4	8
ARSA vs State Security Forces	3	6
DKBA-Splinter vs State Security Forces	1	5
KNU vs NMSP/MNLA	5	5
NMSP/MNLA vs State Security Forces	1	1
<b>Total Estimate of Combatants Killed in 2019</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>1711</b>

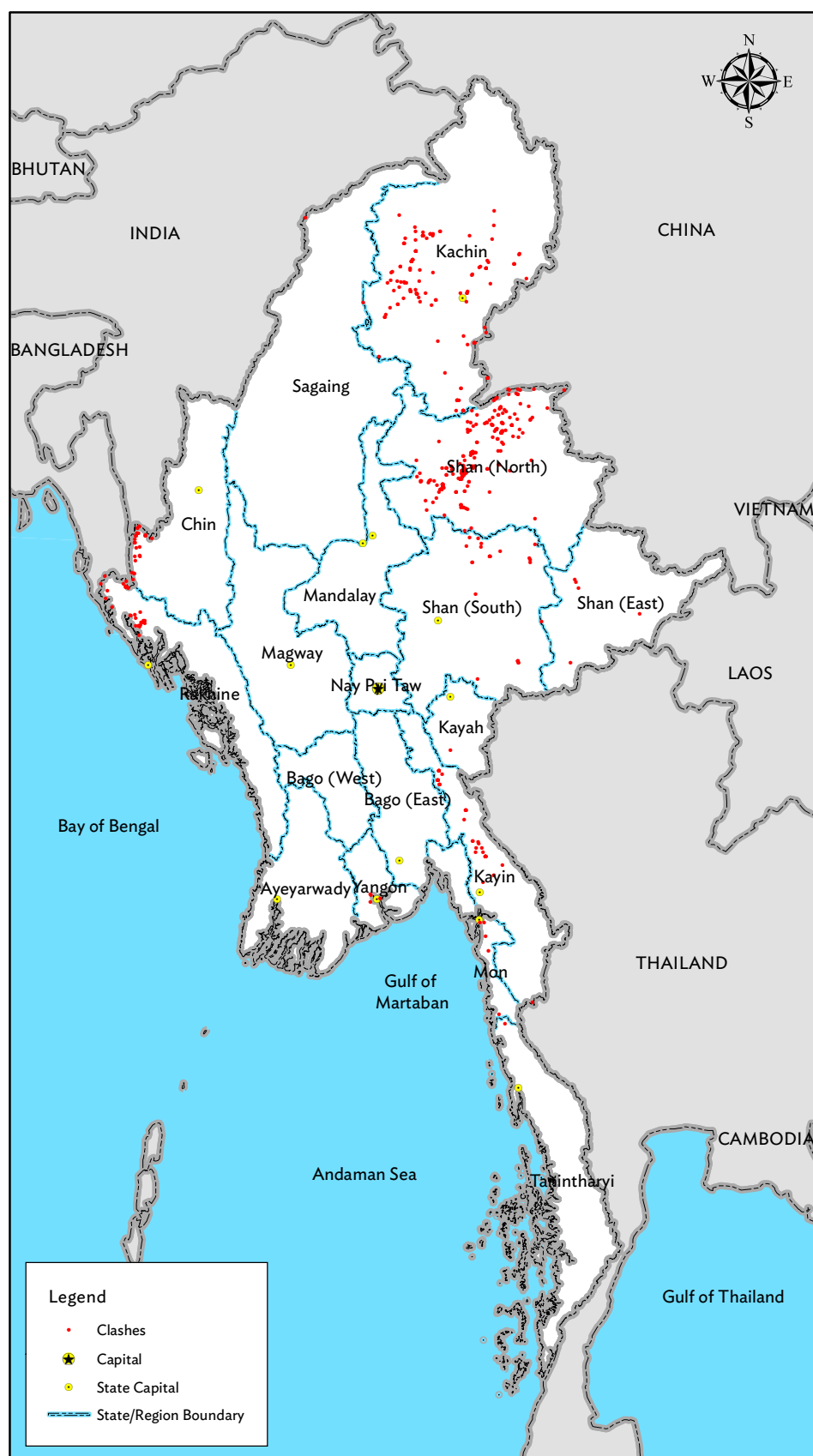
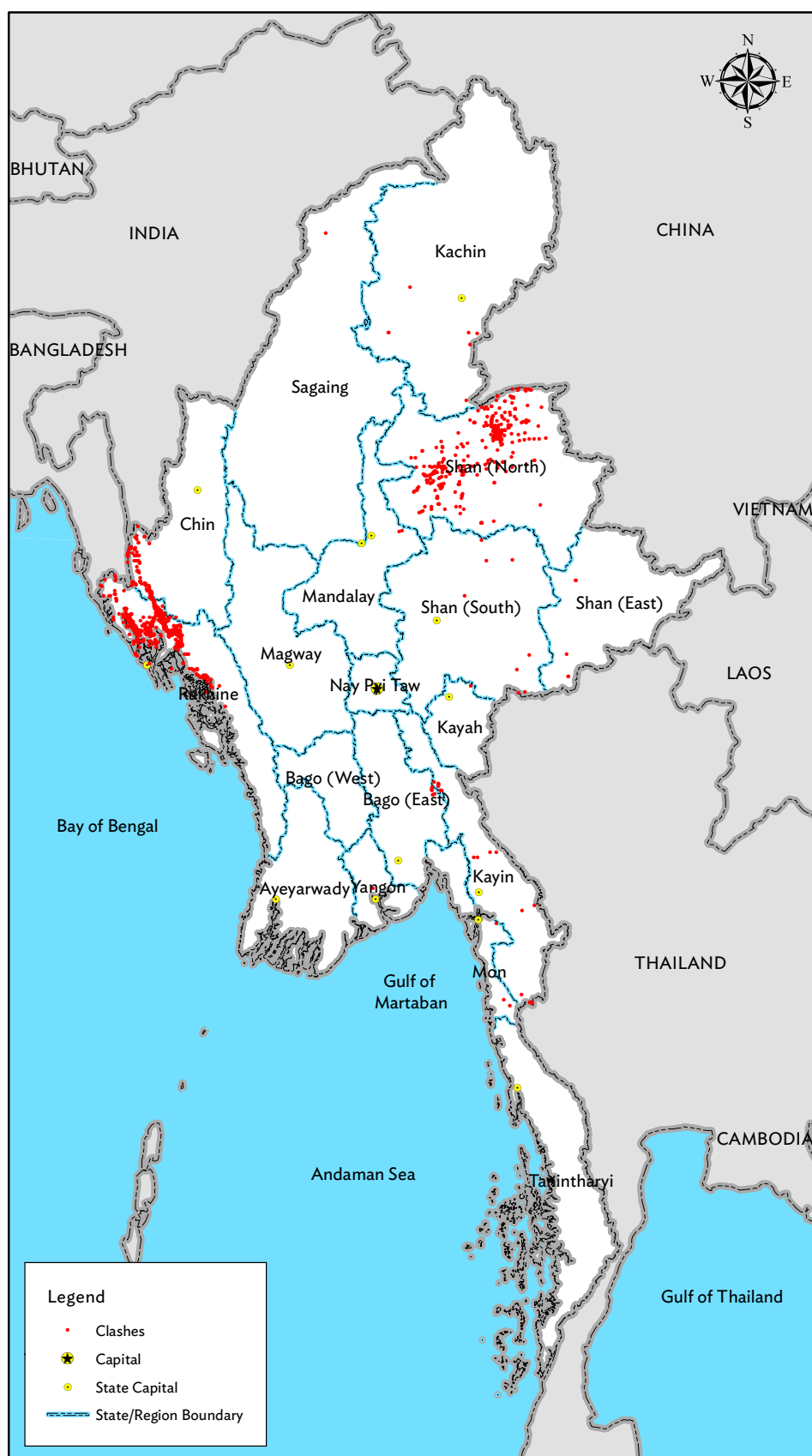


Figure 1. Distribution of armed clashes across Myanmar in 2018.



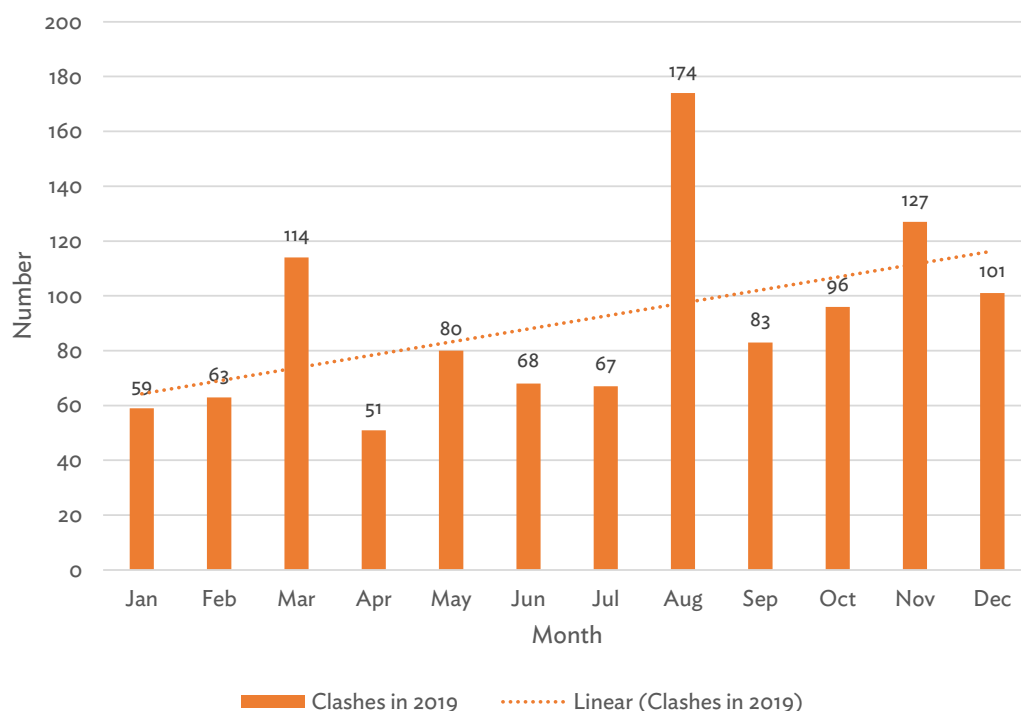
**Figure 2.** *Distribution of armed clashes across Myanmar in 2019*

Although the overall incidence of armed conflict in Myanmar drastically increased in 2019, this trend was largely bound by geography and driven only by a few actors. For example, clashes between the Tatmadaw and AA in both northern Rakhine

and southern Chin states accounted for 58% of all armed clashes recorded nationwide in 2019. Meanwhile, clashes between the Tatmadaw and TNLA in northern Shan State accounted for another 23% of all armed clashes recorded throughout the year.



**ALTHOUGH THE OVERALL INCIDENCE OF ARMED CONFLICT IN MYANMAR DRASTICALLY INCREASED IN 2019, THIS TREND WAS LARGELY BOUND BY GEOGRAPHY AND DRIVEN ONLY BY A FEW ACTORS.**

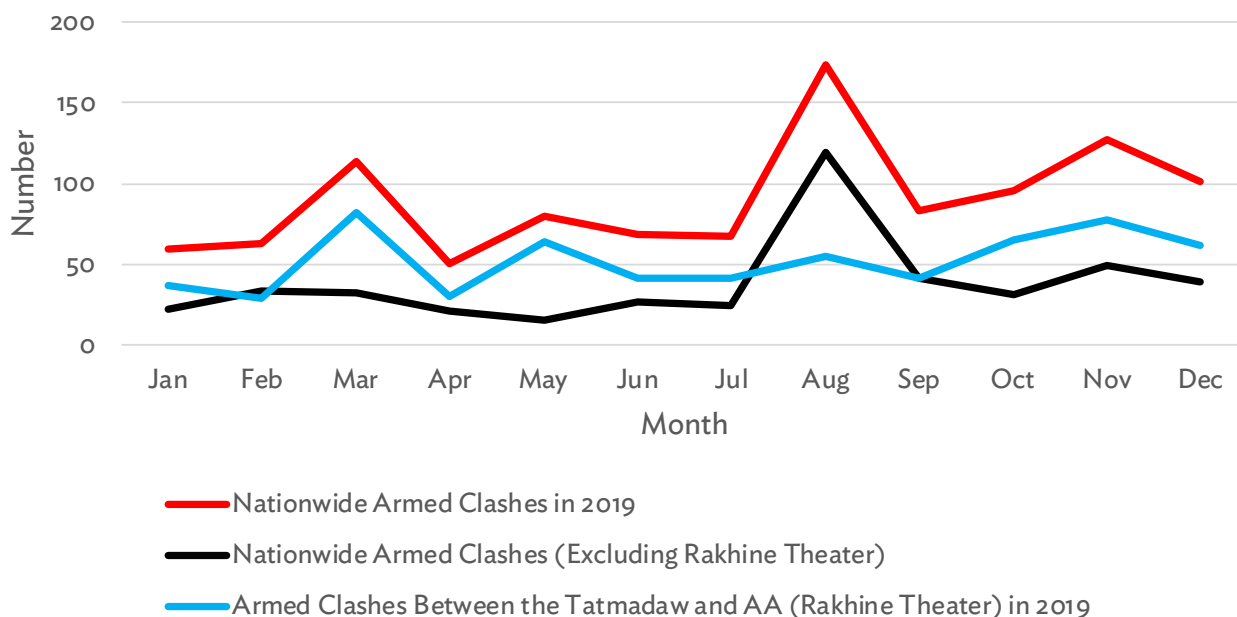


**Figure 3.** *Nationwide armed clashes in 2019 by month*

The incidence of nationwide clashes increased toward the year's end; a trend which, as shown in Figure 4, was mainly influenced by the incidence of clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw in Rakhine and Chin states, and between the TNLA and Tatmadaw in northern Shan State. In March 2019, for example, the AA launched a major offensive against Tatmadaw and police positions in Mrauk

U Township, contributing to a nearly two-fold increase in the monthly number of nationwide armed clashes. After taking about one month to regroup, the AA again staged large-scale attacks on the Tatmadaw in northern Rakhine in May. Similar patterns of armed clashes were observed in Rakhine State throughout 2019.





**Figure 4.** *Incidence of armed clashes in Rakhine Theater versus nationwide*

After repelling the AA's major attacks in October, the Tatmadaw liberalized its use of air and artillery strikes in November in what came to mark the beginning of a sustained offensive against AA fixed positions throughout northern Rakhine and southern Chin states. By late January 2020, the Tatmadaw was targeting AA units and dug-in positions with artillery and airstrikes on a near-daily basis. The ebb and flow of the Rakhine conflict is reflected in the dips and spikes in the monthly totals of armed clashes nationwide.

The major spike in armed clashes recorded in August, however, is largely attributable to the conflict between the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Tatmadaw. In December 2018, the Tatmadaw declared a unilateral cessation of military activities, leading to a pause in fighting with the TNLA in January. By February, however, regular clashes between the two sides resumed. Then, in June, the Tatmadaw launched a limited offensive to dislodge certain TNLA positions. The likely aim of this offensive was to deny the TNLA the ability to claim additional territory during expected ceasefire talks.

With tensions on the rise, the TNLA announced the formation of the Brotherhood Alliance together with the AA and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) before launching a major offensive against government positions up and down the economic corridor linking Myanmar and China on August 15. The Kachin Independence Army's (KIA) conspicuous absence from the new alliance reflected its ongoing efforts to reduce hostile tensions with the Tatmadaw, even as it continued to lead the Northern Alliance together with the TNLA, AA, and MNDAA.

In the month of August alone, TCMS recorded 113 clashes in northern Shan State, equivalent to nearly one third of all clashes recorded between state security forces and EAOs in all of 2018. Although major offensive operations subsided in just two weeks, residual fighting between the TNLA and Tatmadaw continued into 2020.

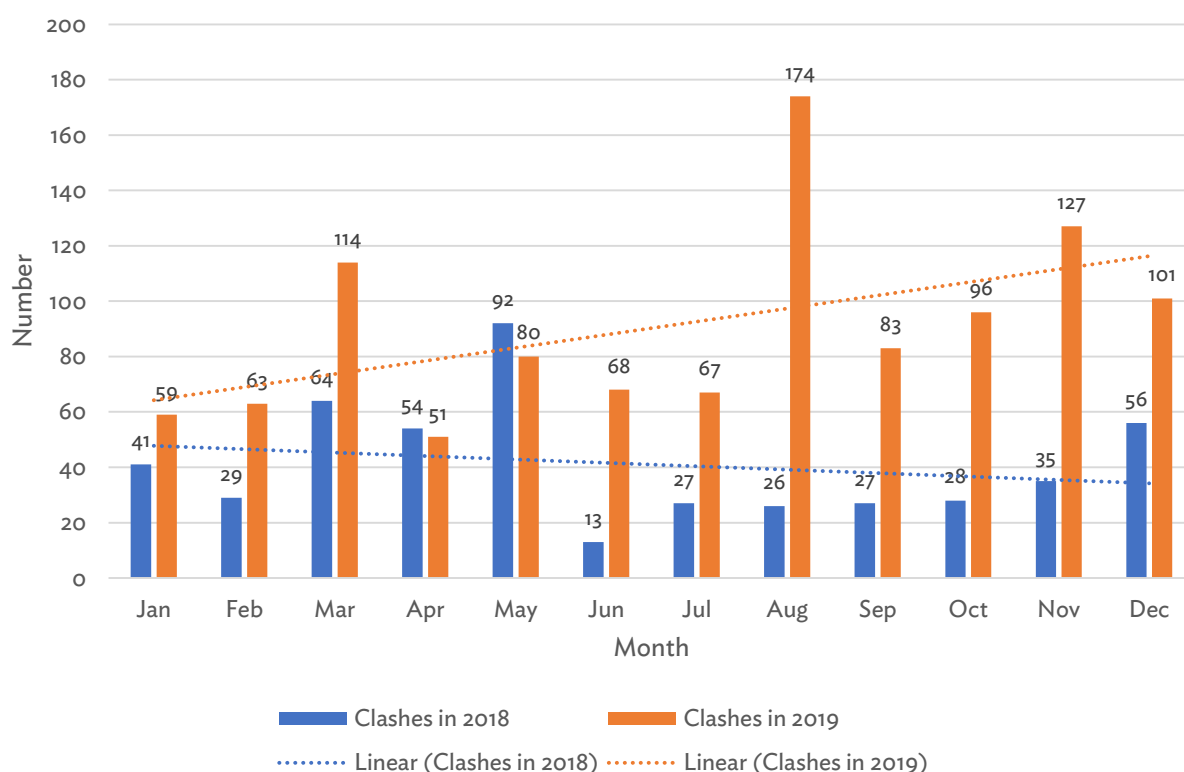
In contrast to the escalation in northern Shan State, armed conflict was largely absent from Kachin State in 2019, as both the KIA and Tatmadaw maintained an unspoken truce. In Kayin State, on-



**IN THE MONTH OF AUGUST ALONE, TCMS RECORDED 113 CLASHES IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE, EQUIVALENT TO NEARLY ONE THIRD OF ALL CLASHES RECORDED BETWEEN STATE SECURITY FORCES AND EAOS IN ALL OF 2018.**

going tensions between the Karen National Union (KNU) and Tatmadaw led to sporadic clashes in 2019, but the two sides also avoided a wider con-

frontation like the one sparked over the Tatmadaw's road projects in March 2018.



**Figure 5.** Comparison of nationwide armed clashes in 2018 and 2019 by month

The trend lines of armed clashes in 2018 and 2019 went in two different directions. In 2019, more clashes were observed by the end of the year, while the opposite was true in 2018. In both years, there were significant clashes during the rainy season from June to September. In fact, there was a spike in clashes in August at the height of the monsoon. Several factors may explain why the rainy season did not dampen fighting.

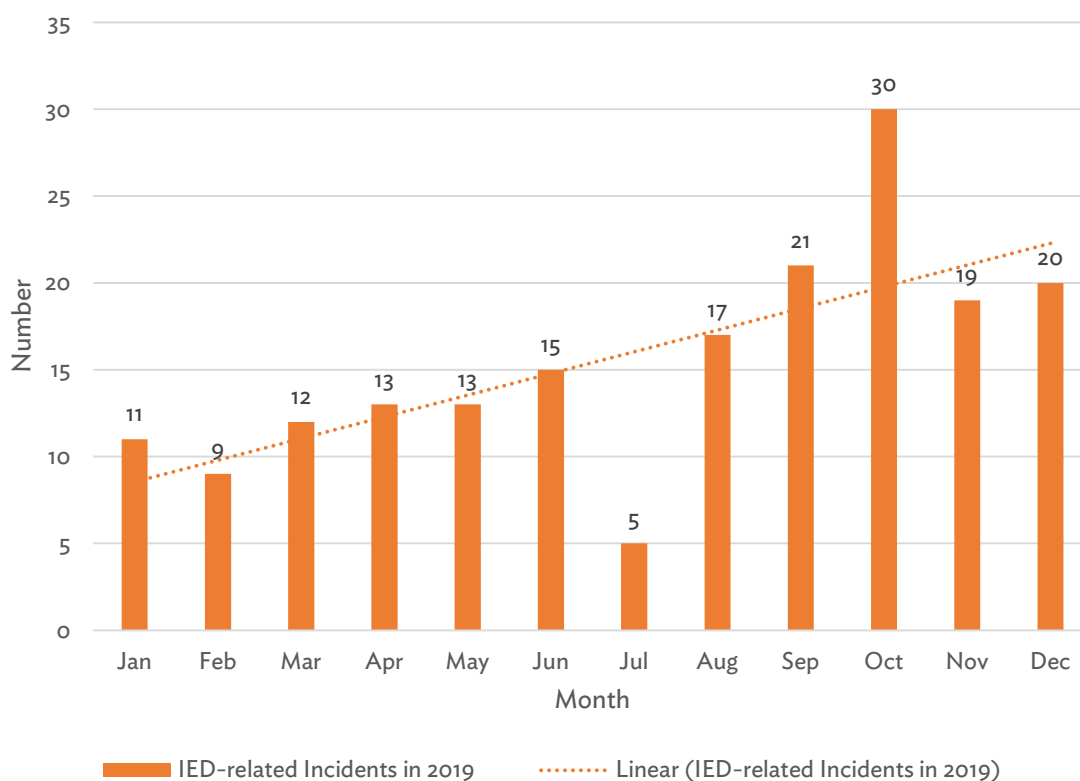
In Rakhine State, for example, the continuation of fighting despite the rains might be explained by the Tatmadaw's increasing reliance on artillery and air-strikes, which are less affected by inclement weather than ground soldiers. In Shan State, continued fighting during the rainy season could be explained by the nature of the TNLA's August offensive. That operation was primarily concentrated along the highway, rather than in the rugged jungles and

mountains that are annually muddied by the onset of the rainy season.

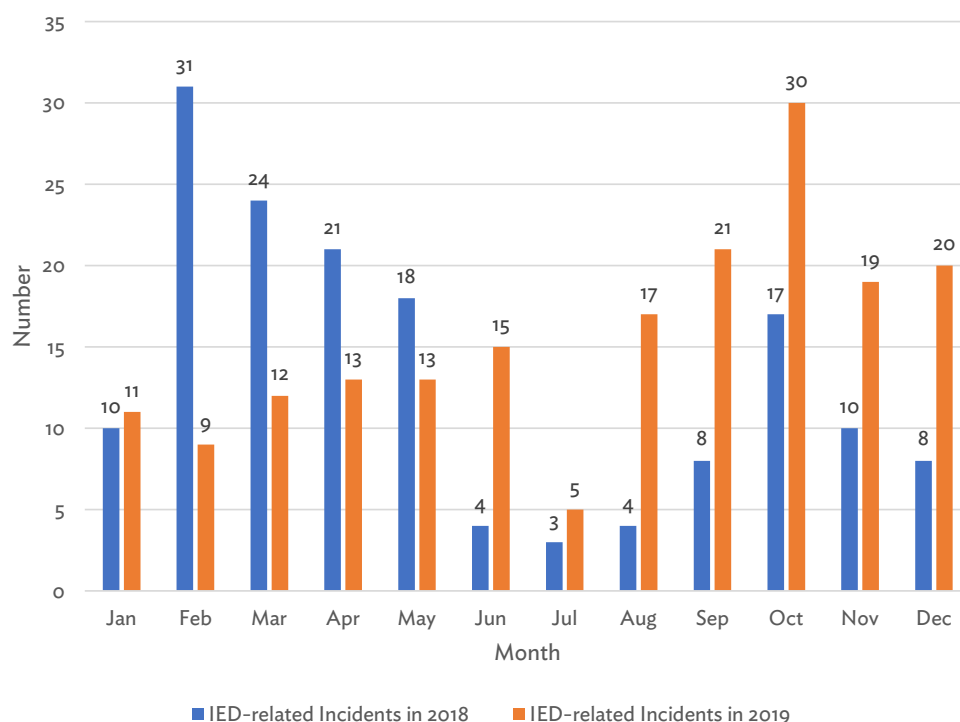
As Figure 6 indicates, there was a steady increase in mine- or improvised explosive device (IED) related incidents in 2019, a trend that closely coincided with the increase in armed clashes. As in the previous year, a higher number of armed clashes typically drew a high number of mine- or IED-related incidents. In northern Shan State, for example, the increase in incidents in August and September was likely related to the Brotherhood Alliance's offensive that began on August 15. When armed actors

move into new areas, they often plant mines for force protection. In 2019, 76% of IED or mine-related incidents involved civilians.

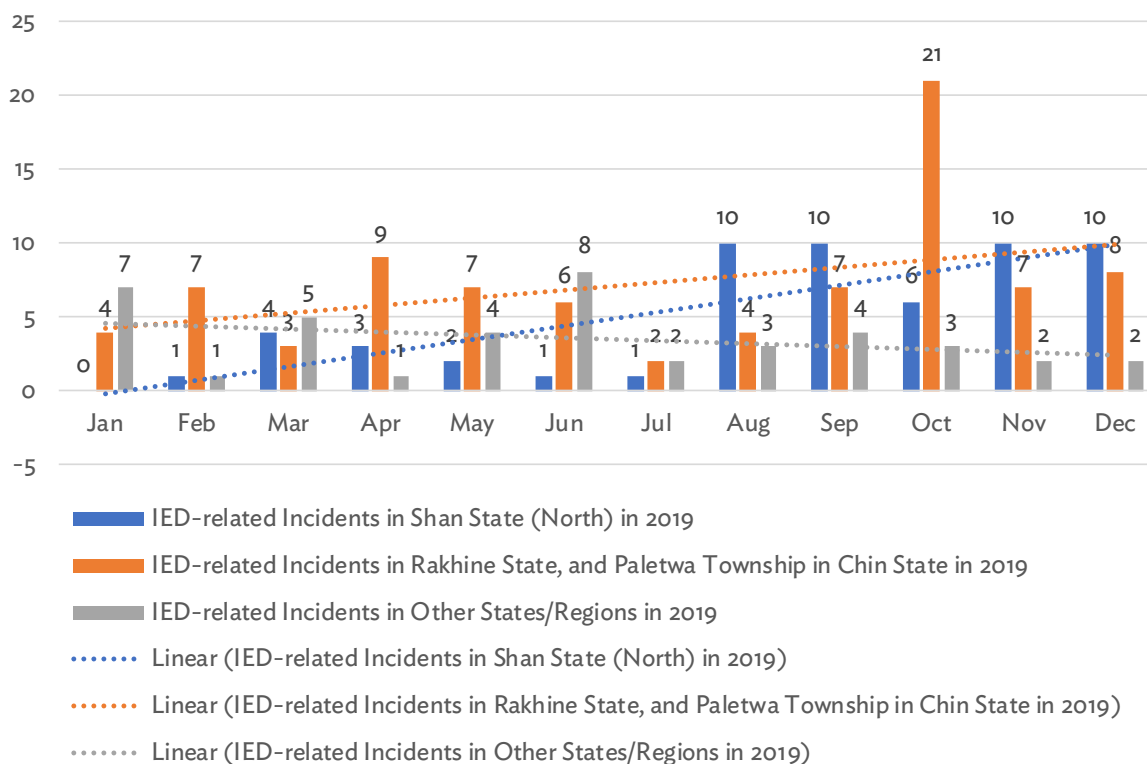
It is important to note that mine or IED-related incidents involving combatants from both sides are likely underreported, and that the number recorded by TCMS therefore tends to underrepresent the actual count. MIPS is confident, however, that the trend of mine- or IED-related incidents demonstrated by TCMS is similar to the rising trend on the ground.



**Figure 6.** *Nationwide mine- or IED-related incidents in 2019 by month*



**Figure 7.** Comparison of nationwide mine- or IED-related incidents in 2018 and 2019 by month



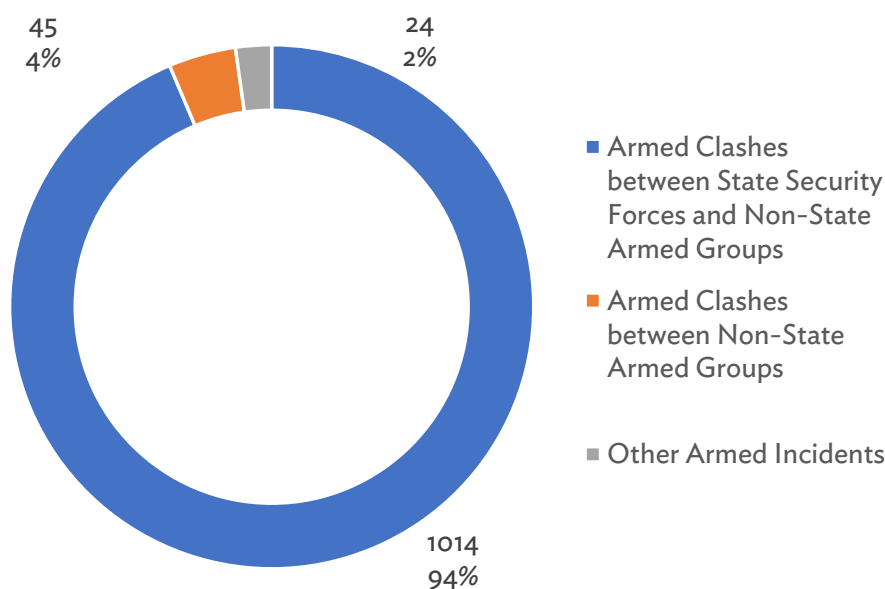
**Figure 8.** IED- and mine-related incidents by region and month in 2019

Mine- or IED-related incidents occurred mostly in areas affected by the conflicts involving the AA and TNLA. While IED-related incidents in both cases gradually increased throughout 2019, the AA appeared to become increasingly reliant on IED-based ambushes throughout 2019. MIPS observed the heavy use of mine and IED attacks against the Tatmadaw in early 2020 as well. Even if the frequency and intensity of head-to-head armed clashes reduce in Rakhine State, mines and IEDs will likely continue to pose a risk throughout 2020 unless an explicit ceasefire is agreed to by the AA and Tatmadaw.

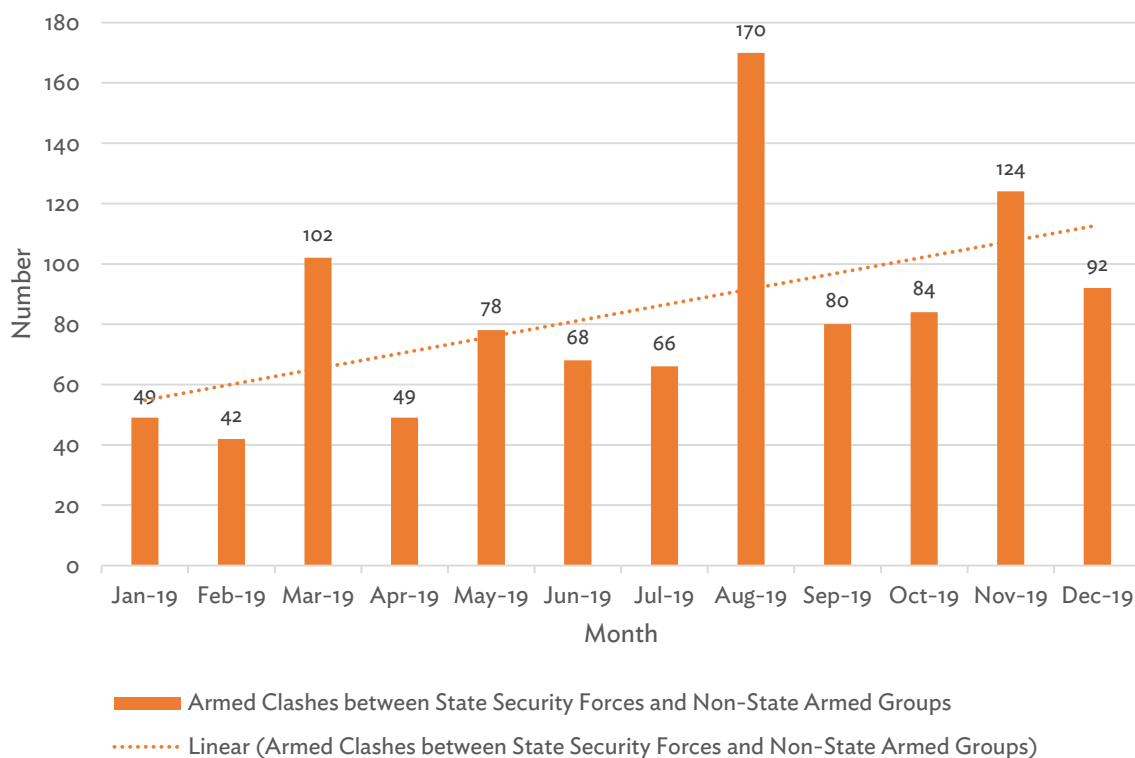
Of the 1,083 total armed clashes recorded in 2019, 1,014 occurred between state security forces and non-state actors, the latter usually being the ethnic armed organizations (EAO). A total of 45 armed clashes took place between non-state actors, while

the remaining 24 were violent incidents involving organized groups such as state security forces, militias, EAOs, gangs or organized civilians. Groups involved in inter-EAO fighting in 2019 included the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), Karen National Union (KNU), and New Mon State Party (NMSP).

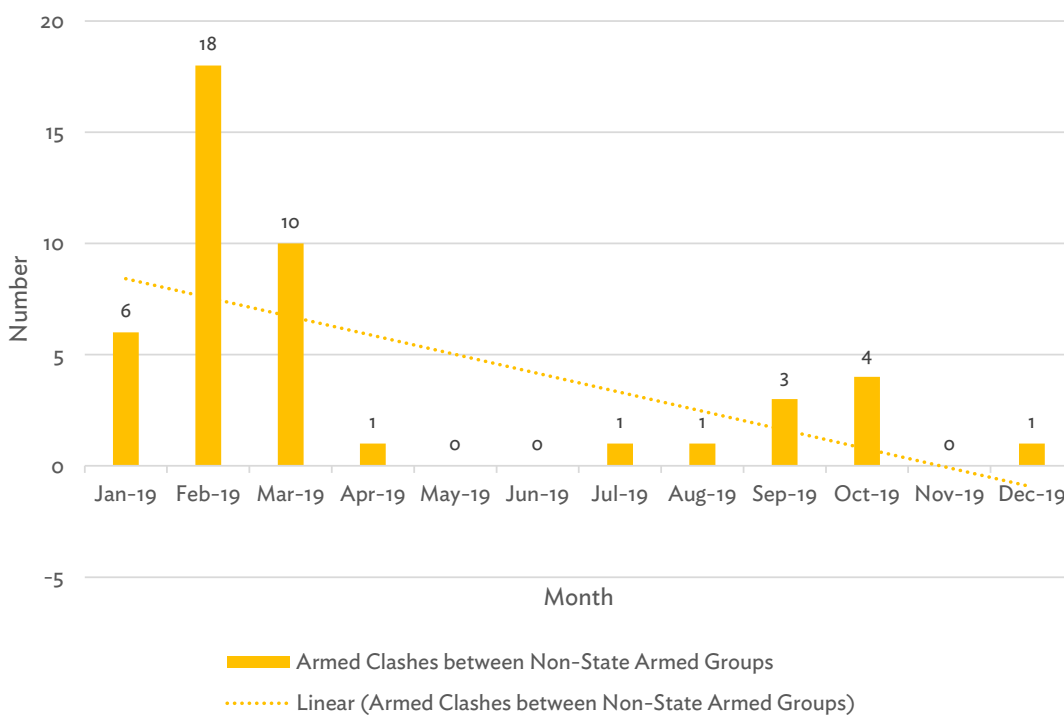
On the whole, 2019 witnessed a 176% rise in armed clashes between state security forces and non-state actors but, as previously shown, this increase was linked primarily to fighting between two pairs: the Tatmadaw and AA, and the Tatmadaw and TNLA. Meanwhile, there was a 52% reduction in armed clashes between non-state actors, largely because the TNLA-SSPP coalition and the RCSS mostly avoided confrontation following an agreement between the SSPP and RCSS in April.



**Figure 9.** Nationwide armed clashes in 2019 by category



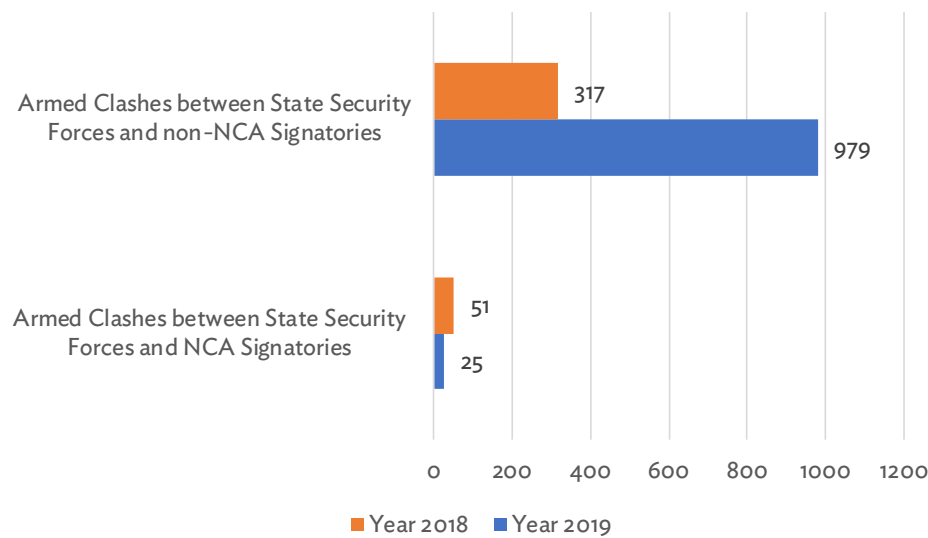
**Figure 10.** Nationwide armed clashes between state security forces and non-state armed groups in 2019 by month



**Figure 11.** Nationwide armed clashes between non-state armed groups in 2019 by month

In 2019, there was also a 37% rise in armed clashes between state security forces and EAOs that have not signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), compared with a 51% reduction in armed clashes between state security forces and EAOs that have signed it. This latter dynamic was large-

ly because, in 2019, the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Union (KNU) were able to avoid a wider confrontation like the one sparked in Hpapun Township in March 2018. In general, the NCA and bilateral ceasefires were effective in preventing frequent clashes among signatories in 2019.

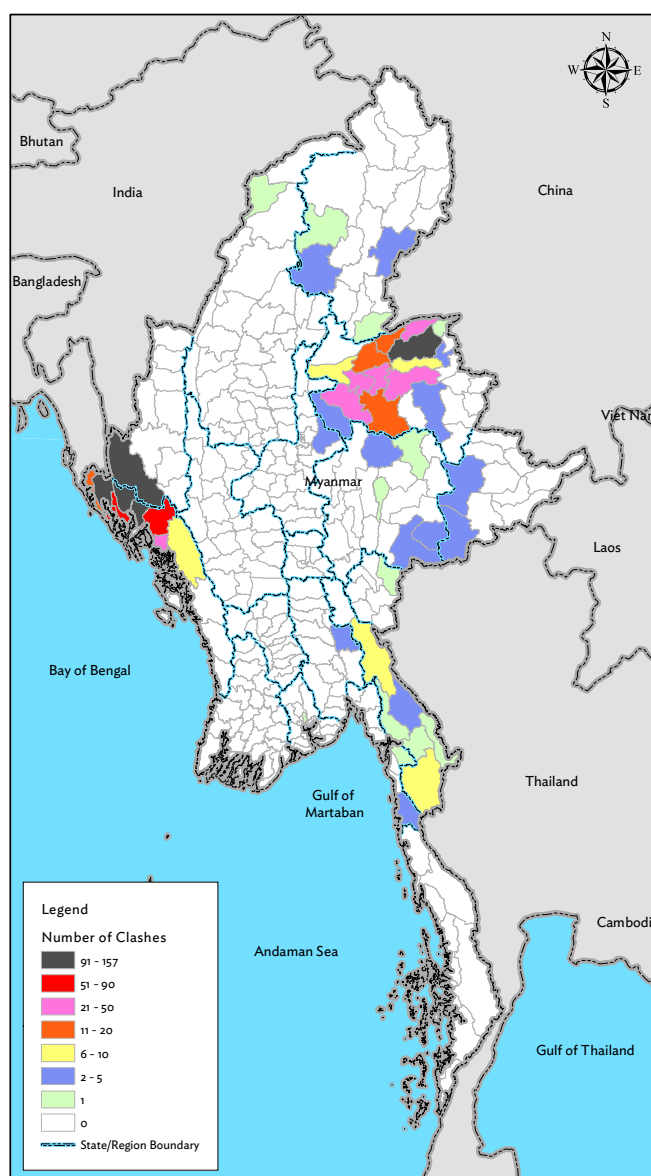


**Figure 12.** *Total nationwide clashes between state security forces and NCA-signatories versus total nationwide clashes between state security forces and non-NCA armed groups in 2018 and 2019*

# CONFLICT-AFFECTED TOWNSHIPS

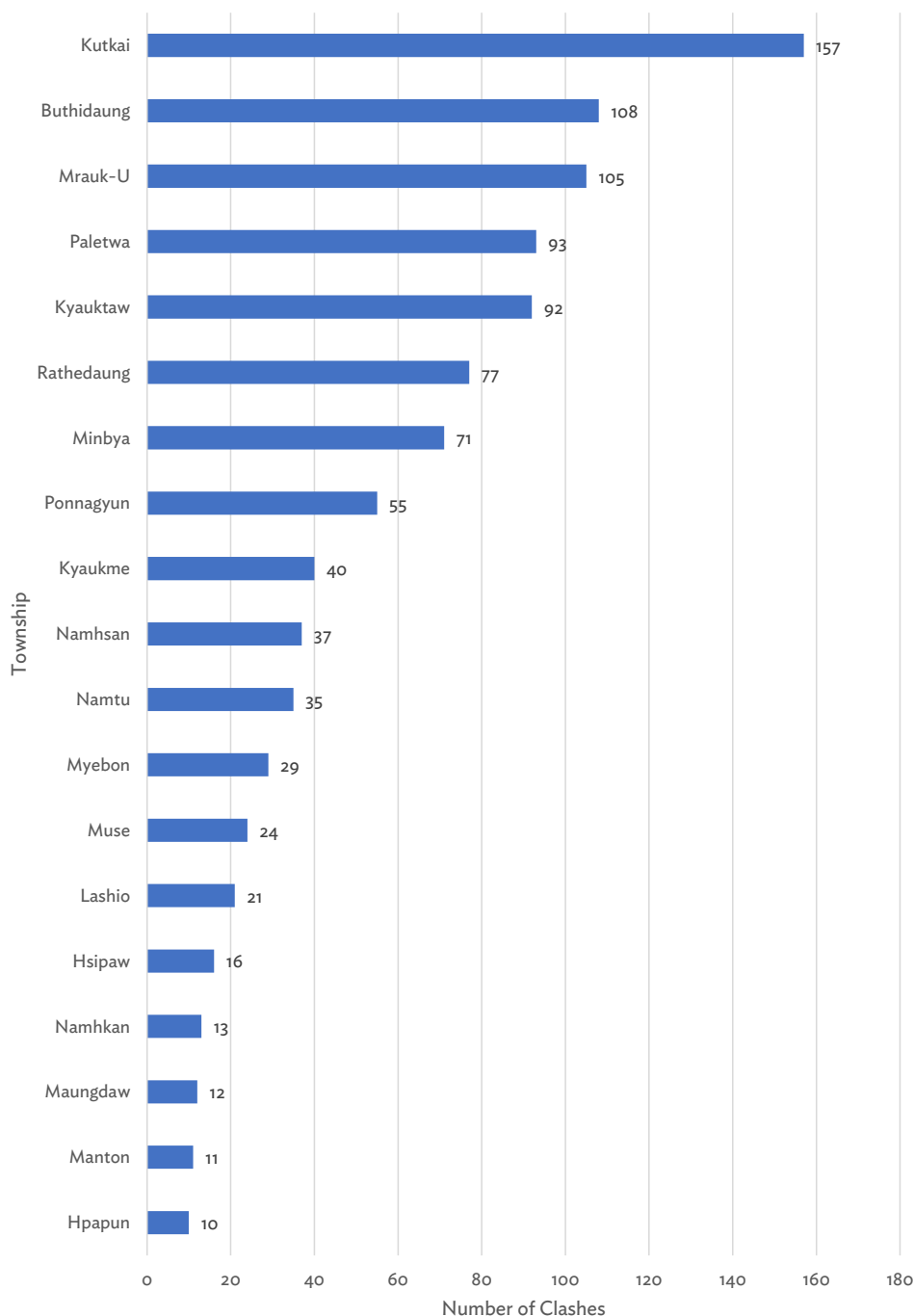
As in 2018, the Township-Based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) identified 50 townships in 2019 that experienced one or more armed incidents, meaning either armed clashes or incidents involving mines or improvised explosive devices (IED). More specifically, such incidents include armed clashes between state security forces and non-state actors, clashes be-

tween two or more non-state actors, or incidents in which civilians were targeted or inadvertently affected by the actions of state security forces or non-state armed actors. This figure does not include other conflict-related costs that may have been borne by civilians in other townships, but is instead indicative of violent actions carried out by organized armed actors.



**Figure 13.** Conflict-affected townships in 2019

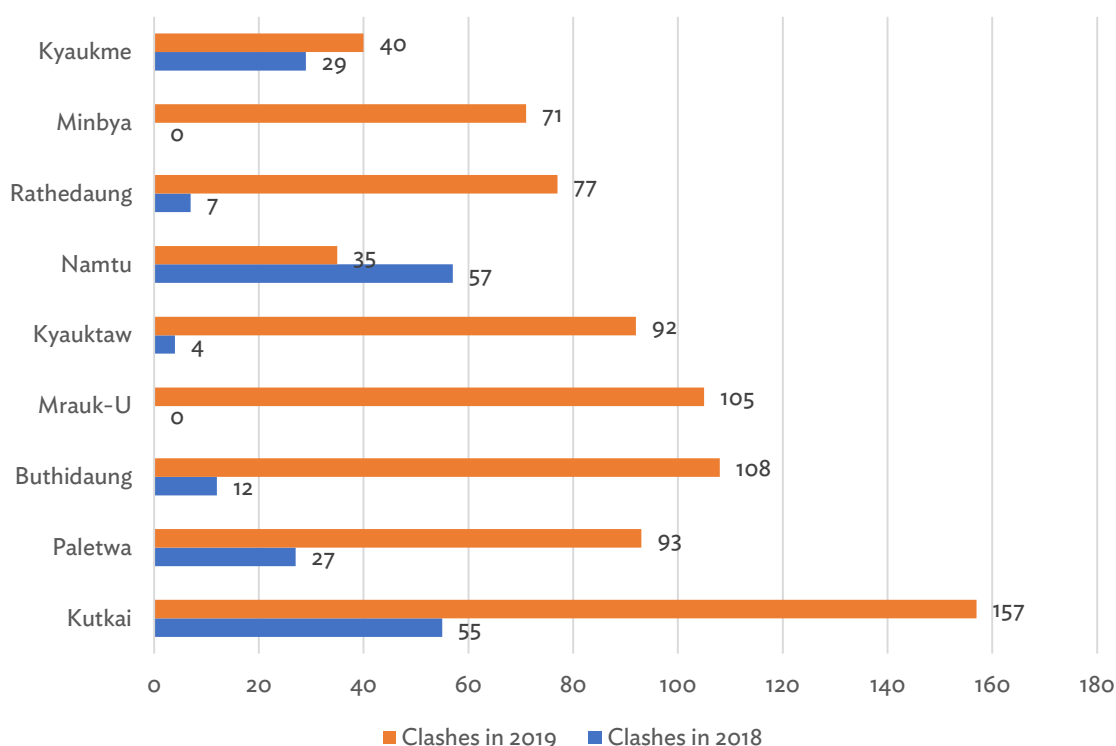




**Figure 14.** Townships where at least ten clashes occurred in 2019

Overall, the number of affected townships remained the same in 2019, but more townships were affected by a higher number of armed incidents compared with 2018. In total, 19 townships experienced at least ten or more armed incidents in 2019, compared with only 14 townships that reached the same threshold in

2018. Only 29 out of 50 townships experienced four or fewer armed incidents in 2019, compared with 34 out of 50 townships that experienced only four or fewer armed incidents in 2018. Among the top most affected townships, the total number of armed incidents was substantially higher in 2019 than in 2018.



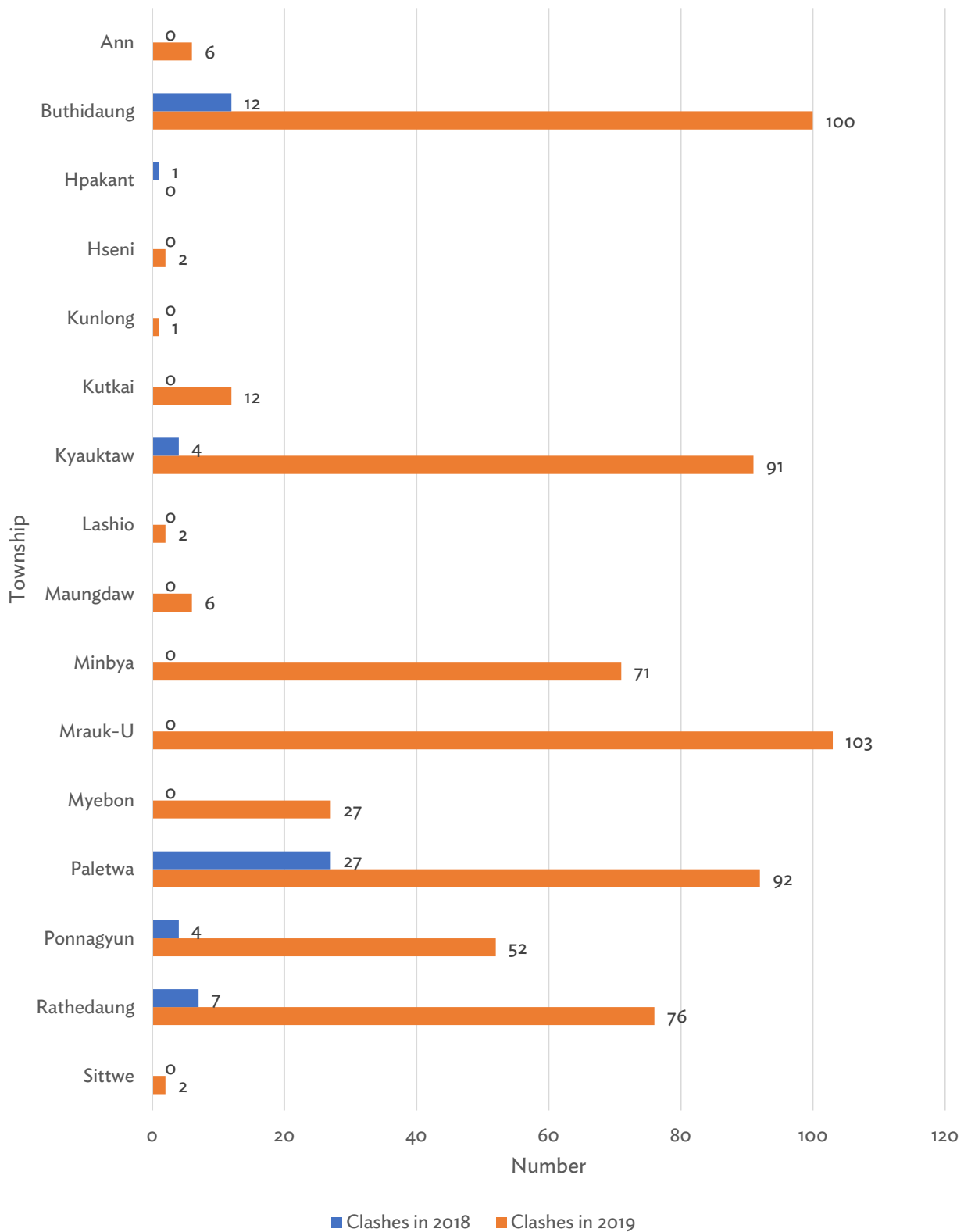
**Figure 15.** Comparison of townships where at least ten clashes occurred in 2018 and 2019

A closer look shows these trends were largely driven by regional shifts in conflict dynamics, and should be considered in light of four general patterns. First, townships in Kachin State that were among the most affected in 2018 dropped off the list in 2019. Second, the highest concentration of clashes shifted from northern Shan State in 2018 to northern Rakhine State in 2019. Third, the composition of conflict-affected townships in Shan State changed in 2019 as one conflict subsided and another escalated. Finally, although no major episode of fighting took place in Kayin State, sporadic and limited clashes there became the norm.

Tanai and Hpakant townships in Kachin State were among the most conflict-affected townships in 2018 because they were the focal point of two Tatmadaw offensives against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). After the Tatmadaw wrapped

up its offensives in May 2018, however, clashes between the two sides largely subsided. Since then, the Tatmadaw and KIA have maintained an unspoken truce throughout all of Kachin State, and in 2019 no clashes were recorded in Tanai Township while only one clash was recorded in Hpakant Township.

The highest concentration of armed clashes in 2019 was recorded in northern Rakhine and southern Chin states, where the conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and Tatmadaw placed seven townships among the top ten most affected. The rise in conflict there began when the AA launched its bid to oust the Tatmadaw and establish control of the region in January 2019. As a result, townships like Mrauk U and Minbya, which did not have clashes in 2018, in addition to townships like Kyauktaw and Ponnagyun, which only had a few, were cata-



pulted to the top of the list.

**Figure 16.** Townships affected by armed clashes between state security forces and the Arakan Army (AA) in 2018 and 2019

Among all the conflict-affected townships in northern Rakhine State, Buthidaung Township experienced the highest frequency of clashes in 2019, largely because of its strategic importance for the AA. Like Paletwa Township in Chin State, Buthidaung Township's proximity to the border offers the AA strategic depth by serving as a bridge between Bangladesh, where the AA is known to seek reprieve, and the wider Rakhine Theater. Major battles, however, were comparatively less common in Buthidaung Township, where the relatively small ethnic Rakhine population offers less support for AA fighters.

Meanwhile, Mrauk U Township earned its top spot largely because it is the focal point of the AA's "Arakan Dream 2020", a slogan that highlights the group's ambition to establish a headquarter in the township by 2020. Located at the center of northern Rakhine, Mrauk U township is the stronghold of the AA and offers the broadest support from the local population. Mrauk U's terrain, however, is not ideally suited for guerrilla warfare, and the AA did not engage in major battles there after attempting to overrun a police battalion in March 2019. Instead, the epicenter of major fighting shifted to Minbya and Kyauktaw townships in Rakhine State.

Although the center of gravity shifted firmly to Rakhine State, northern Shan State was still significantly affected, albeit by a new set of emerging conflict dynamics. Kutkai Township, for example, experienced 157 armed incidents in 2019, a figure higher than the total number of armed incidents recorded in the top three townships from 2018 combined. The primary reason for this large number is that the township was the focal point of the Brotherhood Alliance's offensive in August in which the alliance tried to cut off the Lashio-Muse highway, the most critical link between mainland Myanmar and China. In that month alone, TCMS recorded 71 clashes in the township, 45% of its an-

nual total.

Still, clashes recorded in Kutkai throughout the remainder of the year were also high because of its status as an important juncture. Located on the doorstep of the Palaung heartland, Kutkai offers access to the border at Muse to the north as well as the border at Chinshwehaw to the east. Almost all of the major armed groups that operate in northern Shan State maintain a presence in Kutkai, a dynamic that invariably leads to more clashes.

Number 9 on the list, Kyaukme Township in Shan State experienced a higher number of armed clashes in 2019 than in 2018, but clashes there were primarily of a different nature. In 2018, two thirds of the clashes in Kyaukme were linked to the inter-ethnic armed organization (EAO) conflict among the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS). Because that conflict largely subsided in April 2019, however, less than one fifth of the armed clashes that year were attributable to the inter-EAO conflict. Instead, Kyaukme saw a rise in clashes between the Tatmadaw and TNLA, especially after the August offensive when the Tatmadaw tried to push the TNLA out of the area.

Although it still landed among the top affected townships, Namtu township in northern Shan State saw a drop in armed conflicts in 2019 as the inter-EAO conflict decelerated. Meanwhile, the neighboring township of Namhsan experienced a 147% rise in armed clashes from 2018 to 2019 because the Tatmadaw abandoned its policy to contain the TNLA to the Palaung Self-Administered Zone (SAZ). Throughout 2018, the Tatmadaw largely refrained from targeting the TNLA within Namhsan and Manton townships, which together make up the SAZ, but in late November 2019 inserted a light infantry division

(LID) to attack TNLA fixed positions there after the Brotherhood Alliance launched an offensive in August 2019.

The final notable township-based trend of 2019 was not necessarily categorized by escalation or de-escalation, but rather by a simmering normalization of sporadic clashes in both Hpapun Township, Kayin State, and in neighboring Kyaukkyi Township, Bago Region. In March 2018, a major episode of clashes was sparked by a disagreement

over the Tatmadaw's road construction, putting Hpapun Township among the top three most affected townships that year. The Tatmadaw continued these road building efforts in 2019, provoking sustained opposition from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Both sides, however, appeared reluctant to allow an escalation similar to what transpired in 2018, leading instead to sporadic clashes that continued into 2020. MIPS projects a similar makeup of conflict-affected townships throughout 2020.

## CLASHES NEAR MAJOR ROADS

Conflict near major roads was a significant trend in 2019, with 725 (67%) of the 1,083 armed clashes occurring within 2.5 miles of a major road segment. The vast majority of these clashes occurred in northern Rakhine and northern Shan states, and were linked to the conflicts involving the Arakan Army (AA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), respectively. Although far fewer clashes occurred in Kayin State, disagreement over the Tatmadaw's upgrade of unpaved tracks in the jungle drove conflict there between the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).

In Rakhine State, 379 (68%) of the 557 armed clashes reported in 2019 occurred within 2.5 miles of a major road segment, but this trend did not appear to be driven by logistics. The AA likely stored weapons and ammunition in hidden caches across the state before the war began, using the road from Magway Town to Ann Town and onwards, and possibly the road between Pyay Town and Taung Gok Town, as its primary logistics entryway into the operating theater. Following the onset of fighting, the AA's use of major roads appeared to be insignificant except in areas where the Tatmadaw did not operate frequently. Instead, Rakhine State's rivers, especially the Kaladan, proved vital for AA resupply.

The large number of clashes near roads in Rakhine State had much to do with where and how ethnic Rakhine people live. Unlike in Kachin and Shan states, where significant portions of the population live in remote mountain villages, the majority of Rakhine State's population, especially ethnic Rakhine, resides in lowland areas connected by roads, even if poorly constructed.

In 2019, 97% of armed clashes in Rakhine State occurred within 2.5 miles of a village. The AA's reliance on the local population for logistical support meant that its fighters frequented the many villag-

es dotted across the state. Soldiers from both sides used the available roads to move about. Clashes often occurred when patrolling Tatmadaw units encountered AA fighters moving between villages, or when the AA ambushed Tatmadaw columns and vehicles traveling along the roads. The AA's attempt to control positions close to Yangon-Sittwe Highway, and the Tatmadaw's attempts to remove these bases, also contributed to the frequent clashes near major roads in Rakhine.

Historically, the conflict between the TNLA and Tatmadaw has played out in the remote mountainous areas where ethnic Palaung people reside. But in 2019, it flowed out of the mountains and spilled onto the Mandalay-Muse Highway below. The year before, only short-lived clashes between the two groups happened on the highway when the TNLA attempted to stop traffic and collect unofficial tolls.

In August 2019, however, this dynamic shifted significantly after the Brotherhood Alliance, led by the TNLA, directly attempted to cut off a segment of the Mandalay-Muse Highway to the north and south of Kutkai Town during a major offensive.

In total, 274 of the 377 armed clashes recorded in northern Shan State in 2019 occurred within 2.5 miles of a major road segment. Many of these clashes took place when the TNLA and its partners attacked Tatmadaw bases guarding the main highway, and in the subsequent struggle for control over the economic corridor. As the August offensive's heaviest fighting subsided in early September 2019, the TNLA once again sent in small teams to halt traffic, prompting the Tatmadaw to respond.

In Kayin State, fighting between the Tatmadaw and KNLA was directly linked to the former's efforts to upgrade and expand an existing road net-

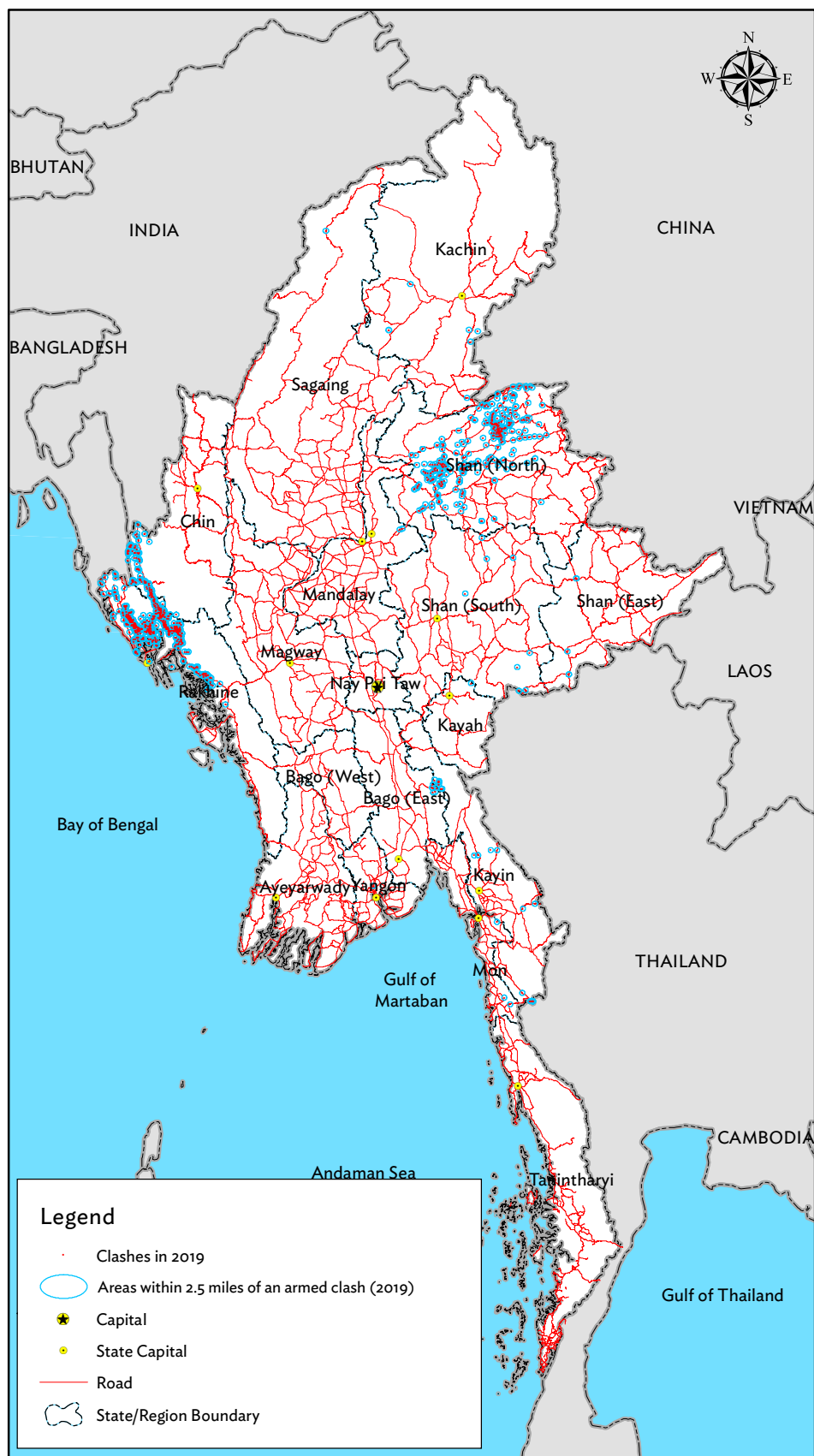
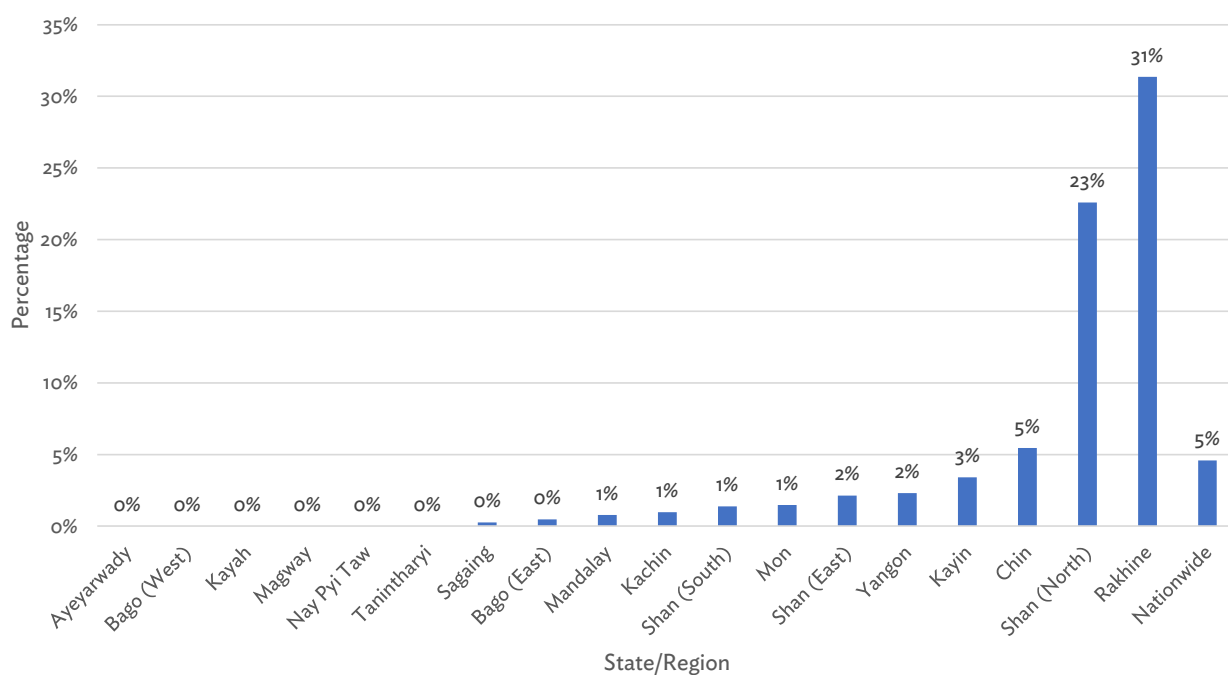


Figure 17. Clashes near major roads in 2019

work. These roads, which are often more akin to dirt trails, connect the Tatmadaw's bases on the border with Thailand to its bases in the Bago Region. Although of mixed control, the land in between comprises the heart of the KNLA's Brigade 3 and 5 operational areas. The KNLA has strongly

opposed the expansion of these roads, but the Tatmadaw has so far insisted on continuing its work. The dynamic led to the repeated occurrence of sporadic clashes by the end of 2019, and is discussed in detail in the subsection about the Karen National Union (KNU).



**Figure 18.** *Percent of major road segments that fell within 2.5 miles of an armed incident in 2019 by state or region*





## DRUG SEIZURES

The Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) collects data related to the seizure of illicit narcotics and precursor materials needed for their manufacture. The production and trafficking of illegal drugs, as well as the trafficking of precursor chemicals, provide a large and highly profitable source of revenue for a multitude of armed actors on all sides of the conflict in Myanmar.

As per collection standards, TCMS records drug seizures with a reported amount of 1,000 or more tablets for methamphetamine and an equivalent amount for other drugs. This enables MIPS to understand the pattern of medium and large drug seizures and trafficking routes.

In 2018 and 2019, drug seizures were centered around four types of substances: methamphetamine tablets called “yaba”, crystal methamphetamine or “ice”, heroin, and opium. In 2018, Myanmar authorities reported at least 817 seizures involving one or more of these substances, compared with 805 seizures in 2019. The two forms of methamphetamine comprised the large majority of drug seizures by weight.

Compared to 2018, ice seizures in 2019 increased 1,465% while methamphetamine tablet and hero-

in seizures dropped by 41% and 69%, respectively. The trend indicates that drug smugglers and producers have shifted focus toward the more lucrative crystalline form of methamphetamine marked for international markets and consumption. While the government’s two mobile x-ray machines in Pyin Oo Lwin and Thazi townships in Mandalay Region captured large amounts of methamphetamine tablets, these gates did not seize a significant quantity of ice. Large ice seizures in 2019 were mostly made in coastal areas, but also in one incident in Kayah State, during transit to international destinations. The ice seizure trend in 2019 indicated that law enforcement could not intercept significant amounts of ice smuggled between production sites in Shan State and inland terminal points.

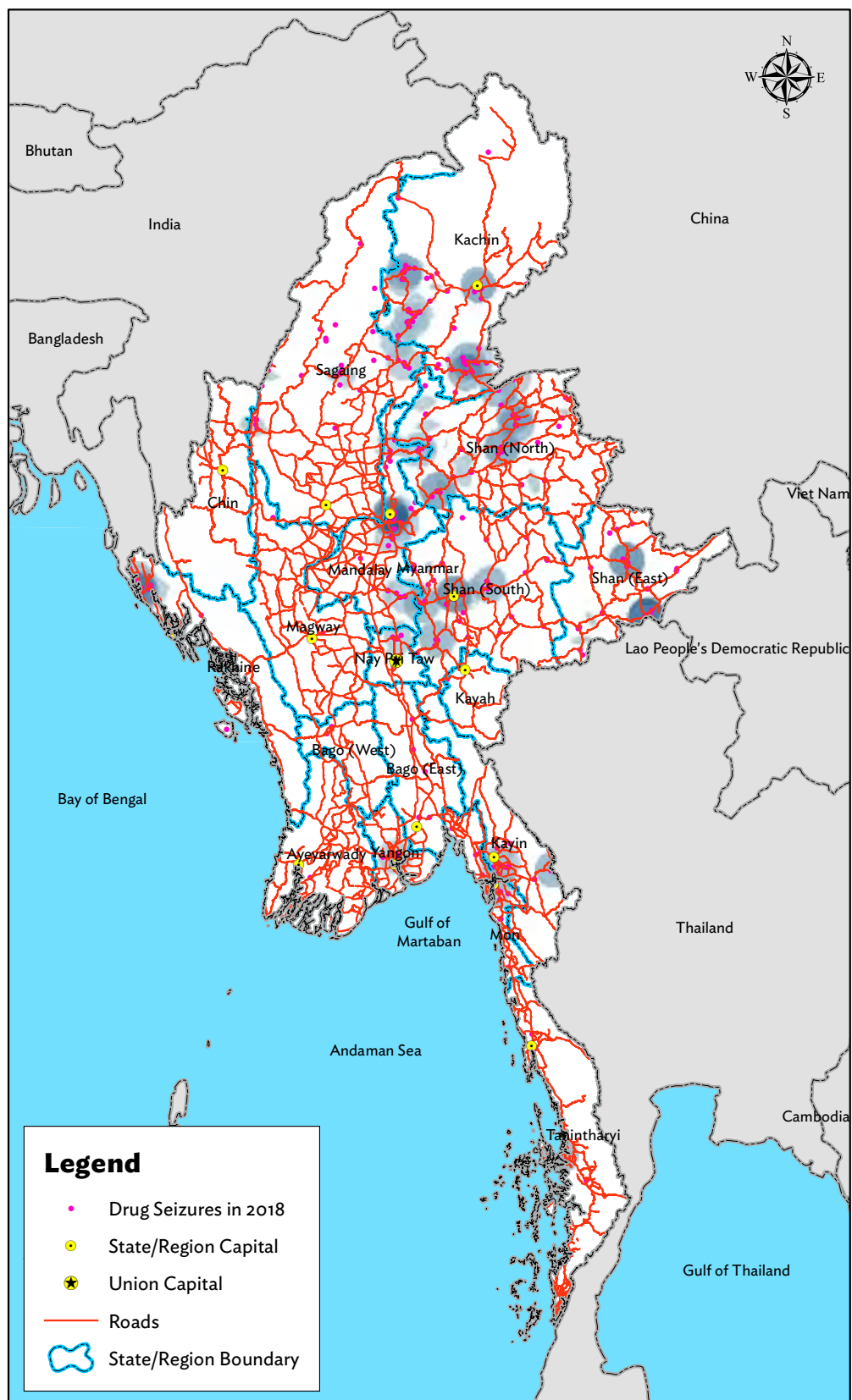
Drug seizures in 2018 and 2019 demonstrated that coastal areas, especially Rakhine State and Tanintharyi Region, were the critical transportation routes to international destinations. Yangon was likely also a terminal transit point before international shipment. Some smugglers might have even used DHL to send drugs to international destinations: 17 kilograms of ice were seized after smugglers attempted to post a DHL parcel to New Zealand in 2019.

**Table 4.** Drug seizures by substance category in 2018 and 2019

Year	Total number of seizures	Stimulant tablets seized (number)	Ice seized (kilogram)	Heroin seized (kilogram)	Opium seized (kilogram)
Year 2018	817	97800000	592.25	1777.19	1239.02
Year 2019	805	57600000	9269.68	548.87	1746.90
Increase/decrease (%)	-1%	-41%	1465%	-69%	41%



Figure 19. Drug seizures by substance category in 2018 and 2019



**Figure 20.** Drug seizures by location and density along major routes in 2018

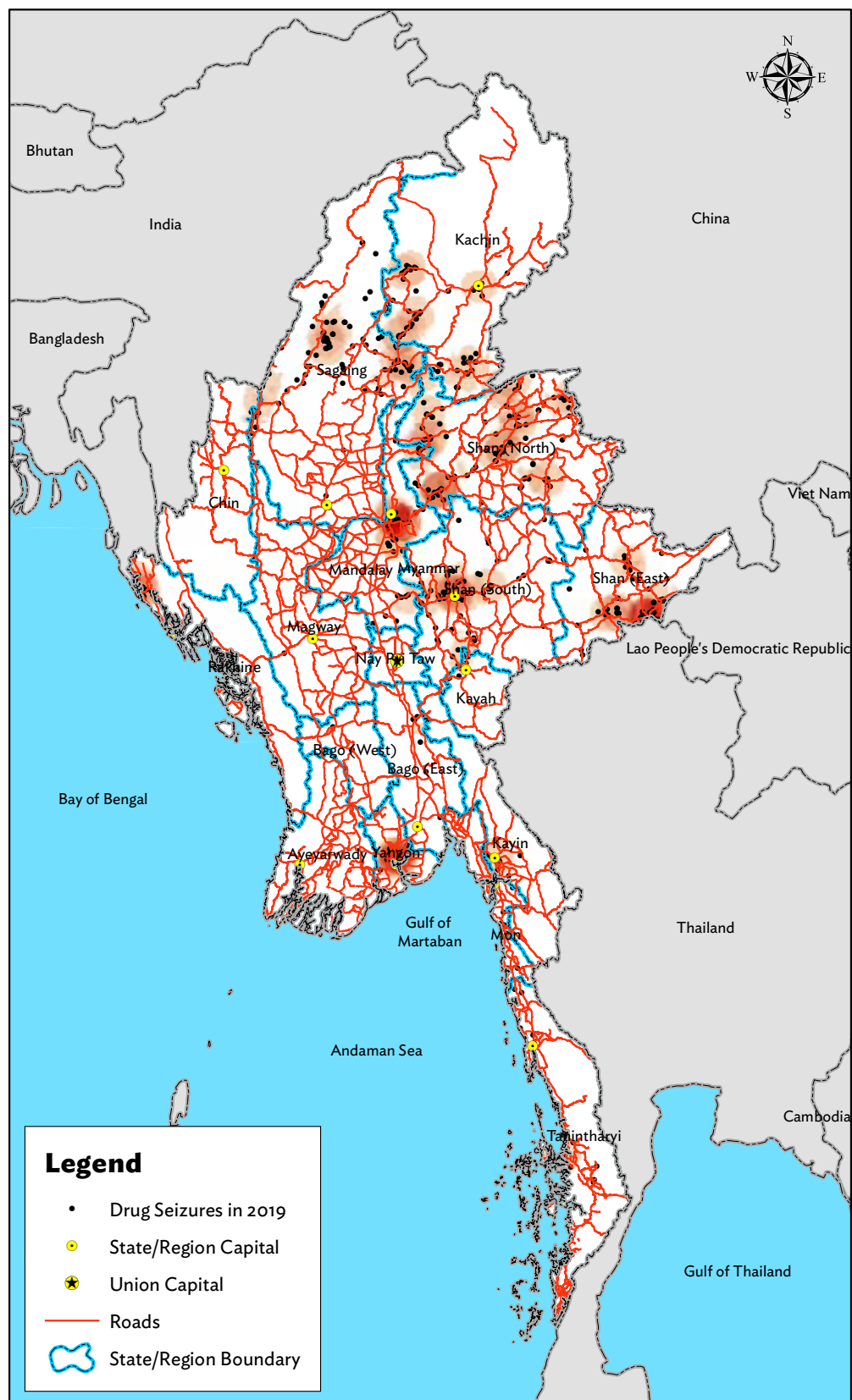


Figure 21. Drug seizures by location and density along major routes in 2019

As the center of drug production and manufacturing in Myanmar, Shan State experienced the highest number of seizures of any state or region in both 2018 and 2019. The highest concentration of drug seizures within the state occurred in the north, an area inhabited by numerous armed actors and disproportionately affected by armed conflict. Northern Shan State experienced a near 40% increase in drug seizures from 2018 to 2019. The seizures were made either when drugs produced in Shan State were intercepted by authorities along transit routes, or during raids on production facilities.

In Sagaing Region, the number of drug seizures increased by 127%, from 48 seizures in 2018 to 109 in 2019. The increase in the frequency of drug seizures in Sagaing was possibly due to efforts by authorities to enhance drug screening at checkpoints along major roads and thoroughfares, and by the possibility that India might have emerged as a new route of transit. The drugs seized in Sagaing were likely intended for the border with India since trafficking routes in Rakhine State became more restricted in 2019.

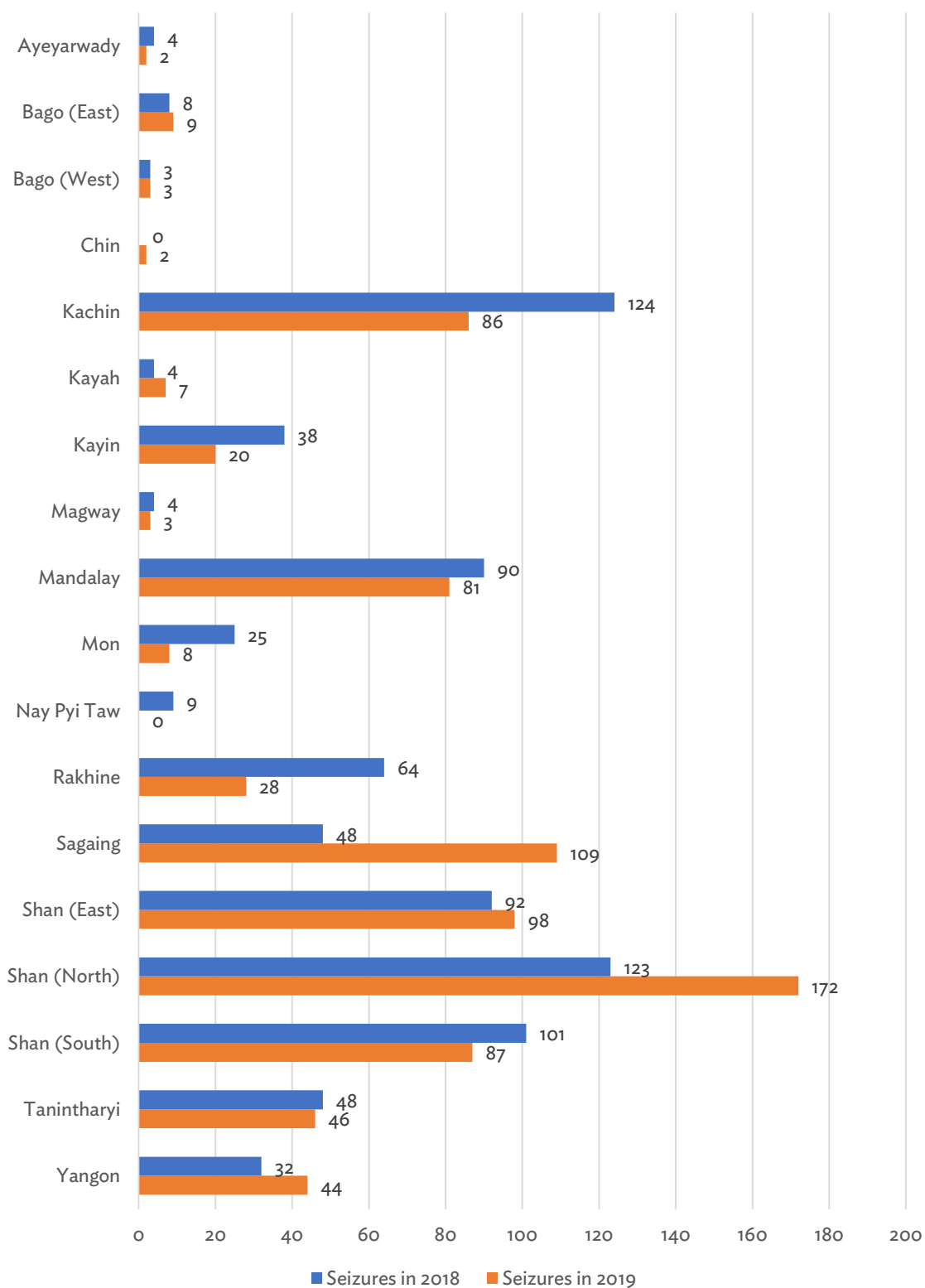
The number of drug seizures dropped in two states in 2019. In Rakhine State, the frequency of drug seizures decreased by 56%, from 64 seizures in 2018 to 28 in 2019. This decrease was likely due to the imposition of the Tatmadaw's blockade against the Arakan Army's (AA) supply route, which made trafficking through Bangladesh increasingly nonviable for drug smugglers. In Kachin State, seizures decreased by 31%, from 124 in 2018 to only 86 in 2019. The decrease coincided with a significant reduction in armed conflict between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) from 2018 to 2019.

Although the number of seizures in Tanintharyi Region remained virtually unchanged from 2018 to 2019, by mid-2020 the region had emerged as a new trafficking hub in Myanmar. This trend was likely influenced by renewed crackdowns on trafficking in Thailand, and the growing inability of smugglers to utilize Rakhine State as a major trafficking corridor.

MIPS found some evidence that drug smugglers in Rakhine State redirected their maritime transport to Tanintharyi in 2019 and 2020.

Drug production and smuggling in Myanmar has become increasingly complex and sophisticated. Until the mid-2000's, one organization usually operated the entire supply chain from production to smuggling. At present, the supply chain involves different entities including investors, security providers, producers, foreign technicians, and bands of smugglers. China remains the major source of precursor materials that are channeled to Myanmar, sometimes via Laos, while some precursor chemicals are sourced from India, Vietnam, and Thailand. Some ethnic armed organizations (EAO) and militia serve as the primary security providers by allowing production facilities run by transnational organized criminal groups to operate in their controlled area or vicinity. Some EAOs also provide safe passage during smugglers' journeys.

In 2020, the Tatmadaw stiffened its crackdown on major drug producers in Shan State. In April 2020, it disarmed the Kawngghka Militia, a government-backed militia notorious for drug production. Formerly the Kachin Defense Army (KDA), the Kawngghka Militia maintained amiable relations with several EAOs that operate in northern Shan State. The demise of the militia cut a valuable income source for the numerous groups it dealt with. In May 2020, Myanmar authorities landed the largest ever drug bust in Asia after seizing 18 tons of narcotics in Kutkai Township, Shan State. The haul included the largest amount of tablet methamphetamine ever seized during a single operation in both Myanmar and the region. It also included crystal methamphetamine, heroin, ketamine, Myanmar's first significant suspected seizure of a variation of fentanyl (a synthetic opioid), very large volumes of pre-precursor and precursor chemicals, and sophisticated laboratory equipment. The Tatmadaw and government will likely sustain their efforts to suppress drug production and trafficking throughout 2020.



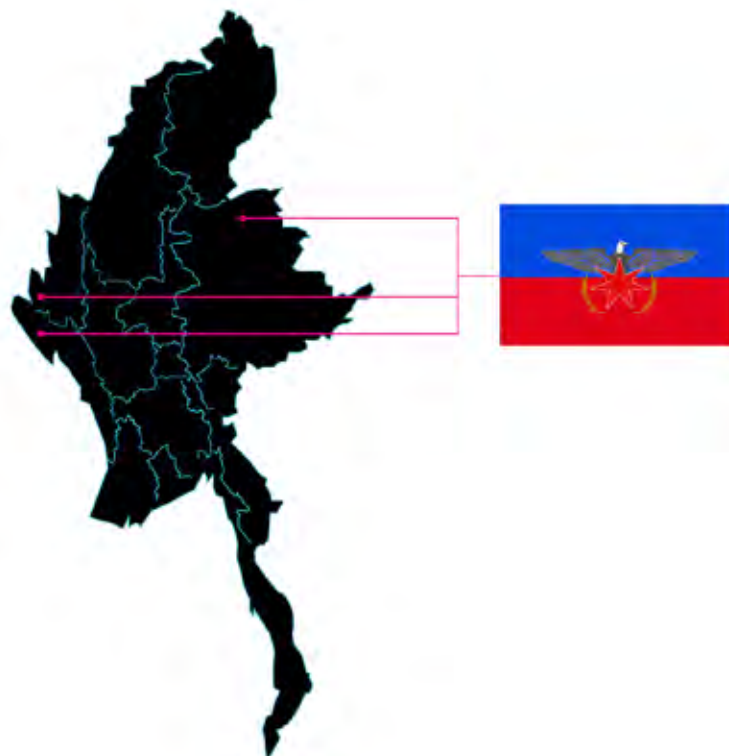
**Figure 22.** Comparison of the frequency of medium and large drug seizures in 2018 and 2019 by region

# **SECURITY & CEASEFIRE**





# THE ARAKAN ARMY



In the early hours of January 4, 2019, fighters from the Arakan Army (AA) launched coordinated attacks on four police outposts in Buthidaung Township, northern Rakhine State. Despite ongoing clashes, the targeted attacks were the first major offensive actions by the AA and marked the beginning of a sustained campaign to achieve its “Arakan Dream”, or takeover of Rakhine State. Backed by extensive public support, the AA’s attacks on government security posts continued, provoking a strong Tatmadaw response and fierce conflict that continues today.

The AA was formed in 2009 when its current leader, Major General Twan Mrat Naing, recruited the first fighters from the jade mines of Kachin State. Under the guardianship of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the AA established its “temporary” headquarters in Lai Zar, Kachin State, where it continued to recruit and train migrant Rakhine men. Efforts to establish a foothold and drum up

public support in Rakhine State began as early as 2013.

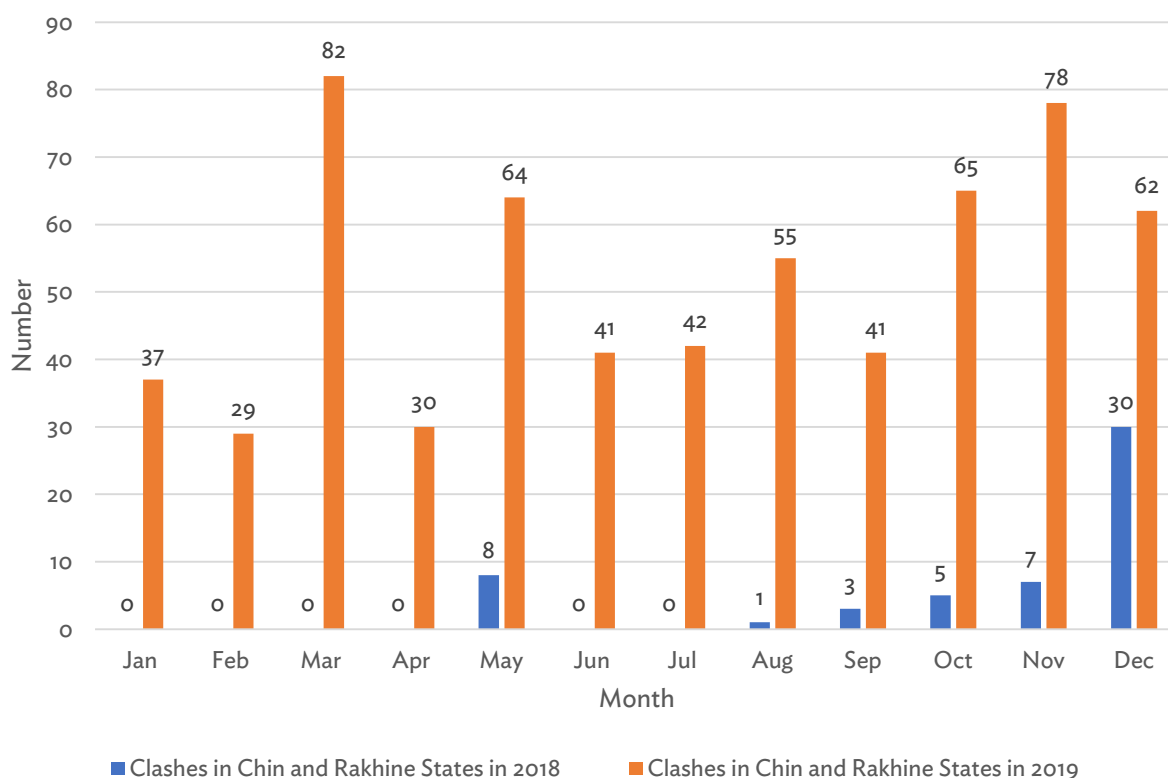
The AA and its supporters are motivated by a variety of economic, political, and historical grievances. Among the poorest and least developed regions in Myanmar, Rakhine State has faced decades of imposed rule by successive, ethnic Bamar-dominated and centralized governments. As a core component of its propaganda messaging, the AA seeks to re-establish the Kingdom of Mrauk U, an independent Rakhine kingdom lost to Burmese conquest in 1785. With this goal in mind, AA leader Twan Mrat Naing has repeatedly vocalized plans to re-assert Rakhine autonomy by ousting “the Burman” and establishing headquarters in Mrauk U by 2020.

The first reported clash between the AA and Tatmadaw in northern Rakhine State took place in Buthidaung Township in March 2015. Despite

several subsequent bouts of fighting, however, the AA maintained a low profile in the region until late August 2017, when it ambushed a boat carrying Tatmadaw soldiers along the Kaladan River in Paletwa Township, Chin State. Consequently, the Tatmadaw mobilized a division in November to deny the AA a foothold in Paletwa Township. By December's end, the Tatmadaw had pushed the fighters out of their positions in Paletwa and over the border into Bangladesh and India. The Tatmadaw's response to the AA throughout the western theater at this time, however, remained relatively minimal until 2019, especially when compared to similar se-

curity threats handled by the Tatmadaw in the past.

The next round of fighting took place in May 2018, but once again ended with the AA disappearing into the thick jungle after a few weeks. Then, in August 2018, a single clash between the AA and Tatmadaw was reported in Paletwa Township, marking the beginning of what is now nearly two years of sustained fighting. By November 2018, light clashes had spread from Paletwa Township to the northernmost edges of Buthidaung Township in Rakhine State. During 2018, most of the fighting was concentrated in Paletwa Township.



**Figure 23.** *Monthly clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and Tatmadaw in Chin and Rakhine States in 2018 and 2019*



**Figure 24.** *Comparison of clashes between state security forces and the Arakan Army (AA) in Chin and Rakhine States in 2018 and 2019*

Around this same time, MIPS sources identified the existence of multiple AA bases as far south as Kyauktaw Township, with one as near as 11 miles from the Tatmadaw's Regional Operations Command (ROC) headquarters. Yet, despite likely knowing of these positions, the Tatmadaw refrained from inserting additional divisions to attack them. There are several possible explanations for this apparent restraint.

First, the Tatmadaw might have wished to avoid the additional public scrutiny in Rakhine that mounting a new major operation would bring. Second, the Tatmadaw may have considered the AA as a potential buffer force against the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), or simply miscalculated the magnitude of the AA's threat. The Tatmadaw's eventual insertion of five divisions, which were kept as part of its reserves and not deployed elsewhere, suggests it was unlikely that a manpower shortage

was behind its hesitation to insert additional troops into Rakhine prior to 2019. For its part, the AA also appeared to be avoiding any major confrontation with the Tatmadaw prior to January 2019, perhaps to provide itself with more time to prepare for the operations to come.

By December 2018, however, the Tatmadaw began to adjust its approach by launching sustained artillery strikes on known AA bases in Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Ponnagyun, and Kyauktaw townships. Using local units, the Tatmadaw established firebases, sometimes in or near police encampments, from where it pounded AA positions in the jungle. The stage was set, and on January 4, 2019, the AA responded by launching an offensive with the initial attacks on police stations in Buthidaung.

The attacks would serve to justify a Tatmadaw counteroffensive with support from the govern-



**Figure 25.** *Combatant deaths during the conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and State Security Forces in 2019*

ment. Speaking at a press conference following an emergency convening of the National Defence and Security Council in Nay Pyi Taw, government spokesperson U Zaw Htay said that “the president’s office had instructed the military to launch an operation to crush the terrorists.”<sup>1</sup> In the following days, the Tatmadaw inserted three light infantry divisions (LID) in northern Rakhine, beginning its efforts to seek and destroy AA training camps and bases hidden in the jungle close to villages.

The AA’s offensive in northern Rakhine State beginning in January 2019 was characterized by numerous attempts, involving hundreds of AA fighters, to overrun Tatmadaw bases and police headquarters. The intent was likely twofold. First, to establish a headquarters in northern Rakhine State, the AA would need to control territory and thus dislodge Tatmadaw positions. Second, by overrunning police or Tatmadaw positions, the AA could acquire valuable weapons and supplies, as well as boost morale among fighters and supporters.

According to MIPS sources, 25% to 50% of the AA fighters involved in major assaults went into battle unarmed. When a comrade was killed or wounded, unarmed fighters would drag the body



**TO SUPPORT ITS OFFENSIVE, THE AA BUILT AND OPERATED A NETWORK OF HIDEOUTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE POSTS IN THE FORESTED MOUNTAINS OF NORTHERN RAKHINE, BUT NOT FAR FROM THE ETHNIC RAKHINE VILLAGES THAT PROVIDED CRITICAL RESOURCES AND SERVED AS LOGISTICAL HUBS.**

1 Thu, M. (2019). Govt stirs Rakhine anger with warning about Arakan Army. Retrieved from <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/govt-stirs-rakhine-anger-with-warning-about-arakan-army>

away and take his weapon, a tactic that allowed the AA to sustain firepower during an attack. In the first half of 2019, the AA rarely left the bodies of fallen fighters behind, demonstrating good morale among its ranks. Converging on Tatmadaw bases and police headquarters in large numbers, however, left the AA fighters vulnerable to Tatmadaw artillery and airstrikes.

To support its offensive, the AA built and operated a network of hideouts and administrative posts in the forested mountains of northern Rakhine, but not far from the ethnic Rakhine villages that provided critical resources and served as logistical hubs. By placing bases or camps on the edge of the jungle, AA fighters enjoyed easy access to the battlefield and villages, but could also retreat deeper into the jungle to avoid Tatmadaw pressure if needed. In 2019, 97% of the armed clashes between the AA and state security forces in northern Rakhine State took place within 2.5 miles of a village.

One key pattern from 2019 was the ebb and flow of major AA attacks. First, AA fighters would launch multiple large-scale attacks on Tatmadaw fixed positions in an attempt to overrun them. When these attacks were repelled, as they often were, the AA fighters would return to their hideouts to regroup, tend to the wounded, and resupply. Typically, the AA took about four to six weeks before attempting another round of large-scale attacks on Tatmadaw positions. In the interim, however, AA fighters maintained constant engagement with the Tatmadaw by conducting regular small-scale ambushes and targeted roadside bombings against military columns.

The best example of this dynamic was seen in March 2019, when the AA launched numerous large-scale attacks on police and Tatmadaw positions on the edge of Mrauk U town. In February, the Tatmadaw anticipated a looming offensive, and pulled back its 55<sup>th</sup> LID from Paletwa Township to guard major towns and strategic positions, like

Mrauk U. The decision to reposition troops likely allowed the Tatmadaw to repel the March offensive.

After a six-week lull, the AA resumed major attacks in mid-May. Then, in early June, it launched a major ambush on a Tatmadaw column maneuvering along the river in an area known as Pan Myaung, Minbya Township. Trapped against the river by the attacking AA fighters, the Tatmadaw column was narrowly saved by air support, precision artillery strikes, and a column of reinforcements. Battered but intact, the prevailing Tatmadaw unit then pursued the retreating AA fighters into the mountains nearby. The incident would mark a new phase in the conflict, with the momentum shifting in favor of the Tatmadaw for the time being.

In the following months, the Tatmadaw began to build on the momentum won at Pan Myaung by conducting heavy artillery strikes against AA units and bases wherever they were spotted. With the Tatmadaw counteroffensive building, the AA attempted to relieve pressure on its most embattled units by conducting numerous diversionary attacks, including a standoff rocket attack on Tatmadaw naval vessels near Sittwe in July. Around this same time, MIPS recorded a significant uptick in clashes further south in Myebon and Ann townships. The clashes there marked the beginning of a sustained AA effort to open a new front further south.

Opening a southern front in Myebon and Ann townships was likely designed to serve two purposes. First, it would relieve pressure on embattled AA fighters by diverting Tatmadaw attention away from the heaviest fighting in Minbya Township. Second, the AA's expansion of the conflict zone would demonstrate to supporters that it was continuing to take the fight to the Tatmadaw after a series of setbacks in June and July.

The AA's attempt to fight the Tatmadaw further south, however, would prove more challenging

than in the north. It was unlikely that the AA had conducted the same amount of preparation in Myebon and Ann townships prior to the commencement of hostilities as it had further north. In townships like Buthidaung, Mrauk U, Ponnagyun, and Kyauktaw, the AA likely spent at least three years mobilizing support and stockpiling supplies. Also, having learned its lesson from late 2018, the Tatmadaw responded promptly to the AA's expansionary ambitions further south by inserting more than one infantry division into Myebon, Ann, and Taung Gok townships, rather than repositioning troops from the north. Combined with units already in place, the newly inserted divisions would greatly restrict the AA's capability in the area. Moreover, both Myebon and Ann townships lie wedged between the sea and mountains, providing a natural cut-off point for the Tatmadaw.

Despite setbacks in the rainy season, the AA was back on its feet by early September and moving to retake positions in Pan Myaung that it had lost to the Tatmadaw in July and August. To the south in Myebon Township, the AA stepped up operations by carrying out more ambushes against Tatmadaw columns, especially along the Yangon-Sittwe Highway. This renewed AA offensive, however, would come against a changing backdrop in Rakhine State. With the end of the rainy season approaching, the Tatmadaw now controlled the majority of key positions in Rakhine and had established a network of firebases throughout the state. It had also begun to squeeze AA supply lines, with a full land and naval blockade now in place.

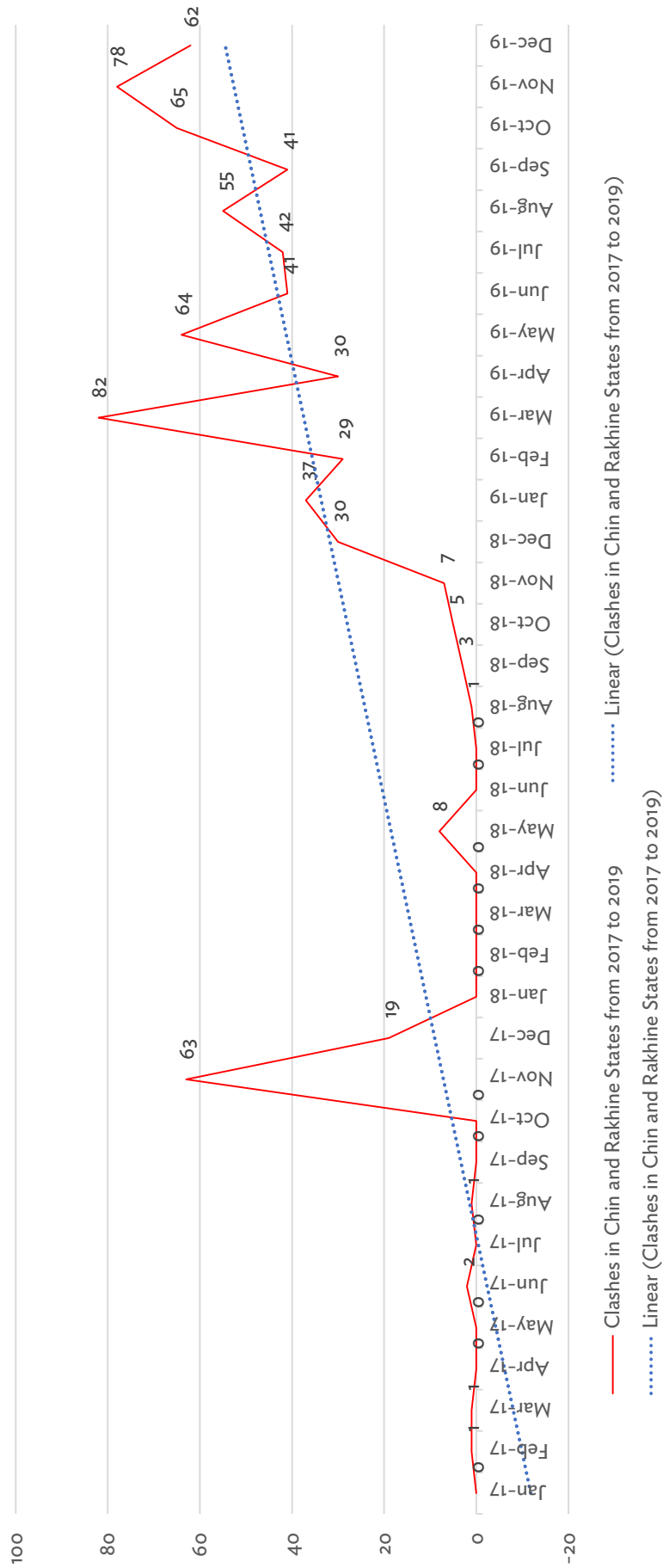
In October, the Tatmadaw launched a renewed offensive by inserting an additional division into Myebon and Ann townships to dislodge AA positions located on the edge of the jungle abutting the Yangon-Sittwe Highway. In 2019, the Tatmadaw

liberalized the use of airpower by authorizing the regional commander to conduct airstrikes without permission from headquarters in Nay Pyi Taw. Throughout the month, the Tatmadaw conducted frequent air and artillery strikes against AA units and positions, aided by unmanned reconnaissance drones capable of spotting AA units in real-time. Yet, despite this increasing pressure, the AA still managed to carry out multiple coordinated attacks in October, although such attacks did not succeed in achieving their objectives.

By November, fighting across northern Rakhine State was raging as the Tatmadaw continued to hammer AA positions with heavy firepower. After another short pause, the AA once again managed to coordinate its next round of large-scale attacks in December, but again failed to overrun any Tatmadaw positions. The Tatmadaw would continue to pummel AA positions with frequent and heavy airstrikes and artillery into the New Year.



**THE RAKHINE  
CONFLICT HAS ALSO  
USHERED IN A NEW  
ERA OF TATMADAW  
WAR-FIGHTING  
CAPABILITIES AND  
MILITARY THINKING,  
ESPECIALLY IN REGARD  
TO AIRPOWER.**



**Figure 26.** Timeline of clashes between state security forces and the Arakan Army (AA) in Chin and Rakhine States from 2017 to 2019



There are several key takeaways regarding the AA's operations throughout 2019. Beginning with its strengths, the AA has proved more than capable of maintaining robust support from the local population in northern Rakhine. It enjoys good morale among its fighters and a strong ability to recruit young men into its ranks. Its ability to establish and connect supply depots to key villages and outposts in the mountains is also impressive. The AA's logistical abilities enabled it to continue fighting throughout the year despite a Tatmadaw blockade and government-imposed mobile internet shut-down.

Another key area where the AA made significant progress in 2019 was the dismantling of the government's civil administrative structure in northern Rakhine State. As a critical part of its plan to assert its own authority, the AA has worked to systematically undermine and disrupt government operations and jurisdiction. In towns like Mrauk U and Kyauktaw, the civilian government has effectively ceased operating. Regular targeted killings of suspected government collaborators by unknown actors has also helped to prevent civil servants from carrying out their duties, as well as cultivated a widespread aversion to dealing with the government or government-linked entities in northern Rakhine.

Despite its strengths, the AA continues to face a number of significant challenges, both on the battlefield and off. In the first half of 2019, the AA largely set the conflict's tempo by launching numerous rounds of large-scale coordinated attacks on Tatmadaw positions. Faced with mounting Tatmadaw artillery and airpower, however, such attacks became increasingly infrequent and unlikely to succeed. By the end of the year, the AA had also lost many of its jungle hideouts, training camps, and supply depots to Tatmadaw assaults.

Another major challenge the AA will need to contend with is its supply line. Unlike most of Myan-

mar's ethnic armed organizations (EAO), the AA's primary area of operation is not on the doorstep of a major weapons' market like those that exist in the borderlands of China and Thailand. There are no indications so far that Bangladesh is providing or will provide a weapons channel for the AA. Absent of this route, the AA will need to overcome the Tatmadaw's ever-tightening blockade. Any hidden weapons and ammunition stockpiles across northern Rakhine will only become further depleted as fighting wears on.

The AA has also faced increasing opposition from non-Rakhine ethnic groups in places where it operates. In mountainous areas they inhabit across northern Rakhine State, ethnic Mro people are less than enthusiastic about the advent of conflict between the Rakhine and Bamar. In Paletwa Township, Chin State, conflict-related hardships have stirred opposition from ethnic Chin communities, especially among the sub-sect of Khumi people, who now find themselves squeezed between the AA and Tatmadaw.

Simmering tensions were further enflamed by the AA's insistence that Paletwa belongs to Rakhine, and that the Khumi people are a sub-sect of the Rakhine ethnic group. The abduction of an ethnic Khumi lawmaker in late 2019 also significantly escalated the tension between the AA and Khumi. Such ill feeling will likely push influential Chin entities toward the side of the government and Tatmadaw, and may lead to the formation of a pro-government Khumi militia in the Paletwa area.

The Rakhine Conflict has also ushered in a new era of Tatmadaw war-fighting capabilities and military thinking, especially in regard to airpower. The Tatmadaw's air force, which continues to acquire advanced fighters from Russia and China, flew its first night-time sorties against AA positions in 2019 and demonstrated its all-weather capabilities during the monsoon season. Sources also indicate that the Tatmadaw is developing guided munitions

and may be testing them in Rakhine State. Moreover, the Tatmadaw no longer faces ammunition supply issues as it did in the past, since it is now able to produce most munitions domestically.

The Tatmadaw's improved capabilities have enabled its growing reliance on airpower. In the past, the Tatmadaw viewed airpower primarily as a tool to support ground soldiers. By mid-2019, however, the Tatmadaw was using frequent airstrikes to attack AA units in the absence of ground operations. This general liberalization of airpower is reflected by the numerous gunships that now wait on standby at helipads across northern Rakhine, ready to take off in a moment's notice at the instruction of the regional commander. In 2019, TCMS recorded the use of airstrikes during 55 clashes with the AA in Rakhine and southern Chin states. Almost every medium and large clash that lasted more than one hour in 2019 involved airstrikes.

The Tatmadaw's sweeping blockade, which was the centerpiece of its first joint operations involving the army, navy, and air force since the 1990s, has also worked to significantly cut AA supply lines spanning both land and sea. By late 2019, some sources suggested a reduction in the volume of firepower brought forth by the AA during clashes. The Tatmadaw's ability to squeeze AA supplies was also aided by its hold on the majority of strategic positions throughout Rakhine State and its comprehensive network of artillery firebases that threaten AA positions.

Despite these strengths, the Tatmadaw also continues to face an assortment of challenges and obstacles, both operationally and politically. For example, more than half of its current fighting units in Rakhine State are over the age of 30. Due to ongoing problems with recruitment, the Tatmadaw faces difficulties in reinforcing its battalions with fresh troops. Collecting intelligence is another challenge, although by late 2019 it was receiving more help from the local non-Rakhine popula-

tion. An even bigger challenge to the Tatmadaw's counterinsurgency operations is the current gap in civil-military relations. With the civil administration nearly non-existent in northern Rakhine State, the Tatmadaw has sought to institute martial law, but attempts to do so were blocked by the civilian government in 2019. Moreover, the link between the Tatmadaw's counterinsurgency campaign and the judiciary system is weak. Increasingly, judges are acting independently in cases involving suspected AA members by dropping evidence and dismissing cases. Unconfirmed reports suggest that some of these judges have received threats from the AA.

Beyond these operational constraints are the wider political issues that will continue to drive conflict in Rakhine State. Principally, both the government and Tatmadaw have shown little to no willingness to address the Rakhine people's aspirations for greater autonomy. For its part, the government has not made a serious effort to engage with important Rakhine stakeholders, including Rakhine political parties, while the Tatmadaw's counterinsurgency operations remain largely disconnected from the political process in Rakhine State. So long as these issues are not addressed, the Rakhine population may continue to see armed struggle as their best hope for greater autonomy.

Overall, the prospects for peace and security in Rakhine State in 2020 remain dim. It is likely that the Tatmadaw will continue to build its momentum with the relentless use of heavy firepower to target AA units and positions. Although the AA's proven resilience and doggedness make it likely to attempt more large-scale attacks, such attacks are increasingly unlikely to succeed in overrunning Tatmadaw positions. By early 2020, the AA was beginning to leave dozens of bodies behind after failed attacks.

It is also likely that the Tatmadaw will attempt to implement a more robust version of its 'four cuts' strategy, a counterinsurgency doctrine designed to

deny the enemy food, financial resources, recruits, and information. As the conflict deepens, ethnic tensions between the Rakhine and Bamar, as well as between the AA and local non-Rakhine populations, are also likely to increase.

Another likely scenario is that the Tatmadaw could take a long-term approach to counterinsurgency in Rakhine State, since the AA will most likely face future issues with supply. There are already indications that this is the case. Rather than pursuing the

AA into the jungle as it did in 2019, the Tatmadaw now appears to be drawing the AA fighters out by allowing them to attack its positions. It is possible that the Tatmadaw now envisions a war of attrition in which it can take its time to slowly degrade the capacity and morale of the Rakhine fighters. Although enduring hardships could feasibly lead civilians to reconsider their support for the AA, such a scenario remains far off. With entrenched positions on both sides, war in Rakhine State is likely to endure well into the foreseeable future.

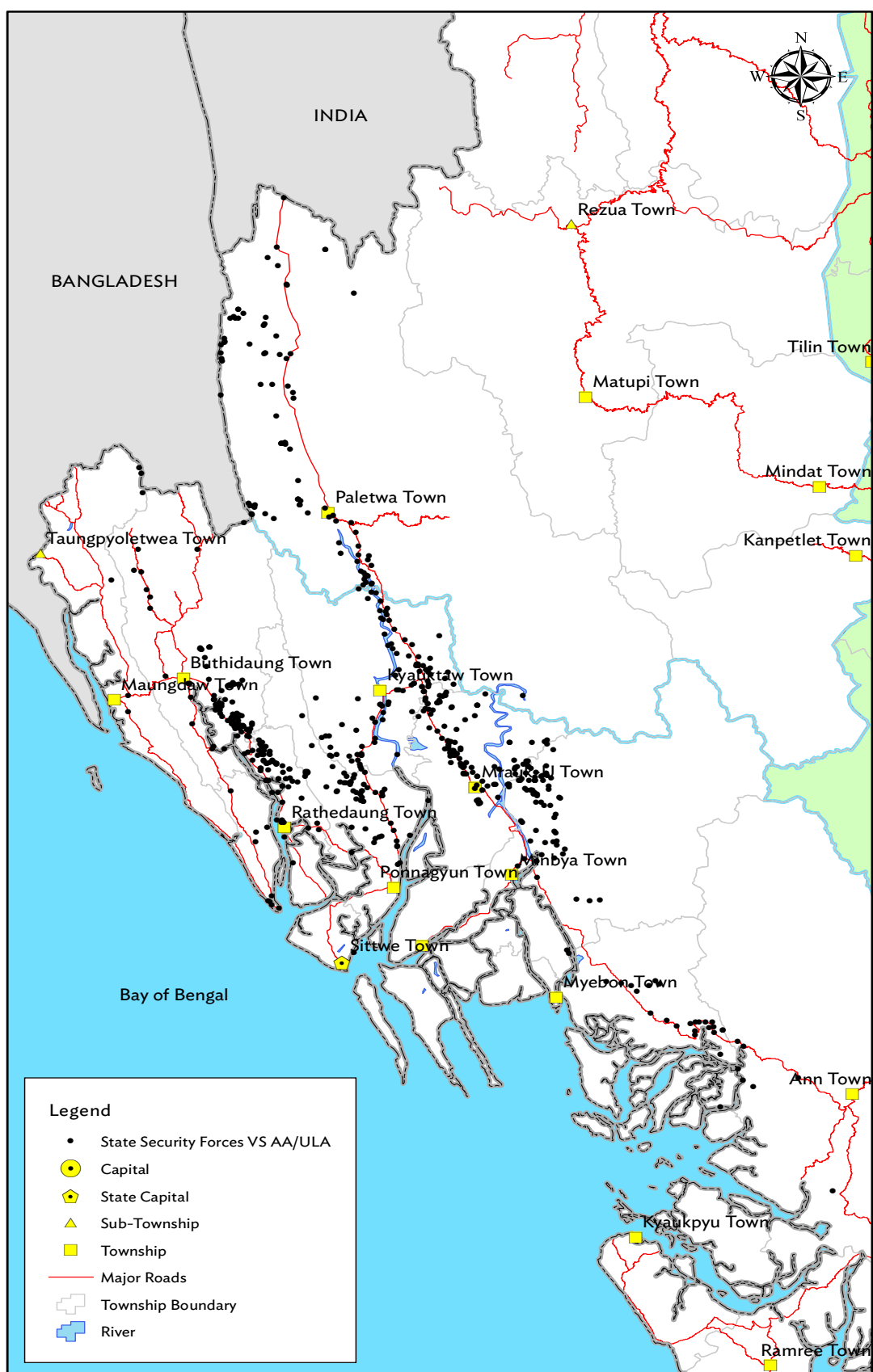


Figure 27. Clashes between state security forces and the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine and Chin states in 2019



# THE TA'ANG NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY AND BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE



Under the gleam of a full August moon, a small team of ethnic Palaung fighters emerged from the tree line on a hill overlooking Pyin Oo Lwin, a charming resort town just 40 miles to the east of Mandalay. Dressed in plain clothes, the fighters unloaded a small cache of 107mm rockets before carefully connecting them to used car batteries. At exactly 5:30 am, just as the sun began to illuminate the town below, the rockets lit off, cascading down on the Tatmadaw's prestigious Defense Services Technological Academy below.

At exactly the same time, fellow fighters from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) were striking targets along the road stretching northeast from Pyin Oo Lwin. A traffic gate, a narcotics checkpoint, and a bridge guarded by a small police post located beneath the famous Gotheik Viaduct all fell victim to assault. The attacks that day would make international headlines, not least for their brazen nature and impressive reach into government

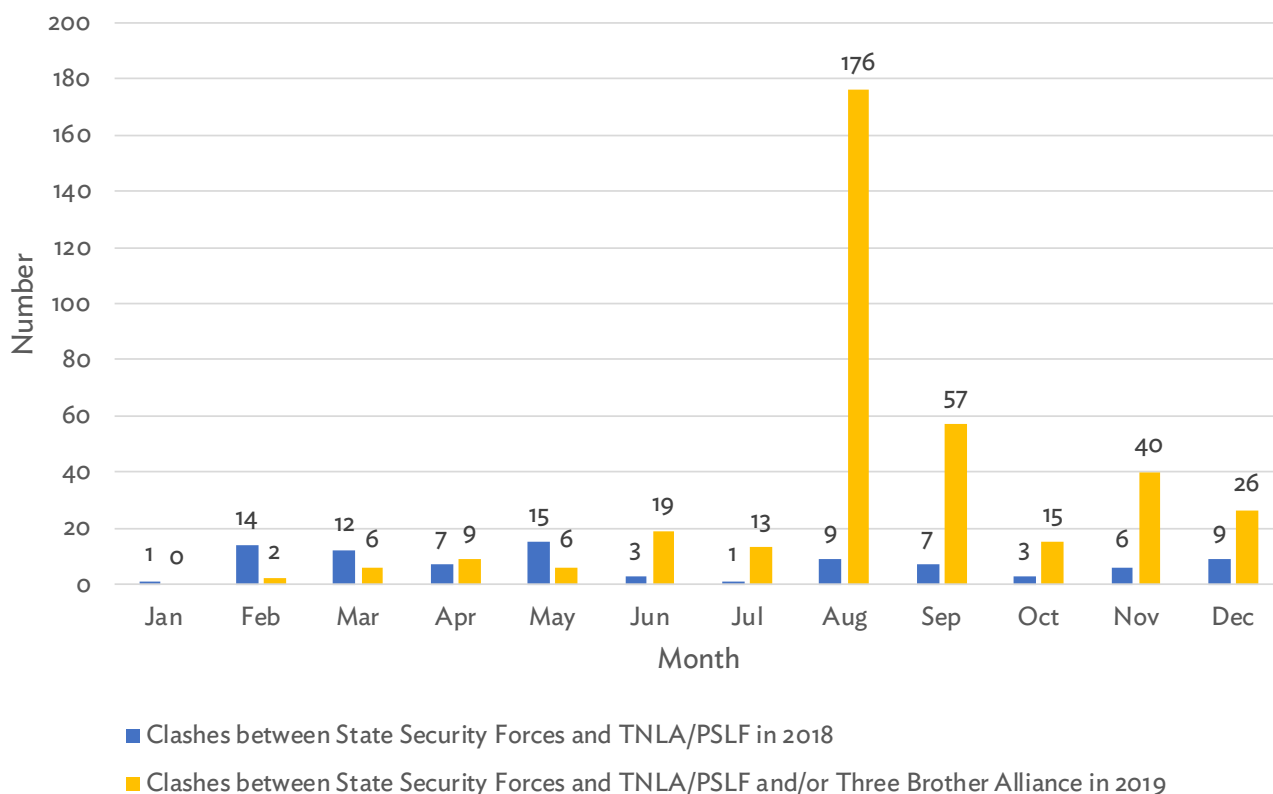
territory. But the most significant fighting was yet to come. In the following days, a widespread offensive by the newly formed Brotherhood Alliance would unfold up and down the main highway linking Myanmar and mainland China.

At the head of the offensive was the TNLA, an ethnic armed organization (EAO) that recruits among the ethnic Palaung, or Ta'ang, population indigenous to Shan State. Formed in 2009, the TNLA is the reincarnation of the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA), which reached a ceasefire agreement with the government in 1991 before disarming in 2005. The TNLA's rise was initially supported by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), but the group would later receive assistance from the powerful United Wa State Army (UWSA) as well.

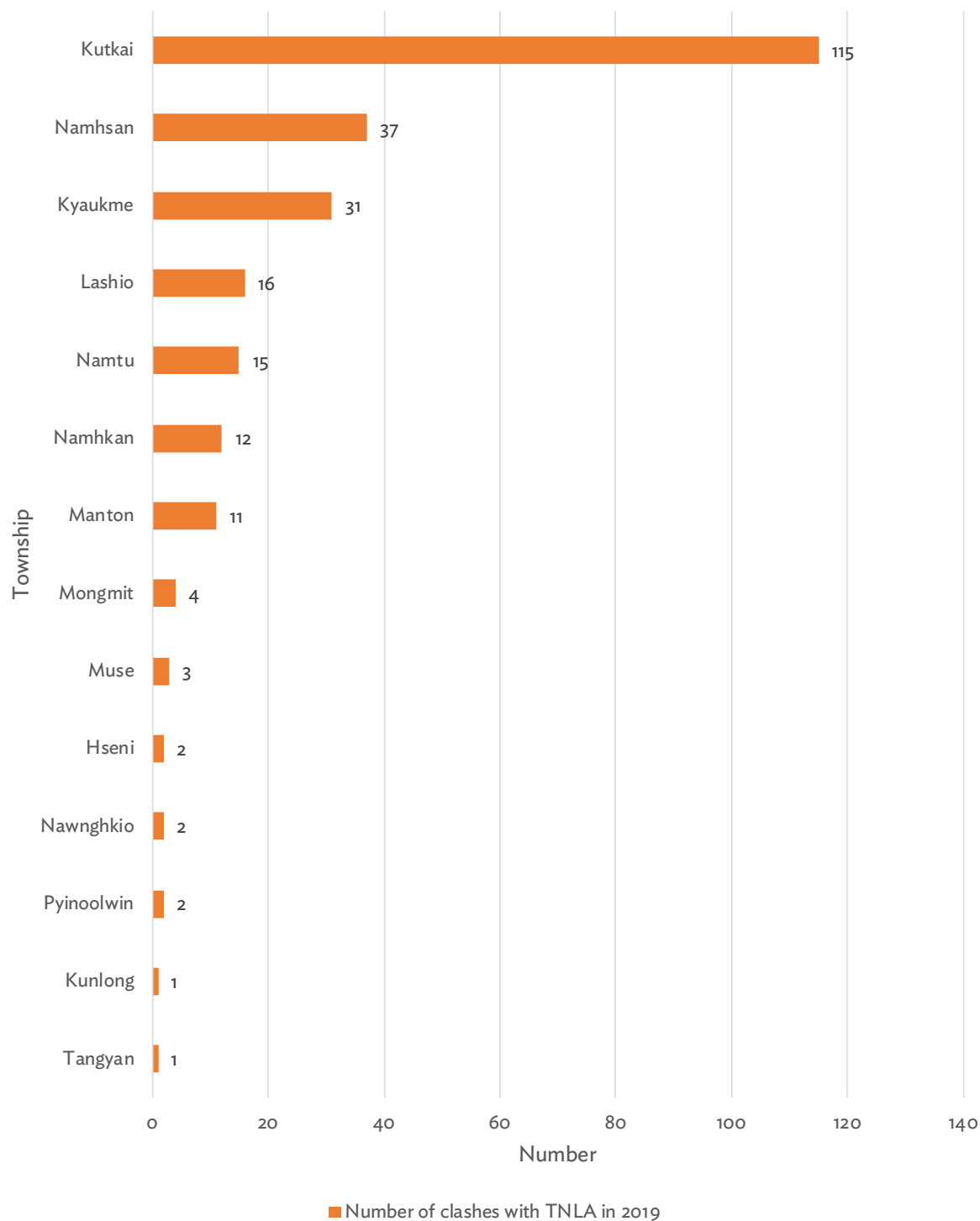
A primarily mobile force, the TNLA maintains few fixed positions and operates in or near the majority of ethnic Palaung villages throughout northern

Shan State. Although it does maintain standing forces, the bulk of its fighters live among civilians and take up arms when called upon. The TNLA is largely motivated by what it says is a history of abuse against ethnic Palaung people at the hands of the Tatmadaw, militias, and numerous EAOs that

operate in northern Shan State. Prior to 2013, its forces numbered less than 1,000, but since 2016 its size has grown to about 4,000 active fighters. It is strongest within Namhsan and Manton townships, which together form the Palaung Self-Administered Zone (SAZ).

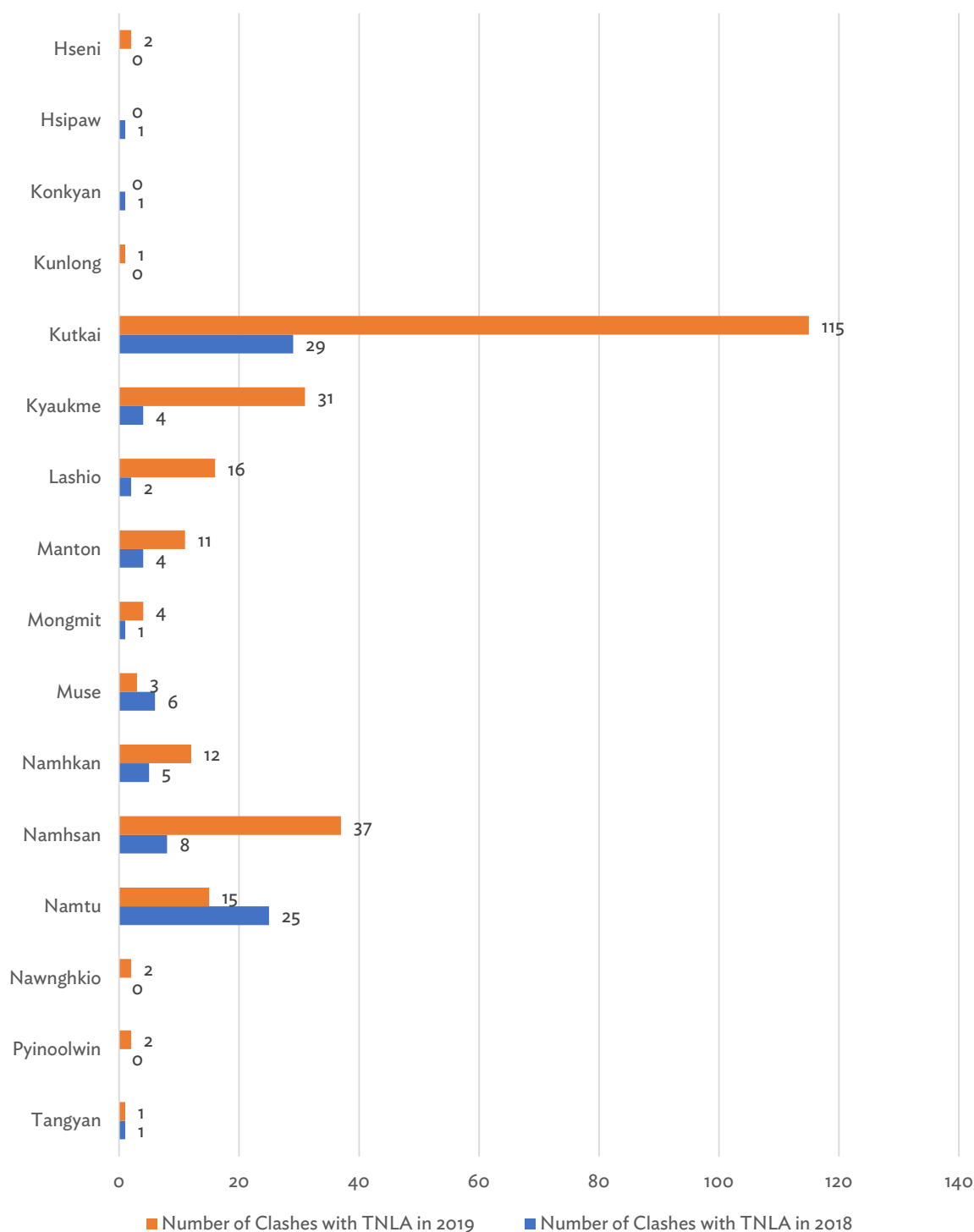


**Figure 28.** *Monthly clashes between state security forces and the TNLA or the TNLA and its alliance partners in 2018 and 2019.*



**Figure 29.** Townships where clashes occurred in 2019 between state security forces and the TNLA





**Figure 30.** Comparison of townships where clashes occurred between state security forces and the TNLA in 2018 and 2019

Although the TNLA ended 2019 embroiled in an ongoing conflict with the Tatmadaw, it had begun the year fighting a different enemy. Historically based in the south, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), a powerful EAO and signatory of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA),


began to build a presence in northern Shan State as early as 2011. After signing the NCA in 2015, the RCSS became more visible in the north, a dynamic that would culminate in a confrontation with the TNLA and another prominent Shan EAO, the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP).

Alarmed by what they saw as encroachment by the RCSS into their areas of operation, the TNLA and SSPP banded together in July 2018 in an attempt to expel the RCSS from the north. The inter-EAO conflict that followed was characterized by fierce fighting, often near or in large villages and towns, and continued unabated until April 2019, when influential Shan monks brokered a truce between the SSPP and RCSS. The conflict remains frozen today, with the underlying causes unaddressed despite an end to the fighting.

As the TNLA's conflict with the RCSS was winding down, hopes for ceasefire with the Tatmadaw also began to grow. In December 2018, the Tatmadaw announced a unilateral cessation of military activities in the north of Myanmar, which included the TNLA's operational areas. As a result of the unilateral 'cease-fire', no clashes were reported between the TNLA and Tatmadaw in January while only two light clashes were reported in February. Although small and sporadic clashes did resume by March, tensions on the ground would remain relatively low until June 2019.

The Tatmadaw's decision to announce a suspension of military activities was likely designed to provide an opening for bilateral ceasefire talks with the Northern Alliance groups, which includes the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Arakan Army (AA), and the TNLA. During a meeting in Mongla, Shan State, in June 2019, the government's Peace Commission presented the groups with individual ceasefire proposals. Leaked details of the proposals showed that the Tatmadaw demanded the TNLA, AA, and MNDAA to return to their 'points of origin' as a condition to ceasefire. For the TNLA, this meant confining its operational zone to the Palaung SAZ. The groups rejected this demand.

For the AA, the Tatmadaw's insistence that it returns to Lai Zar in Kachin State was fundamentally at odds with its aim to establish a foothold in Rakhine State. Knowing this, the Tatmadaw had



**LEAKED DETAILS OF THE PROPOSALS SHOWED THAT THE TATMADAW DEMANDED THE TNLA, AA, AND MNDAA TO RETURN TO THEIR 'POINTS OF ORIGIN' AS A CONDITION TO CEASEFIRE. FOR THE TNLA, THIS MEANT CONFINING ITS OPERATIONAL ZONE TO THE PALAUNG SAZ. THE GROUPS REJECTED THIS DEMAND.**

excluded Rakhine State from its unilateral ceasefire and continued to mount an offensive against the AA there. In April 2019, the AA, MNDAA, and TNLA threatened to take joint action if the Tatmadaw did not end its assault on the AA. Nonetheless, both the MNDAA and TNLA appeared reluctant to carry through with their threat so long as the Tatmadaw maintained its ceasefire in their operational areas.

As the bilateral ceasefire talks moved forward in June, however, the Tatmadaw decided to tackle the issue of territory by force. That same month, it launched a limited offensive to dislodge TNLA positions outside of the Palaung SAZ so as to prevent the group from attempting to claim additional ter-

ritory during negotiations. The Tatmadaw continued attacking TNLA outposts through July, while initially avoiding attacks against the MNDAA. Nonetheless, the two groups began to rethink their reluctance to retaliate in solidarity with the AA.

As July turned to August, clashes between the Tatmadaw and both the TNLA and MNDAA were escalating. Then, on August 12, the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA announced the formation of the Broth-

erhood Alliance. Despite leading these three groups in the Northern Alliance, the KIA maintained its distance from the military confrontation brewing in Shan State in order to maintain tranquility in Kachin State. The newly minted Brotherhood Alliance warned the Tatmadaw to suspend its offensives, but once again to no avail. On August 15, 2019, the alliance finally retaliated against Tatmadaw operations in Rakhine and Shan states by launching its offensive, beginning with the attacks in Pyin Oo Lwin.

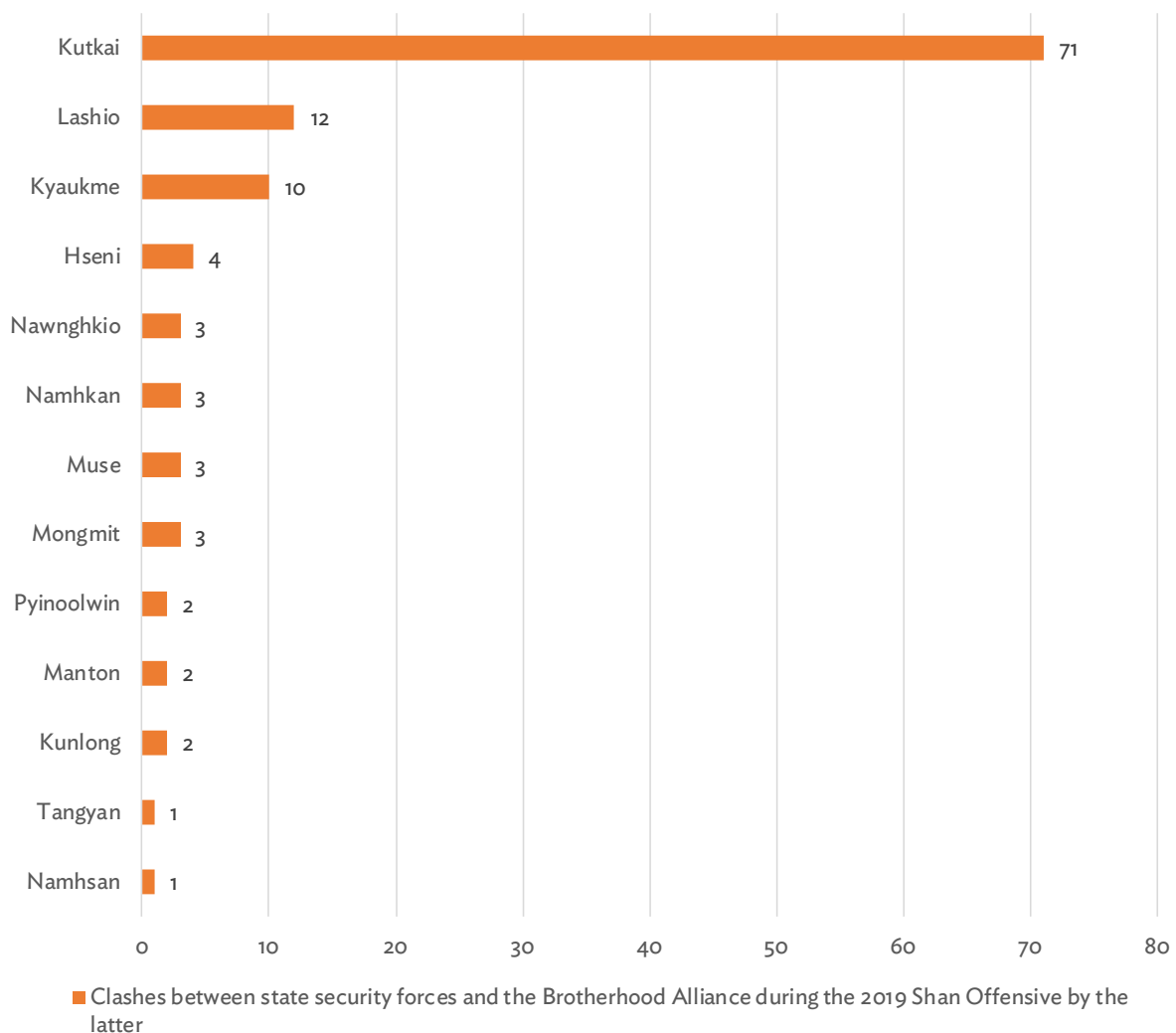


**THE NEWLY MINTED BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE WARNED THE TATMADAW TO SUSPEND ITS OFFENSIVES, BUT ONCE AGAIN TO NO AVAIL. ON AUGUST 15, 2019, THE ALLIANCE FINALLY RETALIATED AGAINST TATMADAW OPERATIONS IN RAKHINE AND SHAN STATES BY LAUNCHING ITS OFFENSIVE, BEGINNING WITH THE ATTACKS IN PYIN OO LWIN.**

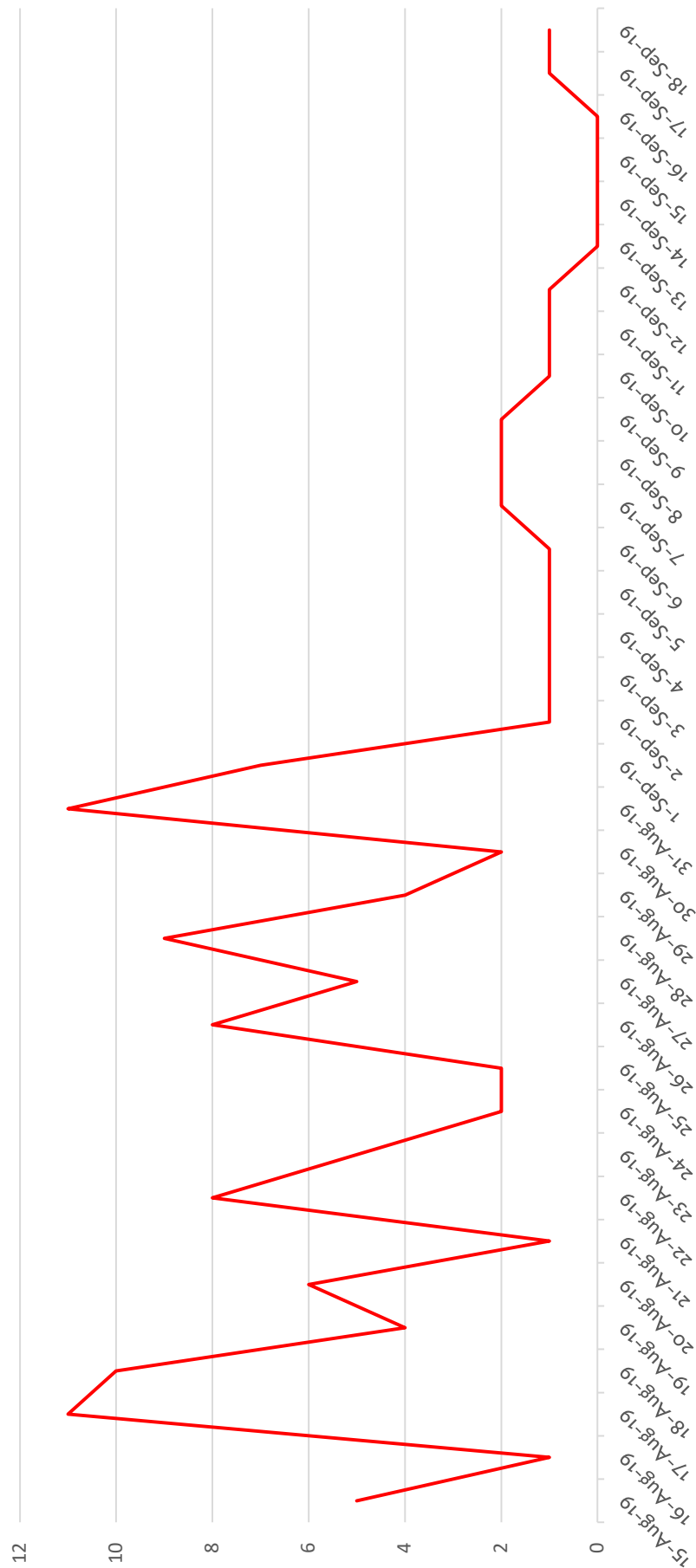


The attacks carried out on the opening day of the offensive were largely against soft targets. The Tatmadaw's Defense Services Technological Academy, for example, is not heavily guarded because the town of Pyin Oo Lwin is considered a 'white zone', or low risk area. Although the alliance managed to destroy several bridges within the opening days of the offensive, these bridges were relatively small and also unguarded. The attacks on soft targets were likely designed as a diversion from the primary aim of the operation: the disruption of the main highway and trade route linking Myanmar and China.

To do this, the alliance deployed hundreds of fighters in an attempt to capture numerous Tatmadaw bases that guard segments of road to the north and south of Kutkai, a major town along the Mandalay-Muse Highway. The bulk of the alliance's contingent was comprised of TNLA fighters, who launched large-scale, coordinated attacks on the Tatmadaw's bases for days at a time. Despite bringing commerce and traffic along the route to a halt for nearly two weeks, however, the alliance was unable to overrun or capture any of the bases, bridges, or critical segments of road after the first day of the offensive. It had also lost the element of surprise by concentrating its efforts on the largely symbolic and diversionary attacks on day one.



**Figure 32.** Townships affected by fighting during the Brotherhood Alliance's August 2019 offensive in northern Shan State



**Figure 33.** Timeline of clashes between state security forces and the Brotherhood Alliance during the August 2019 offensive in northern Shan State

The Tatmadaw's response was relatively limited and came in three phases. The first phase was simply to repel the offensive and reopen the highway to trade and commerce. By the beginning of September, traffic was once again flowing through the corridor, disrupted only periodically by small teams of TNLA fighters who managed to establish roadblocks for short periods of time. With the heaviest fighting subsiding, the Tatmadaw initiated its second phase of response by branching away

from the highway to dislodge alliance positions and units to the east and west. Although residual fighting for control of positions overseeing the road would continue for several months, the Tatmadaw did not launch a full-on counter-offensive against the TNLA or its partners in Shan State during that time.

In September 2019, the Brotherhood Alliance declared a unilateral ceasefire, partly because of



**Figure 34.** *Combatant deaths during the conflict between the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and State Security Forces in 2019*

mounting pressure from China, but also in anticipation of renewed efforts to negotiate bilateral ceasefire agreements. The declaration, however, had little effect on the Tatmadaw's behavior in both northern Shan State and northern Rakhine State. In November, the Tatmadaw initiated its third and final phase of operations in response to the August offensive.

The Tatmadaw's third phase began with a limited offensive against TNLA positions on the edge of the Palaung SAZ. Then, in December, the Tatmadaw sent its 88<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Division (LID) into the SAZ to carry out targeted raids on TNLA outposts and weapons' caches. The move represented a departure from the Tatmadaw's previous policy to contain the TNLA to the SAZ and thus avoid fighting there. Attacking the TNLA's positions within its stronghold was likely meant to deter the group from carrying out future offensives like the

one in August. The Tatmadaw has historically exacted territorial losses on opponents in response to offensive actions as a form of future deterrence. By February 2020, however, fighting between the TNLA and Tatmadaw was decelerating.

The TNLA benefits from a strong network of support from the Palaung population, especially among youths. Its leaders are also young and savvy, and have built a strong network among Palaung civil society organizations (CSO) and political parties. It is also capable of building important relationships and alliances, as shown by its leading role in the Brotherhood Alliance and its strategic partnership with the SSPP. It additionally benefits from the simple fact that the areas it seeks to protect are rugged, remote, and difficult for the Tatmadaw to operate in.

Yet the remoteness of the Palaung villages also poses

a problem for the TNLA, since its primary source of support is spread thinly from Mandalay Region to the border with China in northern Shan State. Its chain of command is not particularly strong and the group has been accused of various human rights abuses. Its practice of forced recruitment has driven large numbers of ethnic Palaung out of Shan State to seek refuge in major cities like Mandalay and Yangon.

The TNLA also has several fierce rivalries, most notably with the RCSS, which can cause it problems during operations against the Tatmadaw. After staging the attacks in Pyin Oo Lwin on August 15, for example, the TNLA suffered significant losses when it ran into an RCSS column as it withdrew north. Conversely, the TNLA often ran into the Tatmadaw as it maneuvered against the RCSS during the height of inter-EAO fighting in 2018.

Another simmering rivalry is that between the TNLA and Pan Say Militia. In May 2018, the TNLA staged an attack on Pan Say posts in Muse Township, prompting an angry response from the militia's leadership. In 2019, the TNLA was accused of abducting Kholon-Lishaw civilians, the ethnic subgroup the Pan Say Militia claims to represent.

Despite the challenges it faces, the TNLA-led offensive in August firmly demonstrated the group's ability to cause widespread disruption along the most important trade route between Myanmar and mainland China, if only for a limited time. The Tatmadaw also likely understands that it cannot fully remove the TNLA from the entirety of its operational areas beyond the Palaung SAZ. These dynamics have likely played a role in shaping the Tatmadaw's willingness to achieve ceasefire with the TNLA. For its part, the TNLA remains heavily reliant on the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA), two groups that saw significant improvements in relations with the Tatmadaw in 2019.





# THE KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ARMY AND NORTHERN ALLIANCE

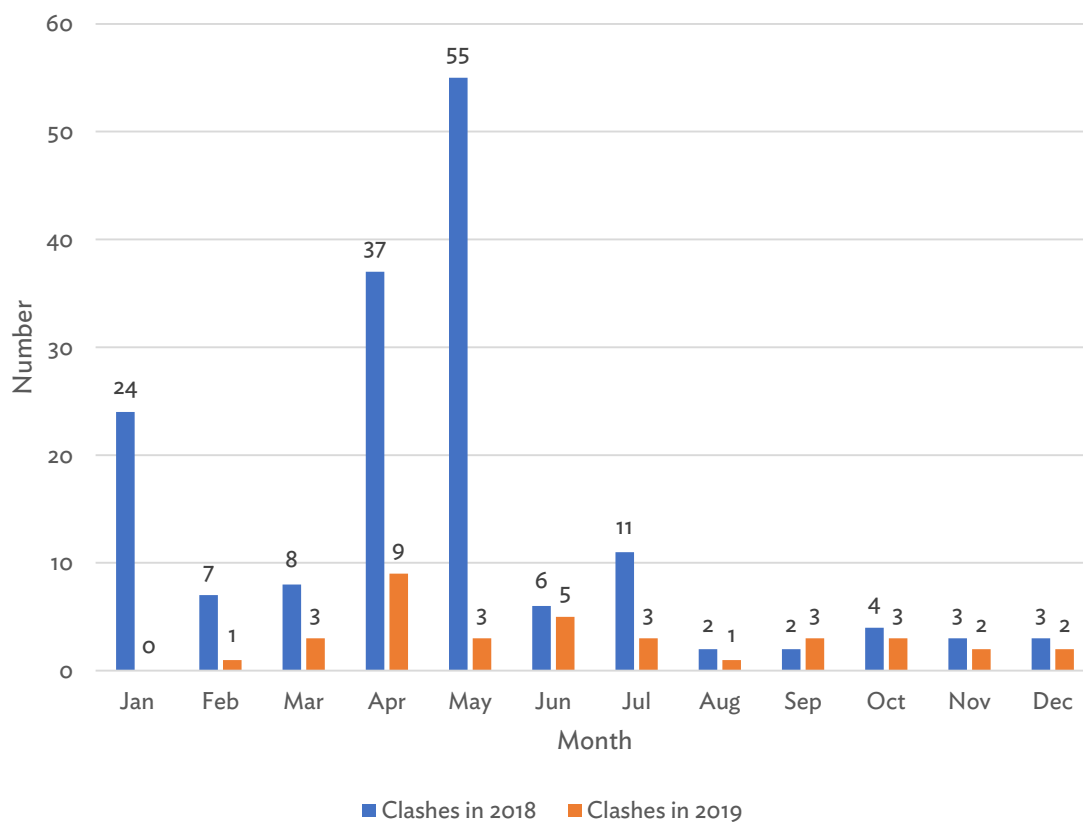


Throughout 2019, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), together with its political wing, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), maintained a de facto ceasefire with the Tatmadaw in Kachin State. Although periodic clashes continued in northern Shan State, relations between the two sides continued to improve and the security situation in Kachin State remains stable today.

Among 40 ceasefire deals reached between the military junta and various armed organizations, the KIA signed the only written ceasefire in 1994, which lasted until June 2011. The renewed conflict in Kachin escalated in late 2012 and early 2013, when the Tatmadaw advanced to the doorstep of Lai Zar, the KIA's headquarters on the border with China. Although it took up multiple strategic positions in the surrounding hills, the Tatmadaw refrained from attacking the city throughout the of-

fensive. Nonetheless, frequent clashes between the two sides continued until May 2018.

The KIO played a leading role in the negotiation of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), right up until the final draft was agreed by the government and ethnic armed organizations (EAO). However, in response to the government's refusal to include the Arakan Army (AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Myanmar Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) in the draft, the KIO ultimately refused to participate in the signing of the NCA on October 15, 2015. It was also likely that the KIO and other members of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) expected the National League for Democracy (NLD) to win the general elections scheduled for November 2015, and hoped that the NLD might offer a better deal.

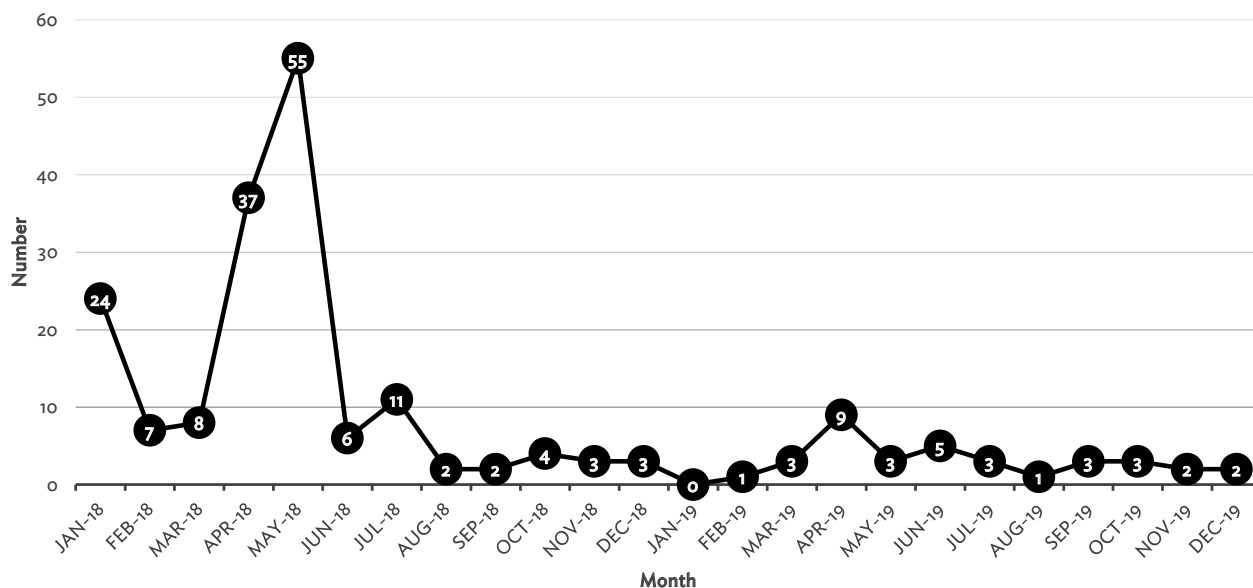


**Figure 35.** Comparison of clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA in 2018 and 2019 by month in Kachin and Shan states

The Tatmadaw launched its last offensive against the KIA in late 2017 with attacks against KIA positions in the resource-rich townships of Hpakant and Tanai. After achieving its objectives, the Tatmadaw wound down the offensive in late January 2018, leading to a two-month period of relative calm in Kachin State. In early April 2018, however, the KIA overran a Tatmadaw post, prompting a renewed offensive. The sharp escalation that

followed led to several major battles and saw the Tatmadaw dislodge at least seven KIA bases.

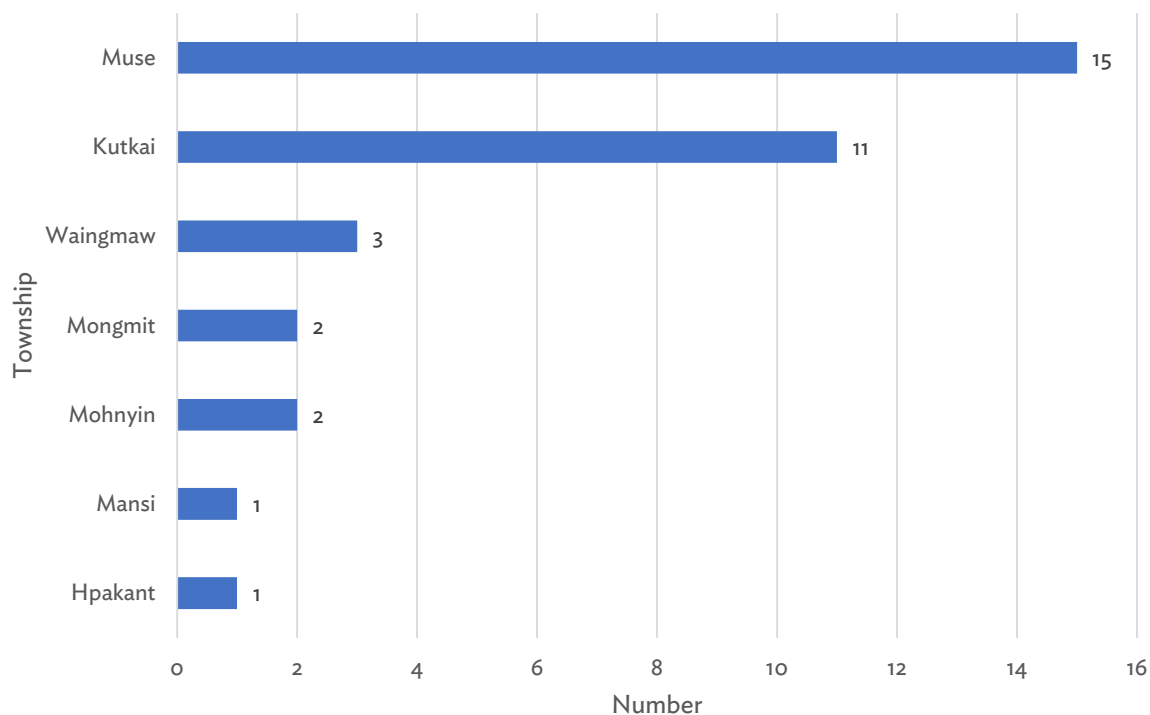
By early June 2018, clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA largely subsided, leading to a period of de facto ceasefire in Kachin State that lasts today. In all of 2019, TCMS recorded only seven minor clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA in Kachin State, demonstrating a clear trend in conflict deceleration.



**Figure 36.** Timeline of clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA from January 2018 to December 2019 in Kachin and Shan states

Although 28 clashes were recorded in northern Shan State that year, those clashes were generally light and did not escalate or spill over into Kachin State. Moreover, both sides frequently kept quiet about clashes, even when casualties occurred. Reports of clashes between the KIA and Tatmadaw in northern Shan State in 2019 were often provided by third parties.

There are two reasons the clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA continued in Shan State. First, the Tatmadaw does not recognize the KIA's presence in northern Shan State and often attacked known KIA bases in an attempt to remove them. Second, some KIA units might have continued to operate with fighters from the TNLA and MNDAA, and in certain circumstances were engaged by the Tatmadaw. Since early 2019, however, the KIA largely kept its distance from the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA.



**Figure 37.** Townships where clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA occurred in 2019.

The KIA assumed a leadership position within the Northern Alliance when the group was established to enhance military cooperation in November 2016. Immediately after its formation, the alliance launched a failed offensive with an aim to retake Mongkoe, a border town to the east of Muse, the main trading port between Myanmar and China. The Mongkoe Offensive was the only major operation the Northern Alliance ever launched with the participation of the KIA.

The KIA maintained its leadership position within the Northern Alliance throughout 2019 and publicly advocated a policy of collective negotiation vis-à-vis the government. Behind the scenes, however, the KIA met with the representatives of the government bilaterally in Chiang Mai, Thailand and Kunming, China as early as January 2019. Altogether, the government met with the Northern Alliance as a group ten times in 2019.



**THE KIA MAINTAINED ITS LEADERSHIP POSITION WITHIN THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE THROUGHOUT 2019 AND PUBLICLY ADVOCATED A POLICY OF COLLECTIVE NEGOTIATION VIS-À-VIS THE GOVERNMENT. BEHIND THE SCENES, HOWEVER, THE KIA MET WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT BILATERALLY IN CHIANG MAI, THAILAND AND KUNMING, CHINA AS EARLY AS JANUARY 2019.**

Differences between the KIA and its alliance partners grew increasingly apparent during the negotiations with the government in the first half of 2019. In April, for example, the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA issued a joint statement threatening collective action if the Tatmadaw did not halt its offensive against the AA in Rakhine State. The KIA did not sign the statement, a telling sign given the alliance's history of military solidarity. Just one year earlier in May 2018, the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA had staged coordinated operations against the Tatmadaw to relieve pressure on KIA units under attack in Kachin State.

One week after issuing their warning, the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA joined the KIA at a meeting with the government in Muse, Shan State. There, the KIA presented a draft bilateral agreement to the government, but sources told MIPS at the time that the drafts from the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA were hastily prepared. The KIA appeared much keener to reach a bilateral ceasefire with the government than its partners.

As talks with the Northern Alliance continued, the Tatmadaw began targeting some TNLA and MNDAA posts in northern Shan State in June 2019. With tensions rising, the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA once again warned the Tatmadaw to halt its offensives in both Rakhine and Shan states. The three groups then announced the formation of the Brotherhood Alliance without the KIA, and launched a major offensive along the economic corridor in northern Shan State on August 15. The KIA took no part in the offensive.

Despite the major escalation in Shan State, the Brotherhood Alliance joined the KIA for ceasefire talks with the government in Keng Tung, Shan State on August 31, 2019. Aware of the unlikelihood of a multilateral agreement, the KIA proposed a multilateral preliminary agreement as a way to open the

door for subsequent bilateral talks. By doing so, the KIA could demonstrate solidarity with the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA before moving on to negotiate individually with the government.

In September, the government and alliance members reached a seven-point agreement on the principles of future bilateral negotiations. Both the KIA and government then prepared draft "Deed of Commitment" statements and appeared ready to move forward. After an internal meeting on October 20, however, the Brotherhood Alliance informed the KIA that it remained committed to multilateral ceasefire, and would not pursue bilateral ceasefire with the government.

The KIO's relationship with the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and its ties to the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) also began to sour in early 2019. The FPNCC is a seven-member organization that includes all four members of the Northern Alliance plus the UWSA, National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), and the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP). As the leader of this 'political' alliance, the UWSA appeared unhappy that the KIO had taken a leadership position over the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA during negotiations with the government. The UWSA sent only a junior officer to observe the Northern Alliance's negotiations with the government in early 2019. By June, the UWSA stopped sending observers to those negotiation sessions altogether.

As these inter-EAO dynamics played out in 2019, the KIA worked to maintain stability in Kachin State and avoided military confrontation with the Tatmadaw. Meanwhile, the KIO informally cooperated with the government in areas like internally displaced persons (IDP) resettlement, demining, and the reopening of schools in formerly conflict-affected areas.



**Figure 38.** *Combatant deaths during the conflict between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and State Security Forces in 2019*

It is likely that the KIA will maintain the current status of de facto ceasefire throughout 2020. It may likely pursue official bilateral ceasefire with the government while maintaining its distance

from the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA. The KIO's role in the FPNCC will remain obscure in the future as well.

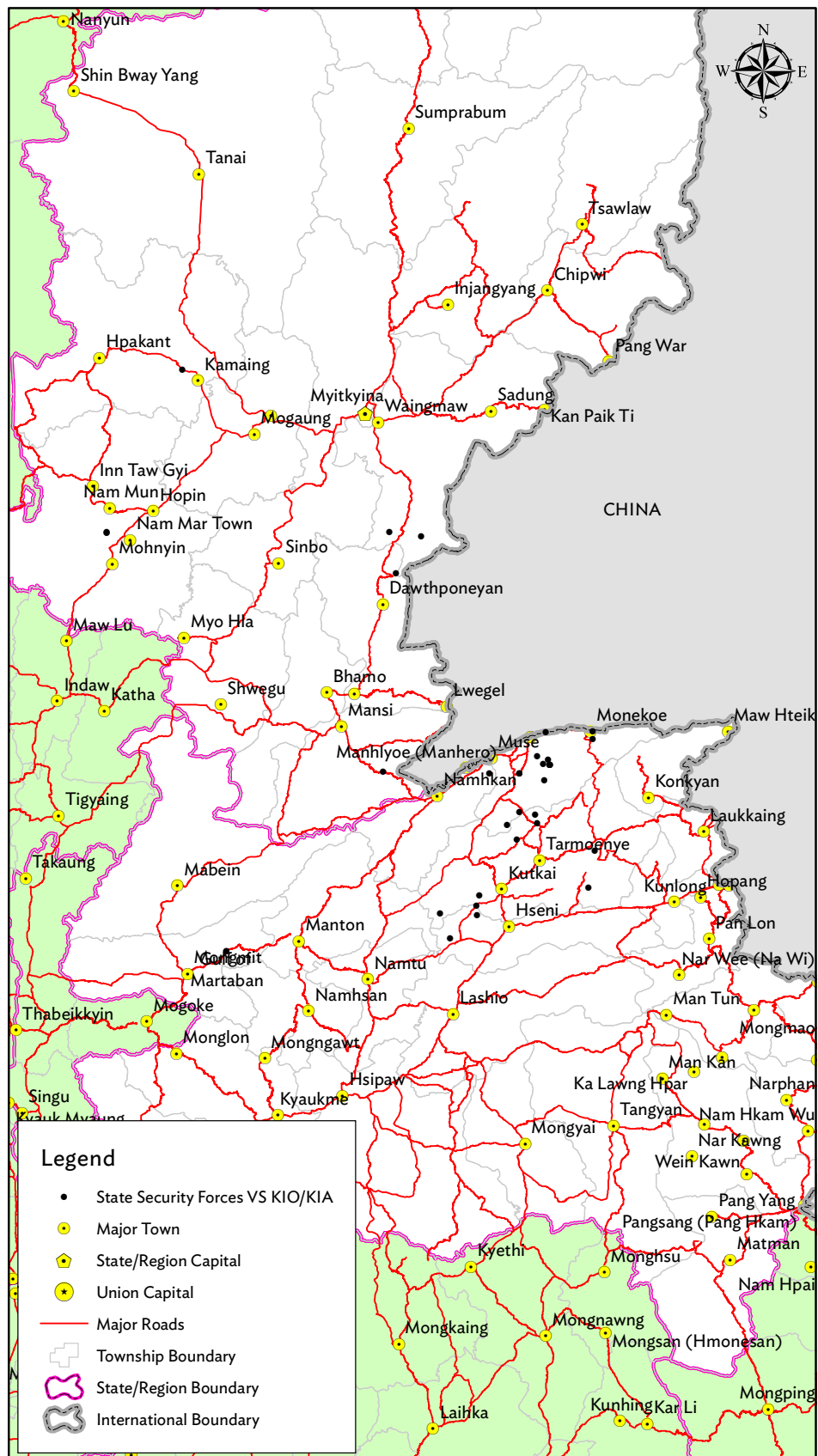


Figure 39. Clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA in 2019





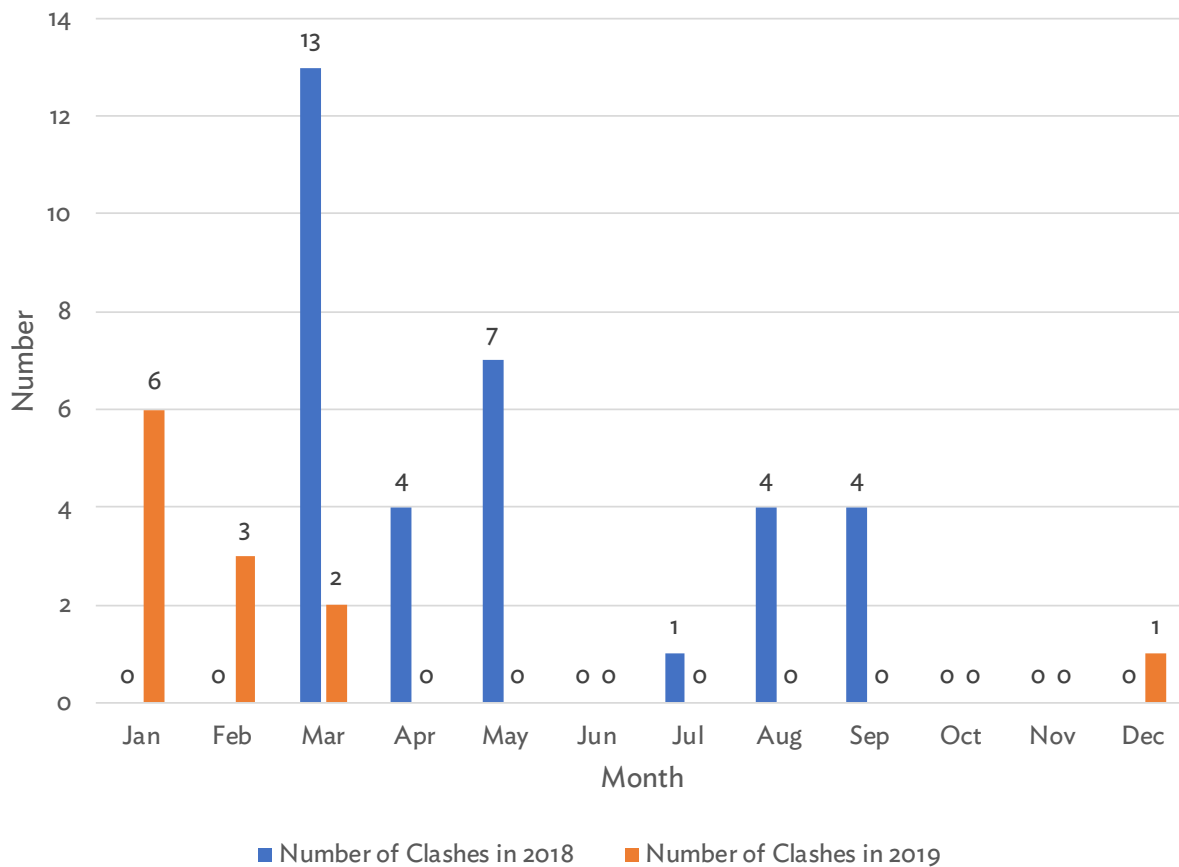
# THE KAREN NATIONAL UNION



In 2019, the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) recorded only 12 clashes between the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), all of which occurred either in Hpapun or Kyaukkyi townships in Kayah State and Bago Region, respectively. This seemingly low figure, however, belied tensions that erupted in 2018 and, by 2020, came to define a new normal in parts of Kayah State.

At the root of these tensions lay a disagreement between the Tatmadaw and KNLA over a network of old roads and paths that crisscross areas of mixed

control. In March 2018, a significant bout of fighting began when the Tatmadaw attempted to clear and upgrade a dilapidated stretch of road between two of its bases in Hpapun Township, where the KNLA's Brigade 5 operates. The fighting exacerbated the Karen National Union's (KNU) internal disagreement over how to respond to the government's peace process, especially the fiasco that resulted from a top-level meeting between the government and ethnic armed organizations (EAO) in October 2018. The KNU temporarily suspended formal participation in the peace process following that meeting.



**Figure 40.** Comparison of clashes between the Tatmadaw and KNLA in 2018 and 2019 by month

Military tensions were partly diffused during a meeting between the chairperson of the KNU and the Tatmadaw's commander in chief, where the Tatmadaw agreed to suspend its road works. A second round of less intense fighting took place between July and September, but by October 2018 clashes had once again subsided.

Fighting then reignited in January 2019, but this time over different segments of road that the Tatmadaw attempted to repair or rebuild to link what it claimed was a network of ten bases. A spokesperson for the KNLA Brigade 5 warned that the KNLA had established local boundaries and that there would be conflict if the Tatmadaw crossed them while repairing roads.



**LIGHT CLASHES AND VIOLENT INCIDENTS CONTINUED INTO MARCH 2019 AS THE CONTESTED AREAS OF HPAPUN TOWNSHIP GREW AND EXPANDED INTO NEIGHBORING KYAUKKYI TOWNSHIP.**

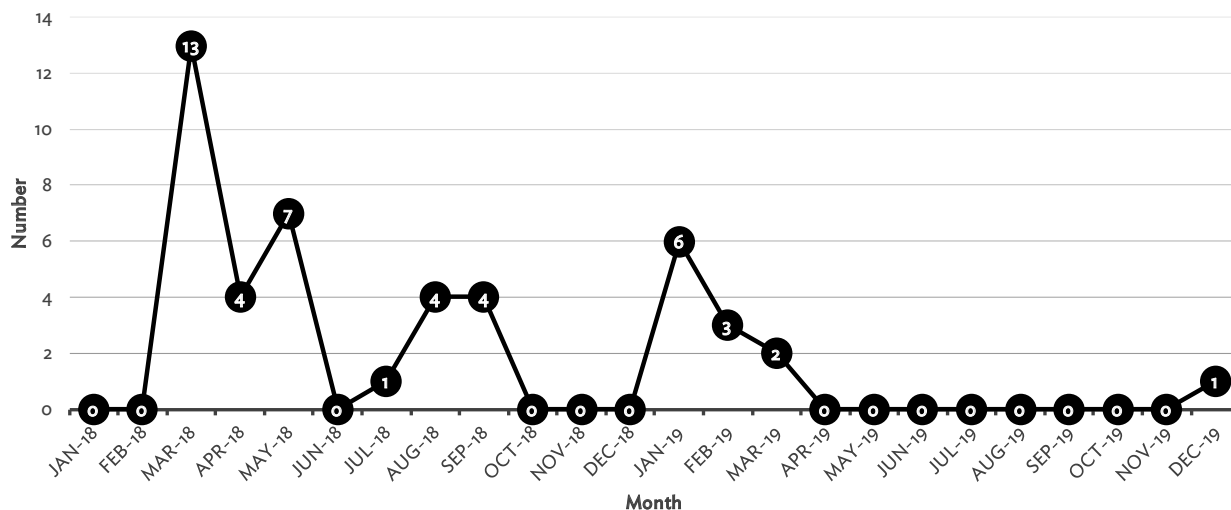


**Figure 41.** *Combatant deaths during the conflict between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and State Security Forces in 2019*

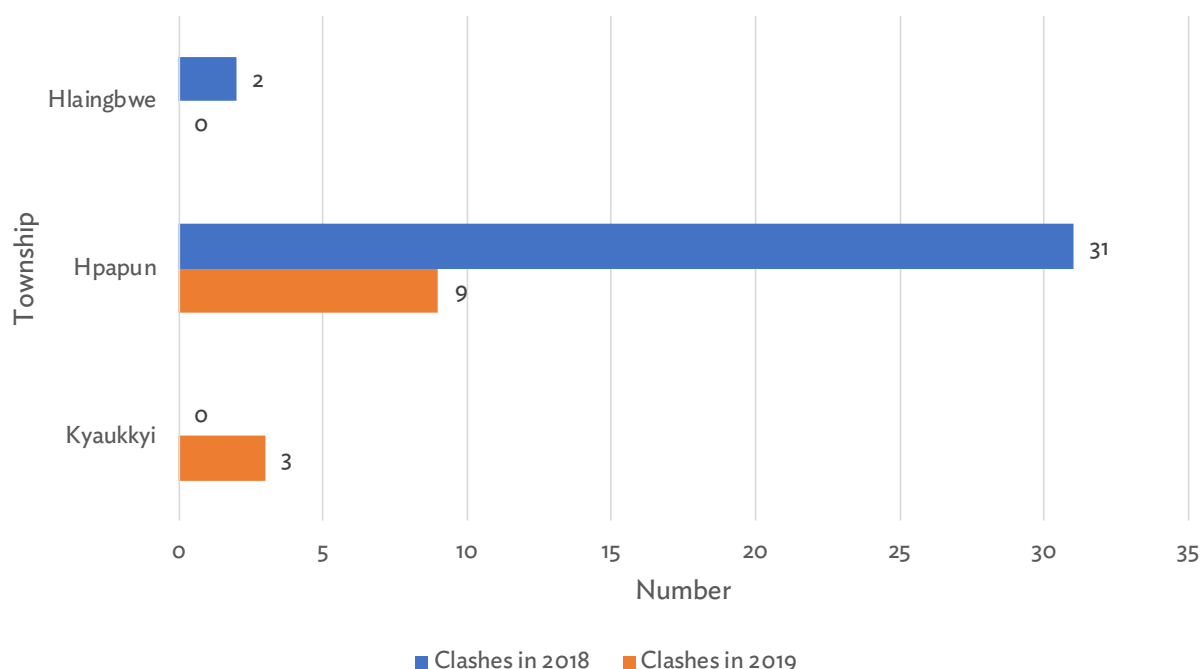
Light clashes and violent incidents continued into March 2019 as the contested areas of Hpapun Township grew and expanded into neighboring Kyaukkyi Township. Behind closed doors, the Tatmadaw complained that KNLA troops were firing at its soldiers unprovoked. Online, Karen rights groups and activists accused the Tatmadaw of firing mortar shells near or at villages and making life untenable for civilians. At least three Tatmadaw soldiers were

killed in clashes with the KNLA in 2019.

Despite these accusations, both sides appeared reluctant to allow for escalation similar to that of March 2018, and no armed clashes were reported in Hpapun or Kyaukkyi between April and November 2019. Nonetheless, the underlying causes of the tensions not only persisted, but began to morph as the conflict progressed.



**Figure 42.** *Timeline of clashes between the Tatmadaw and KNLA from January 2018 to December 2019*



**Figure 43.** Townships where clashes between the Tatmadaw and KNLA occurred in 2018 and 2019

The Tatmadaw has maintained a series of outposts along the Thailand-Myanmar border since dislodging a number of KNLA bases there in the mid-1990s. Since then, the KNLA has gradually moved its posts further inland, and the Tatmadaw supplied its border bases via the inland areas where the KNLA operated.

The original explanation given by the Tatmadaw in March 2018 for needing to improve the road between its bases at Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu was to ease resupply. Old and overgrown, the road was no longer motorable by four-wheeled vehicles. Although the KNLA accepted resupply by pack mule, it feared that road construction could later facilitate military reinforcements and government-backed resource extraction.

By 2019, the Tatmadaw began claiming that it needed to clear or reconstruct a host of other roads that connect its bases on the Thai border with bases up and down the Bago-Kayin state

border. Publicly, the Tatmadaw claimed these bases were an integral part of its national defense posture, but likely also saw them as a necessary defense against insurgency. The heart of the KNLA's Brigade 5 and 3 area is sandwiched between these bases.

As monthly clashes in Hpapun and Kyaukkyi became regular in early 2020, the Tatmadaw began explaining that the roads it was improving would benefit local livelihoods and serve development purposes. By this time, the Tatmadaw had made clear plans to connect the over-mountain road from Kyaukkyi to Hpapun, thereby creating a link between the Yangon-Naypyidaw corridor and the heart of central Kayin State.

The KNLA viewed expansion of the road network and construction of motorable roads linking Bago and Kayin as unacceptable. For one, such a road system could conceivably facilitate the type of military and government incursions it warned against



**A NEW DYNAMIC BEGAN TO EMERGE, IN WHICH THE TATMADAW PUSHED AHEAD WITH ROADWORK IN AREAS OF MIXED CONTROL, AND THE KNLA RESPONDED BY DESTROYING TATMADAW EQUIPMENT OR LAUNCHING LIMITED ATTACKS AGAINST TATMADAW UNITS DEFENDING THE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT.**

in early 2018. Moreover, the KNLA argued that the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) requires approval by both sides before road building or other development projects can be implemented, and felt that the Tatmadaw was not honoring its commitments.

Another important factor in the conflict is the consistent opposition from Karen civil society organizations (CSO) against the Tatmadaw's efforts and plans to upgrade and expand the road network in Hpapun. Like the KNLA, some Karen civilians fear the further militarization and environmental degradation of ethnic Karen lands, although some locals want better transportation routes connecting their villages to the mainland. Many Karen communities in Hpapun retain not-so-distant memories of abuses and hardships suffered during the conflict between the Tatmadaw and KNLA.

After one armed clash and the destruction of a Tatmadaw bulldozer in December 2019, the KNLA and Tatmadaw reached an agreement over road building at a ground commander meeting in Kayukkyi on January 10, 2020. The agreement outlined the extent to which the Tatmadaw could widen the road, established the rules for civilian use, and prohibited military patrols along the road. Within weeks of the agreement, the two sides were fighting again nearby.

A new dynamic began to emerge, in which the Tatmadaw pushed ahead with roadwork in areas of mixed control, and the KNLA responded by destroying Tatmadaw equipment or launching limited attacks against Tatmadaw units defending the construction project. The Tatmadaw would respond, sometimes by firing shells nearby civilian populated areas. Tit-for-tat engagements in Hpapun and Kyaukkyi townships became the norm and continue until today.



Figure 44. Clashes between the Tatmadaw and KNLA in 2019

# INTER-EAO CONFLICT



In the early summer of 2018, leaders from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) came to an agreement. Despite recent clashes between them, they vowed to join forces to fight a common enemy: the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS). The inter-ethnic armed organization (EAO) conflict that followed produced frequent and fierce clashes through the remainder of 2018, but by early 2019 the conflict began to wind down in a trend that continued well into 2020.

The RCSS is a powerful and influential Shan EAO and is signatory to the Nationwide Cease-fire Agreement (NCA). It was founded in 1996 by its current leader, General Yawd Serk, and has long operated in southern Shan State where it maintains a headquarters on the Thai border at Loi Tai Leng. In 2011, the RCSS began building

a wider presence in northern Shan State and became visibly active there after signing the NCA in 2015.

The TNLA is a relatively new armed group that recruits from the ethnic Palaung, or Ta'ang, population scattered throughout the hills of Shan State. Its primary motivation is the protection of ethnic Palaung people who, it claims, suffer abuse at the hands of the more dominant groups in the region, such as the RCSS. The RCSS posed an additional threat to the TNLA and its supporters, a dynamic that came against the historical backdrop of ethnic animosity between the ethnic Shan and ethnic Palaung. The TNLA and other groups, like the Pa-Oh National Liberation Organization (PNLO), have often accused the RCSS of forced recruiting among Palaung and Pa-Oh ethnic villages.

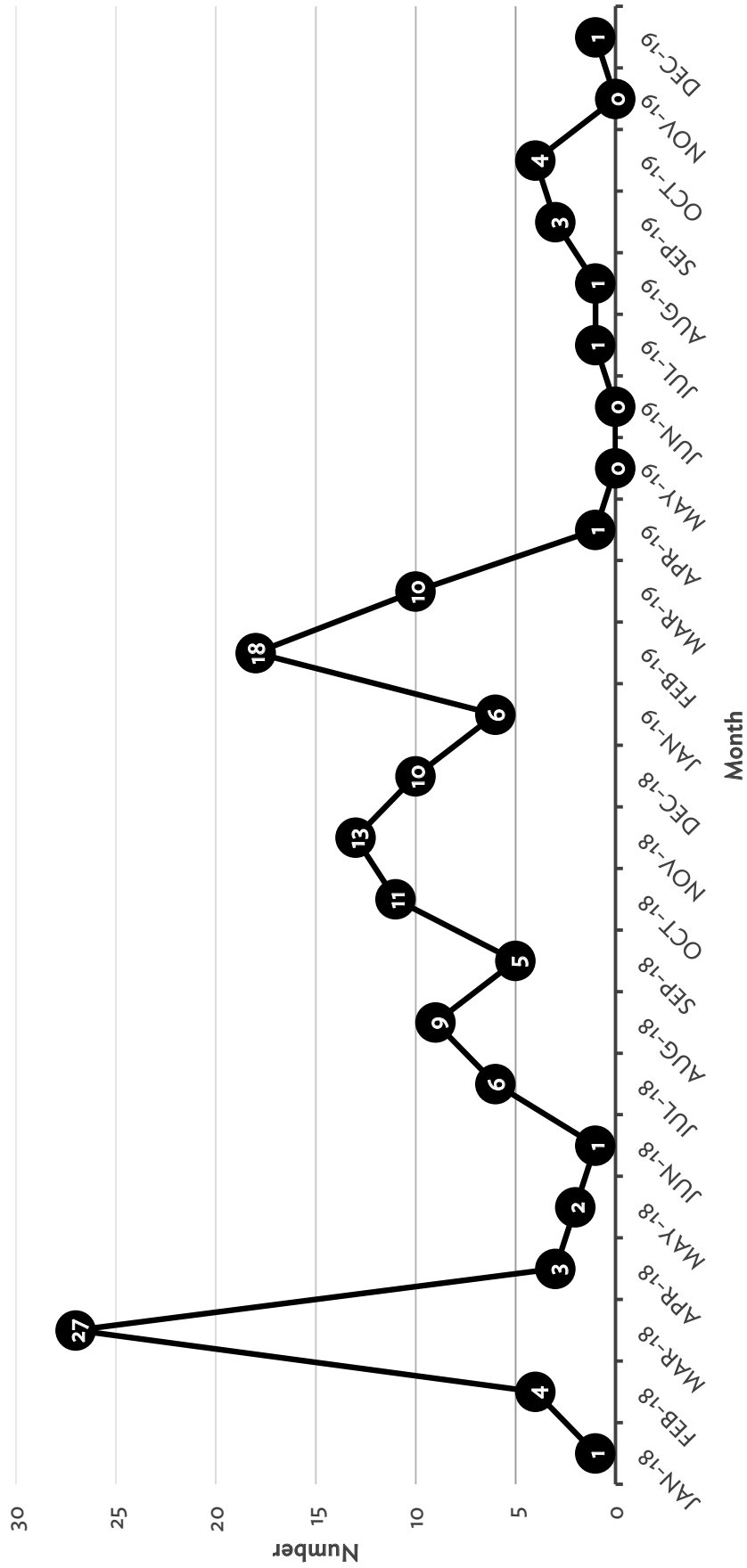


Tensions between the SSPP and RCSS, both ethnic Shan groups, were based more on influence, territory, and perhaps ideology. As the historically dominant political and military force in the north of the state, the SSPP brands itself a more socialist-oriented entity and enjoys close ties to the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a powerful offshoot of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). The rise of the RCSS in the north, with its more ethno-nationalist orientation, presented a challenge to the SSPP's position as the premier Shan leader in the area.

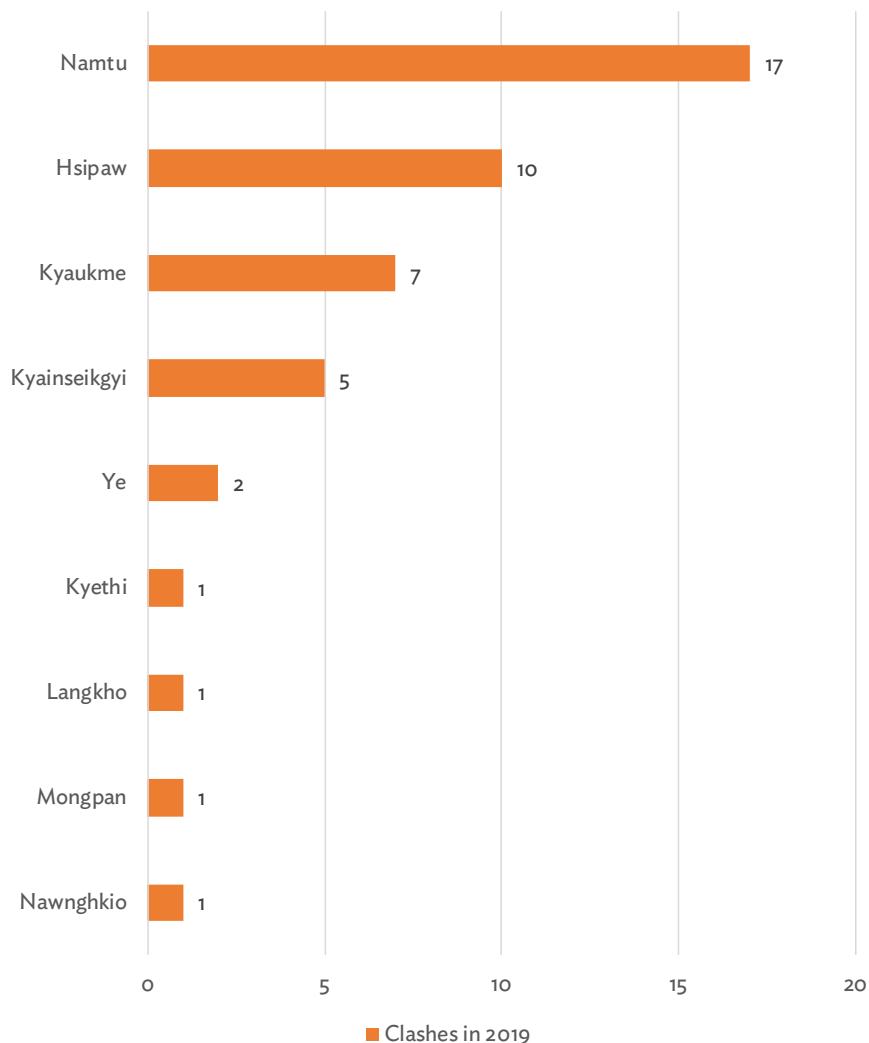
After months of simmering tensions, the inter-EAO conflict between the TNLA-SSPP coalition and the RCSS ignited in July 2018. The fighting was characterized by long, drawn out battles over strategic

villages and small towns across the north of Shan State. After what were often multi-day clashes, the two sides would withdraw, only to later return and fight over the same hills and valleys. The heavy fighting near or even directly in population centers led to high levels of displacement and carried on unabated into 2019.

The highest concentration of clashes among the TNLA, SSPP, and RCSS in 2019 occurred in Namtu, Kyaukme and Hsipaw townships in northern Shan State. These were the focal point of the inter-EAO conflict because they are largely multi-ethnic areas with both large Palaung and Shan populations.



**Figure 45.** Monthly timeline of inter-EAO clashes from 2018 to 2019



**Figure 46.** Townships with inter-EAO clashes in 2019

The conflict also brought serious implications for Shan politics, since both the RCSS and SSPP were members of the Committee for Shan State Unity (CSSU), a political organization comprised of Shan political parties, civil society organizations (CSO), and armed organizations. The fighting between the two dominant Shan EAOs roiled the Shan community and flung ethnic politicians, constituents, and religious leaders to its midst.

The growing cry for unity among the Shan community ultimately led the two sides to a verbal truce. After signaling a willingness to deescalate in

March, the SSPP and RCSS agreed to a ceasefire at the behest of influential Shan monks in April 2019. Although not party to the agreement, the TNLA largely followed the SSPP's lead, and the inter-EAO conflict effectively subsided, with the exception of periodic but generally small clashes between the TNLA and RCSS later in the year.

Other inter-EAO confrontations in 2019 were generally small and isolated events. Among them were several episodes in Kyaikseikgyi Township, home to the strategically important border crossing with Thailand at Three Pagoda Pass. The pass is home

to a number of actors, including the Tatmadaw, New Mon State Party (NMSP), Karen National Union (KNU), and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), a dynamic that leads to occasional run-ins and clashes.

In September 2019, for example, the NMSP attacked a splinter cell of the DKBA after the latter tried to establish a new post near Three Pagoda Pass. The next month, clashes broke out after the NMSP removed a KNU flag post near the pass, prompting the KNU to attack two NMSP posts. Despite five clashes and several casualties, the

two sides met promptly and were able to reach an agreement and deescalate the situation within days.

Overall, 2019 witnessed the deceleration of inter-EAO conflict in Myanmar, a trend that is likely to continue throughout 2020. Nevertheless, the underlying causes and conditions that led to confrontations in 2019 remain unresolved throughout the country. Periodic clashes will likely occur in areas where numerous actors operate and vie for territory, control of resources, and influence, a risk that may escalate before or during the election period in late 2020.

**Table 5.** *Inter-EAO clashes in 2019 by pair*

Inter-EAO Clashes in 2019	Number of Clashes	% of Total Inter-EAO Clashes
RCSS vs SSPP	24	53%
RCSS vs TNLA	11	24%
KNU vs NMSP	5	11%
NMSP vs DKBA-Splinter	2	4%
RCSS vs PNLO	2	4%
SSPP vs SSPP	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100%</b>



# THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST COUNCIL OF NAGALAND-KHAPLANG



The National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) is a relatively small ethnic armed organization (EAO) that operates in the remote borderlands of Sagaing Region and Northeast India. It claims to represent the interests of ethnic Naga people from both India and Myanmar and seeks the establishment of a contiguous cross-border Naga homeland. The NSCN-K signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the Sagaing regional government in April 2012. Although the government invited the NSCN-K to join the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), the NSCN-K refused to participate in political dialogue to any extent unless it addressed the welfare of Naga people in both countries. This demand, however, contradicted the government's baseline premise of sovereignty.

The Tatmadaw's indifference toward the NSCN-K abruptly subsided in January 2019 after the Arakan Army (AA) staged coordinated attacks on police in northern Rakhine State. The AA's main operational area includes Paletwa Township, Chin

State, which is bordered by Bangladesh to the west and India to the north. Amidst a backdrop of improving Indian-Myanmar relations, the Tatmadaw sought cooperation from Indian security forces to prevent AA infiltration into Indian territory.

By February 2019, the Indian military had sealed off the Paletwa border with hundreds of soldiers, but the move did not come for free. In exchange, India requested the Tatmadaw to take action against a number of Northeast insurgent groups hosted by the NSCN-K in Sagaing Region. The Tatmadaw seized the NSCN-K's headquarters at Taga without violent incident on January 29 before raiding camps belonging to an assortment of Northeast groups nearby.

The NSCN-K was formed in 1988 when Shangkhang Shanyang Khaplang, a Myanmar-born Naga, split from the original NSCN. Following Khaplang's death in 2017, leadership was taken over by Khango Konyak, an India-born Naga. In

August 2017, the NSCN-K ousted Khango Konyak and elected a new chairperson named Yung Aung, a Myanmar-born Naga. Khango Konyak and his faction later returned to India to join talks with the central government there.

On March 9, 2019, the Tatmadaw raided the NSCN-K's liaison office in Khamti, Sagaing Region and arrested five of the group's leaders. The Tatmadaw accused the NSCN-K of violating the 2012 agreement by hosting the Northeast groups from India and charged the five leaders with unlawful association.

The Tatmadaw continued to apply pressure on the NSCN-K and its affiliates by conducting raids on camps throughout the remote borderlands of Sagaing Region. Although many of the incidents ended without violence, the Tatmadaw and NSCN-K clashed once in Lahe Township on May 16. The clash appeared to anger the group, leading spokesperson Joseph Lam Kan to assert that they would not sign the NCA. In November 2019, the NSCN-K released a statement announcing the expulsion of the five leaders that had been arrested in March. The statement accused the leaders of

conspiring to promote the NCA.

Prior to 2019, the NSCN-K did not outright reject the NCA, but wanted an agreement that included all Naga people, including those across the border in India. The Myanmar government stated that it could not negotiate over the status of people outside its borders. As the split between Yung Aung and Khango Konyak suggested, the Yung Aung faction may be more firmly committed to the idea of a cross-border Naga homeland, a demand that precludes the possibility of signing the NCA. The Tatmadaw's raids and operations throughout 2019 weakened the NSCN-K, which now finds itself squeezed between two countries.

Whether the NSCN-K is willing to sign the NCA is likely not a concern for the Tatmadaw. The NSCN-K, which has historically suffered from a lack of resources and factionalism, now poses little to no military threat. The Tatmadaw is instead primarily concerned with the AA and therefore seemingly willing to appease India in exchange for security cooperation at the border. The government no longer talks with the NSCN-K as a dialogue partner in the peace process either.

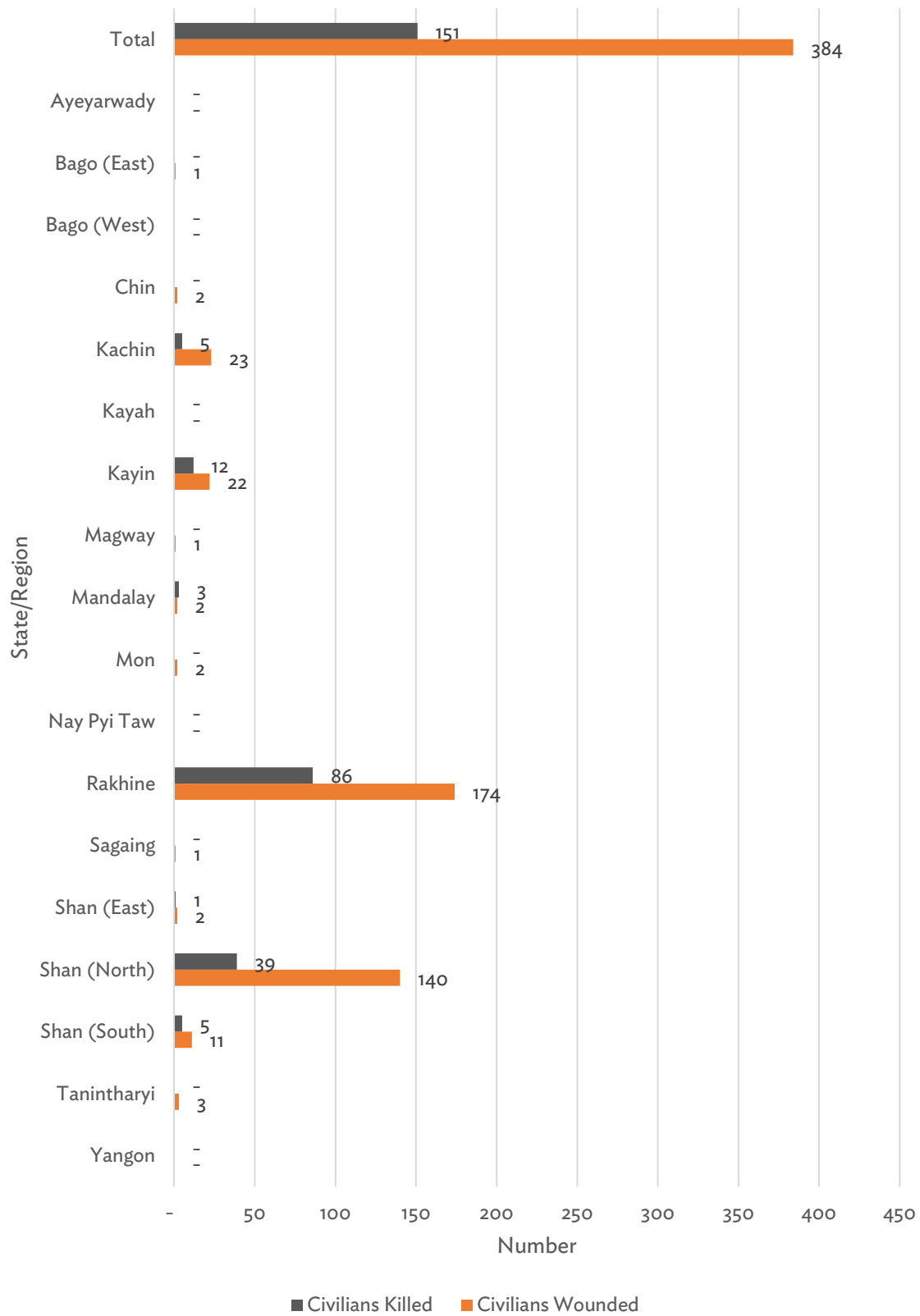
# IMPACT ON CIVILIANS



Every year, Myanmar's internal armed conflicts impact the lives of civilians who reside in conflict-affected areas, especially when armed clashes occur in or near populated areas. In this way, civilian casualties are directly related to the proximity of armed

clashes and civilian residency. In 2019, the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) recorded 151 conflict-related civilian deaths and 384 wounded civilians as a result of conflict-related incidents nationwide.





**Figure 47.** Nationwide civilian casualties in 2019 by state and region

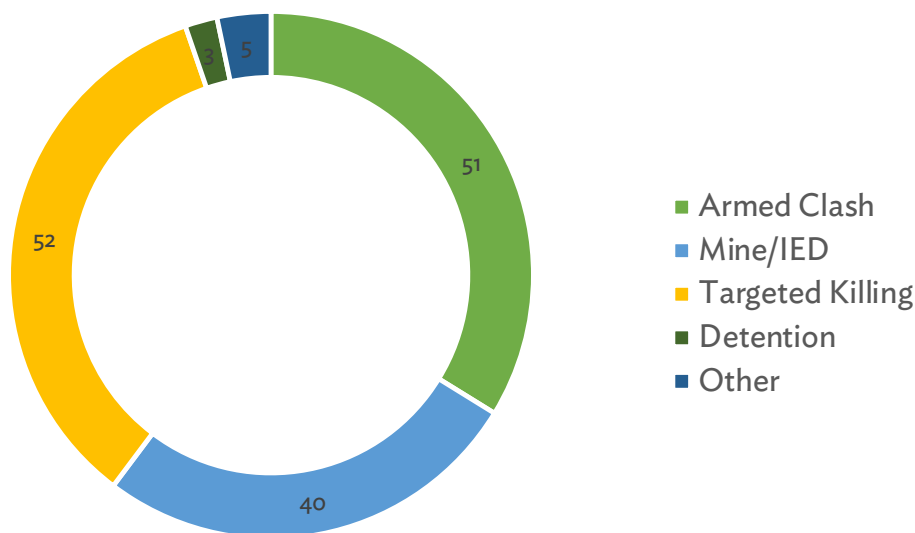
Civilian casualties are mainly caused by crossfire, mines or improvised explosive devices (IED), targeted killings, and injury or death under detention. MIPS was unable to independently verify the authenticity of each individual report about civilian casualties. Instead it recorded civilian casualties as reported by media outlets or other sources.

On the whole, TCMS recorded 51 civilians who were killed by armed clashes, 40 killed by mines or IEDs, 52 who were victims of targeted killings, and three who died during detention in 2019. Five more civilians were killed in other conflict-related events, such as the intentional destruction of private property. Another 171 civilians were wounded by armed clashes, 152 by mines or IEDs, and 22 during attempted targeted killings. One civilian was injured during detention, and another 28

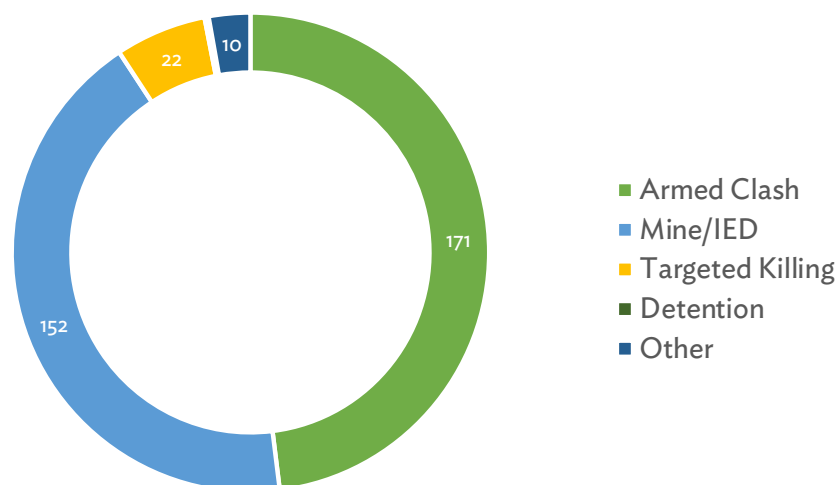


**CIVILIAN CASUALTIES ARE MAINLY CAUSED BY CROSSFIRE, MINES OR IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES (IED), TARGETED KILLINGS, AND INJURY OR DEATH UNDER DETENTION.**

were tortured. Ten more civilians were injured or wounded during other conflict-related events.



**Figure 48.** Nationwide conflict-related civilian fatalities in 2019 by category

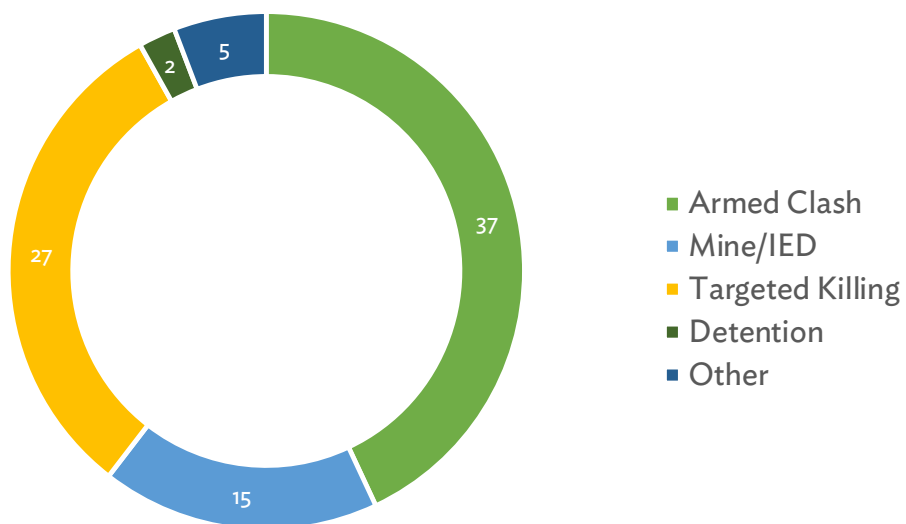


**Figure 49.** *Civilians wounded by conflict-related events nationwide in 2019 by category*

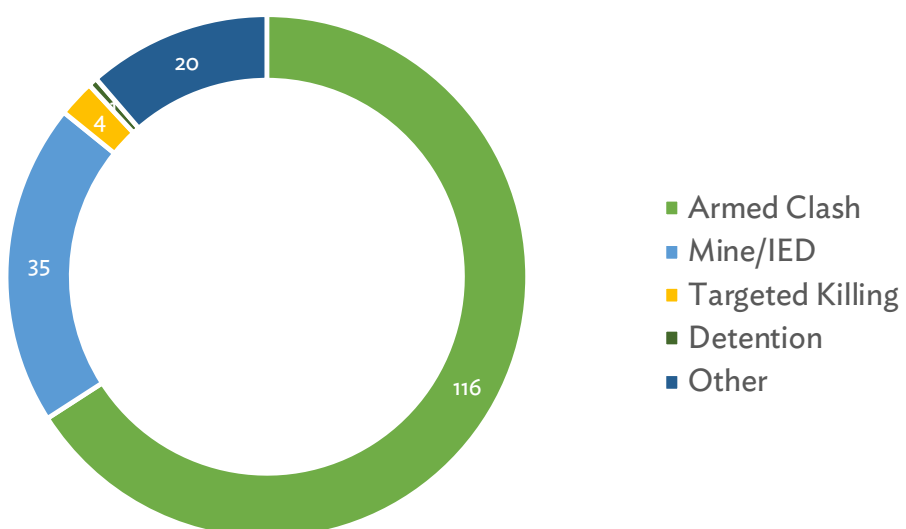
The highest proportion of civilian fatalities recorded in 2019 (86/151) happened during the conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and Tatmadaw in northern Rakhine and southern Chin states. Another 176 civilians out of a total 384 were injured during this conflict. Most of these

victims were hit by small arms or artillery fire. The Rakhine Ethnic Congress (REC) reported 116 civilian deaths in 2019 as a result of the conflict,<sup>2</sup> but MIPS was unable to verify the 30 additional counts, as they had not been reported on REC's Facebook page.

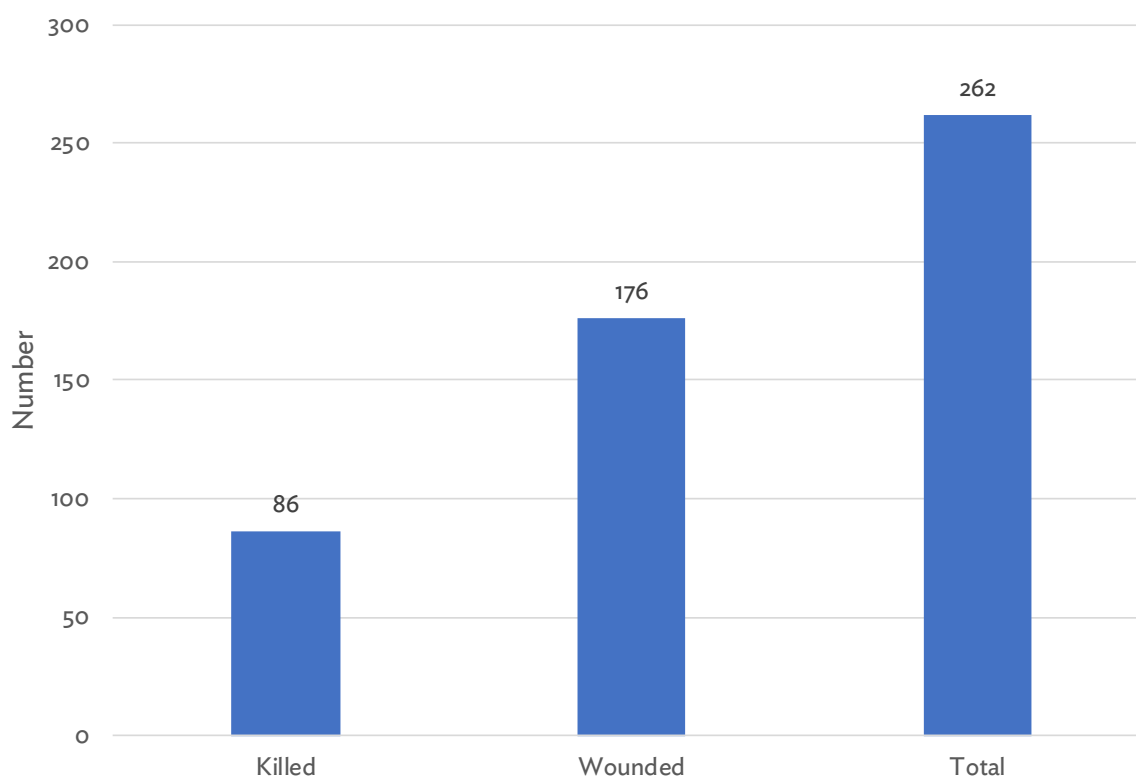
<sup>2</sup> MIPS attempted to synchronize its civilian fatality data and requested the REC's list, but so far has not received the information for comparison.



**Figure 50.** Conflict-related civilian fatalities in Rakhine and Chin states in 2019 by category



**Figure 51.** Civilians wounded by conflict-related events in Rakhine and Chin states in 2019 by category



**Figure 52.** *Civilians killed and wounded in 2019 as a result of fighting between the Arakan Army and Tatmadaw in Rakhine State and Paletwa Township, Chin State*

The nature of Myanmar's internal warfare often makes it difficult for armed actors to distinguish between combatants and civilians, especially in certain areas. In northern Rakhine State, for example, many AA fighters wore civilian clothing and took refuge in villages before and after armed clashes. TCMS data shows that, in 2019, 540 out of the 557 armed clashes between the AA and state security forces in Rakhine State were within 2.5 miles of a village. Armed clashes that occur near populated areas inevitably lead to higher rates of civilian casualties. A high number of civilian casualties was also recorded during the Brotherhood Alliance's August offensive in northern Shan State. Most of that fighting took place along the main highway that bisects numerous villages and large towns.

MIPS records the number of civilians displaced by each armed clash, but this data is very difficult to obtain for several reasons. Many field reports refer to an aggregate number of civilians displaced during wider episodes instead of providing infor-

mation about the number of civilians displaced during a single clash. When specific numbers are mentioned, they are difficult to verify.


Also, once displacement figures are reported, there is seldom a follow-up report that tracks how many of the displaced returned to their villages or resettled elsewhere. If a village experienced two episodes of displacement in one year, for example, the number of civilians from that village is typically counted twice in the annual displacement figures. For these reasons, it is difficult to accurately track the displacement caused by a particular armed clash.

The Rakhine State government's Disaster Management Department and the Rakhine Ethnic Congress (REC) respectively reported 49,221 and 37,202 civilians living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps by the end of January 2020.<sup>3</sup> Due to differences in counting methodology, as discussed above, REC estimates that a total of 106,614 civilians were displaced by the conflict.<sup>4</sup>

3 Rakhine IDPs Top 160,000; More Aid Needed. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/rakhine-idps-top-160000-aid-needed.html>

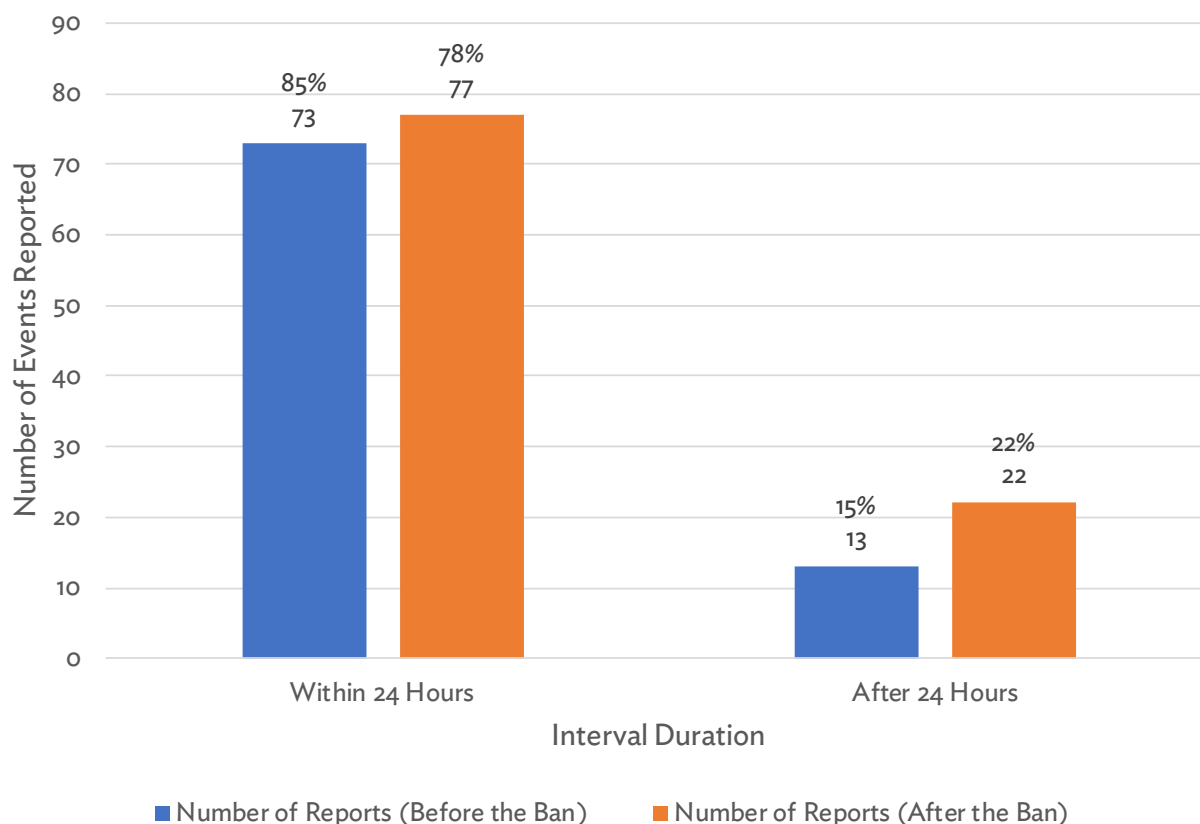
The number of civilians in IDP camps is significantly smaller than the actual number of displaced because some displaced persons returned to their villages, went to stay with relatives in other villages or towns, or found other accommodations.

MIPS also examined the impact of the mobile internet shutdown on the reporting of civilian fatalities and injuries in northern Rakhine State and Paletwa Township, Chin State in 2019. TCMS recorded 187 reports involving civilians in the nine townships affected by the mobile internet ban in 2019. Eighty-six of these reports were recorded before the internet shutdown, while the remaining 99 were recorded after. Two other reports were recorded without details about when they occurred. Prior to the internet ban, 73 (85%) reports in these townships were recorded within 24 hours. Following the ban, 77 (78%) reports were recorded within 24 hours. This suggests that the mobile internet ban had little impact on the reporting of civilian-involved incidents in Rakhine and southern Chin states. There are several important reasons that may explain this.



**THIS SUGGESTS THAT THE MOBILE INTERNET BAN HAD LITTLE IMPACT ON THE REPORTING OF CIVILIAN-INVOLVED INCIDENTS IN RAKHINE AND SOUTHERN CHIN STATES. THERE ARE SEVERAL IMPORTANT REASONS THAT MAY EXPLAIN THIS.**

4 Rakhine IDPs Struggle to Get Assistance. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/rakhine-idps-struggle-get-assistance>



**Figure 53.** *Interval comparison of civilian casualty reports before and after the mobile internet ban*

First, the suspension was for mobile internet services only, and did not include SMS or calling. Locals could call or text important information to areas where mobile internet connection was still available, like in Sittwe Township. Also, wired broadband internet remained available in major towns like Mrauk U and Kyauktaw. In some cases, journalists and activists would collect physical evidence from the field, such as photos, and drive it to places where internet was available for uploading. In some of the townships where the ban was instituted, mobile internet connection remained available atop elevated structures, bridges, and hilltops. In Maungdaw Township, mobile services from one particular provider remained operational for some time, driving the cost of a SIM card to 10,000 MMK, nearly ten times the regular price.

Another significant impact of the Rakhine Conflict

was the Tatmadaw's strategy to block the channeling of AA supplies through supporting villages. To do so, the Tatmadaw severely restricted the amount of provisions, especially rice, that could be transported by civilians into AA areas of operation. It also worked to block the use of land and water routes critical to the AA's logistics, an effort that inevitably affected civilians reliant on the same routes.

Civilian transportation was significantly affected by the conflict in Rakhine. The AA, for example, targeted ferries and boats that travelled without its authorization along the waterways bisecting its operational areas, such as a cargo ship carrying bridge spans near Paletwa Township in March 2019. It also seized a passenger ferry in October that was carrying numerous members of state security forces returning from leave among its civilian passengers.

Frequent fighting along the major roads in Rakhine State, the Tatmadaw's use of civilian vehicles, and the AA's targeting of any vehicles carrying security forces also had an adverse impact on the local population.

Fighting affected rice production in Rakhine State in 2019. One member of the Rakhine Farmer's Association explained to MIPS that although there was no official measure, many farmers were unable to sow their fields due to conflict. Some reports also accused the Tatmadaw of burning down rice paddies in vacant villages after the residents fled. Despite this, the state still managed to produce a rice surplus of over 6,200 metric tons in 2019, according to an official from the Rakhine Consumer Department. Since exports were halted, the government is considering buying the surplus for its national rice reserve.

The perpetuation of these trends in 2020 could continue to reduce the yearly surplus of rice in Rakhine State, where farmers rely on income from exports

to Bangladesh. Although residents of rice production areas in northern Rakhine likely have sufficient rice for their consumption in 2020, people living in mountainous areas, like Paletwa, will continue to face rice shortages if clashes continue close to Paletwa and transportation routes leading there.

Inter-ethnic tensions rose in 2019. In Rakhine State, anti-Bamar sentiment was boiling, with numerous cases of Bamar vendors disappearing or being killed after returning with goods from places like Magway. In some cases, the family members of retired or active police and soldiers were also targeted. Online, MIPS's social media monitoring initiative witnessed an all-time high in hate speech between ethnic Rakhine and ethnic Bamar users, especially on Facebook. Similar sentiments between the ethnic Rakhine and Chin were also stoked by the conflict in Paletwa Township and the AA's kidnapping of an ethnic Khumi lawmaker. These tensions will continue to play out and possibly escalate throughout 2020.





# THE JOINT CEASEFIRE MONITORING COMMITTEE



Similar to the political dialogue, the ceasefire monitoring mechanism remained largely on hold throughout 2019 after two large ethnic armed organizations (EAO) boycotted participation in formal negotiations, including within the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC).

The JMC was established in November 2015 after the government and eight EAOs signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which required both sides to jointly establish a mechanism to monitor and implement ceasefire provisions as outlined in Chapter 3 and 4. By design, the JMC and its counterpart, the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), which is responsible for coordinating and implementing political negotiation, were set up as two separate institutions un-

der the NCA. This was to not only distinguish the division of labor but also to maintain the continuity of implementation even if political negotiations or the ceasefire encountered impasse.

In late October 2018, however, the Karen National Union (KNU) and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) suspended their participation in the JMC after the KNU's fallout from the political dialogue. Already grappling with internal disagreement, the KNU withdrew from formal meetings following the outcome of a special 10+10 meeting among top leaders from the EAOs, government, and military held in mid-October 2018. The JMC–Union Level (JMC–U), the highest decision-making body in the JMC, had held its 18<sup>th</sup> meeting in September 2018. Despite plans to hold

the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting in early 2020, by mid-2020 the meeting had not taken place.

The KNU and even more so the RCSS were not satisfied with the functioning of the JMC. Both EAOs felt that the JMC lacked a conflict resolution mechanism and that military issues outlined in Chapter 3 and 4 of the NCA required additional clarification. For example, the KNU and RCSS pointed out that demarcation, troop positioning, and the identification of contested areas were not clearly defined in the NCA. Such territorial issues, therefore, required thorough discussions with the Tatmadaw.

The Tatmadaw's perspective is that territorial control is defined by the existence of fixed bases. The Tatmadaw therefore did not want to acknowledge a wide area of EAO control in places where its soldiers were stationed or operating. In hindsight, the Tatmadaw developed a negative view of previous ceasefire deals made under the military junta between 1988 and 2011 for allowing wide, dedicated areas of EAO control.

Under the NCA, both sides are required to inform one another when they maneuver troops in contested areas. On the ground, however, this practice largely depends on the relationship between local commanders from both sides. In areas where opposing commanders maintain good relationships, both sides tend to inform the other before undertaking troop movement.

The issue became particularly problematic in both Kyaukkyi Township, Bago Region, and Hpapun Township, Kayin State as tensions between the Tat-

madaw and Brigade 3 and 5 of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) continued to grow over the former's efforts to rebuild and expand its road network. With meetings suspended, the problem could not be resolved at the JMC, although bilateral discussions eventually took place.

Despite the KNU's boycott in 2019, some KNU leaders and commanders attended informal state-level JMC meetings to resolve complaints made by both sides. Commanders within the RCSS, however, remained unhappy with the Tatmadaw's constant complaints over their alleged violations of the NCA, especially regarding the issues of illegal taxation and forced recruitment. As a result, no informal meetings between RCSS commanders and the Tatmadaw took place in Shan State throughout 2019.

In January 2020, the government and EAOs held the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM) where they decided to hold the JMC and UPDJC within two months. The RCSS and Tatmadaw also met in February 2020, and both sides were reportedly happy with the discussion. The RCSS, which in mid-2019 became the leader of the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST), the decision-making body of the ten EAOs party to the NCA, agreed to reconvene the JMC in accordance with the JICM's decision.

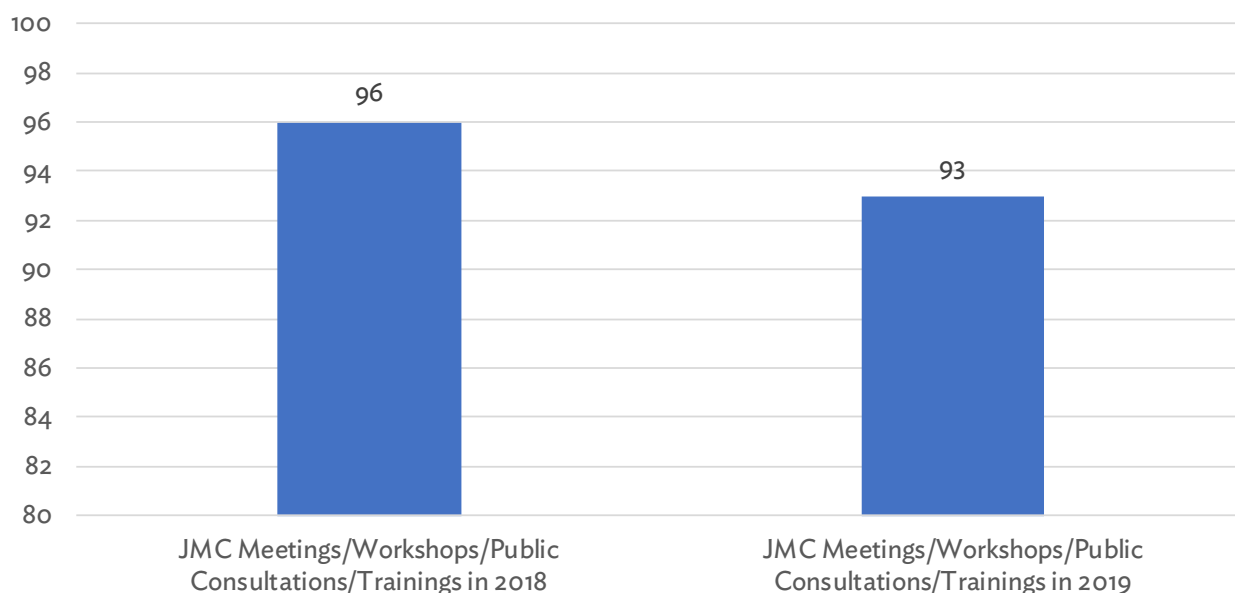
The KNU, on the other hand, insisted that both sides needed to settle outstanding issues related to Chapter 3 and 4 before proceeding with the JMC-U meeting. In response, the Tatmadaw agreed to discuss those issues, but insisted that the union-level meeting be held first or in parallel to

the discussion. Although the modality of the meeting was not completely settled, both sides moved forward to commence the 19<sup>th</sup> JMC–U meeting. The outbreak of COVID-19, however, has prevented the meeting from taking place as of mid-2020.

Despite the deadlocks between the Tatmadaw and EAOs, civilian representatives nominated by both sides were quite active in 2019 and proved capable of bridging differences and extending the viability of the JMC.<sup>5</sup> Civilian representatives held at least 57 meetings to facilitate conflict resolution and capacity building for the JMC at state levels in 2019. Civilian representatives played a crucial role in reducing tensions between both sides at times when parties to conflict could not meet face to face.

Under the current government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD), military representatives dominated the government's<sup>6</sup> representation within the JMC. The NLD government did not send its representatives to the JMC. Perhaps the NLD government believes that the proceedings of the JMC are related only to military affairs.

The government and EAOs are now moving closer to the commencement of the 19<sup>th</sup> JMC–U meeting, slated for July 2019, should the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic prove manageable. Both sides have also agreed in principle that unclear issues within Chapter 3 and 4 of the NCA should be discussed. If the JMC–U meeting is held in 2020, the body may be able to revive its potential to maintain and monitor ceasefire.



**Figure 54.** JMC-related events in 2018 and 2019

5 The JMC's structure includes representatives from the government and EAOs in addition to civilians at the union, state, and local levels.

6 Government in this sense refers to the military and elected civilian government, which together negotiate vis-à-vis the EAOs.



**DIALOGUE**



# THE GOVERNMENT, PARLIAMENT, AND TATMADAW

The government failed to meet its key objectives for the peace process and convene the Union Peace Conference—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC) in 2019. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will likely further stall the peace process until the end of 2020.

The first objective pursued by the government in 2019 was to resume the peace process that stalled after the Karen National Union (KNU) and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) suspended their participation in formal negotiations in late October 2018.

Amid looming deadlock, the government and ethnic armed organizations (EAO) had organized a special 10+10 meeting among top leaders in Nay Pyi Taw on October 15, 2018. The lead up to the meeting was fraught with uncertainty and competing views among the EAOs as to whether to attend. The KNU chairperson, Saw Mutu Say Poe, made a last-minute decision for the EAOs to go.

Although the meeting's outcome seemingly allowed for talks to move forward, ongoing internal discord within the KNU led it to suspend formal participation in the peace process less than two weeks later. The RCSS followed the KNU's decision and pulled out from the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC), where the Tatmadaw had frequently made complaints against the group.

The government attempted to jumpstart peace talks by sending a delegation to meet with KNU representatives in Chiang Mai, Thailand in March 2019. The KNU suggested a continuation of informal meetings as necessary preparation for future

formal negotiations. Both sides agreed to meet informally to iron out their differences and misunderstandings.

A total of eight informal meetings, both bilateral and multilateral, took place between the government and Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) in 2019. These meetings slowly helped restore confidence and, by the end of the year, the EAOs, including the KNU, began demonstrating a willingness to resume formal negotiations. To do so, both sides agreed to hold the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM), a high-level meeting designed to resolve impasse in the peace process.

The JICM was convened on January 8, 2020 and produced a decision to convene the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), a political negotiation body, as well as the JMC, a ceasefire monitoring mechanism, within two months. Although the UPDJC was held on March 12, the JMC has not convened as of mid-2020 because of limited willingness from both the KNU and RCSS. Although the government's preparations throughout 2019 led to the resumption of formal talks in 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 derailed formal negotiations and the peace process indefinitely.

The government's second objective was to convene the fourth UPC with the aim of reaching agreement on a set of federal principles. In 2019, high-level representatives from the government and Tatmadaw agreed on a set of federal principles to negotiate vis-à-vis the EAOs. It remains unclear, however, how closely aligned this set of principles is to that proposed by the EAOs.



The government informed the NCA-S that it had reached a common position on federal principles with the Tatmadaw and said it was ready to negotiate. State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi also reiterated that the National League for Democracy-led (NLD) government was committed to the formation of a federal union on October 15, 2019, the anniversary of the NCA signing. Despite the progress between the government and Tatmadaw, however, the government and EAOs have not begun actual negotiations over federal principles as of mid-2020.

The government's third objective was to pursue ceasefire with non-signatories of the NCA. Although the government's initial strategy was to convince non-signatories to join the NCA, it changed its approach in 2019 by pursuing bilateral ceasefire agreements with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Arakan Army (AA), who together formed the Northern Alliance.

Both sides exchanged bilateral ceasefire proposals in April 2019, but the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA appeared less interested in reaching deals than the KIA, which had essentially stopped fighting with the Tatmadaw in Kachin State since June 2018. Ceasefire talks were later challenged after the Brotherhood Alliance, a newly formed military pact among the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA, launched an offensive in August 2019.

Led by the TNLA, the alliance's August offensive obstructed the primary economic corridor linking Myanmar and China in northern Shan State for more than two weeks. Despite this, the govern-

ment and Tatmadaw did not reference 'terrorism' nor declare the TNLA as a terrorist organization like they later would with the AA. The government met with the Northern Alliance groups on August 31, after which the Tatmadaw extended a unilateral ceasefire to provide room for another meeting in September 2019.

A government delegation again met with the Northern Alliance groups at the United Wa State Army's (UWSA) headquarters on December 15, 2019. The alliance's proposal had changed several times during the course of negotiation and now called for three preconditions<sup>7</sup> to bilateral ceasefire. The discussions did not manage to further advance all sides toward bilateral ceasefire, while hopes for a subsequent meeting were soon dashed by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government may likely accept the inclusion of the AA, despite its label as a terrorist organization, if and when the next round of negotiations is held.

Since its inauguration in 2016, the government's peace architecture has suffered from structural and technical defects. First, strained civil-military relations have continued to pose a major challenge for peace-related coordination between the NLD-led government and military. Tensions between the military and the NLD-led government were exacerbated after the NLD pushed for a failed attempt to amend the constitution in the parliament. The campaign served to portray the military as a hard-line institution that obstructs reform in the country.

Notably, the attempt to amend the constitution came after a military spokesperson revealed that, during a high-level meeting convened by the presi-

7 First, the government must not arrest individuals in contact with the Northern Alliance members. Second, the government must release current detainees, a move that the Northern Alliance groups would reciprocate. Third, there must be a conflict resolution mechanism that involves the members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC).

dent, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi ordered military action in response to the AA's attack on police stations on January 4, 2019. The government's spokesperson U Zaw Htay retorted to media the following day that information relating to the high-level meeting was classified and the Tatmadaw's disclosure was inappropriate. Civil-military relations between the government and Tatmadaw did not improve over the course of 2019.

Next, the government's peace architecture lacks an efficient decision-making platform between the government and Tatmadaw. The National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC), led by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, remains the highest decision-making body in the peace process. However, the NRPC does not include the commander in chief or his deputy, meaning that it lacks the ability to produce a policy platform with input from top decision-makers in the military. This dynamic is further complicated by the fact that, unlike the preceding U Thein Sein administration, the NLD-led government has abdicated its lead role in the peace process and positioned itself more as a facilitator.

Third, the Peace Commission (PC), which is tasked with implementing the NRPC's policies, was not properly empowered or provided with policy guidance. The PC, assigned to spearhead the peace process with constant engagement with the EAOs, is staffed by only a small number of civil servants with experience in the peace process. When compared with the Union Peace-making Working Committee (UPWC) that existed under the previous administration, the PC is smaller in size and less mandated.

Fourth, the government's current peace architecture lacks a proper technical support body. Previously, the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC), run by technocrats and 120 staffers, assisted the UPWC with technical support in different sectors. In contrast, seven staff members support the current PC.

The NRPC has recently recognized the shortfall and attempted to establish a technical secretariat, but the new department has yet to materialize.

The Tatmadaw has maintained its veto wielding power within the government's side of the peace negotiation. Without consent from the Tatmadaw, no agreement could be made at the UPC. Although both institutions largely shared a common position in regard to the handling of the AA in Rakhine State, the government remained reluctant throughout 2019 to allow the military to impose martial law like it did during stability operations in Laukkai in 2014.

The Tatmadaw has made major adjustments to its communication strategy since the beginning of 2019. Prior to the formation of the "True News Information Team", the Tatmadaw rarely spoke with journalists or released information about regular operations and events. It now frequently holds press briefings and periodically releases limited data concerning armed clashes and casualty figures based on the number of bodies captured from the battlefield.

Another significant development in 2019 was the commander in chief's explicit endorsement of federalism. On the anniversary of the NCA signing in October 2019, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing stated that the Tatmadaw supported a federal union while noting the existence of different federal models. He alluded that the Tatmadaw was interested in India's model of federalism and sent a Tatmadaw delegation to study federalism there.

Civil-military relations will continue to play a major role in shaping the coordination between and behavior of the Tatmadaw and government in the peace process. The structural defects of the current peace architecture will likely endure until the next government comes to power in 2021. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered the government's endeavor to hold the UPC and reach

a set of agreements on federal principles with the EAOs in 2020. The Tatmadaw, some EAOs, and some political parties appear hesitant to hold the UPC during the election campaign period since the conference became delayed by the pandemic.

Even if the UPC is held before the election, the extent of any agreement will likely prove too general to represent a game-changing moment in the peace process.

# THE NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT SIGNATORIES

As the New Year holiday came to an end in early January 2019, delegates from both the Karen National Union (KNU) and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) headed to their hotel rooms in Chiang Mai, a main stop on the Thailand tourist circuit. But unlike the throngs of holiday goers there to see the shimmering temples and towering elephants, the KNU and RCSS officials had work to do. The two organizations had decided to suspend formal participation in the peace process just two months prior. Government representatives were waiting in the hotel conference room, hoping to kickstart talks.

The KNU's decision to suspend formal participation in the peace process can be traced to the top-level meeting between the government and ethnic armed organizations (EAO) held in October 2018. Although the 10+10 meeting produced several modest outcomes, some KNU leaders were not happy that the meeting took place and even more alarmed by the subsequent decisions it produced. A bout of fighting between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the KNU's armed wing, and the Tatmadaw that began in March 2018 also contributed to the KNU's decision to suspend formal talks.

A dichotomy among the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) emerged in the lead up to their summit with the government and Tatmadaw in October 2018. This division among the EAOs became more obvious in early 2019 after the KNU and RCSS suspended participation. Although the smaller EAOs wished to quicken the pace of the negotiations, the larger EAOs feared that the incumbent National League for Democracy (NLD) administration had limited capability to reach a deal in the peace process.

The KNU confirmed that it would be suspending formal participation in the peace process just two weeks after the October 2018 summit, citing a need to reach internal consensus on certain matters. Upset by reoccurring accusations from the Tatmadaw, the RCSS followed suit by suspending participation at the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC). The peace process had ground to a complete halt by November 2018.

The NCA-S spent the majority of 2019 exploring ways to restart the peace process and restructure their approach in search of better results. For the KNU, this first meant resolving internal divisions among its leadership. In February, the KNU informed the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST), which sets policies for the NCA-S, that it was swapping Chairperson Saw Mutu Say Poe as its delegate to the body in favor of General Secretary Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo. The RCSS chairperson, General Yawd Serk, also announced his resignation as the RCSS's delegate to the PPST. The PPST then decided to restructure its leadership at an internal summit slated for May 2019. The PPST would remain frozen until then.

The KNU's decision to swap Saw Mutu Say Poe for Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo stemmed from the former's unilateral decision to attend the 10+10 summit in October 2018. Some members of the KNU's Standing Committee felt that the proceedings of the PPST were superseding those of the committee, and that the KNU had effectively lost its autonomy. Elements within the RCSS also shared this feeling, leading to the changes in representation at the PPST from both EAOs.

The issue was far from resolved. Within the PPST, some delegates from other EAOs saw Padoh Kwe

Htoo Win, who as vice-chairperson of the KNU was closely aligned with Saw Mutu Say Poe, as a valuable negotiator. The PPST passed a new rule permitting each EAO to invite a special guest to meetings, thereby allowing the KNU vice chairperson to attend PPST meetings.

On May 14, 2019, delegates to the PPST once again convened in Chiang Mai where they planned to restructure their leadership and hash out a fresh approach to the peace process. The meeting would not go as planned. Citing the PPST's shortcomings and inability to restructure thus far, KNU General Secretary Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo announced the KNU's intention to quit the PPST. He then proposed the Peace Process Consultative Committee Meeting (PPCM) as an alternative to the PPST.

According to Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo, the PPCM would serve as a coordination body responsible for finding common ground among the NCA-S and could include non-signatories as well. Replacing the PPST with the PPCM was presumably meant as a way for the KNU to regain its autonomy and independence from the decisions made by the other EAOs. The proposal, however, was met by opposition from delegates of the smaller EAOs who doubted the practicality of an all-inclusive yet non-binding approach to the peace process. The PPST appeared on the verge of collapse amidst the contention between the PPST and PPCM proposals.

To prevent a breakdown, RCSS chairperson General Yawd Serk proposed a last-minute compromise by supporting further exploration of the option of the PPCM while asking the KNU to continue participation in PPST proceedings. The KNU saw the proposal as fair and agreed to postpone its resignation. The meeting concluded with plans to study the KNU's PPCM proposal while continuing regular PPST work. More drama was still to come.

The NCA-S planned a working meeting to discuss the PPCM in Chiang Mai on June 9 and 10, but were prevented from doing so after Tatmadaw military attaché, Brigadier General Khin Zaw, made a mysterious request to the Thai military to block the meeting. The issue was soon resolved and the meeting went forward on June 20, 2019. In yet another twist, the KNU representative scheduled to provide a presentation did not show up. It was soon revealed that, despite Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo's proposal at the PPST's May summit, the KNU had not actually reached an internal agreement over leaving the PPST in favor of the PPCM.

Upset over the Tatmadaw's sudden intervention in Thailand, the KNU refused to attend an informal meeting among Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) secretaries on June 13 and 14, 2019. The UPDJC is a body comprised of representatives from the EAOs, government, and military tasked with convening the Union Peace Conference—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC). After months of alignment, the RCSS broke ranks with the KNU and attended the meeting, where all sides expressed a desire to jumpstart the peace process and hold the next UPC.

By July, the KNU appeared to be in a state of self-imposed isolation, once again refusing to attend a subsequent UPDJC working meeting. At the same time, relations between the RCSS and Tatmadaw began to improve, paving the way for an agreement allowing the RCSS to hold the Shan State sub-national dialogue in Langhko. Disagreement over the location of the dialogue had caused a major deadlock in 2018. With the RCSS's leadership in the PPST, other EAOs appeared ready to move forward, with or without the KNU.

After holding its two-week long Central Committee meeting, the KNU emerged from its hibernation to attend the next PPST meeting in mid-August 2019. The tone was more optimistic: the KNU

had mostly sorted its internal divisions and would be rejoining the formal peace process.

Making good on plans to formulate a new approach, the PPST then created both a political and military working team assigned to negotiate with the government and Tatmadaw, respectively. The formation of the two groups reflected the PPST's new strategy, which was to establish an overall roadmap for the peace process in lieu of negotiating point by point.

Although formal talks were slated to resume, overall progress remained slow. The government and EAOs had initially aimed to hold the next UPC by the end of 2019, but in September pushed the target back to 'early 2020'. Despite multiple opportunities for informal dialogue, all sides struggled to set an agenda for negotiations at the upcoming UPC.

In November, an idea was proposed to convene the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM), which is designed as a deadlock-breaking mechanism, before Christmas. The government and EAOs hoped to use the JICM as a venue to set a firm date for the UPC and to officially mark the resumption of formal talks. Once again, tensions between the KNLA and Tatmadaw in Hpapun Township would lead to delay. After a clash in early December, the KNU held a meeting with the Tatmadaw to discuss the latter's road building, but the meeting did not go well.

Finally, after more than 14 months, the JICM convened on January 8, 2020, marking the resumption of formal talks. Both sides agreed to resume JMC meetings by the end of February and hold the next UPC by the end of April. By mid-March, with a global pandemic in full swing, the peace process once again came to a halt.





## BILATERAL CEASEFIRE SIGNATORIES

Four ethnic armed organizations (EAO) demonstrated interest in signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2019, all of which already maintain bilateral ceasefire agreements with the government. Chief among them is the United Wa State Army (UWSA), which wields control over a virtually autonomous area in Shan State known as Special Region 2 from its headquarters at Panghsang. A close ally to the UWSA is the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), headquartered in Mong La in Shan State's Special Region 4. Both the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) also engaged with the government over the possibility of signing the NCA in 2019.

Until at least mid-2018, the UWSA took the position that the NCA was both flawed and unfair, and claimed that it would design and initiate an alternative path toward national peace and reconciliation. So strong was the UWSA's aversion to the NCA that, in September 2016, it sent its forces to seize territory from the NDAA after the latter signaled interest in signing the agreement. Although the move against the NDAA might have partially stemmed from conflicting economic interests among elites, the UWSA appeared to keep a tight lid on any expression of enthusiasm for the NCA by other Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) members.

Yet by early 2019, new signs of willingness among the FPNCC members to engage with the government and consider the NCA were emerging. New discussions with the Northern Alliance, led by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), intended to reach bilateral ceasefire agreements with the government. These discussions, initially at least, involved efforts to map a future path toward the NCA for the Northern Alliance groups.

In late February 2019, the SSPP met bilaterally with a government delegation from the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC), and later with the Tatmadaw. The SSPP expressed its desire to deescalate all outstanding tensions with the Tatmadaw, and privately told government representatives that it wanted to sign the NCA. Due to its close relationship with the UWSA, however, the SSPP is likely to seek a green light from the UWSA before signing the NCA.

In June, the NDAA invited government representatives to attend ceremonies marking its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ceasefire with the Tatmadaw in Mong La. The elaborate celebrations included carefully choreographed displays symbolizing both the NDAA's autonomy and integration within Myanmar. On the final day of the ceremony, NDAA information and communications officer, U Khum Maung, told the media that the group was ready to sign the NCA. The statement suggested the existence of tacit consent from the UWSA.

Indeed, the UWSA's position toward the NCA had shifted. Within weeks of the ceremony in Mong La, the UWSA sent a proposal to the government outlining its terms for signing the NCA, and made preparations for informal negotiations. Sources confirmed to MIPS at the time that the UWSA had told other FPNCC members to pursue bilateral negotiations with the government, and that those groups who were ready could sign the NCA.

Although talks moved slowly, the UWSA was said to be in 'serious' negotiations with the government by late 2019, requiring two key demands. First, the UWSA asked for the creation of a formal dispute resolution procedure within the framework of the NCA. Second, it requested the right to leave the NCA if a disagreement cannot be solved via the resolution procedure.



At their core, the UWSA's stipulations for signing the NCA are likely meant as a way to demonstrate goodwill and unity while effectively maintaining the status quo. For both the UWSA and NDAA, who operate autonomously and have had no military conflict with the Tatmadaw for 30 years, there may be little incentive to forego their enclaves in favor of joining the long and arduous path toward federal union. At the same time, signing the NCA could cement warm relations with the government and facilitate future opportunities for cooperation, especially regarding planned infrastructure projects

backed by China. Nevertheless, the UWSA appears to favor negotiating bilaterally with the government for a political settlement.

The KNPP's future as an NCA signatory also remains obscure. While the group has not said it will refrain from signing the NCA, it has produced many reasons for delaying signing. Although the government stopped talking to the KNPP about the NCA in 2018, the Tatmadaw and KNPP have managed to maintain their ceasefire relatively well in comparison to some other NCA signatories.

# ANNEXES



# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING JANUARY 2019

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VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(2)

## OVERVIEW

- No fighting was reported in January between the Tatmadaw and any EAO in Shan State, nor between the Tatmadaw and KIA in Kachin State. The Tatmadaw's unilateral ceasefire appeared in place in January.
- The Tatmadaw accelerated its operations against the AA in January, and fighting began to slow in early February as some AA fighters returned to mingle among civilians and hide deeper in the jungle.
- Bangladesh may be allowing the AA and ARSA sanctuary within its borders as a way to gain leverage over Myanmar.
- Two attacks on border guard police suggest that ARSA or other Rohingya militants may be using the instability in Rakhine as an opportunity to attack security forces.
- Fighting between the RCSS and SSPP-TNLA coalition slowed in January amid mounting pressure from the Shan community, and the RCSS and SSPP may meet soon.
- Clashes were sparked between the KNLA Brigade 5 and Tatmadaw in Hpapun when the Tatmadaw crossed KNLA-imposed boundaries while repairing different sections of road. The risk for clashes remains but an all-out confrontation between the KNLA and Tatmadaw is unlikely.
- The Tatmadaw's claim that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi ordered a military response to AA attacks on police caused tension between the government and military, angering many ethnic Rakhine.
- The Tatmadaw adjusted its communications strategy by responding more often to media inquiries about alleged violations and releasing more information about military matters.
- Informal meetings between the Peace Commission, KNU and RCSS moved all parties closer to resuming formal talks.
- China expressed its displeasure with the fighting in Rakhine and may exert more pressure on FPNCC members to refrain from hostilities as it actively pursues the China Myanmar Economic Corridor

## SECURITY

### Fighting Accelerates in Rakhine, but Shan and Kachin Appear Relatively Calm

Fifty-eight armed clashes and 11 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in January for a total of 69 armed incidents nationwide, up from 64 in December, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> Armed incidents took place across 18 townships in January, the same as in December. Buthidaung Township in Rakhine State was most affected, experiencing at least 22 armed incidents. Fighting between the Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA) constituted the majority of armed incidents as the Tatmadaw inserted additional units to clear AA fighters from northern Rakhine. Six incidents occurred between the Brigade 5 of the Karen National Union/Kar-

en National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA) and Tatmadaw as fighting ignited over different sections of road in Hpapun Township. Meanwhile, the inter-ethnic armed organization (EAO) conflict in northern Shan among the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF), Shan State Progress Party/ Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA), and Pa-Oh National Liberation Organization/Pa-Oh National Liberation Army (PNLO/PNLA) decelerated. With the exception of Rakhine State, January was relatively peaceful, with no reported clashes between the Tatmadaw and any EAO in Shan State or between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Kachin State.

### Tatmadaw Intensifies Campaign in Northern Rakhine

Fighting in northern Rakhine intensified in January after the AA attacked four police posts, prompting the Tatmadaw to insert multiple mobile strike brigades. The intensity of the clashes, however, reduced in early February as the Tatmadaw made gains in its clearance operations. Under heavy pressure, AA fighters began to disguise themselves among civilians, compelling security forces to conduct more household checks, most of which will likely be conducted by the border guard police. The Tatmadaw inserted soldiers from multiple Light Infantry Divisions (LID) following the AA attack on police on January 4. The Tatmadaw continued with air and artillery strikes before send-

ing in infantry to assault AA positions. According to MIPS sources in the security community, the Tatmadaw engaged the AA in all areas where insurgents appeared to operate and by early February had dislodged some of the known AA bases. The AA attempted to deter the Tatmadaw by launching several ambushes and IED attacks.

AA fighters in northern Rakhine State mingled among civilians before mobilizing across northern Rakhine in late 2018. Sources told MIPS that after recently being dislodged from their bases in January, 2019, AA troops are again donning civilian clothes and mingling among local villagers. In re-

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

sponse, the Tatmadaw and police are conducting more household checks<sup>2</sup> to root out the insurgents, and more civilians are likely to be detained on suspicion of having ties to the AA<sup>3</sup>.

Despite its earlier reluctance to insert LIDs into Rakhine State, the Tatmadaw has again demonstrated a willingness to mobilize the necessary

forces to beat back the AA. It is likely that the Tatmadaw will maintain a strong presence in northern Rakhine State and Paletwa Township in Chin State for a least another year. Fighting may begin to slow as the Tatmadaw disperses the AA fighters. The AA may attempt to launch a counteroffensive, but is in a substantially more difficult position to do so.

## Bangladesh Government Possibly Allows Sanctuary for AA and ARSA

According to a source in the diplomatic community, Bangladeshi intelligence facilitated the meeting between the AA and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) mentioned by government spokesperson U Zaw Htay on January 7.<sup>4</sup> Leaked photos allegedly showing AA fighters crossing the border fence suggest that the Bangladesh government at least tolerates the AA seeking sanctuary within its borders. ARSA's purported cross-border attack on a police outpost on January 24 also suggested that the group is operating in Bangladesh.

On January 12, a Facebook account by the name of Saw Mon Awung published photos claiming to show AA fighters on the Bangladesh side of the border in 2016. In the post, Saw Mon Awung claimed to be a former AA fighter who had been treated

badly by the AA. Awung or Awng is the Kachin spelling for the common Burmese name Aung. Many Rakhine with the name Aung changed the spelling to Awng after AA second-in-command Nyo Twan Awng did the same. At a quick glance, it appeared that a disgruntled AA soldier had leaked the photos.

Interestingly, Saw Mon Awung's page uses the vanity URL /sit.min.9212301.<sup>5</sup> Sit Min literally translates as "war lord" and is a name widely used by pro-Tatmadaw Facebook accounts. Moreover, Saw Mon Awung claimed to be Bamar in an earlier post, and in a later post claimed to be half Rakhine and half Bamar. The discrepancies suggest the account began as a pro-Tatmadaw page but was later made to look like a page belonging to an ex-AA fighter.

2 Moe Myint. (2019, February 01). Household search operations to be carried out in N Rakhine. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/household-search-operations-carried-n-rakhine.html>

3 Aung Theinkha., & Htet Arkar. (2019, February 04). Police arrest 24 villagers displaced by armed conflict in Myanmar's Chin state. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/police-arrest-24-villagers-02042019164757.html>

4 Nan Lwin Hin Pwint. (2019, January 07). Gov't accuses AA of having ties with ARSA. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/govt-accuses-aa-ties-arsa.html>

5 Content no longer available. Originally accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/sit.min.9212301>

At its press conference on January 18, the Tatmadaw said that in 2009 the AA pulled its first 26 recruits from a jade mine in Kachin. A PowerPoint slide mentioned just two of the 26 recruits by name, one of which was Saw Mon Aung. It is likely that a source close to the Tatmadaw or its psychological warfare unit leaked the photos. The Tatmadaw may have found the photos on the phone of a dead or captured AA fighter.

The photos themselves, however, appear to be authentic and reveal much about the AA's operations. To begin, some of the AA fighters carry KIA-made AK-47's, presumably manufactured at the KIA's plant in Lai Zar, and a few are without boots. Multiple photos are taken along a barbed wire fence, presumably along the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh. In one, an AA fighter scales the fence with a bamboo ladder. In two others, trees are felled atop the barbed wire fence to make a crossing, and one of the photos clearly shows that the tree was cut with a chainsaw. The photos give the impression that the AA fighters were able to operate in the area freely and without much concern.

The post also included a screenshot showing the geo-tag of a photo that depicts AA fighters standing in a creek. Using the coordinates provided in the screenshot, MIPS examined the satellite imagery back to 2012. The exact coordinates fall on small creek on the Bangladesh side. By 2015, three 30-foot structures in cleared fields appear nearby the creek. The structures are connected by footpaths and set apart from one another. Fighters in the jungle likely distanced the buildings so that security forces

could not easily raid all at once. By 2016, the area is covered in vegetation once more. In 2018, several clashes took place in villages less than four miles across the border in Myanmar. It is likely the area was or still is the site of an AA training ground or barracks.

MIPS also observed that during the latest round of fighting, no clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw have taken place in Maungdaw Township with the exception of several on the border with Buthidaung. On January 7, U Zaw Htay claimed that ARSA and the AA agreed to demarcate their territory along the Mayu mountain range, with ARSA controlling the area to the west. The Mayu mountains roughly separate Maungdaw Township from Buthidaung Township and the rest of northern Rakhine. Sources told MIPS that the Myanmar government informed Bangladesh of the meeting.

Bangladesh may have instructed the AA and ARSA to avoid fighting one another as a condition for allowing sanctuary and facilitated the meeting so that the two groups could demarcate their territory. Bangladesh may consider allowing both the AA and ARSA to operate in its territory as a way to gain diplomatic leverage over Myanmar. At the time of writing, MIPS has not seen any evidence that the AA or ARSA are procuring significant weapons via Bangladesh. If Bangladesh allows weapons procurement to either group, the security situation in western Myanmar may become further destabilized. Such an action could also land weapons in the hands of insurgent groups operating in northeast India.

## Two Attacks Suggest Possible ARSA Activity

Two attacks on border guard police in northern Rakhine State in January again suggested the possibility of activity from ARSA, but the group did not claim responsibility like it usually does for such attacks. The attacks followed a string of killings in Maungdaw Township in December 2018. It is likely that either ARSA or another Rohingya militant group, such as the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) may be using the intensified conflict between the AA and Tatmadaw as an opportunity to carry out limited attacks on security forces, primarily in Maungdaw Township.

An ambush on a Border Guard Police truck wounded six policemen in Maungdaw on January 16.<sup>6</sup> The government initially said the AA was responsible, but later accused ARSA after a video filmed by the attackers began circulating online three days later. The video, which was edited using a free mobile application, was stamped with ARSA's insignia and a flag that resembles one used by the group in the past.<sup>7</sup>

The attackers were not particularly well-equipped or experienced. Wearing combat fatigues, the fight-

ers carried only AK-47's and what appeared to be at least one homemade, remotely detonated IED. Despite travelling with their backs to the attackers and in an unarmored vehicle, none of the policemen were killed.

On January 25, state-run newspaper the Global New Light of Myanmar reported that Border Post 41 in Maungdaw Township was attacked by "unknown terrorists" from within Bangladeshi territory.<sup>8</sup> Photos showed a spent RPG propeller and the damage caused by the attack. Tatmadaw spokesperson Zaw Min Tun later said he suspected ARSA was behind the attack.<sup>9</sup>

On February 3, ARSA released a 66-page report discussing the history of its movement and justification for its actions, among other topics.<sup>10</sup> The January 16 ambush and latest propaganda push come amid intense and widespread fighting between the AA and Tatmadaw in northern Rakhine. The AA or other Rohingya militant groups may attempt to capitalize on the instability in northern Rakhine by targeting police or security forces in limited attacks in the coming months.

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- 6 Fresh ARSA attack injured six police officers: Govt. (2019, January 20). The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/fresh-arsa-attack-injured-six-police-officers-govt.html>
  - 7 Winchester, M. (2017, August 28). Birth of an ethnic insurgency in Myanmar. Asia Times. <https://asiatimes.com/2017/08/birth-ethnic-insurgency-myanmar/>
  - 8 Small police outpost station close to BP 41 was attacked from about 200 meters inside Bangladesh territory. (2019, January 25). The Global New Light of Myanmar, 6.
  - 9 The Fifth Wave News. (2019, January 24). ARSA အဖွဲ့လိုခံရမှုနှင့်ဆက်သွယ်။ [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/fifthwavenews/photos/a.155492918514774/365213810876016/?type=3&theater>
  - 10 Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. (2019, February 03). Reviving the courageous hearts. <https://www.scribd.com/document/398814696/Report-1>



## Tatmadaw Bases in Kayah Unlikely to Spark Conflict

The construction of four new Tatmadaw bases in Kayah State sparked concern among Karenni Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and within the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), but is unlikely to lead to armed conflict between the KNPP and Tatmadaw.<sup>11</sup> The four bases, which were completed on January 7, are near but not within KNPP territory. The Tatmadaw likely built the bases as a temporary precaution following its December 21 announcement to pause military activities for four months. Tatmadaw leaders likely

wish to dissuade any EAO from taking advantage of the ceasefire.

The KNPP voiced its concerns during an informal meeting with the government's Peace Commission (PC) in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on January 14. The meeting was positive, according to government spokesperson U Zaw Htay.<sup>12</sup> The KNPP and Tatmadaw hold a regular monthly meeting and will likely resolve the issue through dialogue.

## Inter-EAO Conflict in Shan North Decelerates

The number of clashes between the RCSS and the SSPP-TNLA coalition decreased in January amid mounting pressure from the wider Shan community calling for an end to the fighting, and the RCSS and SSPP are reportedly exploring ways to begin talks. Although the prospect of dialogue may lower the frequency of clashes, the SSPP is unlikely to accept an RCSS presence in northern Shan, and the risk for continued fighting remains high. On January 11, more than 4,000 ethnic Shan signed a petition calling for an end to the fighting.<sup>13</sup> The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)

received a second petition with 3,000 signatures from Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Hsipaw Township on January 22.<sup>14</sup> The Committee for Shan State Unity (CSSU) had sent a letter to the RCSS and SSPP on December 31, 2018.

The RCSS also faces increasing criticism over its tax collections and alleged force recruitment, while the SSPP has encountered backlash from some Shan ethnics for its alliance with the TNLA.<sup>15</sup> Mounting pressure from the Shan community likely played a role in the reduction of clashes in January.

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- 11 Lawi Weng. (2019, January 23). New army bases spark fears of fresh fighting in Kayah state. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/new-army-bases-spark-fears-fresh-fighting-kayah-state.html>
  - 12 Nyein Nyein. (2019, January 15). KNPP raises Tatmadaw troop movements in Karenni state with peace commission. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/knpp-raises-tatmadaw-troop-movements-karenni-state-peace-commission.html>
  - 13 Thousands sign petition urging RCSS, SSPP to end clashes. (2019, January 14). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/thousands-sign-petition-urging-rcss-sspp-end-clashes>
  - 14 Lawi Weng. (2019, January 28). Thousands of IDPs sign petition urging Shan groups to stop fighting. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/thousands-idps-sign-petition-urging-shan-groups-stop-fighting.html>
  - 15 Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint. (2019, January 31). Villagers issue plea for help over huge RCSS tax demand. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/villagers-issue-plea-help-huge-rcss-tax-demand.html>

Neither side appears to have achieved any decisive victory since major fighting began in July 2018. Instead, both the RCSS and TNLA-SSPP coalition have engaged in a continuous cycle of attack and withdrawal. After months of intensive fighting, attrition may have also compelled each side to consider talks. According to MIPS sources in the Shan community, both the RCSS and SSPP

have expressed a willingness to talk. Discussions will most likely be facilitated by the CSSU. The RCSS and SSPP will need to reach an agreement on demarcation, but it is unlikely that the SSPP will recognize RCSS territory in northern Shan. Fighting may continue to slow before potential talks but the possibility of reescalation remains high.

## Clashes Renew in Kayin Over Different Sections of Road

Several small clashes between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA's Brigade 5 broke out in Hpapun Township over a previously uncontested area. The engagements occurred when the Tatmadaw crossed local boundaries set by the Brigade 5 in repairing two segments of road that are different than the one the two sides fought over in 2018. The fighting has not escalated to the level it did in 2018, but the risk for more clashes remains.

It appears that the clashes began when the Brigade 5 fired on the Tatmadaw for crossing its self-declared boundaries. On January 25, the Tatmadaw released a statement accusing the KNLA of violat-

ing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) by extorting protection money and targeting Tatmadaw soldiers along the road with sniper fire and anti-vehicle mines.<sup>16</sup> The KNLA responded by saying the statement was “purely an accusation in nature”, but did not explicitly deny that its troops fired on the Tatmadaw soldiers working along the road. In comments to the 7Day Daily on January 27, Brigade 5 Spokesperson Saw Kleh Doh also did not deny that KNLA troops attacked the Tatmadaw.<sup>17</sup> Earlier in the month Saw Kleh Doh explained to the Karen Information Center that the Brigade 5 has set boundaries, and that if the Tatmadaw crosses them, there will be conflict.<sup>18</sup>

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- 16 ပစ်ခတ်တိုက်ခိုက်မှုရပ်စဲရေးနှင့် တာဝန်ရှိသူများချစ်မ်းရေးအတွက် ထုတ်ပြန်ချက်အပေါ်သတိပေးသတင်းထုတ်ပြန်ခြင်း။ (2019, January 25). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. <http://www.cincds.gov.mm/node/1581>
- 17 Aung Zaw Tun. (2019, January 27). တပ်မတော်နှင့်တို့တွေ့မှုဖြစ်ဟု KNU ရှင်းလင်း။ 7 Day News. <https://7day.news/story/148508?fbclid=IwAR2olfaMSTOWO42vQ66di3GrMx7IS1Nh0tel1kISoxzjpt9ZDL79ac28Gog>
- 18 ဂျပန်နိုင်ငံဆင်းပိုင်းတွင် KNU နှင့် မြန်မာတပ်မတော် ပစ်ခတ်မှု ပြင်းပြနေသည်။ (2019, January 14). KIC. [http://kicnews.org/2019/01/%E1%81%82%E1%81%80%E1%81%81%E1%81%89%E1%82%8F%E1%80%BD%E1%80%85%E1%80%B9%E1%80%86%E1%80%94%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B8%E1%80%95%E1%80%AD%E1%80%AF%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B8%E1%80%90%E1%80%BC%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9-k/?fbclid=IwAR0IHxjRpNrt-5AI2tjGOCUpjSafNij5CyOQ4KN4Sk\\_QT-Pfpf-MOEGtxN80](http://kicnews.org/2019/01/%E1%81%82%E1%81%80%E1%81%81%E1%81%89%E1%82%8F%E1%80%BD%E1%80%85%E1%80%B9%E1%80%86%E1%80%94%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B8%E1%80%95%E1%80%AD%E1%80%AF%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B8%E1%80%90%E1%80%BC%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9-k/?fbclid=IwAR0IHxjRpNrt-5AI2tjGOCUpjSafNij5CyOQ4KN4Sk_QT-Pfpf-MOEGtxN80)

The fighting in 2018 took place along the road between two Tatmadaw bases— Ler Mu Plaw to the south and Kay Pu to the north—but the latest fighting took place elsewhere. One clash occurred along the same road, but to the south of Ler Mu Plaw. Other clashes took place farther south along a different east-west road. The east-west road was

previously uncontested and the Tatmadaw said in its statement that it has maintained 10 bases in the area. Public statements by the Brigade 5 in the past explicitly mentioned the segment of old road between Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu, but not these other segments of road. It appears that the contested areas of Hpapun have now expanded.

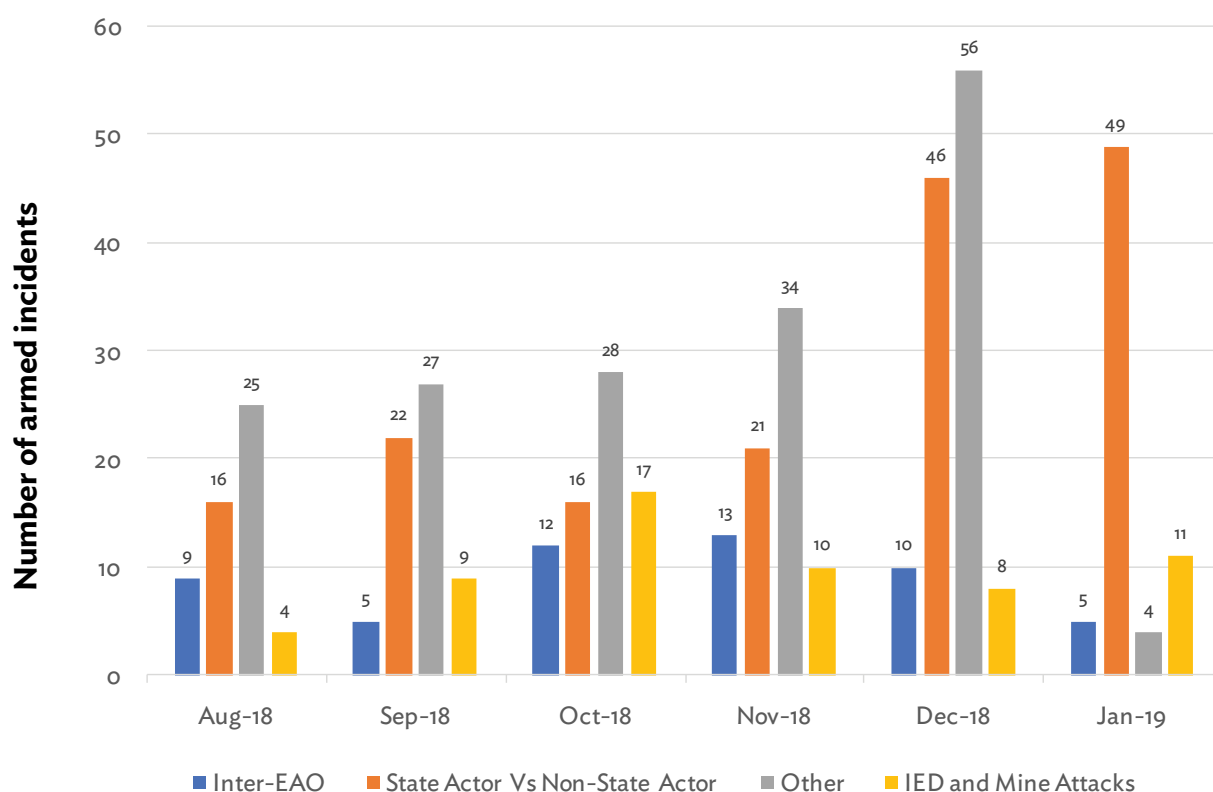
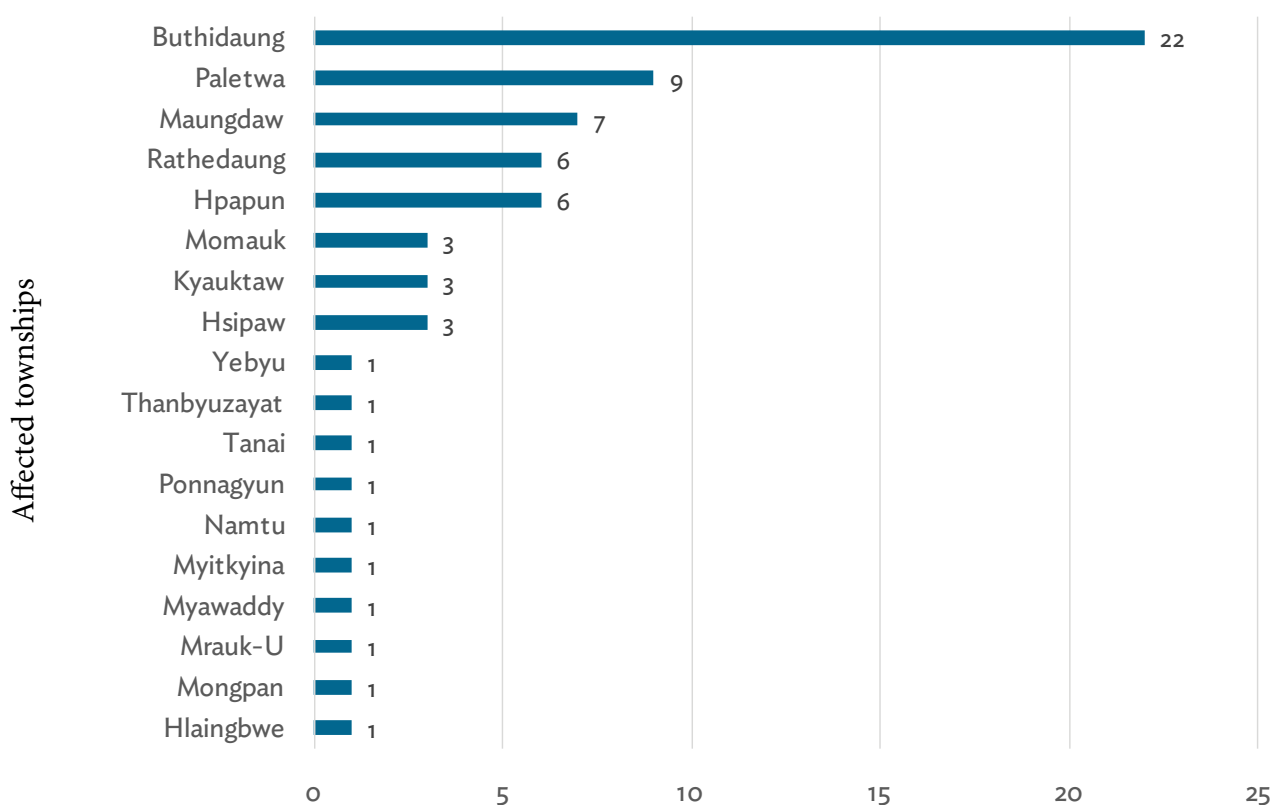
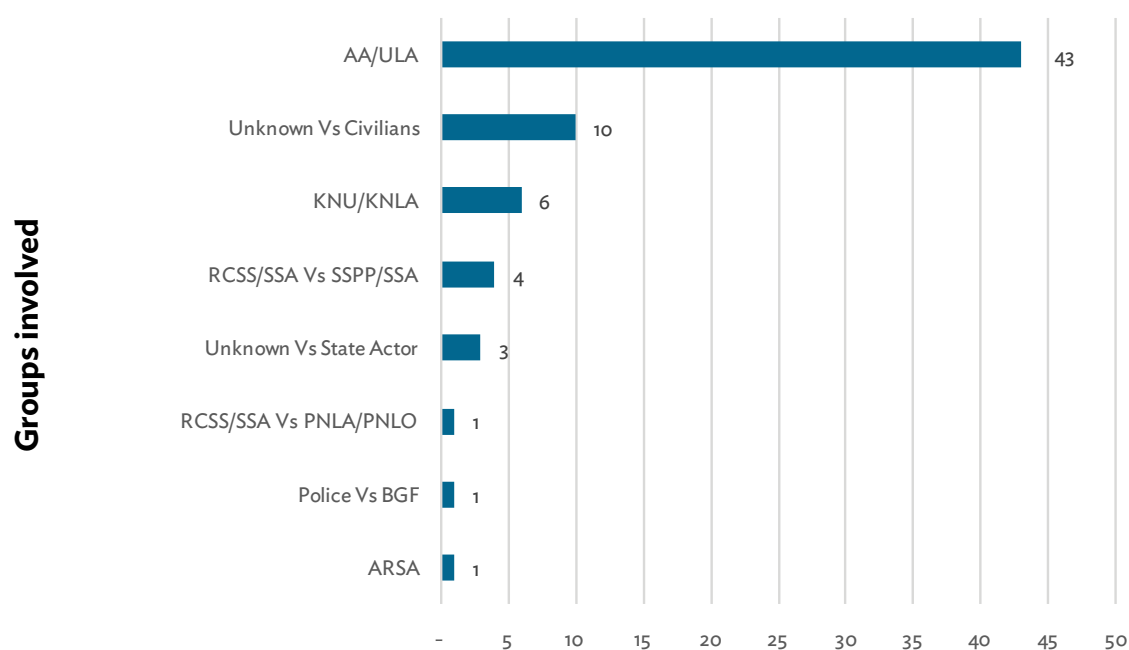


Figure 1. Armed incidents from August 2018 to January 2019



### Number of armed incidents

**Figure 2.** Townships affected by armed incidents in January 2019



### Number of armed incidents

\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine. EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

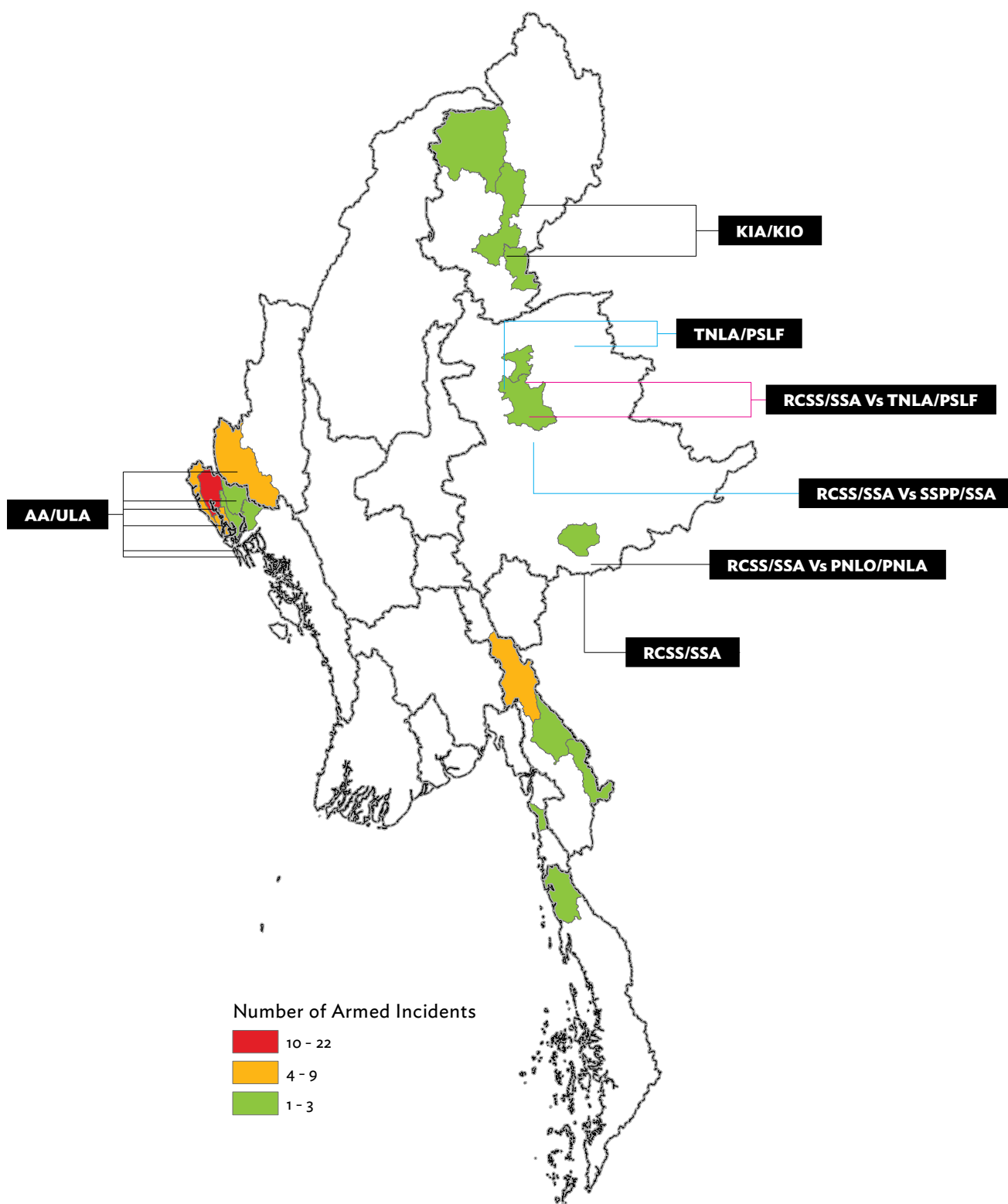
**Figure 3.** Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in January 2019

Meetings	Number
JMC Meeting	1
Kachin National Congress Party and National League for Democracy Meeting	1
KIA Meeting with Kachin Civilians for Peace Process	1
Meeting between Chinese Special Envoy for Asian Affairs Sun Guoxiang and AA/ULA, TNLA/PSLF, and MNDAA	1
Meeting between Chinese Special Envoy for Asian Affairs Sun Guoxiang and KIA	1
Meeting between Chinese Special Envoy for Asian Affairs Sun Guoxiang and NDAA (Mongla)	1
Meeting between Chinese Special Envoy for Asian Affairs Sun Guoxiang and SSPP/SSA	1
Meeting between Peace Commission and KNPP	1
Meeting between Peace Commission and KNU	1
Meeting between Peace Commission and RCSS/SSA	1
Northern Alliance Meeting	2
NRPC Meeting with KIA	3
<b>Total Number of Meetings</b>	<b>15</b>

**Figure 4.** Significant meetings related to the peace process in January 2019

Year	Date Range	Number of Armed Clashes	Number of Mine Attacks	KIA (EAO)	KIA (Tatmadaw)	WIA (Tatmadaw)	Number of Weapons Seized by Tatmadaw
2015		15	1	3			12
2016		26	10	22			43
2017		56	5				
2018		61	19	73			45
2019	Jan 1-3	8		3	2		
2019	Jan 4	4			13	9	
2019	Jan 5-16	8	5	13			3

**Figure 5.** Armed Incidents between the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army from 2015 to January 16, 2019, according to the Tatmadaw



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.

EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 6.** *Armed incidents in January 2019*

# GOVERNMENT

## AA Attacks Cause Political Fallout

The President convened a high-level meeting with all members of the National Defense and Security Council on January 7 in response to the AA attacks on police that occurred days earlier. The meeting and the government's response demonstrated that it took the attacks seriously, and that the government and Tatmadaw both believe that the AA insurgency should be dealt with. Despite this agreement, the issue resulted in tension between the government and Tatmadaw.

During his press briefing the same day, government spokesperson U Zaw Htay indicated that the government ordered the military to respond to the AA, a comment that sparked anger among the Rakhine community. Then, on January 18, the Tatmadaw stated that it was specifically State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who gave the order, further enraging many ethnic Rakhine

who lamented that a Nobel laureate had ordered military action. The following day, U Zaw Htay told the media that the information about the meeting was classified, indicating that the Tatmadaw's disclosure was inappropriate.<sup>19</sup> The issue caused tension between the government and military, and sources told MIPS that some government officials saw the Tatmadaw's move as a political trap.

Nonetheless, both the government and Tatmadaw were upset that the AA targeted police and agreed on the need to send more soldiers into northern Rakhine State. The government also appeared concerned that the attacks could hamper Myanmar's handling of the refugee crisis. Following the attacks, Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr. Win Myat Aye said the attacks should not delay repatriation.

## Tatmadaw Adjusts Communications Strategy

The Tatmadaw began releasing more information about military matters on the ground following its unilateral announcement on December 21, 2018. In January, the Tatmadaw held a press conference and published clash data, responded to multiple media inquiries, and released more statements in response to certain allegations. The Tatmadaw may now offer more information regarding clashes with EAOs and other military matters in order to effectively shape the public narrative.

The Tatmadaw "True News Information Team" held a press conference about the AA on January 18 and released data on incidents with the AA since 2015, as well as incidents that occurred with other EAOs in five regional commands since its unilateral announcement on December 21.<sup>20</sup> The data about the AA included casualty figures on both sides. In 2015 and 2016, the Tatmadaw published casualty information during fighting with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)

19 Htet Naing Zaw. (2019, January 19). တပ်မတော်ပြောသော AA နှင့် ပတ်သက်သည့် ဒေါ်အောင်ဆန်းစုကြည်၏ ပြောဆိုချက် သမ္မတရုံး ပြန်ရှင်း The Irrawaddy. <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2019/01/19/180768.html?fbclid=IwAR3IPU-EHQaluKe00AvCQVxgrjEOdMFdwwOXPTN8-Fhqb2crzeXNbTb-il>

20 Tatmadaw holds press conference at defence services museum in Nay Pyi Taw. (2019, January 18). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. <http://cincds.gov.mm/node/1511>

along the Chinese border, likely because it saw the conflict as a threat to national sovereignty. Typically, however, the Tatmadaw refrains from releasing information about those killed or wounded from either side. According to sources in the security community, the Tatmadaw refrained from releasing casualty data because it did not want to unnecessarily incite further ethnic animosity.

The recent data release, provided in a table above, included the number of captured AA bodies between January 5 and 16, but the actual number of AA killed during the period is likely higher. The Tatmadaw likely released this information as a counter to AA propaganda that depicts AA fighters as winning the fight, a notion that attracts young recruits. By releasing casualty information, the Tatmadaw is warning Rakhine youth that there are fatal consequences to joining the insurgency.

According to the Tatmadaw's data release, the number of AA killed increased each year since 2015.

Interestingly, the Tatmadaw omitted the number of AA killed in 2017, the same year as the Rakhine Crisis began, likely because it does not want such data to be used against it. MIPS is not able to verify any of the Tatmadaw data.

The Tatmadaw also responded to journalists and published more statements on military matters in defense of purported violations. For example, the TNLA stated <sup>21</sup> that it clashed with the Tatmadaw on December 24 in Kutkai Township, but the Tatmadaw denied the clash in a statement published the next day<sup>22</sup>. MIPS was unable to confirm the alleged clash. On January 4, the TNLA again claimed that the Tatmadaw violated the December 21 unilateral announcement by deploying more soldiers to multiple contested townships in northern Shan State. <sup>23</sup> Speaking to the Myanmar Times, a Tatmadaw spokesperson from the North East Command denied the accusation, stating that troops levels had in fact been reduced.<sup>24</sup>

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- 21 Content no longer available. Originally accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/PsIfTnla/photos/a.229861440471776/1143235632467681/?type=3&theater>
- 22 Military operations halted as stated in peace statement; reported clashes near Shwehmaw village in Kutkai township incorrect. (2018, December 25). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. <http://cincds.gov.mm/node/1332>
- 23 Content no longer available. Originally accessed at <http://box2191.bluehost.com/suspended.page/disabled.cgi/www.pslftnla.org>
- 24 Naw Betty Han. (2019, January 07). Tatmadaw denies increasing troops in Shan ceasefire. Myanmar Times. [https://www.mm-times.com/news/tatmadaw-denies-increasing-troops-shan-after-ceasefire.html?fbclid=IwAR2JJw32LGycGZFoTo5OsGHaqcd-VHFsk6ld3WEkRt3i1YC\\_utlyBvtv5nq4](https://www.mm-times.com/news/tatmadaw-denies-increasing-troops-shan-after-ceasefire.html?fbclid=IwAR2JJw32LGycGZFoTo5OsGHaqcd-VHFsk6ld3WEkRt3i1YC_utlyBvtv5nq4)



# NCA-SIGNATORIES

## KNU and RCSS Move Closer to Resuming Formal Talks

Representatives from the KNU and RCSS held separate informal meetings with the government's PC in Chiang Mai, Thailand on January 13 and 14, respectively.<sup>25</sup> The meetings reportedly went well and moved all sides closer to resuming formal negotiations.

MIPS spoke with representatives from both the KNU and RCSS who commented positively on the outcome of the meetings. A tentative agreement

was reached to hold a meeting between the PC and all 10 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) in late January or early February with the aim of resuming peace talks. Moreover, sources told MIPS that officials from the RCSS, National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC), and Tatmadaw are also planning to meet in February. On February 5, KNU central executive committee member Padoh Saw Tha Main Htun said the KNU will resume formal talks soon.<sup>26</sup>

## Northern Alliance Plans to Meet with PC

According to the Shan Herald, the KIA met with the PC in Chiang Mai on January 14, and later with representatives from the NRPC in Kunming, China on January 21.<sup>27</sup> Sources familiar with both meetings said they were positive and the two sides are planning to meet again. During one of the meetings, the KIA insisted that the government meet with all four

members of the Northern Alliance, and the government side agreed to the request. The agenda for negotiation, however, is still not set and the government has not clearly indicated that the negotiation will be multilateral. The upcoming meeting will outline the agenda and modalities of the negotiation between the government and the Northern Alliance members.

25 Shan. (2019, January 15). RCSS spokesperson: 'Major deadlocks cannot be solved in short time'. Shan Herald Agencies for News. <https://english.shannews.org/archives/18473>

26 KNU on track to 'resume participation in peace process'. (2019, February 05). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/knu-track-resume-participation-peace-process>

27 Moe Zaw. (2019, January 21). KIA နဲ့ အစိုးရတို့ ထိန်းသိမ်းရေး တရားရုံးတို့ တွင်းထွက်ဆုံ. VOA. <https://burmese.voanews.com/a/kia-and-government-delegate-meeting-/4751996.html>

## China Meets with FPNCC Members as it Pushes its Economic Interests

Chinese representatives met with members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) in January as part of their effort to facilitate Myanmar's peace process and move forward with China's economic plans. The Chinese government may exert more pressure on EAOs operating in the border areas as it focuses attention on completing planned projects, such as the Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

China's Special Envoy for Asian Affairs Sun Guoxiang met with the SSPP and United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Panghsang, the UWSA's headquarters, on January 9.<sup>28</sup> The Chinese delegation met with the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) at the EAO's headquarters in Mongla on the same day. Mr. Sun Guoxiang then met with KIA officials at the group's headquarters in Lai Zar, Kachin State on January 11, and finally with the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA in Kunming, China on January 31. Sources told MIPS that the Chinese

delegation expressed displeasure with the fighting in Rakhine State, and explicitly warned the groups not to launch any attack that may destabilize the border area with China. Pressure from China may compel the KIA and UWSA to curb their weapons supplies and support to EAOs that operate along the planned China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC).

Achieving stability along the CMEC route from Muse to Kyauk Phyu is a major interest for China. Shortly after the Tatmadaw's announcement to halt military activities on December 21, 2018, engineers began a feasibility survey for the planned Mandalay-Muse railway.<sup>29</sup> The potential route will likely pass through areas where the TNLA operates, and in January the group voiced dissatisfaction with China's failure to consult with it over matters related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>30</sup> The TNLA's reliance on the UWSA and KIA, however, may limit its ability to protest Chinese interests in Palaung areas.

28 Hom Hurng. (2019, January 15). Chinese diplomats meet northern alliance members. Shan Herald Agencies for News. <https://english.shannews.org/archives/18466>

29 Khin Su Wai. (2019, January 09). Mandalay-Muse rail project set to begin in 2020. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/mandalay-muse-rail-project-set-begin-2020.html>

30 Lawi Weng. (2019, January 16). Ta'ang armed group wants talks with China in rail project. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/taang-armed-group-wants-talks-china-rail-project.html>

### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.





# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING FEBRUARY 2019

|

VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(3)

## OVERVIEW

- The conflict in Rakhine State continued to escalate and more fighting is expected in the coming months.
- Fighting between the RCSS and TNLA-SSPP coalition intensified in February, reaching the highest number of clashes of any month since the three began fighting in July 2018.
- The Tatmadaw shelled near the RCSS headquarters after the latter took equipment from a Tatmadaw vehicle. The incident caused discomfort between the two sides but did not escalate further.
- The Tatmadaw cleared camps belonging to armed groups from India's northeast stationed in Sagaing Region. The move was likely in exchange for India's cooperation to deny the AA access across the border.
- The TNLA's abductions of ethnic Kholon Lishaw in northern Shan State are escalating tensions between the TNLA and Pan Say Militia.
- The government and NCA-S EAOs will continue informal meetings, but the government wants any top-leader meeting to be formal.
- The Northern Alliance is seeking bilateral ceasefire with the Tatmadaw, but the government insists that any agreement include a commitment to the NCA.

## SECURITY

### Frequent Armed Incidents Continue in Rakhine and Shan States

Sixty armed clashes and nine incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in February for a total of 69 armed incidents nationwide, the same as in January, according to the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> Armed incidents took place across 21 townships in February, compared with 18 in January, although 11 townships experienced only one armed incident. Rathedaung and Mrauk U townships in Rakhine State, and Paletwa Township in Chin State were most affected by fighting between the Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA) and Tatmadaw. Meanwhile,

Kyaukme and Namtu townships in northern Shan State were also significantly affected by the conflict between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF) coalition. In January, no fighting was recorded between the Tatmadaw and any Ethnic Armed Organization (EAO) in the north, but February saw several clashes between the Tatmadaw and multiple EAOs in northern Shan State. This trend continued into March as well.

### Frequent Clashes Continue in Rakhine, but with Less Intensity in February

At least 31 armed incidents took place between the AA and Tatmadaw in February, compared with 43 armed incidents between the two in January. Although frequent fighting continued, engagements were generally short in duration since the Tatmadaw has already dislodged the AA from many of its fixed positions throughout northern Rakhine. In response, the AA is launching more ambushes and attacks, especially against Tatmadaw vehicles and soft targets. Clashes are also happening closer to local villages where the AA draws support. Up to 12,000 have been displaced, although that figure is relatively light in proportion to the extent of the fighting.<sup>2</sup> The conflict in Rakhine is bringing more

targeted killings, stoking new ethnic tensions, and reshaping administrative and political dynamics in the state.

The Tatmadaw acted against AA bases beginning in December 2018 by shelling AA positions, primarily in Kyauktaw Township. After the AA attack on border police in January, the Tatmadaw inserted outside units from its Light Infantry Divisions (LID) to dislodge the AA from its camps and bases. Clashes during these months were often intense, sometimes lasting more than one hour. As the Tatmadaw pushed the AA from its bases, the fighting shifted away from prolonged engagements and

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

2 Min Thein Aung., & Wai Mar Tun. (2019, March 11). Weekend assault in Myanmar's Rakhine state kills 9 police, prompts new mobilization. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/weekend-assault-in-myanmars-rakhine-state-03112019171610.html>

toward short, guerrilla-style ambushes and attacks. By early March, however, the Tatmadaw was still raiding some newly built AA camps and bases.

Another effect of this changing dynamic is that many of the clashes in February occurred in or near villages, whereas in the previous months, fighting primarily took place in the jungle where the AA placed its bases and camps. On February 20, a young woman was shot dead inside her home when Tatmadaw troops fired randomly into the village.<sup>3</sup> The soldiers reportedly moved into the village after an IED, presumably planted by the AA, exploded nearby. Despite the growing risk to civilians, many remain in their villages. So far, civilian casualties appear fewer than other similar conflicts between the Tatmadaw and EAOs. Nonetheless, the proximity of the fighting to villages will continue to risk severe harm to civilians.

In February, the AA primarily targeted Tatmadaw logistic and supply operations with ambushes and IED attacks on Tatmadaw vehicles. On February 10, 12, and 17, the AA claimed individual attacks on Tatmadaw trucks in Mrauk U, Rathedaung, and Ponnagyun townships, respectively. On February 2, an AA mine destroyed a civilian-owned truck that was likely carrying Tatmadaw supplies,

according to the Tatmadaw itself.<sup>4</sup> On February 18, the AA warned private transport companies in Rakhine State not to carry Tatmadaw soldiers, suggesting that civilian vehicles used in Tatmadaw operations could be targeted.<sup>5</sup>

The AA also carried out several attacks on soft targets, primarily police. On February 22, the AA attacked a police post in Than Taung Village, Pal-etwa Township, and abducted the station chief and a village administrator, both of whom were ethnic Chin.<sup>6</sup> The incident outraged many in the Chin community and was painted by some as religiously motivated. On February 27, the AA ambushed four police vehicles travelling in Ponnagyun Township, killing two policemen. And finally, on March 10, the AA carried out another high-profile attack on police in Ponnagyun Township, killing at least nine.<sup>7</sup>

On February 28, the Tatmadaw arrested several village administrators in Mrauk U on suspicion of having ties to the AA. The next day, 89 village administrators resigned due to fear for their safety. All remaining village officials in the township had resigned by March 4 due to security concerns.<sup>8</sup> The AA appears to have an aim to dismantle the government's administration in northern Rakhine State to assert its power over the population.

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- 3 Moe Myint. (2019, February 21). Woman, 18, killed in her home as army opens fire on village in N. Rakhine. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/woman-18-killed-home-army-opens-fire-village-n-rakhine.html>
  - 4 ရခိုင်တောင်မြို့နယ်၊ ရေဘုတ်ကျေးရွာအနီး၌ AA အကြမ်းဖက်သောင်းကျန်းသူ အဖွဲ့က မော်တော်ယာဉ်တစ်စီးအား ဖိုင်နစ်ဖျက်ဆီးခဲ့. (2019, February 3). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. <http://cincds.gov.mm/node/1690>
  - 5 Moe Myint. (2019, February 19). AA warns private bus companies not to transport gov't troops. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/aa-warns-private-bus-companies-not-transport-govt-troops.html>
  - 6 Min Aung Khaing. (2019, February 22). AA abducts village official, police station chief in Chin State. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/aa-abducts-village-official-police-station-chief-chin-state.html>
  - 7 Moe Myint. (2019, March 10). Fresh Arakan army attack kills nine police in Rakhine. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/fresh-arakan-army-attack-kills-nine-police-rakhine.html>
  - 8 Nyan Lynn Aung. (2019, March 05). More village officials resign in Rakhine. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/more-village-officials-resign-rakhine.html>

Targeted killings have also continued. On February 12, a village administration committee member in Minbya Township was shot and killed.<sup>9</sup> The assassination happened after the victim's details were posted online, indicating a new trend where posts on pro-AA accounts serve as target indicators. Several days later on February 16, a parcel-bomb killed a Tatmadaw major's wife after the couple arrived in Buthidaung Township for the major's deployment.<sup>10</sup> Similar killings and assassination attempts are almost certain to continue.

As the AA continues to wage its guerrilla campaign throughout northern Rakhine State, the Tatmadaw and local police are entering villages to conduct household checks and arrest men suspected of being AA fighters. Reports from the ground indicate that many local Rakhine people are missing, likely because they have been arrested by security forces or have joined the AA. Local sources also said that some non-Rakhine vendors who sell goods from central Myanmar in northern Rakhine State had also disappeared. Even Rakhine ethnics from the south are reportedly avoiding travel to the north for fear they may be accused as government informers.

It also appears that the AA is continuing to sustain losses. On February 19, the Tatmadaw released information about a single clash that occurred earlier

in the day.<sup>11</sup> According to the Tatmadaw, its soldiers collected nine AA bodies following what was likely a prolonged engagement with the AA. The Tatmadaw did not release casualty information after other clashes in February, possibly to avoid stoking unnecessary anger among ethnic Rakhine, but likely chose to highlight this one incident as a warning to potential AA recruits. Sources also told MIPS that as many as 40 AA fighters are currently receiving treatment at a hospital in Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram State, India.

The conflict in Rakhine State is continuing to escalate as the AA conducts widespread attacks and ambushes throughout multiple townships. On March 9, for example, the AA reportedly succeeded in overrunning a tactical Tatmadaw post assigned to guard a border fence construction site.<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing, the AA appears capable of sustaining these operations with weapons, ammunition, and fighters. The AA may have stockpiles of supplies in Rakhine State, but could face shortages if its line from Kachin State is squeezed and a new weapons route via Bangladesh proves impossible to secure. The Tatmadaw also appears to be encountering some difficulties in dealing with the AA, and may be currently overstretched. The low-intensity conflict could be prolonged for months.

9 Narinjara. (2019, February 13). မင်းပြားမြို့နယ်ကျောက်ခွတ်ကျေးရွာတာဝန်ခံလုပ်ကြံသတ်ဖြတ်ခံရ. [Status Update]. Facebook. [https://www.facebook.com/151742128171206/photos/a.285339938144757/2309435489068515/?type=3&\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=-R](https://www.facebook.com/151742128171206/photos/a.285339938144757/2309435489068515/?type=3&__tn__=-R)

10 Myanmar officer's wife killed by pipe bomb in latest Rakhine violence. (2019, March 01). Frontier Myanmar. <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/myanmar-officers-wife-killed-by-pipe-bomb-in-latest-rakhine-violence>

11 ကျောက်တော်မြို့နယ်အတွင်းနယ်မြေလုံခြုံရေးဆောင်ရွက်နေသော တပ်မတော်စစ်ကြောင်းများ နှင့် AA အကြမ်းဖက်သောင်းကျန်းသူအဖွဲ့ ထိတွေ့မှုဖြစ်ပွား. (2019, February 19). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. <http://cincds.gov.mm/node/1862>

12 Moe Myint. (2019, March 11). AA occupies tactical base, holds 11 tatmadaw troops in R. Rakhine. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/aa-occupies-tactical-base-holds-11-tatmadaw-troops-n-rakhine.html>

## Inter-EAO Conflict in Shan State Intensifies Again

The conflict between the RCSS and the TNLA-SSPP coalition intensified again in February after slowing down in January amid heightened outcry from the Shan community. Despite some suggestions that the RCSS and SSPP would meet, clashes among the three groups reached the highest number since the conflict took off in July 2018. The fighting was particularly intense in Kyaukme and Namtu townships.

The RCSS and SSPP fought a prolonged battle in an area called Pawng Lawt, about six miles south of Kyaukme. Fighting began on February 8 and continued for four consecutive days. A final engagement was reported on February 15. According to the RFA, more than 1,000 civilians had fled to Kyaukme by February 11, and it is possible that hundreds more fled in the following days.<sup>13</sup> Fighting in Kyaukme Township usually occurs in the mountains north of the town. The major battle in February, however, took place on the southern side of the Mandalay-Muse highway and about an hour's drive from Gokhteik, the sight of a famous

viaduct popular among international tourists. The battle at Pawng Lawt may be the most south-western location of the inter-EAO fighting to date.

In Namtu Township, the TNLA and SSPP fought the RCSS in multiple battles up and down the road between Hsipaw town and Namtu town, sometimes directly in towns and villages.<sup>14</sup> The area, particularly near the town of Man Sam, was the site of prolonged fighting between the two sides in 2018. The RCSS and TNLA-SSPP coalition often fight extended battles until one side withdraws and the two sides meet again later to contest new areas. The latest clashes in Namtu demonstrate that the EAOs will return to contest areas previously fought over, meaning that civilians may be exposed to fighting multiple times. The clashes near Man Sam reportedly displaced hundreds of civilians<sup>15</sup>. MIPS assesses that despite calls for talks, the two sides are unlikely to reach a settlement in the near future, and the fighting will continue.<sup>16</sup>

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- 13 Kan Thar. (2019, February 11). တိုက်ပွဲကြောင့် ကျောက်မဲမြို့ပေါ်ကို ထွက်ပြေးလာသူ ၇၀၀ ကျော် ရှိနေ [Status Update]. Facebook. [https://www.facebook.com/rfaburmese/posts/10158479457338128?\\_tn\\_\\_=-R](https://www.facebook.com/rfaburmese/posts/10158479457338128?_tn__=-R)
- 14 Kan Thar. (2019, March 04). တိုက်ပွဲပြင်းထန်ခဲ့တဲ့ မန်လီရွာ. [Status Update]. Facebook. [https://www.facebook.com/pg/rfaburmese/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=10158532432618128](https://www.facebook.com/pg/rfaburmese/photos/?tab=album&album_id=10158532432618128)
- 15 Hom Hurng. (2019, February 16). မြောက်ပိုင်းမဟာမိတ်တပ်နှင့် RCSS တပ်တို့ နမ့်တူမြို့နယ်အတွင်းတိုက်ပွဲဖြစ် ဒေသခံ ၃ ဦးဒဏ်ရာရ. Shan Herald Agency for News. <https://burmese.shannews.org/archives/10349?fbclid=IwAR1s6nJPx4NikuT6UeKPKKqf5kpFfl-bQr4leQsXzisKUF1Mff55pc8AqAc>
- 16 Content no longer available. Originally accessed at <http://taifreedom.com/burmese/index.php/rcss/2014-05-27-08-31-58/1637-rcss-sspp?fbclid=IwAR0DsNjYeqlaG68rnXAmFO7kKvXk7AUf0lcJdZ7o1blAIY1PzICiw77DjvQ>



## RCSS Troops Stop Tatmadaw Vehicle, Prompting Warning

RCSS troops stopped a Tatmadaw vehicle carrying two officers on their way from Taunggyi to Kengteng on February 12. The RCSS troops took equipment from the truck, prompting an angry Tatmadaw warning to return the items or face consequences.<sup>17</sup> At 2:30 PM the next afternoon, the Tatmadaw shelled near to the RCSS headquarters at Loi Tai Leng, Langkho Township on the Thai border.<sup>18</sup> No casualties were reported and the shelling was likely intended as a threat or reminder that Tatmadaw artillery sits nearby. The RCSS returned

the equipment five hours later to the Tatmadaw cantonment in Mongpyin.<sup>19</sup>

According to MIPS sources, local RCSS commanders were responsible for the incident and the RCSS headquarters acted quickly to return the items and avoid a larger confrontation. Nonetheless, sources told MIPS that the RCSS leadership was dismayed by the Tatmadaw shelling near Loi Tai Leng. While uncomfortable for both sides, the incident did not significantly raise existing tensions.

## Tatmadaw Pressures Indian Armed Groups in Sagaing Region

The Tatmadaw took control<sup>20</sup> of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) headquarters without a significant violent confrontation on January 29 and subsequently raided several camps that belong to an assortment of armed groups<sup>21</sup> from India's northeast. The Indian government regularly asks the Tatmadaw to crack down on these groups, and sources said that Indian intelligence might have provided the Tatmadaw with coordinates for the various camps.

The Tatmadaw's action against the northeast groups came shortly before an Indian army mobilization along the border with Paletwa Township, Chin State.<sup>22</sup> The Tatmadaw does not want AA fighters in northern Rakhine or Paletwa to enjoy sanctuary across the border in India or Bangladesh, and likely acted against the groups in Sagaing Region in exchange for India's cooperation in dealing with the AA.

17 Tatmadaw to take severe action if RCSS/SSA fails to return seized items in prescribed period. (2019, February 13). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. [http://cincds.gov.mm/node/1789?fbclid=IwAR3XzSogP6LRwEwJkUnRR1qdYjbep-fJltMx15cKVR6GMXzd\\_WIR1JWqa0](http://cincds.gov.mm/node/1789?fbclid=IwAR3XzSogP6LRwEwJkUnRR1qdYjbep-fJltMx15cKVR6GMXzd_WIR1JWqa0)

18 Content no longer available. Originally accessed at <http://taifreedom.com/burmese/index.php/2014-05-27-08-33-44/2014-05-27-08-35-25/1623-bur>

19 MOI Webportal Myanmar. (2019, February 15). RCSS/SSA returns seized items from two Tatmadaw officers. [Status Update]. Facebook. [https://www.facebook.com/MOIWebportalMyanmar/posts/1932739116853945?\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=-R](https://www.facebook.com/MOIWebportalMyanmar/posts/1932739116853945?__tn__=-R)

20 Chit Min Thu. (2019, February 01). Tatmadaw occupies NSCN-K headquarters. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/tatmadaw-occupies-nscn-k-headquarters.html>

21 Tightning the screw: Tatmadaw occupation of NSCN-K headquarters. (2019, February 14) BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/tightening-screw-tatmadaw-occupation-nscn-k-headquarters>

22 Moe Myint. (2019, February 18). Indian Troops Seal off Indian - Myanmar border. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/indian-troops-seal-off-india-myanmar-border.html>

In response to the raids, NSCN-K Central Executive Committee member U Kyaw Wan Sein warned that clashes could occur if the Tatmadaw continued its operation in the area.<sup>23</sup> The NSCN-K likely wishes to avoid fighting with the Tatmadaw since it

is already under pressure from Indian security forces. It may therefore accommodate the Tatmadaw's efforts to remove the bases or camps belonging to other armed groups. A medium risk for clashes remains.

## **Pan Say Militia Warns TNLA Over Kidnapping Cases**

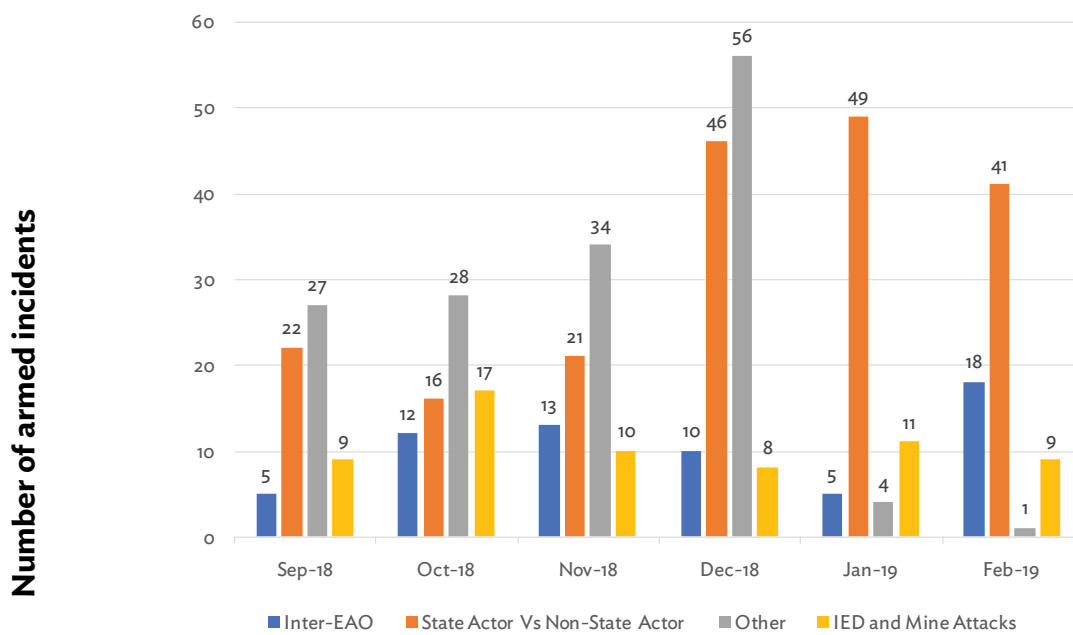
The Pan Say Militia made a formal complaint to the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission in Nay Pyi Taw regarding civilians detained by the TNLA in Namhkam Township on January 6.<sup>24</sup> The Pan Say Militia accused the TNLA of holding ethnic Kholon Lishaw civilians for ransom, even after locals paid for their release. A TNLA spokesperson said that it detains individuals for drug-related charges regardless of ethnicity and asks for compensation for costs related to detainment. The Pan Say Militia is mostly comprised of ethnic Kholon Lishaw fighters. Multiple incidents of abductions were reported since April last year, and a MIPS research team interviewed

purported victims kidnapped by the TNLA in 2018.

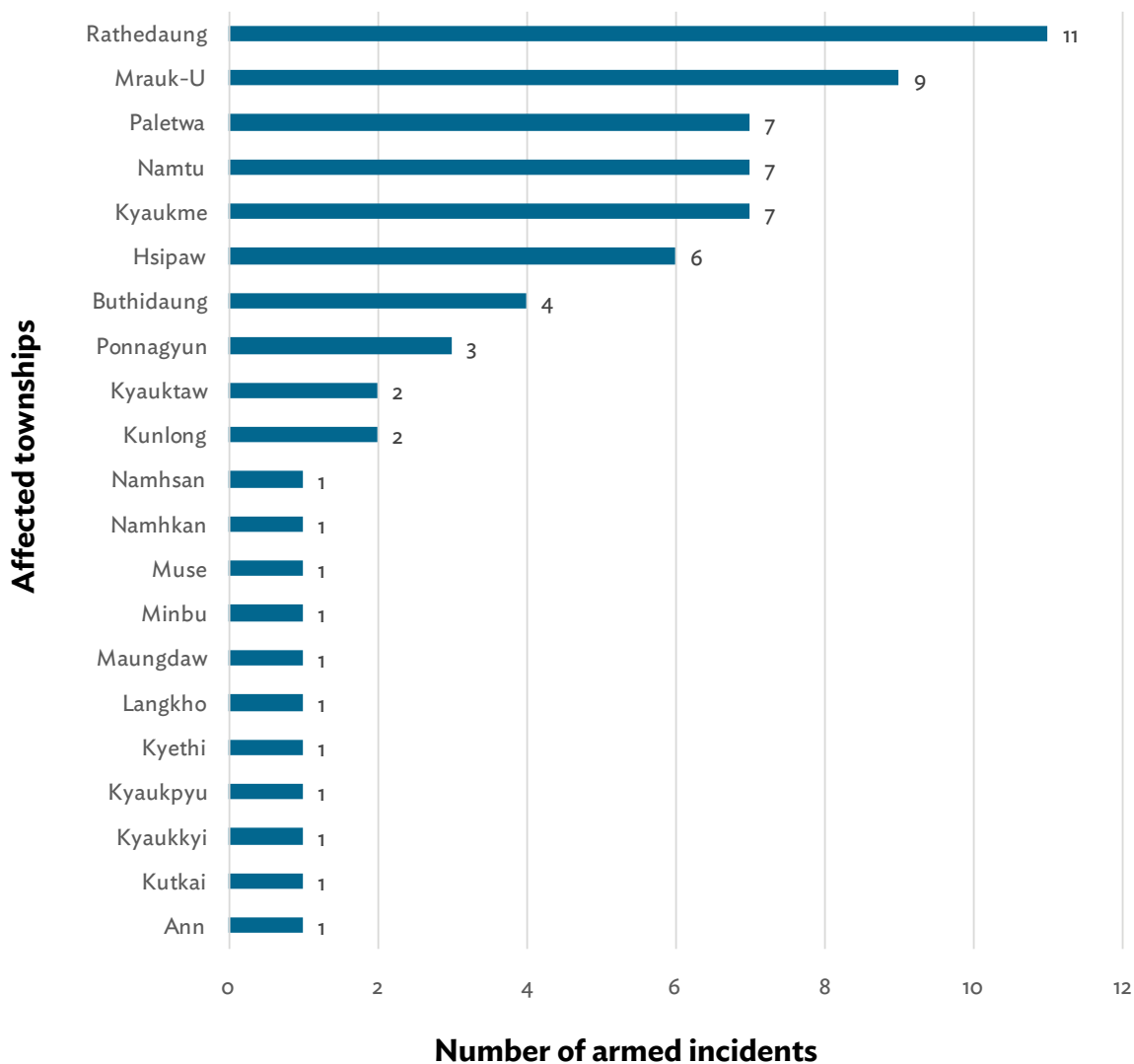
The Pan Say Militia and TNLA have a tense history. In May 2018, for example, the TNLA attacked a Pan Say Militia post near the latter's headquarters on the outskirts of Muse. Sources told MIPS that in response to the TNLA's recent abductions, the Pan Say Militia may resort to doing the same against Palaung villagers, to exchange them for civilians held by the TNLA, if the issue is not otherwise resolved. The episode could result in more abductions and clashes between the Pan Say Militia and TNLA.

23 Lawi Weng. (2019, February 20). Naga rebel group warns of 'problems' if military keeps up pressure. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/naga-rebel-group-warns-problems-military-keeps-pressure.html>

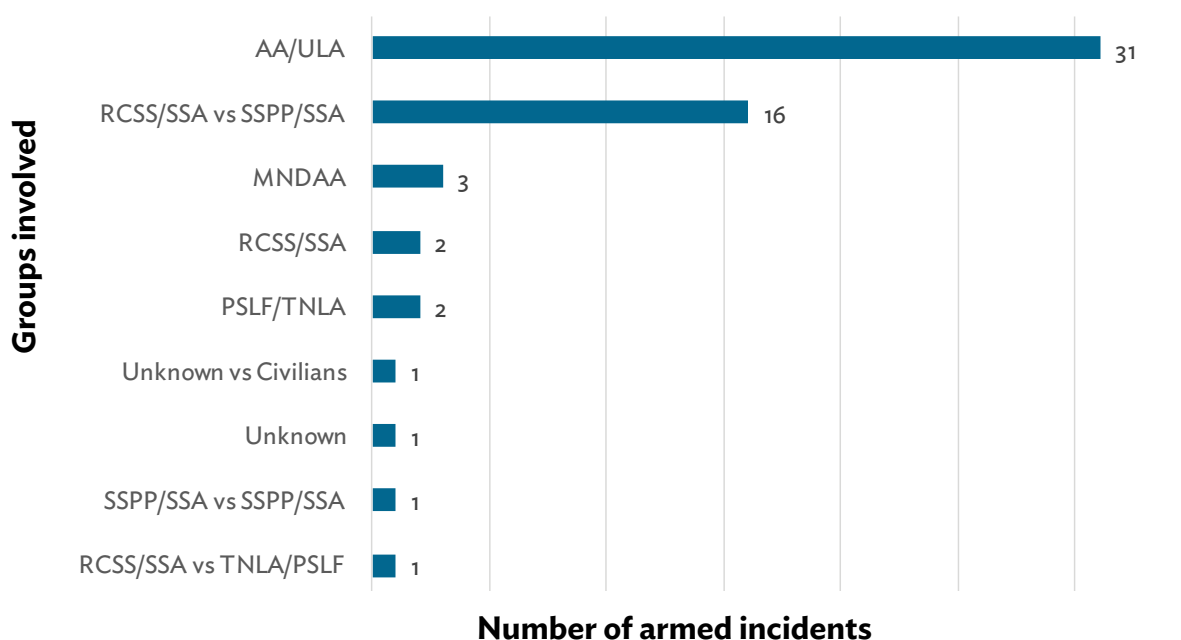
24 Myat Moe Thu. (2019, March 05). Militia demands release of civilians held by Ta'ang. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/militia-demands-release-civilians-held-taang.html>



**Figure 1:** Armed incidents from September 2018 to February 2019



**Figure 2:** Townships affected by armed incidents in February 2019

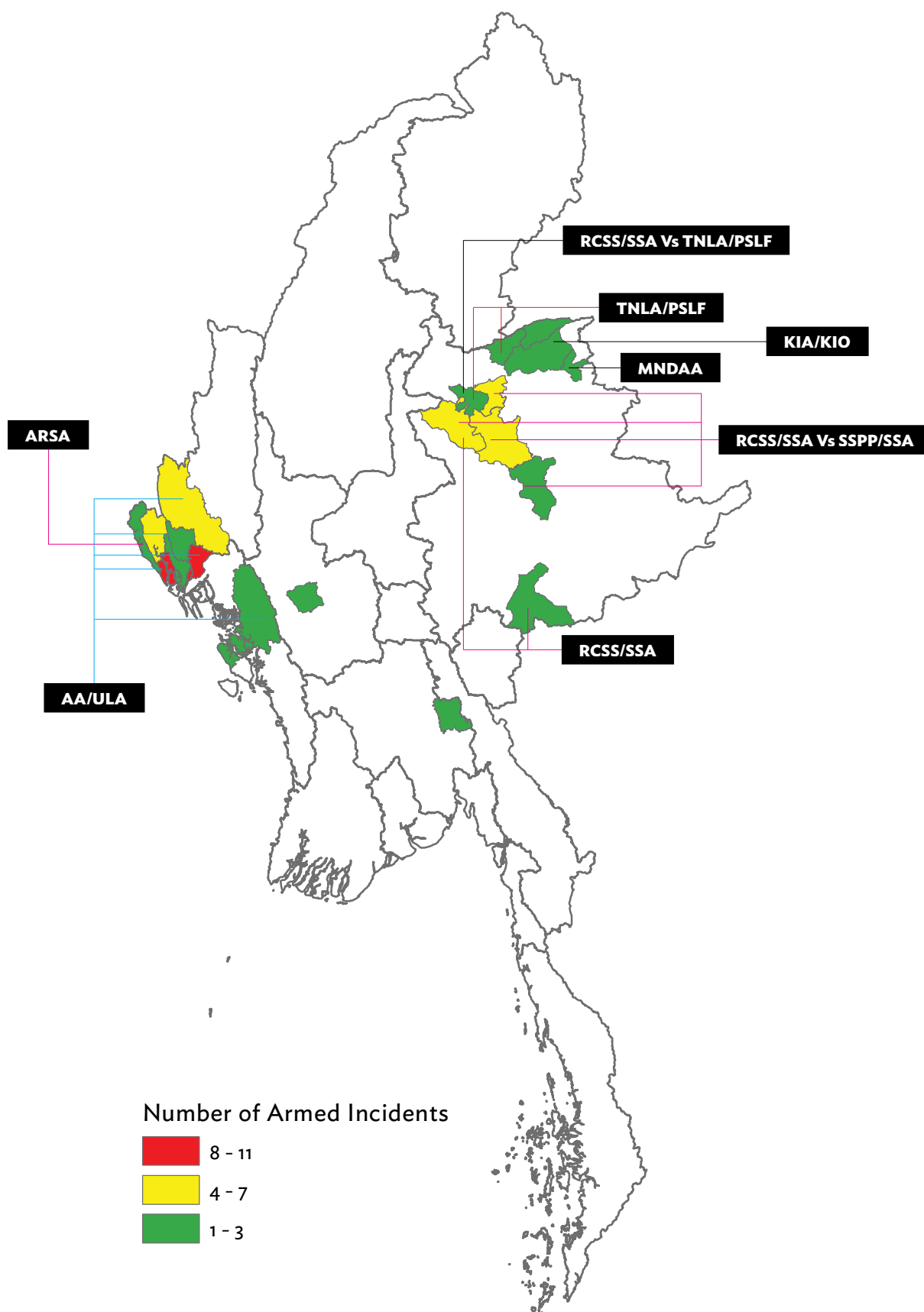


\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine. EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 3:** Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in February 2019

Meetings	Number
NRPC and NCA-S EAOs Meeting	2
JMC Meetings	3
KIO, KHCC, PCG and JST Meeting	1
NRPC and SSPP/SSA Meeting	1
PC and Northern Alliance Meeting	1
<b>Total Number of Meetings</b>	<b>8</b>

**Figure 4:** Significant meetings related to the peace process in February 2019



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
 EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 5:** *Armed incidents in February 2019*

# NCA-SIGNATORIES

## PPST Convenes Internal Meeting and Meets with Government

The ethnic Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) met informally with the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) in Nay Pyi Taw on February 13.<sup>25</sup> Later, the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) convened an internal meeting for the first time since the Karen National Union (KNU) suspended formal participation in the peace process last year.<sup>26</sup> The three-day meeting took place in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from March 5 to 7. During the meeting, the PPST decided that it will restructure its leadership in a summit tentatively scheduled for May. KNU Chairperson Saw Mutu Say Poe and RCSS Chairperson General Yawd Serk announced their official resignation as delegates during the meeting. Sources within the ethnic NCA-S told MIPS that the PPST is struggling with

how to move forward and organize its structure. The dichotomy between the smaller and larger EAOs continues to influence these dynamics.

A government delegation then held separate meetings with the KNU and PPST on March 8 and 9, respectively.<sup>27</sup> According to sources familiar with the ongoing negotiations to resume official talks, the PPST would like to hold another top-level meeting with the government. The government prefers, however, for any top-level meeting to be official, to ensure that any decisions made are respected. In the meantime, the KNU, RCSS, and PPST as a whole will likely continue to meet informally with government representatives to explore solutions to the current impasse.

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- 25 Myo Min. (2019, February 13). NCA-S EAOs နှင့် NRPC တို့အလွတ်သဘောဆွေးနွေး. [Status Update]. Facebook. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=2448051005269106&id=1075410072533213&\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=-R](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2448051005269106&id=1075410072533213&__tn__=-R)
- 26 NCA-Signatory EAOs to hold summit in May. (2019, March 11). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/nca-signatory-eaos-hold-summit-may>
- 27 Government, EAOs to negotiate resumption of peace talks. (2019, March 11). Mizzima. <http://www.mizzima.com/article/government-eaos-negotiate-resumption-peace-talks>

## NON-SIGNATORIES

### Northern Alliance Meets with Government; Differences Appear between KIA and UWSA

All four members of the Northern Alliance met with the government's Peace Commission (PC) in Kunming, China on February 25.<sup>28</sup> The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) had proposed the multilateral meeting during its previous meeting with the government on January 21.<sup>29</sup> The meeting in February explored ways to reach ceasefire and was more formal than previous meetings with all four groups and the government.

According to interviews given by leaders of the Northern Alliance, the government brought a draft deed of commitment to the meeting that would serve as a bridge toward signing the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Although not a ceasefire, the draft contained some language about refraining from hostilities while all sides work toward signing the NCA.

Sources said that the Northern Alliance groups swapped some of their previous delegates with more hardline negotiators. The Northern Alliance representatives expressed little interest in the deed of commitment and instead proposed signing individual bilateral ceasefires first. The government insisted that, like the deed of commitment, any bilateral ceasefire needs to include some commitment to the NCA.

At this time, the government is unlikely to agree to bilateral ceasefires without commitments to the NCA, but the Northern Alliance members appear unwilling to offer such an agreement. Talks between the government and Northern Alliance may likely return to bilateral meetings between the government and individual groups.

The meeting also indicated growing differences between the KIA and United Wa State Army (UWSA). While the UWSA leads the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC), to which all Northern Alliance members belong, the KIA appears to be leading the Northern Alliance. Although the Northern Alliance invited representatives from the UWSA, National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), and SSPP to attend the meeting in China as observers, the UWSA sent only a junior delegate.<sup>30</sup> After the Tatmadaw announced its unilateral cessation of military activities in December 2018, the Northern Alliance and the FPNCC released two separate statements. The FPNCC's statement was noticeably positive, while the Northern Alliance's was more reserved. The events indicate the potential for a leadership struggle within the FPNCC, which has been serving as the main conduit for NCA-related talks between the seven EAOs and government.

28 Govt peace commission, northern military alliance hold talks in China. (2019, February 27). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/govt-peace-commission-northern-military-alliance-hold-talks-china>

29 Lawi Weng. (2019, February 26). Rebel group alliance proposes ceasefire with Myanmar military. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/rebel-group-alliance-proposes-ceasefire-myanmar-military.html>

30 Nyein Nyein. (2019, February 5). Informal talks with northern alliance a positive move for peace. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/informal-talks-northern-alliance-positive-move-peace.html>

## SSPP Meets with Government

An SSPP delegation met with representatives<sup>31</sup> from the NRPC on February 22, and with Tatmadaw representatives<sup>32</sup> on February 25 in Nay Pyi Taw. Sources familiar with the meetings told MIPS that the SSPP expressed a desire to de-escalate tensions and avoid all future clashes with the Tatmadaw. In May 2018, a Shan politician close

to the SSPP suggested that the group would like to sign the NCA, a feeling confirmed by MIPS sources.<sup>33</sup> The meetings between the SSPP and the government and Tatmadaw might have raised some concerns within the RCSS, which is currently locked in an ongoing conflict with its northern counterpart.

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- 31 SSPP tells Tatmadaw to 'solve political problems through political means'. (2019, February 27). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/sspp-tells-tatmadaw-solve-political-problems-through-political-means>
- 32 Myanmar's northern alliance of ethnic armies says it wants bilateral pacts with army. (2019, February 27). RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmars-northern-alliance-of-ethnic-armies-02272019171225.html>
- 33 Chit Min Tun. (2018, May 03). SSPP likely to sign nationwide ceasefire, peace broker says. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/sspp-likely-to-sign-nationwide-ceasefire-peace-broker-says.html>

### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING MARCH 2019

|

VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(4)

## OVERVIEW

- The conflict in Rakhine State intensified in March as the AA carried out counterattacks and the Tatmadaw brought more firepower to the fight. Civilians are increasingly at risk and fighting is set to continue.
- Attacks on the SSPP and TNLA suggest the Tatmadaw may be more tolerant of the RCSS taking new positions in northern Shan State than the former two, in the context of the inter-EAO conflict.
- Although the Tatmadaw may not renew its ceasefire on April 21, both sides will likely sustain the current status of reduced hostilities.
- There was a reduction in fighting several days after both the SSPP and RCSS stated a willingness to de-escalate the conflict, but a high risk for more clashes remains.
- Despite hinting that it is inflicting significant costs on the AA, the Tatmadaw is refraining from releasing overall casualty figures about the AA, likely to avoid stoking further ethnic animosity.
- The PPST is exploring ways to restructure as it continues informal meetings in the aim of resuming formal talks.
- Some non-signatories may engage in more informal meetings with the government as they consider signing bilateral ceasefires.

## SECURITY

### Nationwide Clashes Spike Amidst Intensifying Conflict in Rakhine State

At least 112 armed clashes and 12 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in March for a total of 124 armed incidents nationwide, a significant increase from 69 in February, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> The sharp rise in armed incidents was due primarily to a record high frequency and intensity of clashes between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA). In line with this escalation, Mrauk U Township in Rakhine State was most affected, followed by Paletwa Township in Chin State where the Tatmadaw and AA fought for the seventh month in a row.

Across the nation, fighting took place in 17 townships, down from 21 in February. Clashes between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and the coalition formed by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF) and Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) continued regularly for most of the month before the two Shan groups called for a cessation of hostilities. Several clashes between the Tatmadaw and SSPP, TNLA, and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) also occurred in northern Shan State, adding to the monthly total.

### Rakhine Fighting Intensifies as AA Launches Counterattacks

The conflict between the AA and Tatmadaw reached its highest point of intensity in March since the ongoing clashes began in late August 2018. In addition to hit-and-run guerrilla style ambushes, the AA appeared willing to engage the Tatmadaw head-on by launching counterattacks with superior numbers to encircle isolated Tatmadaw columns. In response, the Tatmadaw began deploying more firepower, especially from the air, to pummel AA fighters in what often became multi-day engagements. The intensified fighting resulted in more civilian casualties as much of the fighting shifted away from the jungle and toward populated villages and even towns. Targeted killings, threats, acts of sabotage, and potent propaganda all contributed to the further destabilization of northern Rakhine and

southern Chin states. The Tatmadaw has strongly rejected the AA's stated aim to secure a foothold in Rakhine State and the contradiction will likely prolong the armed conflict there.

In March, the AA demonstrated its capability to deploy and maneuver a superior number of fighters to encircle Tatmadaw columns and blockade Tatmadaw reinforcements, suggesting that the AA possesses intelligence about where the Tatmadaw operates. According to the Tatmadaw, soldiers entered the mountainous region north of Ponnagyun Town on March 7 in response to a tip-off about AA activity in the area.<sup>2</sup> On March 11, the Tatmadaw discovered and attacked an AA training ground nearby. The next day, the AA launched a counterat-

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

tack with a large number of fighters in an attempt to encircle the Tatmadaw column. On March 13, the AA blocked a contingent of Tatmadaw reinforcements that was sent to relieve the surrounded column.

In response, the Tatmadaw coordinated heavy artillery and airstrikes to attack the concentrated AA fighters. For likely the first time, the Tatmadaw demonstrated its ability to conduct nighttime airstrikes against its enemy by flying MI-35 attack helicopters and possibly an entire squadron of YAK130S against the AA. Speaking to the Irrawaddy, AA information officer Khaing Thukha said the airstrikes lasted the entire night of March 13 and called the event “unprecedented”.<sup>3</sup> The week-long clashes in the area reportedly forced entire villages to flee.

The AA also continued with ambushes and attacks on soft targets. On March 7, the AA reportedly killed up to 15 Tatmadaw soldiers, including a captain, as they travelled in wooden boats on a river in Paletwa Township.<sup>4</sup> On March 9, the AA attacked and occupied a temporary tactical command post tasked with guarding the construction of a border post.<sup>5</sup> On March 21 and 22, the AA ambushed

Tatmadaw columns that were conducting security patrols in Rathedaung Township.<sup>6</sup> According to the Tatmadaw, the attack killed and injured several of its soldiers. The actual number of casualties cannot be confirmed. In perhaps the most high-profile event of the month, the AA reportedly ambushed a Tatmadaw column as it entered Mrauk U Town, the ancient capital of the Mrauk U empire.<sup>7</sup> According to the Tatmadaw, the AA fired from houses nearby, and witnesses reported that the Tatmadaw soldiers responded by firing back. Multiple civilians were wounded in the ensuing clash and several ancient pagodas damaged, sparking outrage from the Rakhine community.<sup>8</sup> In the immediate aftermath, social media users shared reports that the pagodas were damaged by artillery shells fired during the clash on the edge of town, despite photos suggesting that rocket-propelled grenades caused the damage. Days later, the narrative among online Rakhine became that the Tatmadaw was deliberately destroying Mrauk U’s ancient pagodas. Even non-Rakhine social media users shared messages to “save Mrauk U”.

In March, India continued its cooperation with the Tatmadaw by sending additional units to secure the border between Paletwa Township and

- 2 Major clash broke out between security troops taking security measures in and around Ponnagyun and Kyauktaw and AA insurgent group; insurgents suffered heavy losses and flee. (2019, March 15). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. <http://cincds.gov.mm/node/2107>
- 3 Min Aung Khine. (2019, March 15). Entire villages flee as military launches air strikes on AA. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/entire-villages-flee-military-launches-air-strikes-aa.html>
- 4 Moe Myint. (2019, March 08). Captain, killed in clash with AA in Chin state. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/dozen-soldiers-including-captain-killed-clash-aa-chin-state.html>
- 5 Moe Myint. (2019, March 11). AA occupies tactical base, holds 11 Tatmadaw troops in N Rakhine. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/aa-occupies-tactical-base-holds-11-tatmadaw-troops-n-rakhine.html>
- 6 AA insurgents lie in wait for Tatmadaw columns near Yaykhaungchaung village, three bodies of enemy seized. (2019, March 13). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. <http://cincds.gov.mm/node/2232>
- 7 Moore, S. C. (Ed.). (2019, March 19). Six wounded in firing as Myanmar soldiers hunt insurgents in temple town. Reuters. <https://news.trust.org/item/20190319101731-kkc07/>
- 8 Eight injured in Mrauk U violence. (2019, March 20). Frontier Myanmar. <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/eight-injured-in-mrauk-u-violence>

Mizoram.<sup>9</sup> On March 15, Indian media reported that the Tatmadaw and Indian forces conducted joint operations to destroy up to 12 AA camps.<sup>10</sup> In apparent retaliation for India's coordination with the Tatmadaw, the AA sank a boat that was carrying construction materials for the Paletwa Bridge even though the bridge is not part of India's Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project.<sup>11</sup> On March 30, however, the AA destroyed USD 300,000 of construction materials and equipment and abducted 13 employees from a company working on a segment of road linked to the Kaladan project. The AA may continue to target Indian interests in Chin State.

The intensified fighting has led to more civilian casualties and displacement, especially when the fighting occurs near villages or towns. On March 6, a villager was shot during a clash in Mrauk U Township that caused hundreds to flee.<sup>12</sup> Five more

civilians were killed when the Tatmadaw reportedly opened fire on a village in Buthidaung on March 21.<sup>13</sup> On April 3, a Tatmadaw helicopter attack killed at least five Rohingya civilians as they collected bamboo in Buthidaung.<sup>14</sup> Many pro-AA social media users and accounts were quick to portray the incident as further evidence of the Tatmadaw's brutality and indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Some of those same accounts appeared to have posted anti-Rohingya material during the height of the Rakhine crisis in 2017. According to the RFA, there are now more than 39 displacement camps in Mrauk U, Rathedaung, Buthidaung, Ponnagyun, and Kyauktaw townships.<sup>15</sup> As of March 24, an estimated 17,354 people had been displaced in southern Chin and northern Rakhine states.<sup>16</sup>

At the time of writing, it appears that the intensive, multi-day battles in northern Rakhine that occurred in March may be subsiding. The Tatmadaw,

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- 9 Bhattacharyya, R. (2019, March 15). India deploys the army to check rebel, refugee influx from Myanmar. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/india-deploys-the-army-to-check-rebel-refugee-influx-from-myanmar/>
  - 10 Arakan army camps destroyed in border operation, says Indian media. (2019, March 18). *Frontier Myanmar*. <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/arakan-army-camps-destroyed-in-border-operation-says-indian-media>
  - 11 Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project. (2018, December). In Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaladan\\_Multi-Modal\\_Transit\\_Transport\\_Project](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaladan_Multi-Modal_Transit_Transport_Project)
  - 12 Nyan Lynn Aung. (2019, March 06). New fighting erupts in Rakhine, hundreds flee. *Myanmar Times*. <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/new-fighting-erupts-rakhine-hundreds-flee.html>
  - 13 Moe Myint. (2019, March 22). 5 civilians killed as Tatmadaw troops open fire on village in N. Rakhine: witnesses. *The Irrawaddy*. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/5-civilians-killed-tatmadaw-troops-open-fire-village-n-rakhine-witnesses.html>
  - 14 Moore, S. C. (Ed.). (2019, April 04). Myanmar villagers, lawmaker say 'helicopter attack' kills five Rohingya, wounds 13. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya/myanmar-villagers-lawmaker-say-helicopter-attack-kills-five-rohingya-wounds-13-idUSKCN1RG16C>
  - 15 Kyaw Lwin Oo., Thet Su Aung., & Min Thein Aung. (2019, March 06). Myanmar army troop build-up in Rakhine reaches 8000, Arakan Army says. *RFA*. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-army-troop-buildup-in-rakhine-03062019164614.html>
  - 16 OCHA. (2019, March 28). Myanmar: New displacement in Rakhine and Chin state (as of 24 Mar 2019). [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MMR\\_Rakhine\\_New\\_Displacement\\_28Mar2019.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MMR_Rakhine_New_Displacement_28Mar2019.pdf)

however, will likely continue to deploy heavy firepower, including airstrikes, to pound the AA. The AA may still attempt to launch counterattacks and will most likely continue its ambushes and attacks on soft targets. The AA may also attempt to strike

targets beyond northern Rakhine. The Tatmadaw will continue its military pressure on the AA, and fighting will likely continue throughout 2019 unless the government and AA reach an agreement on the status of AA troops in Rakhine State.

## **Tatmadaw Intervenes in Inter-EAO Conflict, Targets KIA and TNLA for Alleged Force Recruiting**

The Tatmadaw attacked the SSPP and TNLA in what appears to be its first major intervention in the inter-ethnic armed organization (EAO) conflict since the SSPP and TNLA joined to fight the RCSS in July 2018. In Hsipaw Township, the Tatmadaw launched an assault on the SSPP's camp at Loi Pan Hka Mountain.<sup>17</sup> According to MIPS sources, the SSPP and TNLA have placed multiple bases or camps adjacent to RCSS positions across the contested areas in northern Shan State. The Tatmadaw protested these bases in March, accusing the two groups of expanding their territorial control. Sources told MIPS that the Tatmadaw asked the SSPP to remove its base at Loi Pan Hka, but the SSPP refused because the RCSS held a post nearby.

The Tatmadaw began its assault on the SSPP at Loi Pan Hka on March 7. According to the SSPP, its troops managed to repel the first attack, killing three Tatmadaw soldiers. The Tatmadaw attacked the base again on March 8 and 9 before conducting airstrikes on March 10, forcing the SSPP to withdraw. One civilian was reportedly killed and

two more injured during the strikes. The SSPP accused the RCSS of participating in the attack on its base at Loi Pan Hka, but the RCSS denied any involvement. Sources told MIPS that the Tatmadaw troops circumvented the RCSS position during their assault on the SSPP's post.

The RCSS and TNLA-SSPP coalition fought an intense battle in the Mong Mu Village Tract in Namtu Township from March 22 to 24. Then, from March 26 to 28, the Tatmadaw launched multiple attacks on SSPP-TNLA coalition positions in and around Mong Mu, which lies near the road between Hsipaw and Namtu towns. The area between Hsipaw and Namtu is highly contested and in February witnessed intense and drawn out battles between the RCSS and the TNLA-SSPP coalition. The TNLA accused the Tatmadaw of aiding the RCSS whenever it is about to overrun an RCSS position.<sup>18</sup>

Until March 2019, the Tatmadaw appeared to mostly stay out of the inter-EAO conflict in Shan State, but sometimes engaged the SSPP and TNLA

17 Hom Hurng. (2019, March 11). Tatmadaw attacks SSPP camp. Shan Herald Agencies for News. <https://english.shannews.org/archives/18757>

18 Lawi Weng. (2019, March 29). TNLA accuses military of helping RCSS gain in N. Shan. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/tnla-accuses-military-helping-rcss-gain-bases-n-shan.html>

when their operations against the RCSS led them near Tatmadaw bases or major roads. In contrast, the Tatmadaw has appeared not to engage the RCSS in northern Shan State during the RCSS' confrontation with the SSPP-TNLA alliance. The Tatmadaw therefore appears more tolerant of the RCSS taking new positions in the north than it is of the TNLA and SSPP.

On March 4, the KIA and TNLA rounded up as many as 200 people as they headed to work in a sugarcane field on the border of Kutkai and Namtu townships.<sup>19</sup> The KIA and TNLA quickly released all married women and elderly, but continued to hold at least 70 people, most of which were ethnic Palaung. Two days later, Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Division (LID) 99 attacked the KIA's Battalion 8 nearby in Kutkai Township.

The Tatmadaw attacked the KIA in Kutkai again on March 11 and 12. The Tatmadaw had warned EAOs not to cause trouble for civilians as a part of its announcement in December 2018 and likely attacked the KIA for detaining the civilians. The KIA issued a statement and released the civilians on March 11.<sup>20</sup>

During a press conference on March 25, the Tatmadaw revealed that it will not renew the unilateral cessation of military activities in the north that is set to expire on April 21.<sup>21</sup> Despite this, both sides may be able to prolong the current trend of limited clashes so long as neither side engages in any major military attack or mobilization. Clashes may occur, however, if the EAOs violate the Tatmadaw's warnings about obstructing trade routes or causing harm to civilians in areas where the Tatmadaw operates.

19 Myat Moe Thu. (2019, March 11). Armed group abducts some 70 field hands. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/armed-group-abducts-some-70-field-hands.html>

20 Content no longer available. Originally accessed at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=840381176317081&id=450117345343468](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=840381176317081&id=450117345343468)

21 Htoo Thant. (2019, March 26). Tatmadaw says ceasefire period will not be extended. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/tatmadaw-says-ceasefire-period-will-not-be-extended.html>

## RCSS Calls for De-Escalation with SSPP

The RCSS issued a statement on March 21 calling for a truce with the SSPP and said its troops would remain in their bases in northern Shan State and avoid fighting with the SSPP.<sup>22</sup> According to the Shan Herald, the fighting ceased on March 19 and leaders from both sides met to discuss the conflict at the RCSS headquarters at Loi Tai Leng on March 20.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the overtures for a de-escalation, the two sides engaged in heavy fighting in Namtu Township from March 22 to 24. In a post to Facebook, the SSPP claimed that the RCSS unit in the area attacked its position.<sup>24</sup> The SSPP and RCSS also clashed in a separate incident in Hsipaw Township on March 25. The clashes between March 22 and 25 suggest that the order from the top did not immediately impact the behavior of local units. At the time of writing in early April, however, clashes between the SSPP-TNLA coalition and RCSS appear to have subsided.

Sources told MIPS that, during a meeting between the RCSS and National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) in Nay Pyi Taw on March 11 and 12, the government proposed a tripartite meeting among the SSPP, RCSS, and Tatmadaw.<sup>25</sup> Although the RCSS did not reject the meeting in principle, it appeared reluctant to allow the government to serve as a mediator between the two Shan groups. According to MIPS sources, the RCSS would like to hold a bilateral meeting with the SSPP to settle outstanding issues before it meets with the government or TNLA.

Both the SSPP and the RCSS have demonstrated a willingness to de-escalate tensions, and the Shan community, including Buddhist monks, is working to facilitate a solution. Therefore, the frequency of clashes may decline for now, but a risk for re-escalation remains if either side mobilizes additional troops or attacks the other's positions.

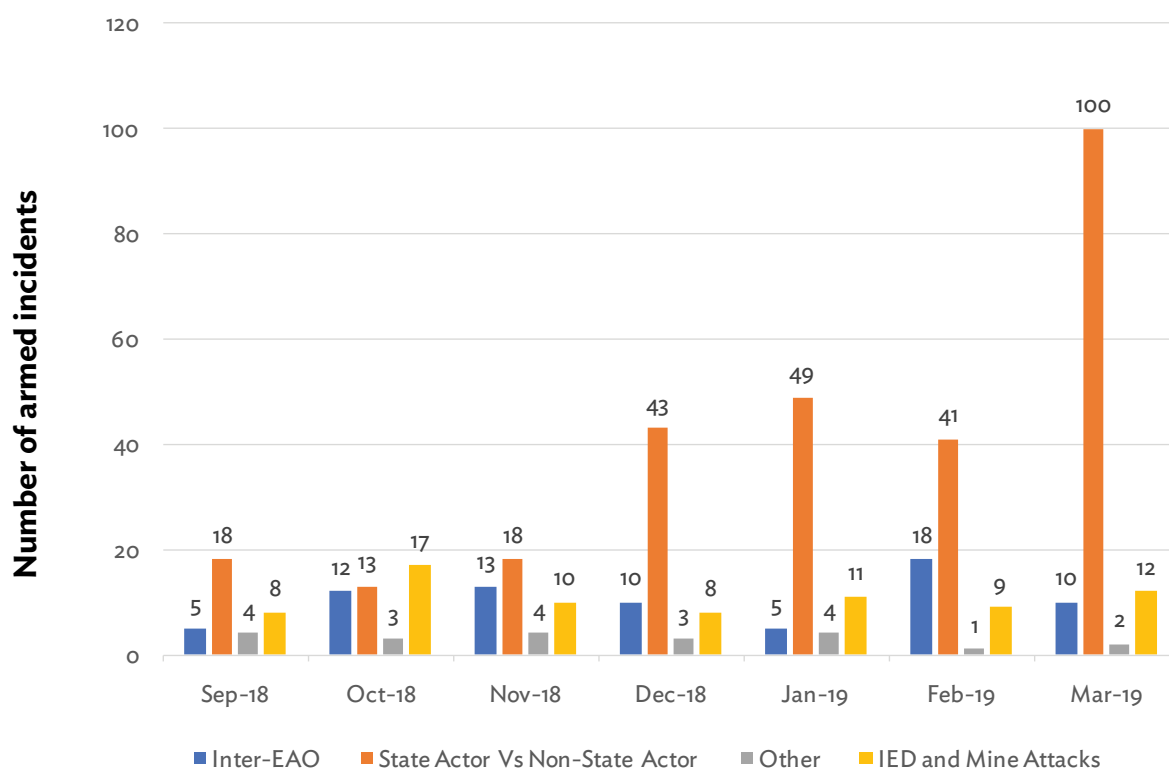
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- 22 Lawi Weng. (2019, March 22). RCSS invites rival Shan group to join ceasefire, excludes TNLA. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/rcss-invites-rival-shan-group-to-join-ceasefire-excludes-tnla.html>
  - 23 Hom Hurng. (2019, March 22). Shan armed groups declare ceasefire. Shan Herald Agencies for News. <https://english.shannews.org/archives/18808>
  - 24 SSPP Info. (2019, March 22). အပစ်ရပ်စဲကြေညာချက်အပြီး (SSPP/SSA)တပ်စခန်းအား (RCSS)တပ် ယထာရပ်စဲကြေညာချက်တိုက်ခိုက်. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/ssppinfo/posts/813867908964238>
  - 25 Htet Naung Zaw. (2019, March 12). Shan rebel group demands release of detained fighters. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/shan-rebel-group-demands-release-detained-fighters.html>



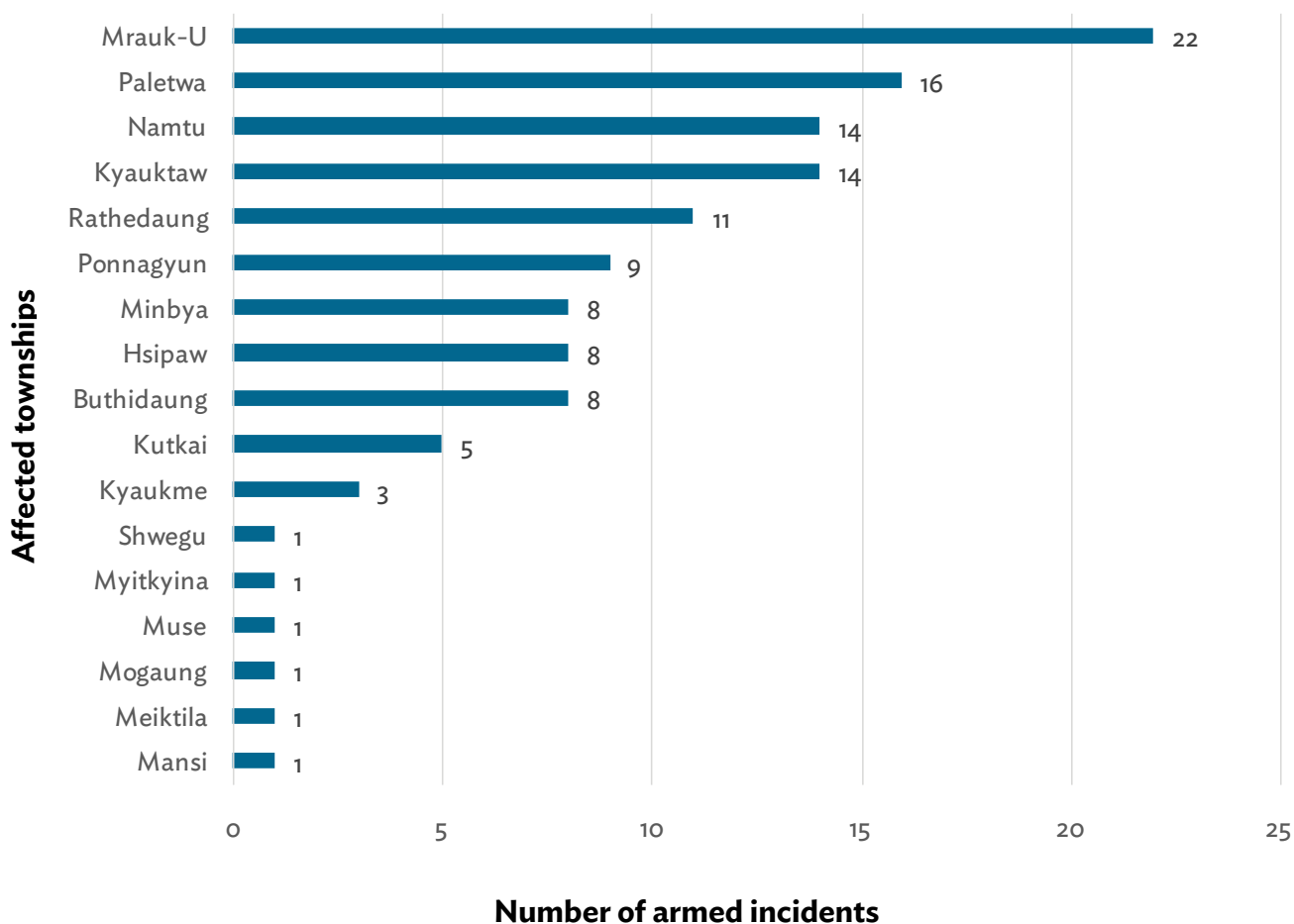
## Sporadic Clashes in Kayin in February

Several small clashes were reported between the Karen National Union's (KNU) Brigade 5 and the Tatmadaw in Hpapun Township, Kayin State in early February. Sources told MIPS that the Tatmadaw complained to the KNU of three incidents where Brigade 5 troops allegedly fired on its soldiers. According to the Karen Human Rights

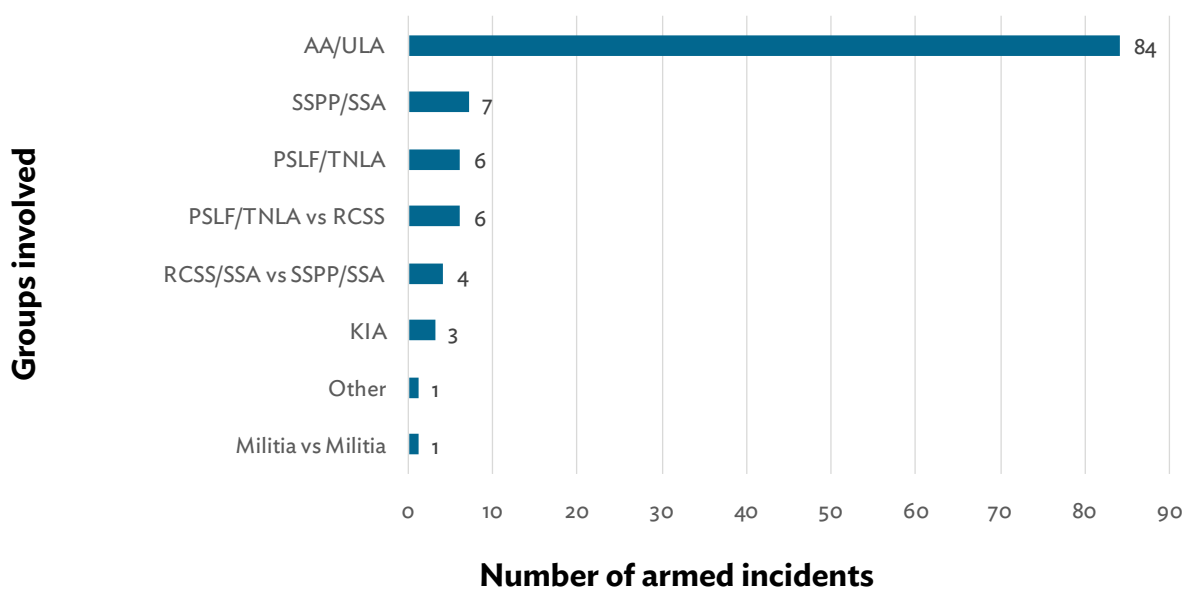
Group (KHRG), the Tatmadaw fired mortar rounds near villages in February, killing some livestock. MIPS did not receive reports of clashes between the Tatmadaw and Brigade 5 in March, and neither a significant escalation nor a wider conflict there with the KNU are likely at this time. Sporadic light clashes, however, may occur.



**Figure 1:** Armed incidents from September 2018 to March 2019



**Figure 2:** Townships affected by armed incidents in March 2019



**Figure 3:** Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in March 2019

Meetings	Number
Bago Government and KNU Meeting with Civilians	1
JMC Meeting	5
Meeting between Kachin Baptist Convention and Yunnan Government, China	1
NRPC and KNPP Meeting	1
NRPC and non-NCA-S EAOs Meeting	1
NRPC and RCSS/SSA Meeting	1
Peace Commission and KNPP Informal Meeting	1
Peace Commission and KNU Informal Meeting	1
Peace Commission and PPST Informal Meeting	1
PPST Meeting	1
RCSS CEC Meeting	1
Tatmadaw and KNPP Meeting	1
Tatmadaw and RCSS/SSA Meeting	1
Total Number of Meetings	17

**Figure 4:** *Significant meetings related to the peace process in February 2019*

Incident Type	Number
Armed Clashes	103
IED	44
Total	147

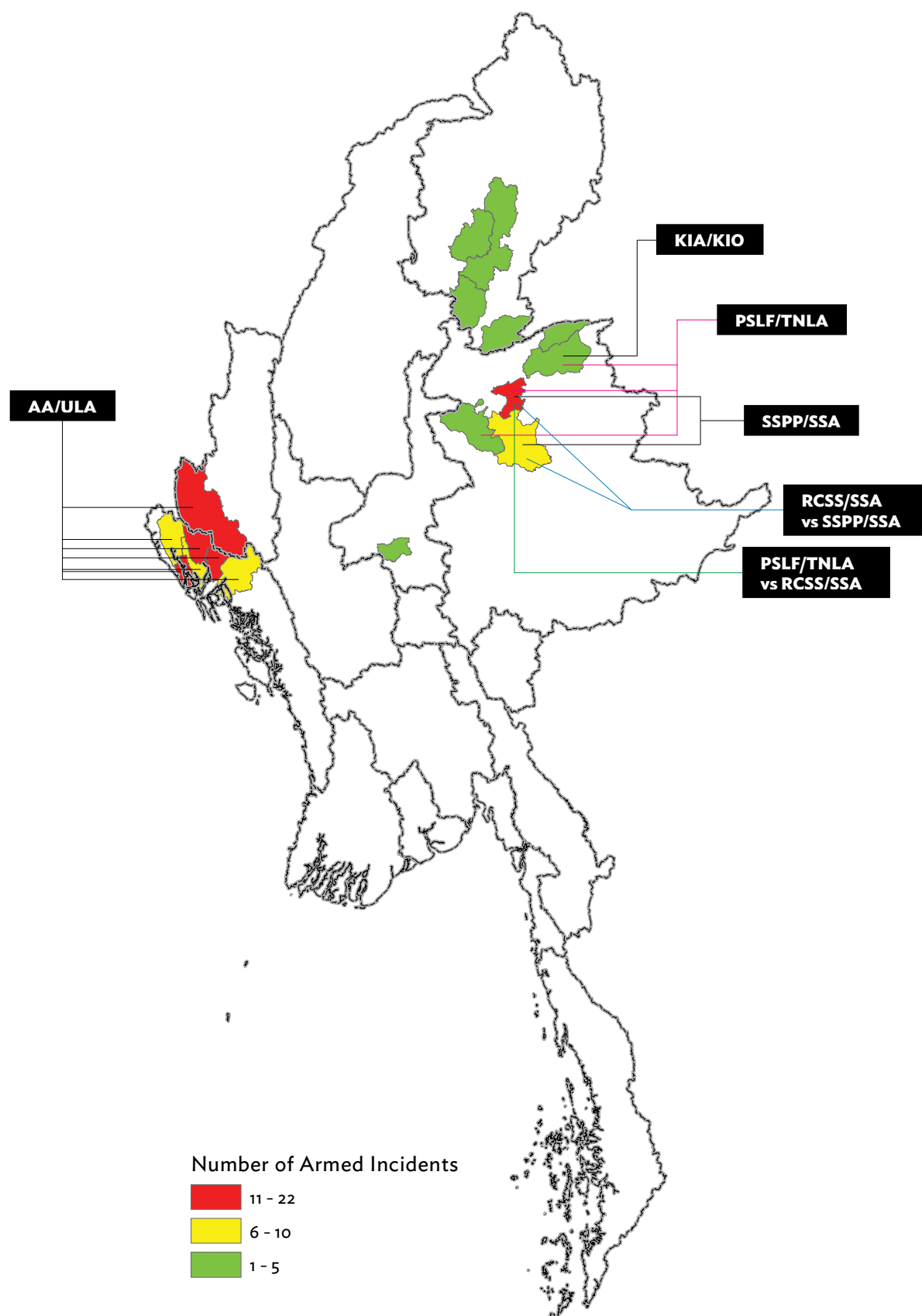
**Figure 5 :** Armed incidents between the Tatmadaw and AA between January 4 and March 28 2019, according to the government

Year	Armed Clash	IED
2015	15	1
2016	26	10
2017	56	5
2018	61	19
2019 (Jan 1 - Mar 24)	97	39

**Figure 6:** Armed incidents between the Tatmadaw and AA according to the Tatmadaw

Target	Killed in Action	Wounded in Action	Arrested	Weapon Seized
Police	27	26		
AA	58		8	22
Civilian	12	20		
Total	97	46	8	22

**Figure 7:** Casualty data and other data related to the conflict between the AA and state security forces from January 4 to March 28 2019, according to the government



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
 EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 8: Armed incidents in March 2019**

## GOVERNMENT

### **Tatmadaw Avoids Casualty Figures in Rakhine, but Government Releases Number**

The Tatmadaw has provided monthly reports about the number of clashes and various violations allegedly carried out by the EAOs since the beginning of 2019. During its latest press conference in March, the Tatmadaw discussed the situation in Rakhine State and released data about clashes with the AA.<sup>26</sup> Notably, the Tatmadaw stated that the mines and IEDs used by the AA are becoming more powerful. It also said that weapons captured from AA fighters were brand new and originated from a neighboring country, but did not specify which one.

The Tatmadaw, however, once again left out detailed information about overall AA casualties. Although it claimed to have clashed with the AA 97 times, it only mentioned a total of five AA casualties since it last discussed the issue. In January, the Tatmadaw claimed to have captured 13 AA bodies

in a single engagement, and during the latest press conference the Tatmadaw spokespersons hinted that the military's fighting capacity is at an all-time high. In other words, the Tatmadaw has suggested that it is capable of killing large numbers of AA fighters but has refrained from releasing detailed information about AA casualties. The Tatmadaw is likely withholding this information to avoid triggering additional anger or ethnic animosity among the Rakhine population.

In contrast to the Tatmadaw's approach, the government spokesperson U Zaw Htay released more detailed casualty figures for Rakhine State during his press conference on March 29. According to U Zaw Htay, 58 AA fighters have been killed in Rakhine State since January 4, 2018. It is unclear, however, if the government's data is comprehensive.

26 Mizzima. (2019, March 25). ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်အတွင်း ဖြစ်ပွားနေသည့် အခြေအနေများနှင့် ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေးဆောင်ရွက်ချက်များအပေါ် တပ်မတော်သတင်းစာ ရှင်းလင်းပွဲ. [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/MizzimaDaily/videos/576615836159541/>

# NCA-SIGNATORIES

## PPST Continues Informal Engagement in Search of Solution

The Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) held an internal meeting in Chaing Mai, Thailand on March 5 and 6.<sup>27</sup> According to RCSS 2<sup>nd</sup> Secretary Colonel Sai Nguen, the meeting covered ways to restructure the PPST, move forward with the current impasse in the peace process, and engage with the non-signatories of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).<sup>28</sup> The PPST plans to hold a summit in May where it will restructure its leadership.<sup>29</sup>

The 10 ethnic NCA-Signatories (NCA-S) then held an informal meeting with the government's Peace Commission (PC) in Chiang on March 9. Both sides reiterated their commitments to finding a way to restart the formal peace process.<sup>30</sup> Both sides are still exploring ways to reach an agreement and will likely continue to meet informally in the coming weeks or months.

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- 27 Min Naing Soe. (2019, March 05). NCA signatories hold PPST meeting in Chiang Mai. Eleven. <https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/nca-signatories-hold-ppst-meeting-in-chaing-mai>
  - 28 Hom Hurng. (2019, March 07). RCSS: 'PPST should be reformed'. Shan Herald Agencies for News. <https://english.shannews.org/archives/18705>
  - 29 NCA-signatory EAOs to hold summit in May. (2019, March 11). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/nca-signatory-eaos-hold-summit-may>
  - 30 KNPP agrees to meet NRPC, Tatmadaw negotiation team. (2019, March 12). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/knpp-agrees-meet-nrpc-tatmadaw-negotiation-team>

# NON-SIGNATORIES

## Non-Signatories Meet Government; KNPP Considers NCA

The NRPC sent an invitation on March 13 to the seven members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) to attend talks in Nay Pyi Taw on March 21.<sup>31</sup> According to MIPS sources, only mid-level delegates from both sides attended the meeting. Although no substantive agreement was reached, both sides demonstrated a willingness to de-escalate tensions and agreed to meet frequently in the future.<sup>32</sup>

The KNPP held an informal meeting with the PC in Chiang Mai on March 10 where it agreed to discuss the signing of the NCA at the NRPC.<sup>33</sup> It then met with the Tatmadaw's negotiation team on March 18 in Nay Pyi Taw, and the two sides reportedly discussed the possibility of the KNPP signing the NCA by June 30.<sup>34</sup> However, the KNPP may not sign the NCA in the near future.

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- 31 Nyein Nyein., & Kyaw Kha. (2019, March 15). Gov't invites 8 armed groups to peace talks next week. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/govt-invites-8-armed-groups-peace-talks-next-week.html>
- 32 Win Ko Ko Latt. (2019, March 21). Myanmar armed groups agree to keep talking with government over cease-fire pact. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-armed-groups-agree-to-keep-talking-03212019164228.html>
- 33 KNPP agrees to meet NRPC, Tatmadaw negotiation team. (2019, March 12). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/knpp-agrees-meet-nrpc-tatmadaw-negotiation-team>
- 34 Win Htut. (Ed.). (2019, March 21). KNPP discuss NCA with Tatmadaw. Eleven. <https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/knpp-discusses-nca-signing-with-tatmadaw>

### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING APRIL 2019

|

VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(5)

## OVERVIEW

- Intensive fighting continued across Rakhine State in April, although at a lower frequency than in March. After fending off a major AA attack, the Tatmadaw resumed its offensive activities and conflict will continue to escalate even during rainy season. The AA is likely facing a shortage of ammunition amidst the Tatmadaw's blockade.
- The use of improvised anti-personal mines and anti-vehicle IEDs is on the rise. Civilians are increasingly exposed to mines and unexploded ordinance in northern Rakhine State.
- The Tatmadaw clashed multiple times with both the KIA and TNLA in Shan State, but a major escalation remains unlikely given the Tatmadaw's extension of the ceasefire period.
- No clashes occurred between the RCSS and SSPP-TNLA coalition in April for the first time since July 2018, and intermediaries tried to bring the SSPP and RCSS to the negotiating table.
- A positive meeting with the Northern Alliance led the Tatmadaw to extend its ceasefire period, but little progress toward bilateral ceasefire was achieved. In principle, however, both sides appear to agree that bilateral ceasefires are possible.
- The extension of the ceasefire in the north may allow the Tatmadaw and Northern Alliance to maintain the trend of reduced hostilities, at the expense of the AA.
- A meeting between the KNU and NRPC failed to produce any substantive outcome and the peace process will remain frozen until the EAOs make decisions at their upcoming summit scheduled for the third week of May.

## SECURITY

### Nationwide Clashes Decline Due to Fewer Incidents in Rakhine State

At least 51 armed clashes and 13 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in April for a total of 64 armed incidents nationwide, just over half the total in March, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> The major decrease in overall armed incidents was primarily due to less frequent, although still intense, clashes between the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA) in Rakhine State. For the first time since July 2018, no clashes were reported between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and coalition forces of the

Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF) and Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA). Armed incidents took place across 16 townships in April, with Mrauk U and Buthidaung townships in Rakhine State experiencing the highest number of armed incidents. Fighting also occurred across Shan State, with as many as nine clashes recorded between both the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Tatmadaw and TNLA. Despite those clashes, the overall situation in Shan State remains relatively stable while the security situation in Kachin shows signs of improving.

### Heavy Fighting Continues in Rakhine State After Volatile Month

Heavy and intense fighting across northern Rakhine State continued in April but at a lower frequency than in March due to a change in tactics and logistical constraints on both sides. In early April, the AA attempted to maintain its counteroffensive by mobilizing large numbers of troops to attack Tatmadaw columns and bases. In response, the Tatmadaw was forced to slow its offensive actions and assume a more defensive posture to guard major towns and bases. In the interim, the Tatmadaw continued with use of heavy firepower to target AA positions deep within the jungle before once again resuming offensive operations with ground units. In early April, the AA's websites were attacked and

downed, leading to a period of quiet from the information-savvy Ethnic Armed Organization (EAO). The AA's release of information related to armed clashes was overall less frequent compared to other months.

According to MIPS sources, the AA planned a major offensive on April 10, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. In an interview with RFA published on March 23, Nyo Twan Awng, AA's second in command, announced that the AA would bring "a big present" to the Rakhine people to mark the occasion.<sup>2</sup> In early April, the Tatmadaw hastily drew out its Light Infantry Division (LID) 55 from Pal-

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

2 RFA Burmese. (2019, March 23). AA နယ်စပ်တိုင်းရင်းမြို့များတွင် အင်အားစုကြီးများ အောင်နိုင်ရေး စီစဉ်နေကြောင်း အကြောင်းအရာများ. [Video]. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKekQ2is\\_7g&fbclid=IwAR2yvUN74f8Met7mRKxmW0QQAUyzUUxIPY\\_F8RURgzVYCE5iv9WDvcLLKIY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKekQ2is_7g&fbclid=IwAR2yvUN74f8Met7mRKxmW0QQAUyzUUxIPY_F8RURgzVYCE5iv9WDvcLLKIY)

etwa Township, Chin State, to guard vulnerable towns and bases in Mrauk U and the surrounding townships. Then, on the night of April 9, the AA attacked a police base and a temporary Tatmadaw position on the outskirts of Mrauk U Town. As many as 500 AA fighters, many from nearby villages, took part in the attack. Sources also said that many of the AA troops did not have weapons but carried large bags to collect materials once the government bases were overrun. The Tatmadaw's mobilization of LID 55 is likely what prevented the AA from overrunning the Tatmadaw and police positions in Mrauk U.

In March, the Tatmadaw responded to the AA's counteroffensive by attacking AA units with heavy firepower and by pursuing retreating AA units into the jungle. The Tatmadaw, however, was forced to curb its offensive actions in April and reposition its mobile strike units to guard bases and towns. In lieu, the Tatmadaw deployed aerial weapons systems, such as 122MM Multiple Rocket Launcher Systems (MRLS), to target AA positions in the jungle.<sup>3</sup> Some sources also suggested that the Tatmadaw may have deployed guided munitions from fighter jets.

After guarding against AA attacks and targeting AA troop concentrations with heavy weapons, the Tatmadaw again shifted into an offensive mode by sending its units into the jungle to root out AA positions. In Paletwa Township, the Tatmadaw deployed LID 77, its oldest assault brigade, likely to seal off the border with Bangladesh

and India. The Tatmadaw likely deployed three new divisions in April and early May to Rakhine State to accelerate its offensive. The Tatmadaw, however, did not pull out LIDs deployed in its operation areas of Kachin and Shan states. Those divisions deployed in Rakhine State appear to be from the reserve forces.

The Tatmadaw, aided by police units, raided villages after armed clashes with AA fighters who had withdrawn into nearby villages. Sources told MIPS that many wounded AA fighters were treated in the wooded areas close to villages and were moved when the Tatmadaw soldiers advanced. The AA still enjoys significant public support and assistance to its fighters. Compared to Tatmadaw's raids in Karen State in the 2000s, those conducted in Rakhine State appear more measured. There has also been frequent use of police forces in cases involving the arrests of AA suspects.

The Tatmadaw will likely continue its momentum by deploying heavy firepower and conducting clearance operations in remote areas of northern Rakhine State. Fighting will likely continue to intensify, even as monsoon season approaches, since many of the Tatmadaw divisions there were trained to conduct operations in the rainy season.

In early April, the AA's two websites, Arakan Army and ULA Today, were subjected to Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks and taken offline. The AA then attempted to set up another website,

3 Aung Nyein Chan. (2019, April 11). Tatmadaw uses multiple rocket launcher system against Arakan army. Myanmar Now. <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/tatmadaw-uses-multiple-rocket-launcher-system-against-arakan-army>

but the new site was also downed. The AA's second attempt to establish a new website was later successful, but much of its previously posted information is now missing. Following the incident, the AA also did not post on its social media accounts, and the information uploaded to its new website is less detailed than usual. The AA may have had trouble keeping up with its online content in the wake of the cyber-attacks. AA leaders who are regularly active on social media, however, also released less information about the clashes through their personal social media accounts. In contrast, the Tatmadaw released more than 10 news updates

about the conflict in Rakhine State in April, a higher number than usual.

According to MIPS sources, the use of improvised land mines and anti-vehicle IEDs is quite frequent in northern Rakhine state. Anti-personal IEDs planted in the soil also have a similar design to those used in Karen State. Sources within the security forces suggested that some individuals from the DKBA-splinter group might be assisting the AA with the use of IEDs. Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) now pose a major risk to civilians in northern Rakhine State.

## Tatmadaw Clashes with KIA and TNLA in Northern Shan State

The Tatmadaw clashed as many as nine times each with both the KIA and TNLA across northern Shan State in April. In addition to several minor clashes with the KIA, the Tatmadaw attacked and occupied multiple KIA positions in both Muse and Kutkai Townships, charging that the KIA encroached on new territory. Meanwhile, fighting between the Tatmadaw and TNLA assumed its normal characteristics, with short engagements near population centers, the highway, and in remote mountain villages. Despite the clashes in April, the overall trend in reduced hostilities throughout the north may continue following the Tatmadaw's extension of the ceasefire period.

Fighting between the Tatmadaw and KIA resumed on April 18 as the Tatmadaw attacked the KIA's Battalion 9, Brigade 6 in Muse Township, Shan State. Then, on April 20, the Tatmadaw launched an assault on multiple posts belonging to the KIA's Battalion 36, Brigade 6 in Muse Township.<sup>4</sup> The Tatmadaw reportedly attacked the Battalion 36 positions with heavy artillery

and from multiple directions. The battle lasted three days and ended after the Tatmadaw occupied as many as seven KIA posts. On April 25, the Tatmadaw also attacked and occupied a KIA training camp in Kutkai Township. The remaining clashes in April were short, low-intensity engagements.

Fighting between the Tatmadaw and TNLA resumed its typical nature in April. On April 7 and 8, the Tatmadaw and TNLA clashed in Namtu Township near an area highly contested in the inter-EAO conflict between the TNLA-SSPP coalition and RCSS. The Tatmadaw has contained spillover from the inter-EAO fighting by periodically engaging the TNLA and SSPP since the conflict took off in mid-2018. In Kutkai Township, the Tatmadaw engaged the TNLA near a large population center and near the major highway to Muse. Other clashes in April in or near remote mountain villages were short in duration. Neither side appeared to launch any major attack on the other, and at the time of writing, no major escalation occurred.

4 အစိုးရတပ်မတော်နဲ့ KIA စစ်ရေးတင်းမာ. (2019, April 22). RFA. [https://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/kia-and-govt-army-attack-04222019093809.html?fbclid=IwAR08OqEJvVnBLf9Z\\_4lXo1S2LvvLSUMVJdVwHBX2V3YJLbubtYNxwj1VZB4](https://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/kia-and-govt-army-attack-04222019093809.html?fbclid=IwAR08OqEJvVnBLf9Z_4lXo1S2LvvLSUMVJdVwHBX2V3YJLbubtYNxwj1VZB4)

Despite the clashes, the meeting between the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) and Northern Alliance on April 30, and the Tatmadaw's subsequent extension of the ceasefire period, may likely allow both sides to prolong the current trend of reduced hostilities in northern Shan State. In Kachin State, the security situation remains stable and even shows signs of improving. In Nam San Yang, Waingmaw Township, for example, the government is planning to reopen the

schools forced shut by the conflict last year.<sup>5</sup> Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) began returning to Nam San Yang in March 2019.<sup>6</sup> The NRPC and the Kachin Humanitarian Concern Committee (KHCC), a coalition of Kachin religious and civil society organizations, recently agreed to a five-point plan to facilitate IDP resettlement which, considering the KHCC's proximity to the KIA, demonstrates that the conflict in Kachin State is de-escalating.

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5 Content no longer available. Original accessed at [http://burmese.kachinnews.com/news/2105-nam-san-yang-7?fbclid=IwAR0VMoY0UFN2x5iWDC39kLdbX7uzZSHYx8wcsi9\\_lw7KKPCjfrv8ORn4SH4](http://burmese.kachinnews.com/news/2105-nam-san-yang-7?fbclid=IwAR0VMoY0UFN2x5iWDC39kLdbX7uzZSHYx8wcsi9_lw7KKPCjfrv8ORn4SH4)

6 Burma army transports 200 IDPs back to Nam San Yan village. (2019, March 08). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/burma-army-transports-200-idps-back-nam-san-yang-village>

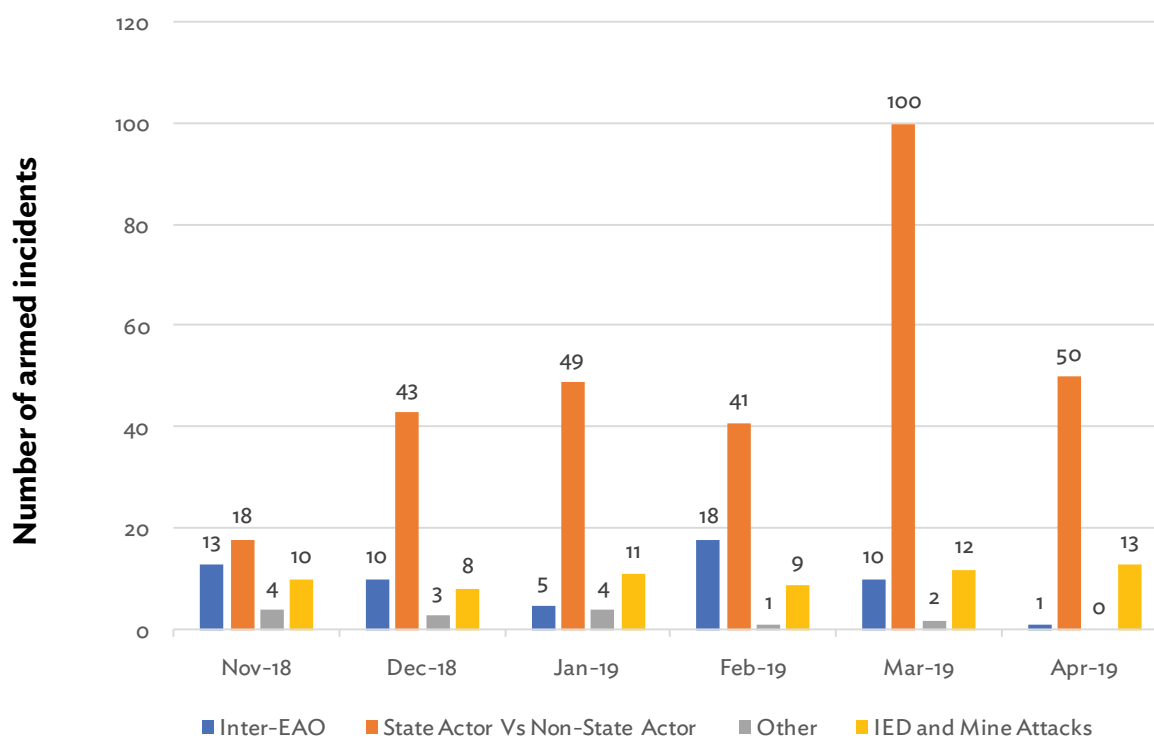
## Inter-EAO Conflict Cools Off

No clashes took place between the RCSS and TNLA-SSPP coalition in April, marking the first clash-free month since the inter-EAO conflict took off in July 2018. The conflict first began decelerating in March after the SSPP and RCSS met and announced an effort to refrain from fighting. Several clashes continued in late March but eventually subsided as troops from both sides withdrew from contested areas and remained in their bases.

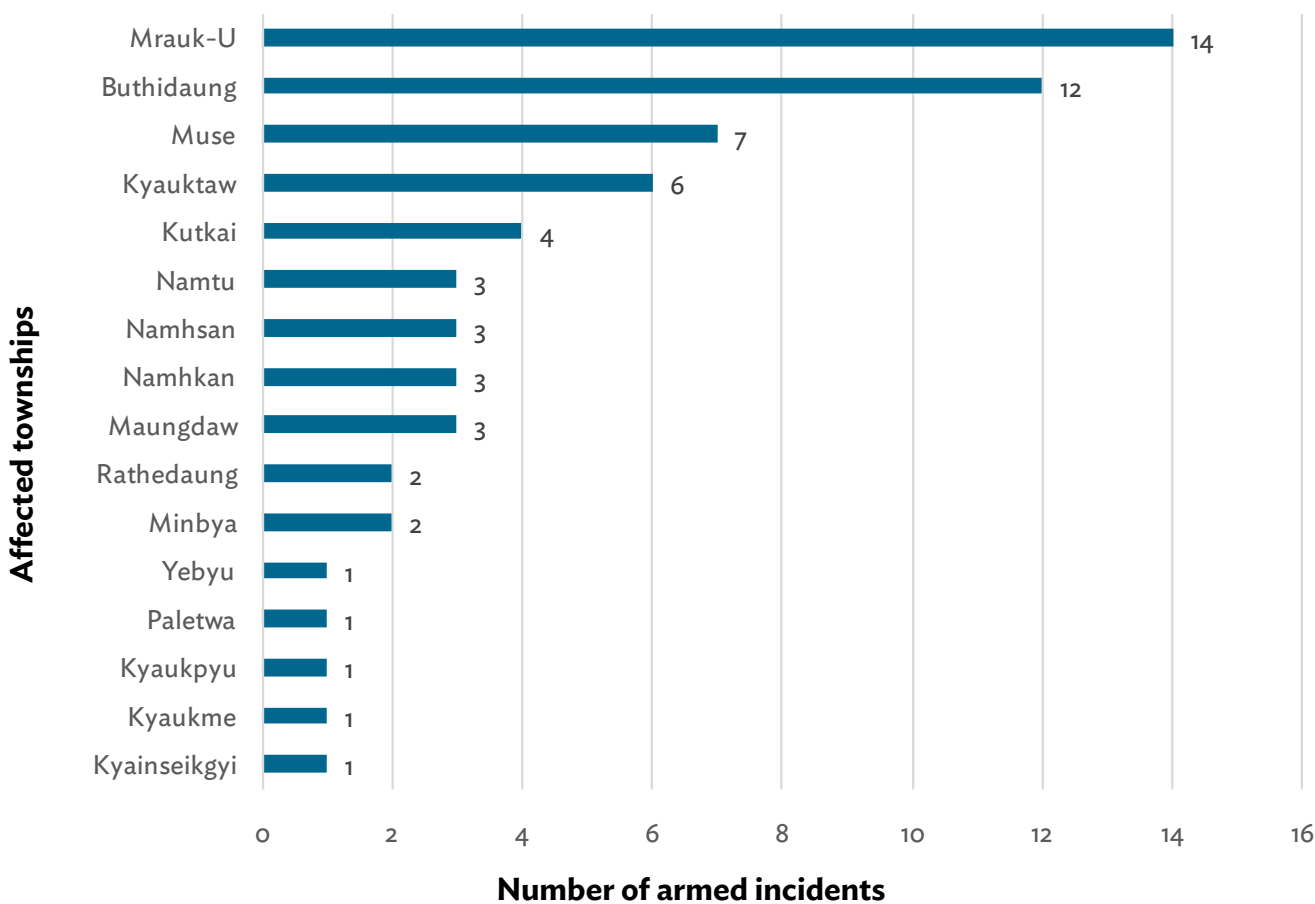
During a meeting with the NRPC in Nay Pyi Taw on March 11 and 12, the RCSS expressed its desire to negotiate with the SSPP before involving either

the government or TNLA in peace talks. Despite its current reluctance to meet with the TNLA, the absence of clashes between the RCSS and TNLA in April suggests that the TNLA is in accordance with the SSPP's desire to solve the conflict through negotiation.

The absence of clashes in April is a positive development and may continue into May so long as all parties refrain from major mobilizations and deployments to contested areas. Nonetheless, the two sides failed to meet in April, and the underlying causes of the conflict have yet to be addressed.

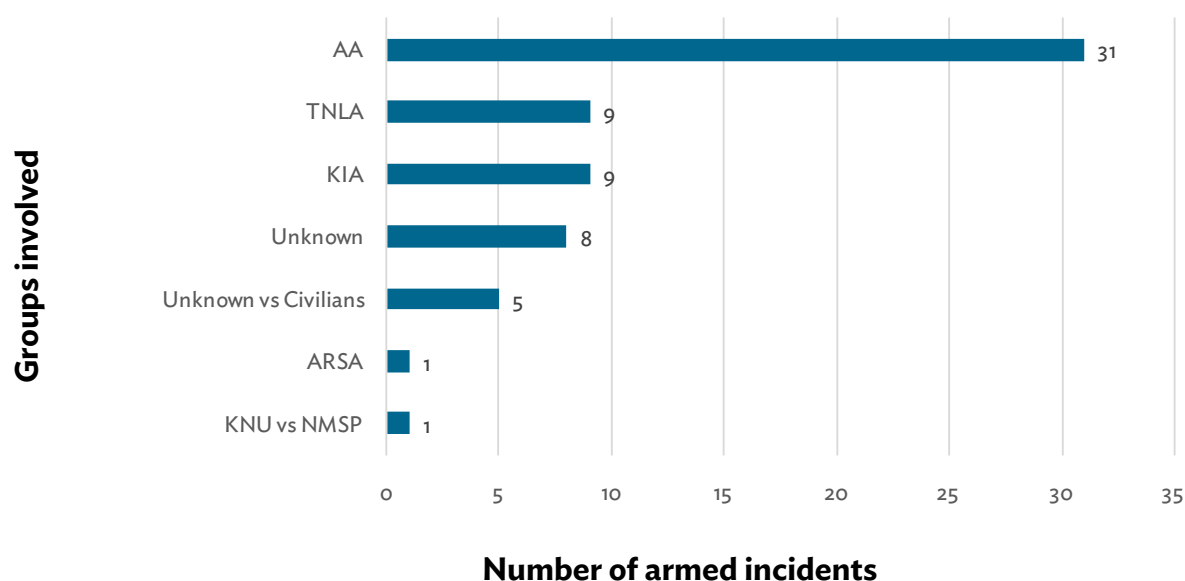


**Figure 1: Armed incidents from November 2018 to April 2019**



**Figure 2: Townships affected by armed incidents in April 2019**



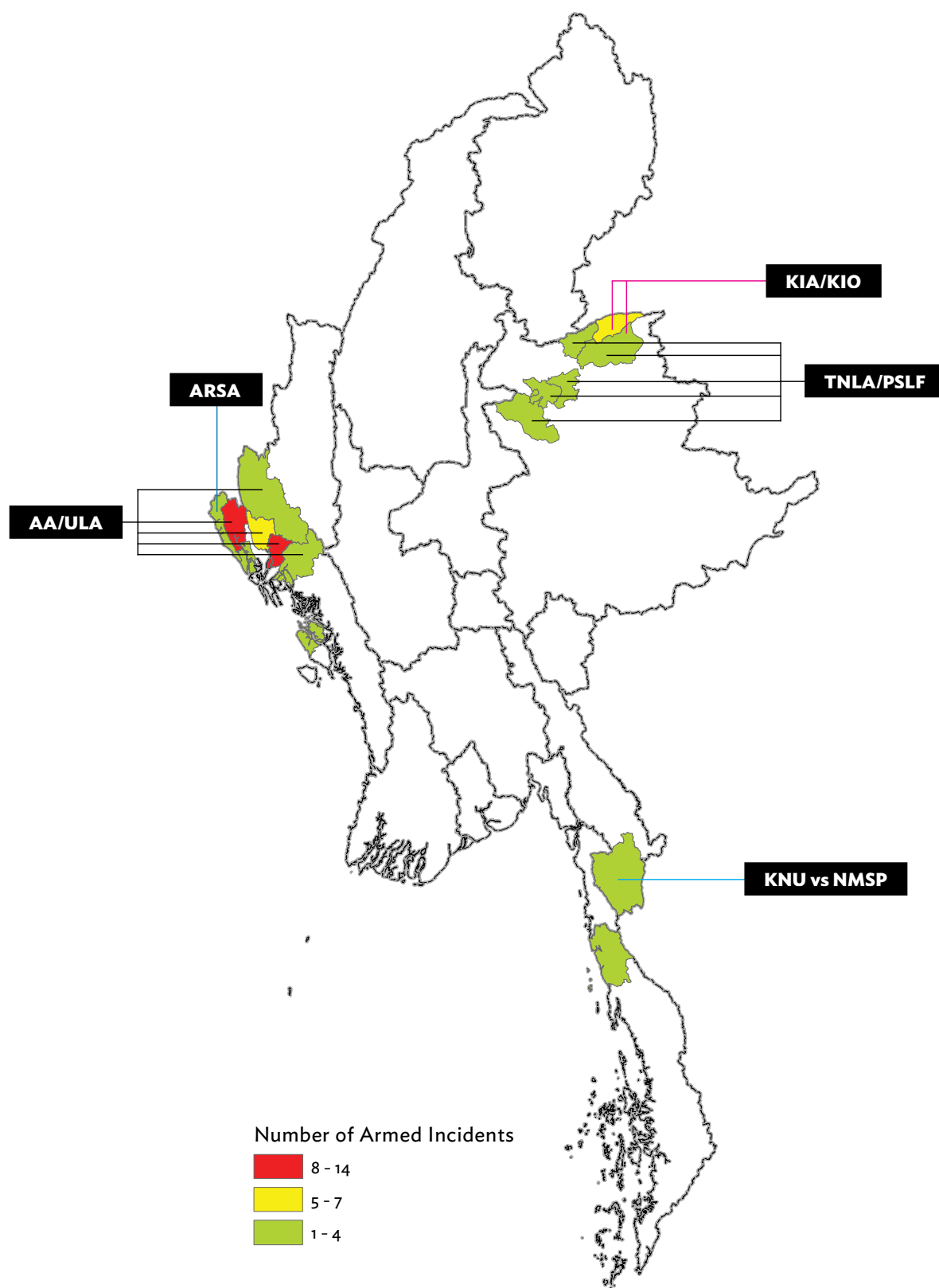


**Figure 3:** Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in April 2019

\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine. EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

Meetings	Number
JMC Meeting	1
KNU and Government Meeting	1
NRPC and KNU Meeting	1
NRPC and Kachin Humanitarian Concern Committee (KHCC) Meeting	1
NPRC and Northern Alliance Meeting	1
NPRC and China's Special Envoy for Asian Affairs Meeting	1
Total Number of Meetings	6

**Figure 4:** Significant meetings related to the peace process in April 2019



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
EOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 6:** *Armed incidents in April 2019*

## GOVERNMENT

### Tatmadaw Extends Ceasefire After Meeting with Northern Alliance

The Tatmadaw extended its unilateral cessation of military activities for two months after a meeting between the NRPC and four Northern Alliance members in Muse, Shan State, on May 30.<sup>7</sup> Despite multiple clashes between the Tatmadaw and both the KIA and TNLA in northern Shan State in April, the extension will likely allow both sides to maintain the current status of reduced hostilities in the north. More work, however, is needed to move all parties toward bilateral ceasefires.

The meeting on April 30 concluded with mixed results. According to MIPS sources, the atmosphere during the meeting was more cordial than the previous discussion held in Kunming, China on February 25, 2019.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite the positive feelings conveyed by participants to the media, the meeting in Muse ended without any concrete steps toward ceasefire.

The KIA appears keener to achieve a ceasefire than its three military partners. The KIA handed a draft bilateral ceasefire agreement to the government three days before the meeting on April 30, but the TNLA, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and AA appeared to have hastily drafted their bilateral ceasefire proposals just prior to the meeting. On April 24, the TNLA and

MNDAA warned that the continued fighting in Rakhine State could lead them to act militarily.<sup>9</sup> The KIA, however, did not sign the joint-statement, suggesting an unwillingness to escalate with the Tatmadaw.

None of the proposals drafted by the Northern Alliance members mentioned a commitment toward the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Both the government and Tatmadaw, however, continue to insist that any bilateral ceasefire agreement include a clause indicating a commitment toward joining the NCA path. At this time, neither the government nor Tatmadaw are likely to accept any bilateral ceasefire agreements without such a clause.

Despite the continued gap over the NCA issue, sources told MIPS that the Tatmadaw decided to extend the ceasefire after noting the positive and cordial exchange during the meeting on April 30. The Tatmadaw's extension may serve as an excuse for the TNLA and MNDAA to avoid taking military action in solidarity with the AA. A major confrontation between the Tatmadaw and TNLA or MNDAA in the next two months may not occur unless the former attempts a major military action in northern Shan State. The relative stability in Kachin State will likely persist.

7 Ye Mon. (2019, May 01). Military extends unilateral ceasefire to June 30 after Muse peace talk. (2019, May 01). Frontier Myanmar. <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/military-extends-unilateral-ceasefire-to-june-30-after-muse-peace-talks>

8 Peace progress: Northern alliance met government representative in Kunming. (2019, March 05). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/peace-process-northern-alliance-met-government-representative-kunming>

9 Content no longer available. Original accessed at <http://box2191.bluehost.com/suspended.page/disabled.cgi/www.pslftnla.org>

The outcome of the meeting also demonstrates the fragility of the Northern Alliance. At the height of the Tatmadaw's offensive against the KIA in May 2018, the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA attacked Tatmadaw units in a display of solidarity with the

KIA. Although the Tatmadaw continues to accelerate its offensive against the AA in Rakhine State, the AA's partners have so far refrained from escalating military tension amid ongoing talks and the Tatmadaw's unilateral ceasefire.

## NCA-SIGNATORIES

### **KNU Meets with NRPC Ahead of Upcoming PPST Summit**

Delegates from the Karen National Union (KNU) met with representatives from the NRPC in Nay Pyi Taw on April 11. The meeting discussed ways to resume the KNU's official participation in the peace process, but sources told MIPS that no decisive decision has yet been made. The two sides will likely continue to meet and explore ways to resume talks, although the frozen state of the

peace process may persist throughout 2019. The EAO-Signatory working groups are meeting in early May to prepare for a summit scheduled to take place from May 14 to 18. The summit will decide the fate of the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) and how the Union Peace Conference — 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC) will move forward before 2020.

#### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING MAY 2019

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VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(6)

## OVERVIEW

- The AA attempted fewer large-scale attacks on Tatmadaw columns in May while the Tatmadaw ramped up counter-insurgency operations with village sweeps. Almost all armed clashes occurred within a three-mile radius from one or more villages in northern Rakhine State. The ongoing dynamics put more civilians at greater risk for harm.
- An EAO summit failed to reach any significant decisions, but the meeting exposed an internal rift after the KNU stated a willingness to quit the PPST. A last-minute intervention by the RCSS chairperson temporarily prevented the collapse of the PPST.
- The Tatmadaw's ceasefire extension in the North appeared firmly in place in May, and a major escalation in Shan or Kachin states remains unlikely at this time. Meanwhile, the reluctance of the KIA, TNLA, and MNDAA to engage the Tatmadaw in solidarity with the AA has weakened the viability of the military alliance.
- The Tatmadaw, in apparent coordination with India, reportedly attacked the NSCN-K and may continue to exert pressure until the beleaguered group is no longer a significant military threat.
- No clashes were reported between the RCSS and coalition formed by the TNLA and SSPP for a second month. The ceasefire will likely hold so long as all parties remain in their current positions, but the underlying causes of the conflict remain unaddressed.
- A single clash took place between the RCSS and Tatmadaw in May, but both sides considered it minor and there is little risk for escalation.
- Pro-KNU sources accused the Tatmadaw of shooting civilians in Kyaukki Township, Bago Region in May, however MIPS is still verifying the details.

# SECURITY

## Increased Number of Clashes in Rakhine Raises Nationwide Total

At least 79 armed clashes and 13 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in May for a total of 92 armed incidents nationwide, up from 64 in April, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> The total increase was attributable to more frequent clashes between the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA), since the number of clashes in Shan State declined amid the Tatmadaw's unilateral ceasefire extension in the North. Although the Tatmadaw and AA fought nearly every day in May, the clashes were overall shorter and less intense than in previous months. Almost all armed clashes occurred within a three-mile radius of one or more villages in northern Rakhine State. Accordingly,

Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, and Ponnagyun townships in Rakhine State experienced the highest number of armed clashes in May compared to all other townships nationwide. For the second month in a row, no clashes took place between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and the coalition formed by the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF). Only a handful of clashes in Shan State were recorded between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Tatmadaw and TNLA. No clashes were recorded in Kachin State. It appears that the quasi ceasefire in Kachin and Shan states remains in effect.

## AA Carries Out Fewer Large-Scale Attacks as Tatmadaw's Counterinsurgency Intensifies

The AA attempted fewer large-scale attacks on security forces in May, focusing more on ambushes, while the Tatmadaw assumed a classic counterinsurgency approach by conducting exhaustive village sweeps and searching potential AA hideouts in forested areas. Since January 2019, the Tatmadaw has regularly discovered and dismantled AA camps and training grounds hidden in the jungle, but no such incidents were reported in May. Operations targeting AA hideouts and potential bases in the jungle yielded little success because the Tatmadaw did not locate any such bases in northern Rakhine State. The Tatmadaw may have already captured or destroyed many of the AA's camps, and

the ongoing drought conditions in Rakhine State have likely made it more difficult for the AA to find water in the mountainous areas, especially around the Mrauk U and Kyauktaw areas, deepening the Ethnic Armed Organization's (EAO) reliance on villages. The majority of clashes throughout the month occurred near villages, signaling that the AA is primarily operating and receiving logistical support from those villages. The Tatmadaw's widened use of classic counter-insurgency tactics and the AA's village-based operations will increase the risk for harm to civilians and consequently intensify Rakhine animosity toward the Tatmadaw and government. The ongoing conflict will also con-

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

tinue to wreak havoc on the region's economy and development.

While the number of clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw increased in April, the fighting was less intense since the AA appeared to launch only one major attack on security forces. Instead, the AA carried out numerous smaller-scale ambushes before retreating to nearby villages to mingle among civilians. On May 4, for example, the AA launched a sophisticated ambush on a Tatmadaw convoy in Mrauk U Township, cutting off the last vehicle from the others. On May 26, the AA ambushed Tatmadaw soldiers crossing a river between Kyauktaw and Paletwa Townships. Two Tatmadaw majors, both the commander and deputy commander of their battalion, were killed when an RPG struck their boat, according to MIPS sources.

The majority of other ambushes failed as the Tatmadaw managed to counterattack, at times killing AA fighters. Near Pyin Chaung village in Buthidaung Township, for instance, the Tatmadaw beat back an AA ambush, forcing the AA to leave behind five dead fighters. AA fighters are trained to remove their dead and usually try very hard to do so. A MIPS source also described an instance in which retreating AA soldiers left behind supplies, including lunch packs containing a variety of meals, suggesting that multiple individual households from nearby villages had prepared the lunches for the soldiers.

In the months preceding May, the AA mobilized large contingents of fighters to launch heavy attacks on Tatmadaw columns. The tactic left concentrated numbers of AA fighters exposed to heavy Tatmadaw artillery and airstrikes. The Tatmadaw's sustained use of heavy firepower might have prevented or deterred the AA from launching such frequent large-scale attacks in May. On May 12, the AA launched a limited ambush in southern Rakhine State for the second time. The AA may try to open a front in southern Rakhine State to relieve Tatmadaw pressure in the north. Public support for the AA in southern Rakhine State, however, is less significant than in the north.

The Tatmadaw is also sustaining losses. Based on information from various sources, MIPS estimates that at least 15 Tatmadaw soldiers were killed in northern Rakhine and southern Chin states in May. Sources also said that a number of Tatmadaw soldiers suffered from heat stroke due to extreme weather conditions.

The Tatmadaw conducted raids on multiple villages suspected of harboring AA fighters, especially after fighting took place nearby. On April 30, the Tatmadaw entered Kyauk Tan village in Rathedaung Township, Rakhine State to search for suspected fighters. The soldiers then detained 275 men between the ages of 15 and 50.<sup>2</sup> Two days later, media reported that six of the detained men were killed and another eight were wounded.<sup>3</sup> Rakhine nationalists, human rights advocates, and

2 Myanmar army rounds up hundreds of Rakhine villagers for questioning. (2019, May 01). RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/rakhine-villages-05012019152334.html>

3 Khin Khin Ei., & Wai Mar Tun. (2019, May 02). Myanmar army kills six detained Rakhine villagers and offers 'Impossible' explanation. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-army-kills-six-detained-rakhine-villagers-05022019164221.html>



other members of the international community immediately decried the killings, accusing the Tatmadaw of arbitrary arrest and execution. The Tatmadaw explained that the detainees attacked the security forces, prompting the soldiers and police to fire upon the crowd as a last resort.

A source on the ground in northern Rakhine State told MIPS that a man with mental-illness was among the 275 detainees. At 02:00 on the morning of May 2, the man became upset and began shouting, causing a commotion in the crowd. The Tatmadaw and police fired into the crowd as some began to run. Four detainees managed to escape, according to the same source.

Conflict dynamics on the ground are putting civilians increasingly at risk of serious harm or death. First, clashes that occur near villages expose civilians to stray munitions and Unexploded Ordinance (UXO).<sup>4</sup> On May 11, a 12-year-old student was killed when she came in contact with an unexploded artillery shell in Kyauktaw Township. There has also been a steady rise in the number of civilians killed by mines and IEDs. On May 3, a mine killed a man in Mrauk U Township, and on May 21 two ethnic Mro men were wounded by a mine in Kyauktaw Township. According to MIPS sources, roadside IEDs are also increasingly common.

On May 31, a bus carrying 44 passengers along the Yangon-Sittwe road in Myebon Township triggered an IED as it pulled over to let another vehicle pass. No one was injured.

Targeted killings also persist. In Rathedaung Town, the son of a Tatmadaw soldier from Battalion 536 was murdered on May 16. On May 20, a young man who had reportedly defected from the AA was allegedly captured and hauled off by AA fighters. More arrests, disappearances, and killings across northern Rakhine State are likely.<sup>5</sup> According to government spokesperson U Zaw Htay, a total of 20 civilians have been killed and another 43 wounded during the past five months of fighting between the AA and security forces.<sup>6</sup> On June 6, the RFA reported that 54 civilians were killed and another 100 wounded during the course of the conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Villagers are also being subjected to detention and severe restrictions. The AA's presence among villagers makes it more difficult to discern fighters from civilians, and the Tatmadaw has responded to this by conducting more rigorous household checks and interrogations of fighting-age men as well as people suspected of harboring or aiding the AA. In May, Amnesty International accused the Tatmadaw of "war crimes and other human rights violations"

4 Moe Myint. (2019, June 03). Five Civilians killed by artillery shelling in N. Rakhine. (2019, June 03). The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/five-civilians-confirmed-dead-rakhine-rescue-team.html>

5 Missing villagers still a mystery after four months. (2019, May 27). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/missing-villagers-still-mystery-after-four-months#.XOyYIkJQc8Y.twitter>

6 Nan Lwin. (2019, May 31). 20 civilians killed in clashes between army, AA since January, Gov't says. (2019, May 31). The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/20-civilians-killed-clashes-army-aa-since-january-govt-says.html>

7 Kyaw Zaw Win., & Thant Zin Oo. (2019, June 04). Arakan army soldiers stop boats, seize rice Myanmar's Chin state. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/rice-06042019165613.html>

The prolonged conflict between the AA and Tatmadaw has unsurprisingly caused negative economic consequences for the region. In Rakhine State, the year's overall rice production was severely reduced, preventing growers from exporting rice to Bangladesh and China.<sup>11</sup> In Paletwa Township,

- 8 Myanmar: Military commits war crimes in latest operation in Rakhine state. (2019, May 28). Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.ca/news/%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8Bmyanmar-military-commits-war-crimes-latest-operation-rakhine-state>
- 9 Army rice restrictions add to suffering of Paletwa villagers, IDP. (2019, May 29). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/army-rice-restrictions-add-suffering-paletwa-villagers-idp?fbclid=IwAR2qORX-QpVKITf7ozv2tS7W01SJ5E5hY-1ijNLbsX2SlSfzwjKcQYVsrG#XO4AXoxHh3s.facebook>
- 10 Chin Human Rights Organization. (2019, May 24). Tatmadaw invites widespread forced labour demands on Chin civilians in effort to keep light infantry division stocked with food supplies. <https://www.facebook.com/ChinHumanRightsOrganization/posts/2392326954152169>
- 11 Arakan state's rice output decreases this year (DMG). (2019, May 21). BNI Multimedia Group. [https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/arakan-states-rice-output-decreases-year-dmg#.XONrH\\_agAWE.twitter](https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/arakan-states-rice-output-decreases-year-dmg#.XONrH_agAWE.twitter)
- 12 Steel for Kalandan bridge deemed unusable. (2019, May 27). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/steel-kalandan-bridge-deemed-unusable#.XOtuf30kK8s.twitter>

## Ceasefire Largely Holds in the North

The Tatmadaw's unilateral cessation of military activities in the north remained firmly in place in May, with only a handful of minor incidents between security forces and the TNLA and KIA in Shan State. On May 1, for example, the KIA attempted to take back a temporary camp in Muse Township that it had lost the previous month. The attack failed. On May 8 and 9, the KIA and Tatmadaw encountered one another in Mongmit Township, leading to several bouts of gunfighting. The Tatmadaw and TNLA clashed six times in May, but four of the clashes were confined to

Namhsan Township, Shan State. All of the clashes were minor and short in duration. No clashes were reported in Kachin State, where the security situation continues to show signs of improvement.<sup>13</sup>

At the time of writing in early June, reports indicate that the Tatmadaw is shelling a KIA position in Hpakant Township, Kachin State. Despite this, a major escalation in Kachin or Shan State remains unlikely while the Tatmadaw's ceasefire is in place, but sporadic clashes may continue.

## Tatmadaw Exerts More Pressure on the NSCN-K

The Tatmadaw continued to apply military pressure on the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K), with Indian media reporting Tatmadaw raids on two NSCN-K camps in the remote borderlands of Sagaing Region.<sup>14</sup> MIPS was able to verify that at least one clash took place between the Tatmadaw and NSCN-K on May 16. The Tatmadaw began pressuring the NSCN-K in January 2018 by seizing its headquarters in Taga, Sagaing Region. It then went on to raid several camps belonging to armed groups from India's northeast that are hosted by the NSCN-K. The move was likely in exchange for India's cooperation in preventing AA infiltration in Indian territory. India has long asked the Tatmadaw to clear out the northeast groups taking sanctuary across the border in Sagaing Region.

In early June, the NSCN-K announced that it will not sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), with NSCN-K spokesperson Joseph Lam Kan deriding the Tatmadaw for pressuring the group to sign.<sup>15</sup> The Tatmadaw's current strategy, however, is likely to apply gradual military pressure until the NSCN-K is no longer militarily significant, rather than pressure the group into joining the NCA path. From India's perspective, the NSCN-K will enjoy more protection if it signs the NCA. The Tatmadaw's desire for India's cooperation in its campaign against the AA may likely compel the Tatmadaw to act in line with India's interests. The Tatmadaw may become more open to the NSCN-K signing the NCA if the latter gives up its demand for a contiguous cross-border Naga homeland.

13 Kachin groups and Gov't make plans to repatriate IDPs. (2019, May 24). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/kachin-groups-and-govt-make-plans-repatriate-idps>

14 Kohima. (2019, May 17). Another setback to Naga rebels in Myanmar; camps busted amid gun-battle. Northeast Now. <https://nenow.in/north-east-news/another-setback-to-naga-rebels-in-myanmar-camps-busted-amid-gun-battle.html>

15 Chit Min Tun. (2019, June 05). Naga armed group refuse to sign NCA. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/naga-armed-group-refuse-sign-nca.html>

## RCSS and SSPP Pledge Ceasefire

The RCSS and SSPP released a joint statement on May 11 reaffirming a ceasefire in Shan State.<sup>16</sup> The statement explained that both sides agreed to cease hostilities upon multiple requests from Shan monks, civilians, civil society members, and political parties. The two sides also agreed to stop slandering one another. A spokesperson from the SSPP said that the

two groups will meet to discuss troop placement. The continued absence of clashes is a positive development, but the underlying causes of the conflict remain. The ceasefire should hold so long as all sides remain at their current positions, but clashes will likely reignite if the TNLA, SSPP, or RCSS take up new positions in northern Shan State once again.

## RCSS and Tatmadaw Clash Once

The RCSS and Tatmadaw clashed in Mong Ping Township, southern Shan State in the middle of May, according to MIPS sources. The incident was regarded as minor by both sides and there is little to no prospect of a wider escalation between the Tatmadaw and RCSS at this time. On May 23, RCSS troops

marched without arms during a ceremony marking the 61<sup>st</sup> Shan Revolution Day at their headquarters in Loi Tai Leng. An RCSS spokesperson said the decision to exclude arms was made in light of the Tatmadaw's extension of the ceasefire period and intended as a demonstration of good will.<sup>17</sup>

16 Zarni Tun. (2019, May 11). SSPP နှင့် RCSS ရှမ်းလက်နက်ကိုင်နှစ်ဖွဲ့အပစ်ရပ်ကြောင်း ပူးတွဲကြေညာချက်ထုတ်ပြန်. RFA. [https://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/sspp-rcss-statement-about-stop-war-05112019083355.html?fbclid=IwAR3W6VWVWURH8QjoPk1\\_L70t0Cn-juP2r\\_HMfWmM1UUNSxo4e47VWMBR2oRcs](https://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/sspp-rcss-statement-about-stop-war-05112019083355.html?fbclid=IwAR3W6VWVWURH8QjoPk1_L70t0Cn-juP2r_HMfWmM1UUNSxo4e47VWMBR2oRcs)

17 Hom Hurng. (2019, May 23). Arms excluded from Shan revolution day parade. Shan Herald Agency for News. <https://english.shannews.org/archives/19161>

## Several Incidents Reported in Kayin State

As many as 19 fighters from a Democratic Karen Buddhist Army Splinter (DKBA-Splinter) led by Saw Hparr Kaw, the son of Bo Na Ma Kyar, clashed with the Border Guard Force (BGF) in Kawkareik Township, Kayin State on May 17. The BGF reportedly captured one fighter and killed another. Then, on the morning of May 18, the BGF reportedly threatened to restrict the movement of yet another DKBA-Splinter as well as local civilians near Mee Zaing Mountain, Hpapun State, if the splinter did not join the BGF. Hours later, the BGF allegedly fired lightweight mortar rounds at the splinter group, injuring a cow. Tensions between the BGF and multiple DKBA-Splinters in Kayin State are not uncommon and sometimes lead to limited episodes.

On May 12 in Kyaukkyi Township, which lies in Bago Region but borders Hpapun Township to the west, a local Tatmadaw Lieutenant Colonel allegedly threatened to shoot local villagers if they were found walking in groups of more than three people. Two days later, the local Tatmadaw unit purportedly fired 60mm mortar rounds to chase away some civilians. Pro-Karen National Union (KNU) sources later accused the Tatmadaw of shooting civilians in the area on May 29, and reports from the ground indicate that a baby was injured by an exploding mortar. MIPS is still in the process of verifying the details surrounding the reported event.

Number of armed incidents

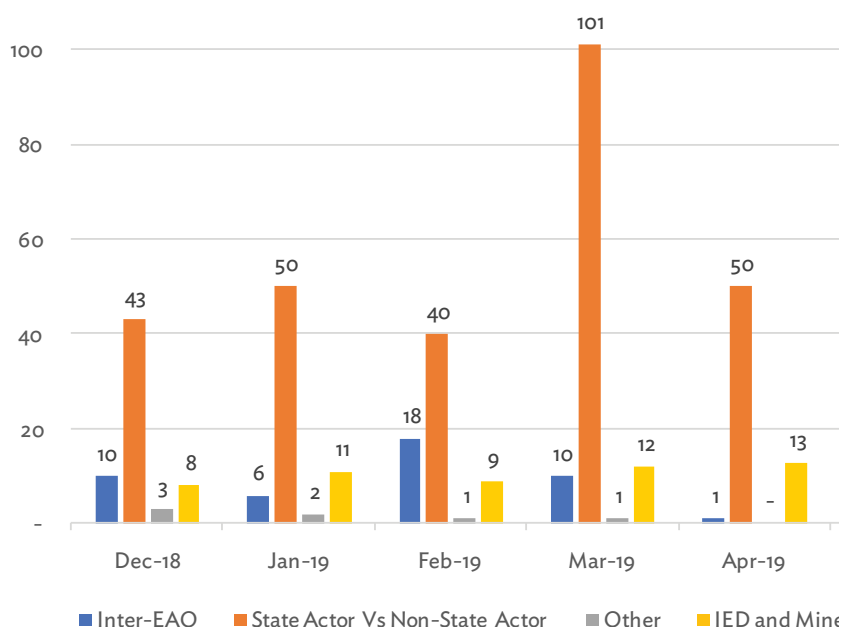
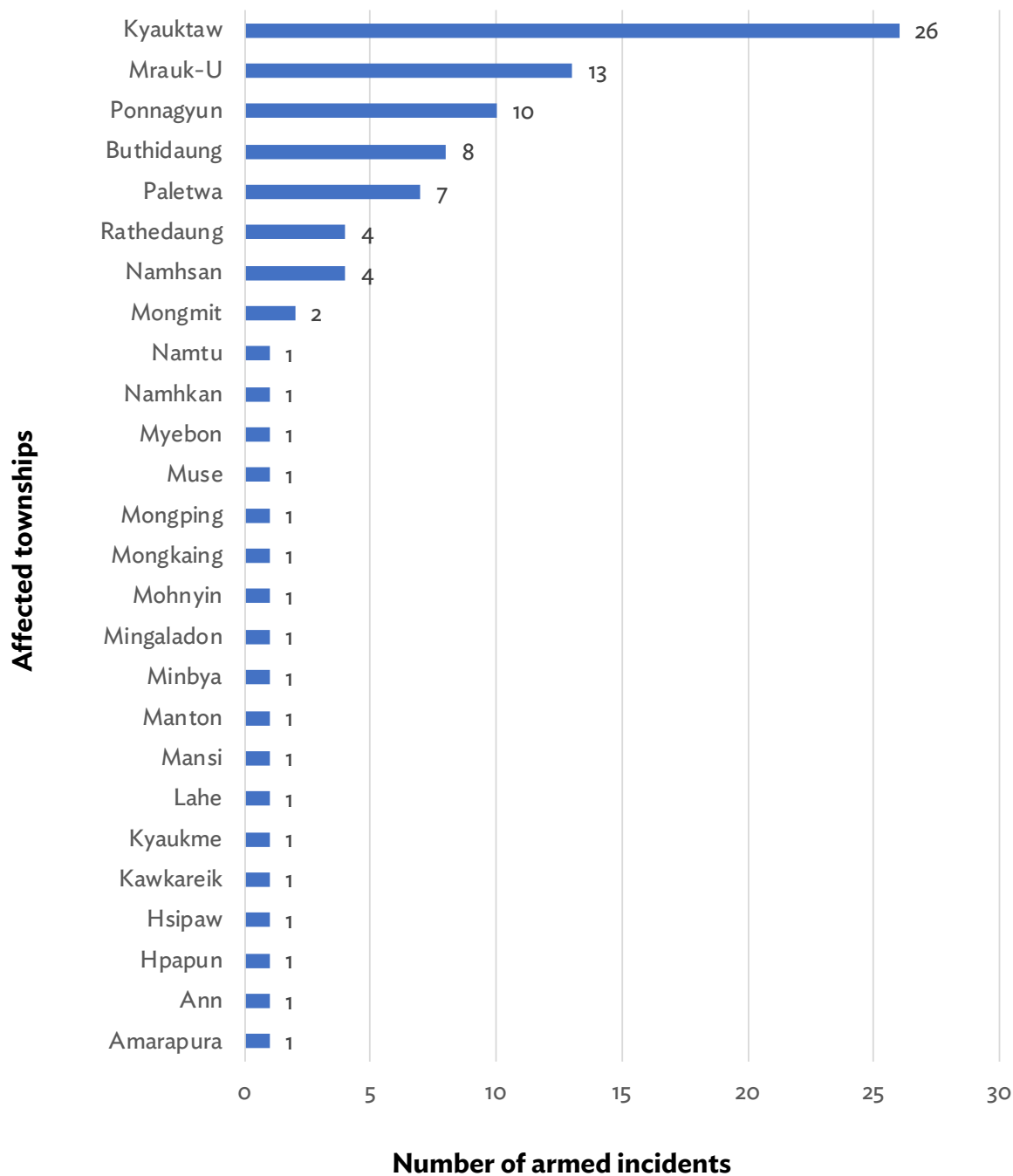
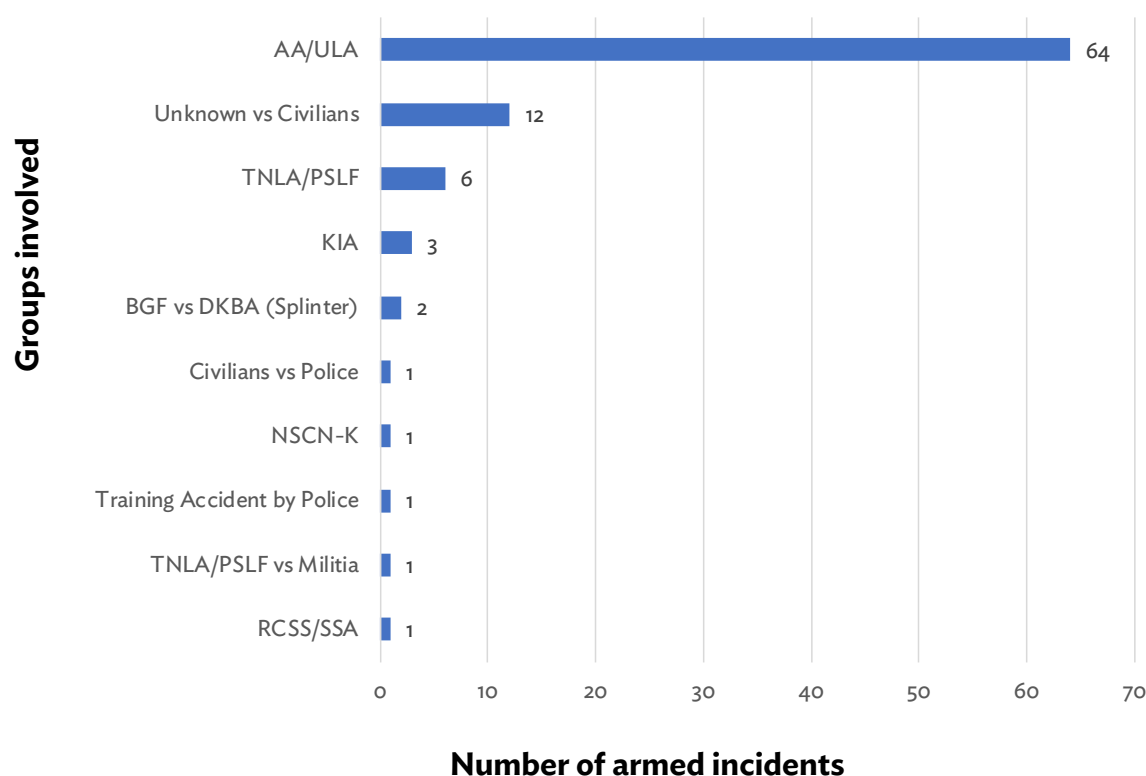


Figure 1: Armed incidents from December 2018 to May 2019



**Figure 2:** Townships affected by armed incidents in May 2019

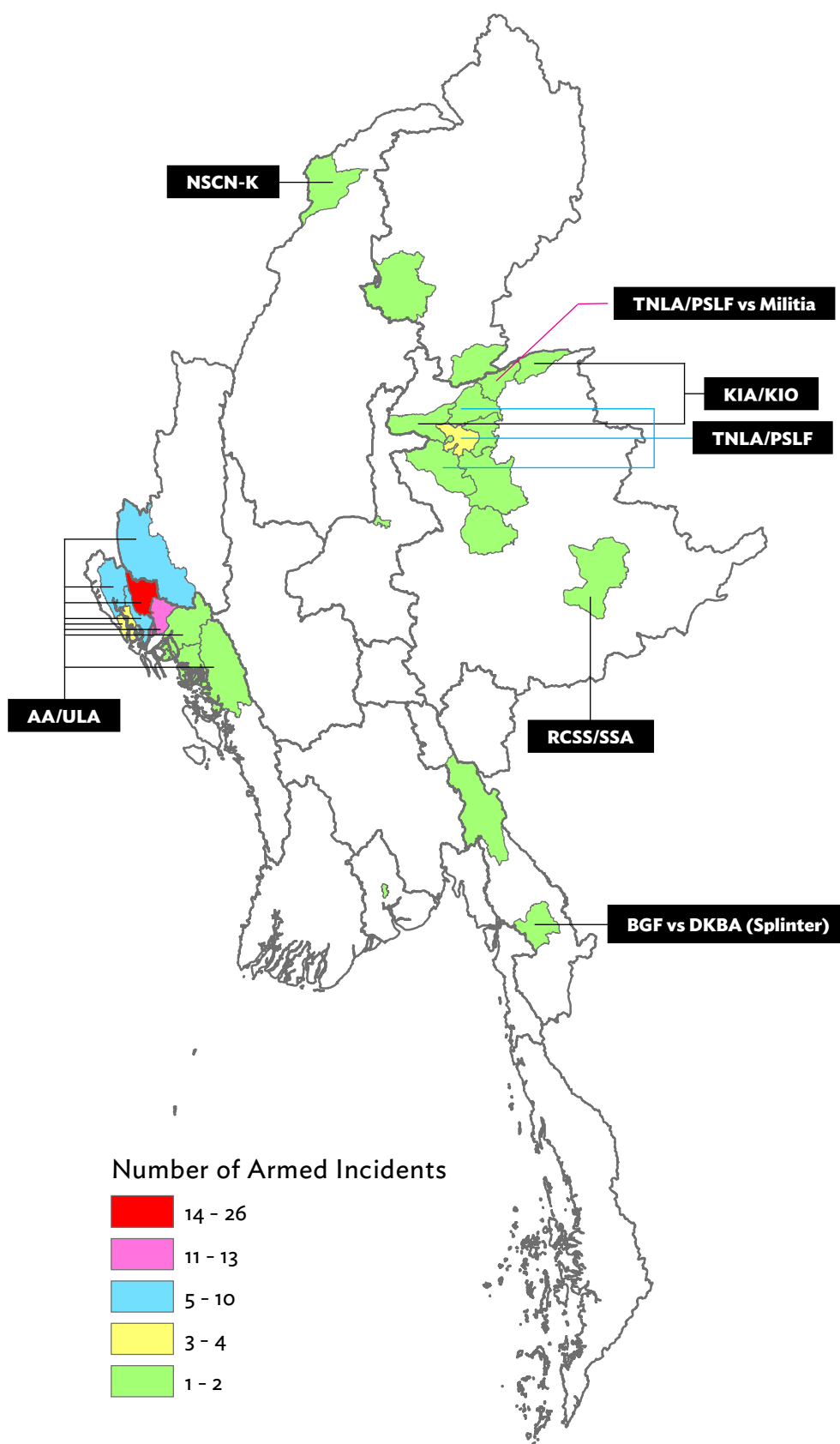


\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine. EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 3: Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in May 2019**

Meetings	Number
JMC Meeting/Workshop	1
KNU and NMSP Meeting	1
Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and KHCC Meeting	1
NCA-S EAO Summit	1
NRPC and KNPP Meeting	1
<b>Total Number of Meetings</b>	<b>5</b>

**Figure 4: Significant meetings related to the peace process in May 2019**



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 5: Armed incidents in May 2019**



# NCA-SIGNATORIES

## EAO Summit Yields No Major Result, but Reveals Internal Discord

The ten ethnic Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) reviewed the structure and role of the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) and discussed ways to resume the peace process during a special summit in Chiang Mai, Thailand from May 14 to 18. The meeting raised the possibility of a new arrangement among the NCA-S, but failed to conclude any substantive agreements. It did, however, display the growing rift between the KNU and other NCA-S. This division was again driven largely by internal KNU dynamics.

The summit began with opening remarks from EAO leaders, including RCSS Chairperson General Yawd Serk, who highlighted the lack of progress achieved since the NCA was signed in 2015.<sup>18</sup> Participants then spent the first three days reviewing the suggestions generated by the working groups. The EAOs were unable to make any decisions in that time.

On the fourth day, KNU lead-representative to the PPST, General Secretary Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo, highlighted the PPST's shortcomings and the failed efforts to reform its structure.<sup>19</sup> The KNU then informed the other NCA-S of its intention to leave the PPST and proposed forming the Peace Process Consultative Meeting (PPCM).<sup>20</sup> The KNU described the PPCM as a coordination body respon-

sible for finding common ground rather than a decision-making body, and said that the PPCM will also include the non-signatories to the NCA.

The KNU's desire to quit the PPST and form the PPCM appears rooted in events surrounding the lead-up and fallout of the special 10+10 meeting among the EAOs, government, and Tatmadaw held in October 2018. Initially, the PPST wavered over whether to join the 10+10 meeting. The decision to attend was ultimately made by the body's then incumbent leader, KNU Chairperson Saw Mutu Say Poe, despite a request from the KNU's Standing Committee to delay the meeting for two weeks. Elements within the KNU dissatisfied with the peace process were dismayed by Saw Mutu Say Poe's unilateral decision to attend the special meeting without delay—a decision they believed was made without their consent. The KNU members in favor of delaying the special 10+10 meeting were further alarmed by the decisions then made during the meeting. These internal dynamics soon led to the KNU's suspension of formal peace talks.

The continuity of these internal KNU dynamics affected the recent EAO summit in Chiang Mai. In the aftermath of the 10+10 summit, the KNU changed its representation in the PPST by replacing Chairperson Saw Mutu Say Poe with General

18 Nang Seng Nom. (2019, May 15). Gen Yawd Serk: No major achievements in three years since NCA. Shan Herald Agency for News. <https://english.shannews.org/archives/19107>

19 Nyein Nyein. (2019, May 21). KNU wants to leave peace steering team. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/knu-wants-leave-peace-steering-team.html>

20 Sai Wansai. (2019, May 19). Fourth NCA- Signatories meeting: Will the PPST become PPCM? Shan Herald Agency for News. <https://english.shannews.org/archives/19130>

Secretary Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo.<sup>21</sup> Some members of the PPST, however, saw KNU Vice-Chairperson Padoh Kwe Htoo Win as a valuable negotiator and introduced a rule allowing each group to invite a special guest. The new rule meant that the vice-chairperson could still attend the meeting and therefore influence the direction of the PPST without the full endorsement of the KNU's Standing Committee.

Consequently, the KNU, as well as the RCSS, felt that it had been forced into certain arrangements and lost its autonomy as a member of the PPST. As a prescription, the KNU proposed the PPCM as a way to continue inter-EAO coordination while affording more autonomy to individual groups. The KNU's proposal, however, was met by opposition from the smaller EAOs concerned that their voices will be downgraded if a shift is made from the PPST to the PPCM. The smaller groups also fear that decisions made at the PPCM will be non-binding. EAO officials skeptical of the PPCM

proposal questioned the practicality and viability of a non-binding, all-inclusive approach in the peace process.

With the PPST on the verge of collapse, RCSS Chairperson General Yawd Serk proposed a last-minute solution to extend the discussion and hold a subsequent summit. General Yawd Serk mediated the situation by supporting the formation of the PPCM while simultaneously suggesting that the PPST continue its work, thereby avoiding a breakdown. The KNU accepted the RCSS Chairperson's suggestion as fair and decided to suspend its resignation from the PPST while continuing with its effort to establish the PPCM.

The summit then concluded with three points: The PPST will continue with its work, a working team will be formed to study the PPCM proposal, and the ongoing peace process should not be disrupted. The EAOs could spend about three months looking at the PPCM proposal.

21 Kyaw Kha. (2019, March 08). Key players in peace process steering team step down. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/key-players-peace-process-steering-team-step.html>

## Northern Alliance and NRPC Fail to Meet

A meeting planned for May 24 and 25 among the Northern Alliance, National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC), and Tatmadaw was cancelled after both sides failed to agree on the location of the meeting.<sup>22</sup> The AA cited concern for the safety of its delegates, but Tatmadaw spokesperson Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun rebuffed the notion, explaining that the Tatmadaw has never harmed an EAO leader during negotiations.<sup>23</sup> At the time of writing, both sides have not yet agreed on a location for the next round of talks.

MIPS also assesses that there is an ongoing uneasiness among the four members of the Northern Alliance. In April, the AA, TNLA, and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) threatened to take joint military action if the Tat-

madaw's offensive against the AA continued, but no such action has occurred despite ongoing clashes. The KIA's signature was conspicuously absent from the statement. The security situation in Kachin continues to show signs of improvement, and the KIA has showed little appetite for escalation with the Tatmadaw since the latter halted its offensive in Kachin State in May 2018. Given the Tatmadaw's two-month extension of the ceasefire in the North, the TNLA and MNDAA may also avoid a confrontation with the Tatmadaw. TNLA Secretary, Brigadier General Tar Bone Kyaw, recently acknowledged that the TNLA could be blamed for any escalation since the Tatmadaw announced a unilateral ceasefire. Meanwhile, sources said the Tatmadaw is carefully studying the bilateral ceasefire proposal provided by the KIA during the last peace talk held on April 30.

22 Army may join meeting of northern military alliance and NRPC. (2019, May 22). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/army-may-join-meeting-northern-military-alliance-and-nrpc>

23 Htet Naing Zaw. (2019, May 27). Not a hair on their heads will be harmed: Tatmadaw. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/not-hair-heads-will-harmed-tatmadaw.html>

### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING JUNE 2019

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## OVERVIEW

- The AA is carrying out fewer large-scale attacks against the Tatmadaw compared to previous months. Intense clashes took place in June after the AA carried out a large-scale ambush between Minbya and Mrauk U, but clashes elsewhere were short in duration and less intense. The Tatmadaw is likely concentrating its operations to chase after a large AA contingent in the mountains northeast of Minbya.
- The government-imposed mobile internet shut down in northern Rakhine and southern Chin states is likely to disrupt the AA's command and control. Nevertheless, propaganda on social media and the flow of information from northern Rakhine State were not significantly affected.
- A rising toll of dead and displaced civilians, in addition to human rights abuses in conflict zones, is increasing Rakhine people's animosity toward the government, Tatmadaw, and the Bamar people.
- A large number of fighters from a faction of a DKBA Splinter surrendered after clashing with the Tatmadaw and BGF, rendering the faction inviable.
- The Tatmadaw attacked some Northern Alliance positions before proposing bilateral ceasefires that require the groups to leave those areas.
- Details from the government's confidential bilateral ceasefire proposals to the TNLA, AA, and MNDA were leaked, but no details about the KIA's proposal emerged. The discrepancy highlights the Northern Alliance's different approaches.
- Despite its proposal to form the PPCM in May, the KNU leadership has not yet reached an agreement on the issue, leading to further delay.
- The NCA-Signatories expressed a desire to convene the UPC in 2019, despite the KNU's absence from an informal UPDJC meeting. The government is now beginning to plan the next UPC.
- The NDAA's ceasefire celebration demonstrated the concept of autonomy within the Union, and the group now says it is willing to sign the NCA.

## SECURITY

### Fewer Armed Clashes in Rakhine But More Clashes in Shan Keep Nationwide Total Up

At least 68 armed clashes and 15 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in June for a total of 83 armed incidents nationwide, down from 92 in May, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> Although 23 fewer clashes were recorded between the Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA) and Tatmadaw, more clashes involving the Northern Alliance groups, particularly the Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF), kept the nationwide total high. Due to fighting involving the TNLA, Kutkai Township in Shan State experienced the highest number of

clashes in June compared with all other townships. The second and third highest number of clashes took place in Mrauk U and Minbya Townships, respectively, where the AA and Tatmadaw engaged in a series of intense clashes after a major AA ambush. All other clashes in Rakhine State were limited in duration and intensity. For the third month in a row, no clashes were recorded between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and the coalition formed by the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) and TNLA. Two clashes, however, took place between the RCSS and Tatmadaw, but the situation poses little risk for escalation.

### Tatmadaw Gains Momentum After Repelling Large-Scale AA Attack

The total number of clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw declined in June despite a series of intense clashes involving a large contingent of AA fighters operating between Mrauk U and Minbya towns. On June 2, up to 400 AA fighters in the area attacked and cornered a Tatmadaw battalion along the Lay Myo river. After repelling the attack with reinforcements and artillery, the Tatmadaw seized the initiative, chasing the AA contingent into the jungle where it discovered more AA bases. With the retreating AA unit under heavy pressure, AA fighters elsewhere carried out smaller ambushes, including a rocket attack on the outskirts of Sittwe, in a likely attempt to relieve pressure from their embattled comrades. The AA's June 2 attack

proved to be its only successful large-scale ambush of the month.

The AA's success in recruiting new fighters has driven a significant need for arms and ammunition. To meet these requirements, the AA launched multiple large-scale attacks on Tatmadaw columns and bases beginning in January 2019. These attacks aimed to encircle and destroy Tatmadaw units and capture their weapons and ammunition. The Tatmadaw responded each time with heavy artillery barrages and airstrikes targeting the concentrated numbers of AA fighters. In May 2019, the AA managed to carry out only one large-scale ambush, possibly because Tatmadaw firepower had deterred it from do-

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

ing so. Instead, the AA appeared to focus more on small-scale, hit-and-run ambushes launched from nearby villages where AA fighters hid and sought local support. Sources said that most of these small-scale ambushes were not effective.

Then, on June 2, as many as 400 AA fighters converged on a Tatmadaw unit on the eastern bank of the Lay Myo river near Myaung Bwe, a tiny town halfway between Minbya and Mrauk U towns. Firing from atop a series of small hills, the AA pinned the Tatmadaw unit against the river bank. The Tatmadaw fired heavy artillery and sent a two-pronged contingent of reinforcements, repelling the AA after nearly 12 hours of sustained fighting. The Tatmadaw did not, however, conduct airstrikes, a decision that drew criticism from its rank and file soldiers, according to MIPS sources. Sources also said that more than 20 Tatmadaw soldiers, including the battalion commander, were killed in the battle.

MIPS sources said that during the clash the AA tried multiple times to overrun the Tatmadaw unit but were pushed back by the besieged battalion and barrages from reinforcements across the river. At night, the AA managed to drag the bodies of its own fighters as well as Tatmadaw soldiers to its side of the battlefield. While the AA usually makes a great effort to carry away its dead, taking pictures of dead Tatmadaw soldiers has become a critical part of its psychological operations aimed to boost the morale of its fighters and supporters. The two sides clashed again the next day four miles to the south. Development Media Group published a horrific account of civilians injured and killed on June 3 when the roof of a monastery they took shelter in was blown off.<sup>2</sup> In the following days, Tat-

madaw units attempted to lure the retreating AA contingent into another fight by maneuvering in the open nearby. The plan succeeded, and on June 16, roughly 200 AA fighters attempted an ambush about six miles to the northeast of Myaung Bwe. A concealed Tatmadaw unit then struck the AA from the south, and together with artillery attacks forced the AA to flee after sustaining casualties. According to MIPS sources, the AA left one dead body behind and carried as many as 20 wounded fighters off into the mountains. With its momentum building, the Tatmadaw pursued the AA into the mountains.

Although slowed by the rain and mines left by the retreating fighters, the Tatmadaw pursued the AA deeper into the mountains where sources said it found at least two fortified camps with over 100 dug-in positions. The Tatmadaw conducted multiple airstrikes against the newly discovered mountain hideouts, likely inflicting multiple casualties. The AA in the area are likely struggling to carry and care for their wounded given the rough terrain and wet season conditions. The Tatmadaw appears to be continuing its operations to chase out the fighters in the area.

To relieve pressure on their comrades embattled in the mountains, AA fighters carried out small ambushes and attacks elsewhere to little or no effect. In the most high-profile example of the month, the AA fired 107mm rockets at a navy tugboat anchored near Sittwe, killing two Tatmadaw sailors on June 22.<sup>3</sup> Most of the other ambushes, however, were short in duration and inflicted few Tatmadaw casualties. Other bigger attempts to attack the Tatmadaw were repelled. In Ponnagyun Township on June 5, for example, the Tatmadaw repelled

2 The unheeded casualties of war. (2019, July 03). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/unheeded-casualties-war#.XRxENybAoZ8.twitter>

3 Htet Naing Zaw. (2019, June 24). AA naval attack kills 2 Tatmadaw fighters. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/aa-naval-attack-kills-2-tatmadaw-fighters.html>

an AA attack and reportedly captured nine dead bodies along with five AA weapons.

Neither the government nor Tatmadaw have changed their position on the AA's presence in Rakhine State while the AA retains its strong popular support and appears capable of receiving its supplies from nearby villages. The Tatmadaw inserted more soldiers into Rakhine State in June, and the full onset of the monsoon did not significantly slow operations on either side. Fresh rains will make it easier for AA fighters to find water in

the mountains, and the Tatmadaw may seek and target remaining AA hideouts hidden in forested areas. Small hit-and-run ambushes will continue, but the AA may attempt fewer large-scale, head-to-head attacks on Tatmadaw units. It may also attempt to strike vulnerable targets outside of its current Area of Operations (AO) to relieve pressure on its forces in the Minbya-Mrauk U area. Meanwhile, the Tatmadaw will attempt to continue with its momentum against the AA, and significant violence, including severe harm to civilians, will continue.

## Mobile Internet Shutoff Aims to Disrupt AA Operations, Sparks Widespread Concern

The government-imposed internet blackout on June 21 was likely intended to disrupt the AA's command and control structure, but drew immediate criticism and concern that it could proceed widespread human rights abuses. Despite the cut-off, several high-profile incidents of abuse were reported in June, including the deaths of two men interrogated by the Tatmadaw. In addition to a growing number of dead and displaced civilians, these factors will likely increase Rakhine people's animosity toward the government, Tatmadaw, and the Bamar people.

On June 21, the government ordered telecommunications companies to shut down mobile internet services in nine townships across northern Rakhine and southern Chin states.<sup>4</sup> The suspension, which did not include calling or SMS, drew immediate criticism from national and international civil society, social media users, and private

businesses. On June 24, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar suggested that the blackout could be used as cover for impending human rights abuses, a notion echoed by many national and international observers. The Tatmadaw later said that the intent of the blackout was to curb hate speech and ethnic animosity.

In reality, the Tatmadaw and government likely ordered the mobile internet shutdown to disrupt the AA's real-time communications between leaders in Lai Zar, Kachin State, and fighters on the ground in Rakhine and Chin states. According to MIPS sources, AA fighters use mobile-based location services to upload their movements as well as Tatmadaw positions to their commanders in real time. AA leaders view the stream of information on multiple monitors in a 'war room' in Lai Zar with assistance from about 20 technicians.

4 Network shutdown in Myanmar, 21 June 2019. (2019, June 21). Telenor Group. <https://www.telenor.com/network-shutdown-in-myanmar-21-june-2019/>



Despite the mobile internet shutdown, MIPS monitors have not detected any significant decrease in conflict-related information coming from Rakhine State, including reports of abuses. There are several reasons to explain this. First, some offices and hotels in major towns like Mrauk U and Kyauktaw are still connected to wired broadband internet. AA operatives, supporters, or activists can call or text information to these areas, or physically travel to them and upload information. They can also access the internet in Sittwe, where mobile internet is not restricted. Sources on the ground also told MIPS that service is still available atop some elevated areas. In Maungdaw Township, Ooredoo services are still online, pushing the price of an Ooredoo SIM card to 10,000 MMK, about ten times higher than the regular price. AA fighters in the border areas can also likely access Bangladeshi networks.

On June 19, the Tatmadaw detained a 28-year-old resident from Mrauk U named Zaw Win Hlaing on suspicion of being an AA member.<sup>5</sup> Zaw Win Hlaing was allegedly tortured by Tatmadaw soldiers who beat him using longyis filled with rocks, and later died on July 3. On June 24, the Tatmadaw released the body of a man who was one of ten detainees arrested on June 21 in Mrauk U Township.<sup>6</sup> Tatmadaw spokesperson Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun denied the use of torture but said

accusations about Zaw Win Hlaing would be investigated.

The Tatmadaw also carried out searches of suspected AA hideouts and supply stashes, including multiple raids on local monasteries. On June 21, for example, the Tatmadaw said it discovered some explosive materials, uniforms, and food at a monastery in Mrauk U Township.<sup>7</sup> It also continued to round up, detain, and interrogate dozens of suspected AA fighters and supporters. Reports of such incidents continued unabated following the mobile internet shutdown across nine townships. Information about wounded, killed, and displaced civilians also continued to flow following the shutdown.<sup>8</sup>

An estimated 40,000 civilians in northern Rakhine and southern Chin have been displaced by the conflict since December 2018.<sup>9</sup> In June, MIPS recorded at least three civilians injured by IEDs and Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) in Rakhine State. In addition to the increasing number of civilians killed and injured, major cases like the internet shutdown and the death of Zaw Win Hlaing are greatly increasing Rakhine people's resentment toward the government, Tatmadaw, and the Bamar majority. Although the internet blackout did not appear to significantly stem the flow of information, locals reported difficulties in communicating

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- 5 Man dies after alleged custody abuse in Rakhine. (2019, July 04). Frontier Myanmar. <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/man-dies-after-alleged-custody-abuse-in-rakhine?fbclid=IwAR3nZwKI95zTfg7kSNAfgyFZrojeypypscKLkPpPPdnDv-3gJ2VPJ8tMLSU>
  - 6 Kyaw Hla Myint. (2019, June 25). သေဆုံးသူ ကိုနေမျိုးထွန်းအလောင်းအား နာရေးကားဖြင့် မြောက်ဦးမြို့သို့သယ်ယူပို့ဆောင်ခြင်း [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/kyaw.h.myint.18/posts/145428056570658>
  - 7 z. (2019, June 22). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. [http://cincds.gov.mm/node/3206?fbclid=IwAR0GHY-iLbbK-bBCQLs64W5y1h8BwSz1\\_-6ILHDDCRLREDysGUD9BKExQGo](http://cincds.gov.mm/node/3206?fbclid=IwAR0GHY-iLbbK-bBCQLs64W5y1h8BwSz1_-6ILHDDCRLREDysGUD9BKExQGo)
  - 8 Kyaw Htun Naing., Thet Su Aung., & Zin Mar Win. (2019, June 24). Fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine state claims Myanmar military casualties, causes civilians to flee. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/fighting-in-myanmars-rakhine-state-06242019161628.html>
  - 9 Kyaw Lwin Oo., & Khin Khin Ei. (2019, June 21). Myanmar army helicopter, artillery strikes force hundreds to flee in Rakhine state. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-army-helicopter-artillery-strikes-06212019160555.html>



with family and operating businesses. On June 23, a report by the Arakan National Party (ANP), a nationalist Rakhine political party, warned that the level of public suffering and higher incidence of abuse, injury, and death is stirring more animosity.

<sup>10</sup> On June 28 the General Secretary of the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), a Rakhine political party with ties to the National League for Democracy (NLD), said that the conflict in Rakhine State is pushing Rakhine people to join the AA. <sup>11</sup>

## DKBA Splinter Surrenders to BGF After Clash

Forty-five fighters from a Democratic Karen Buddhist Army Splinter (DKBA-Splinter) led by the monk U Sanda Wara surrendered to the Border Guard Force (BGF) in June after two months of tensions and multiple armed incidents in Kayin State.

The original DKBA broke away from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in 1994 and was led by the monk U Thuzana. In 2010, the majority of the DKBA transformed into the BGF. The DKBA's Brigade 5, however, refused to be transformed and split from the DKBA, later renaming itself the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army-Brigade 5 (DKBA-5). The DKBA-5 was officially recognized by the Tatmadaw as the Karen Kloo Htoo Baw Organization (KKO) and signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015.

In 2015, the DKBA-5 expelled two commanders, Kyaw Thet and San Aung, who then announced the resurrection of the original DKBA, in effect creating yet another DKBA-Splinter. <sup>12</sup> A third

DKBA-5 commander named Bo Bi—who once commanded BGF 1012—also left to align himself with Kyaw Thet and San Aung.

In May 2019, the BGF 1014 reportedly began pressuring a contingent of DKBA-Splinter fighters, led by the monk U Sanda Wara, to join the BGF. U Sanda Wara is a disciple of U Thuzana and is affiliated with Bo Bi. The BGF 1014 and U Sanda Wara's fighters, likely joined by some of Bo Bi's fighters, clashed on May 18 at Mee Zaing mountain in Hpa An Township, Kayin State.

Then, on June 20, Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 409 and 403 together with the BGF 1014 attacked Bo Bi and U Sanda Wara's troops at Mee Zaing Mountain. The troops under Bo Bi withdrew the next day toward an area controlled by the KNLA's Brigade 5. Then, on June 23, 45 fighters under U Sanda Wara surrendered to the BGF 1011 in Hlaingbwe Township, Kayin State. A ground source in Kayin indicated that U Sanda Wara's faction sought peace with the BGF and Tat-

10 ANP Youth Wing. (2019, June 23). ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်အတွင်း လက်နက်ကိုင်ပဋိပက္ခများကြောင့် ဒေသခံပြည်သူများ၏ ထိခိုက်နစ်နာချက်များ. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/youthwing.anp/posts/2346339902290528>

11 Khin Khin Ei. (2019, June 28). ပဋိပက္ခတွေက AA အဖွဲ့ထဲသို့ အာဇာနည်တို့နဲ့ ပိုသလို ဖြစ်နေတယ်လို့ ALD ပါတီသုံးသပ်. RFA. [https://www.rfa.org/burmese/program\\_2/aa-rakhine-ald-06282019121511.html?searchterm%3Autf8%3Astring=%20ALD&fbclid=IwAR0DDg-SMy7rQH8FqCOsYn2XboW0USJR5teKA4GYfeDAIA5TeKDFt5Elbtw](https://www.rfa.org/burmese/program_2/aa-rakhine-ald-06282019121511.html?searchterm%3Autf8%3Astring=%20ALD&fbclid=IwAR0DDg-SMy7rQH8FqCOsYn2XboW0USJR5teKA4GYfeDAIA5TeKDFt5Elbtw)

12 Keenan, P. (2016, November). EBO Background Paper (Report No. 5/2016). EBO Myanmar. [https://euroburmaoffice.s3.amazonaws.com/filer\\_public/b4/f0/b4f0f11d-f75c-4613-a544-677059b441aa/ebo\\_background\\_paper\\_no\\_5\\_2016\\_-\\_karen\\_state.pdf](https://euroburmaoffice.s3.amazonaws.com/filer_public/b4/f0/b4f0f11d-f75c-4613-a544-677059b441aa/ebo_background_paper_no_5_2016_-_karen_state.pdf)

madaw, and surrendered some of its fighters and weapons as a part of negotiations. Other U Sanda Wara fighters remain in uniform at the Mee Zaing Mountain, which is now controlled by the Tatmad-

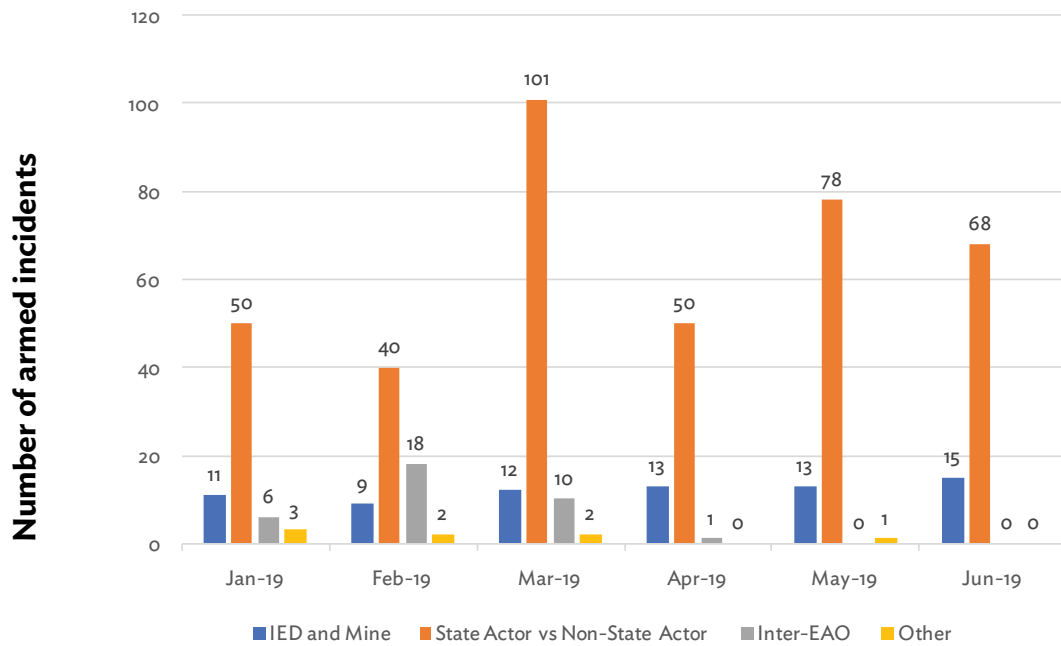
aw and BGF 1014. The large surrender will likely render U Sanda Wara's faction militarily insignificant. As many as 200 civilians were displaced and several more wounded during the clash in June.

## **Tatmadaw Attacks Some Northern Alliance Outposts as Prospects for Bilateral Ceasefire Grow**

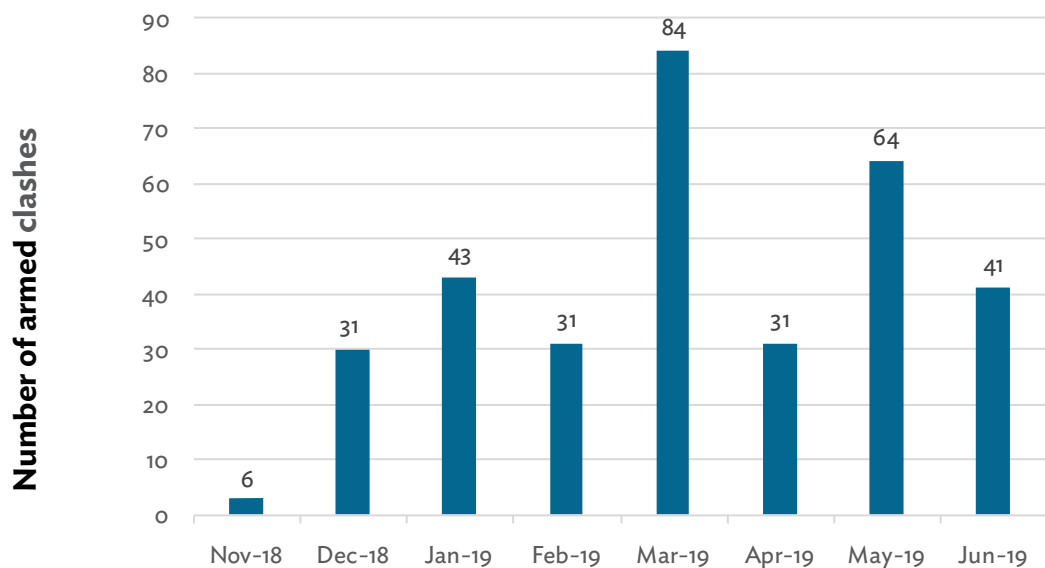
The Tatmadaw attacked some Northern Alliance positions in Shan and Kachin states in June before providing the groups with bilateral ceasefire proposals at a meeting in Mong La on June 30. Leaked details of the proposals given to the TNLA, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and AA show that the Tatmadaw requested each group to return to their points of origin. The issue is discussed further in a subsection below.

As prospects for a bilateral ceasefire grow, the Tatmadaw appeared to target Northern Alliance camps and outposts that lay beyond areas it deems

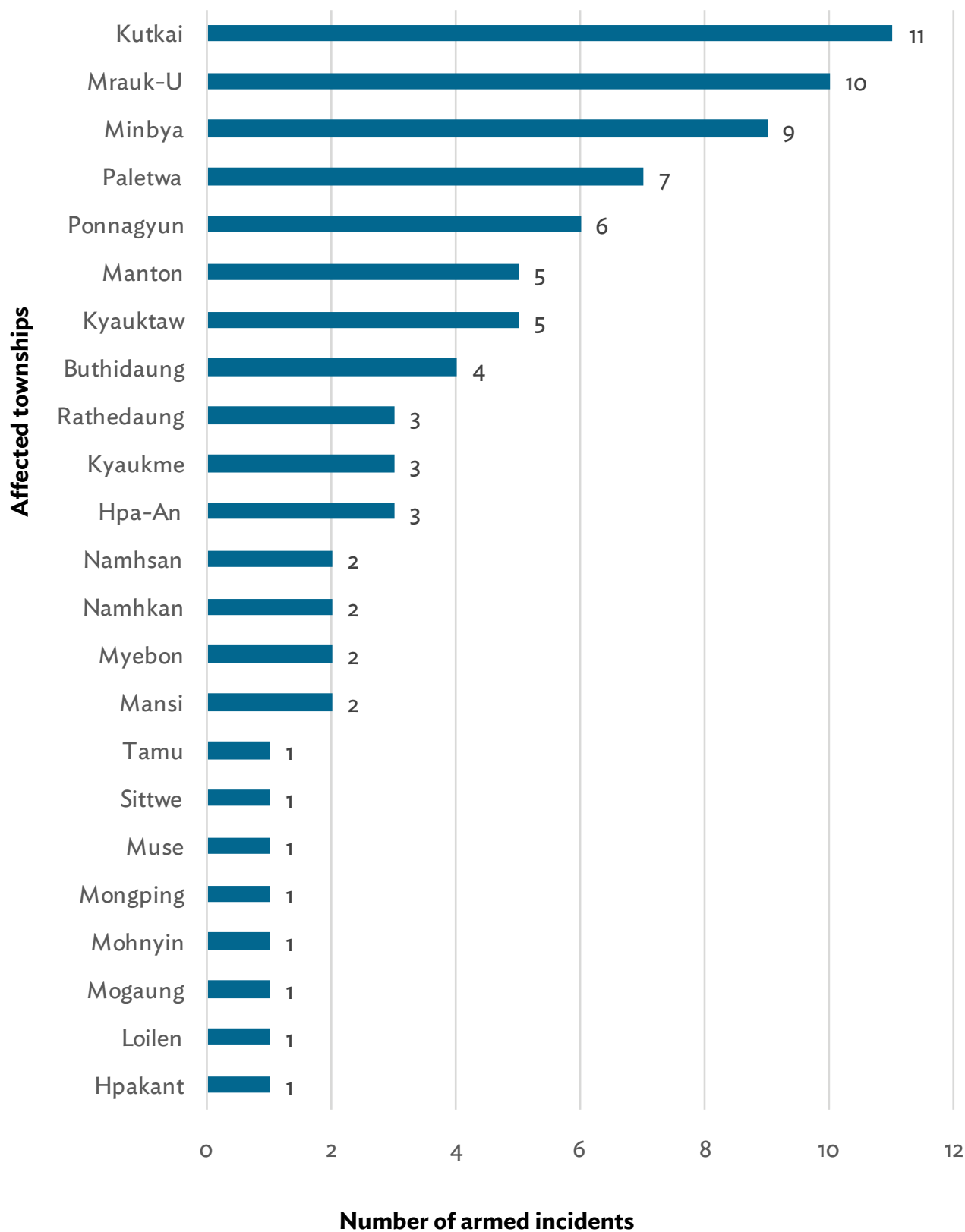
acceptable. In June, the Tatmadaw attacked TNLA outposts across several Shan townships outside of the Palaung Self-Administered Zone (SAZ). It also shelled a Kachin Independence Army (KIA) position in Hpakant on June 6, and attacked several KIA positions in northern Shan State. MIPS received but could not verify reports of three or four clashes between the Tatmadaw and MNDAA, but a ground source in Shan State said that the Tatmadaw denied fighting with the MNDAA. The Tatmadaw may continue limited efforts to demarcate Northern Alliance positions during bilateral ceasefire negotiations, even as it claims to uphold its unilateral ceasefire in the north.



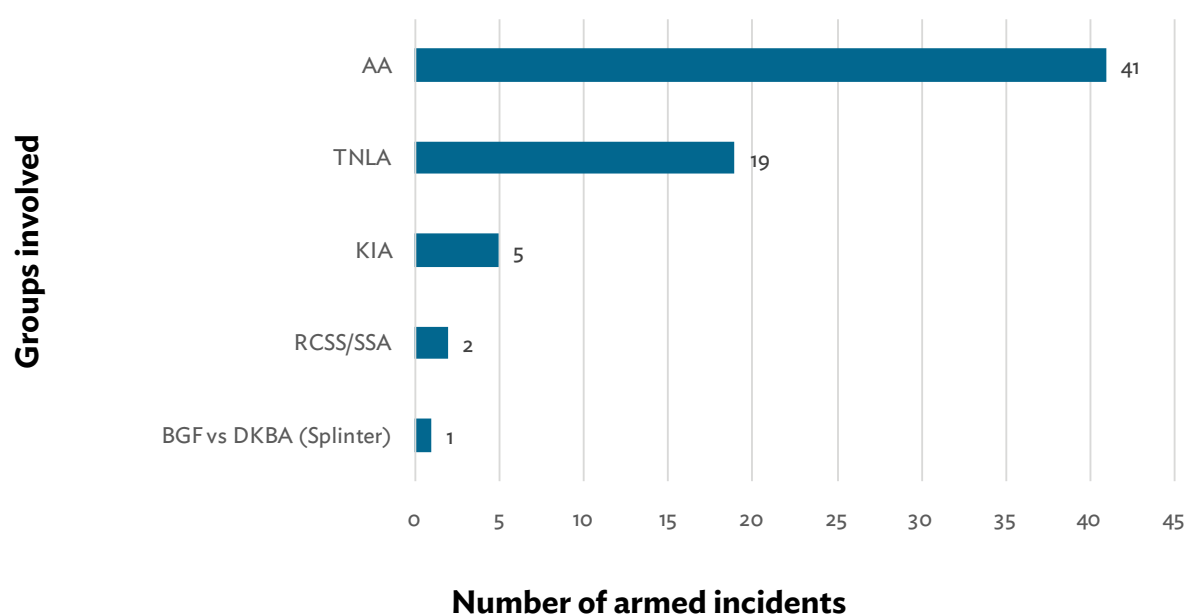
**Figure 1: Armed incidents from January 2019 to June 2019**



**Figure 2: Clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw from November 2018 to June 2019**



**Figure 3:** Townships affected by armed incidents in June 2019



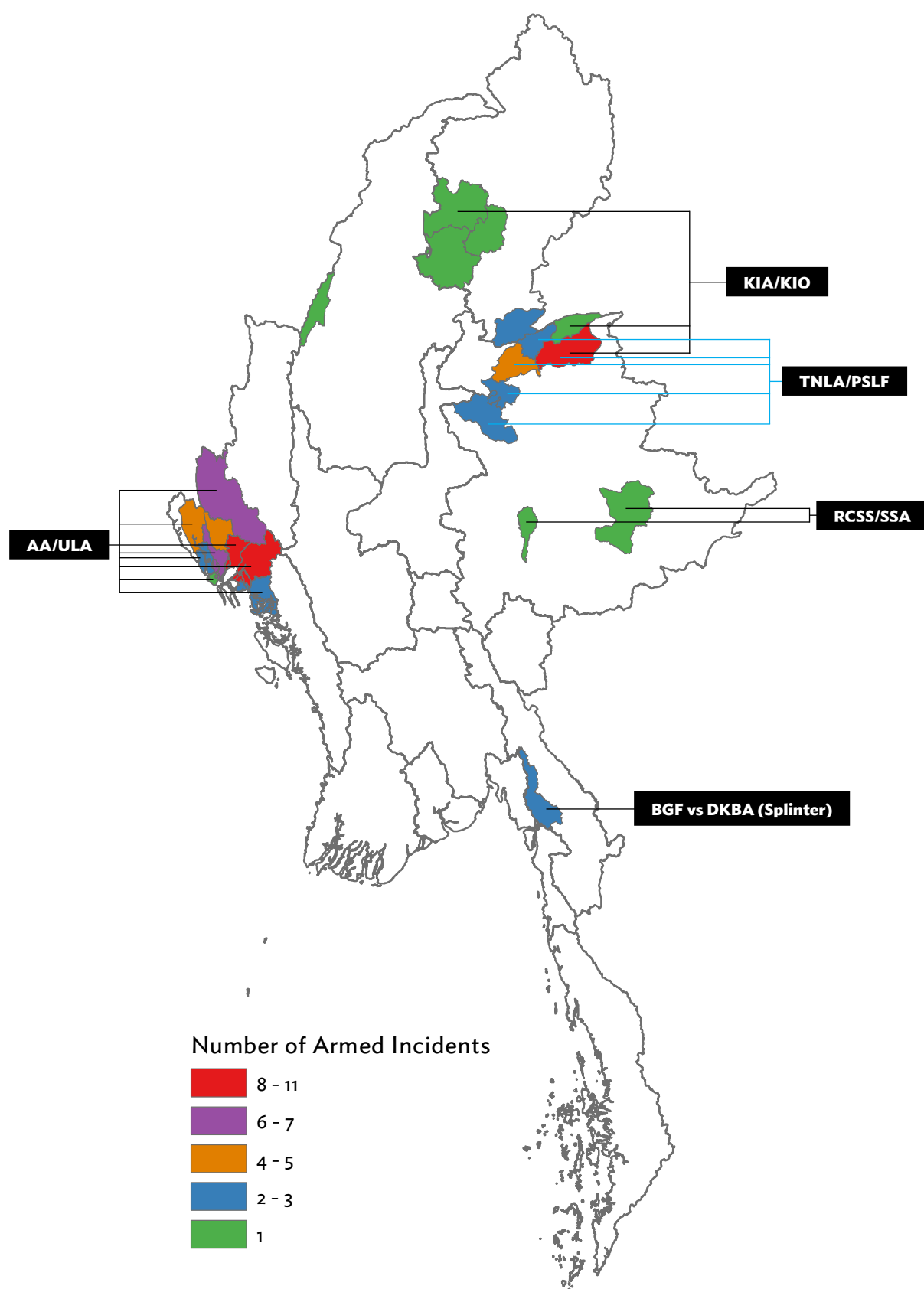
\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine.

EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 4:** Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in June 2019

Meetings	Number
FPNCC Meeting	1
Peace Commission and China's Special Envoy Meeting	1
Peace Commission and Northern Alliance Meeting	1
Tatmdaw plus BGF and DKBA (Splinter) Meeting for Negotiation	1
UPDJC Secretaries' Informal Meeting	1
JMC Meetings/Workshops	5
Total Number of Meetings	10

**Figure 4:** Significant meetings related to the peace process in June 2019



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 5: Armed incidents in June 2019**

## GOVERNMENT

### Tatmadaw Hands Northern Alliance Sealed Ceasefire Proposals, Extends Unilateral Ceasefire

The Tatmadaw extended its unilateral ceasefire, originally labelled as a cessation of military activities, until August 31, 2019. The extension, which continues to cover Shan and Kachin States, was announced following a meeting in which representatives from the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) provided bilateral ceasefire proposal drafts to each of the four Northern Alliance groups.<sup>13</sup> According to MIPS sources, National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) Chairperson Sai Lin, also known as Lin Mingxian, assisted both sides to set up the meeting while he hosted ceremonies marking the NDAA's 30<sup>th</sup> ceasefire anniversary.

The Northern Alliance groups had handed the government bilateral ceasefire proposals during the last meeting between the NRPC and Northern Alliance held in Muse, Shan State on April 30, 2019. During the meeting on June 30, the NRPC presented each of the four groups with separate sealed counterproposals and asked the groups to keep the contents confidential since further negotiations are expected. Details of the government's proposal, however, were soon shared and circulated on Facebook.<sup>14</sup>

As per the leak, the government's proposal asked the TNLA to return to Namhsan and Manton, the two townships comprising the Palaung SAZ. The TNLA's operations beyond these two townships,

however, are largely conducted by mobile units and not from fixed positions. In June, though, the Tatmadaw targeted some TNLA outposts that do exist in these areas. The issue is discussed further in a separate section above.

The government also asked the MNDAA to return its scattered troops to its headquarters at Hong Ai, situated in the border area of northeast Shan State, and for the AA to return to the site of its birthplace in Lai Zar, Kachin State. In return, the Tatmadaw offered to withdraw soldiers from its Light Infantry Divisions (LID), or mobile strike units, from contested areas, including northern Rakhine State.

Notably, details of the proposal handed to the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) were not leaked or discussed by members of the KIO or its affiliates. Sources told MIPS that the KIO has even asked pro-KIO news outlets not to report battle news in order to downplay existing clashes between the KIA and Tatmadaw. The discrepancy is a further indication of the different approaches between the KIO and its three alliance partners.

In April, the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA released a statement without the KIA that threatened joint military action against the Tatmadaw if the latter continued its offensive against the AA in Rakhine State. Despite the rhetoric, the TNLA and MNDAA appear hesitant to return to open conflict with

13 NRPC meets KIO, MNTJP, PSLF, ULA in Mongla, special region (4). (2019, January 07). NRPC. <http://www.nrpc.gov.mm/en/node/309>

14 Lawi Weng. (2019, July 01). Military draft peace deal demands retreat of northern alliance troops. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/militarys-draft-peace-deal-demands-retreat-northern-alliance-troops.html>

the Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw has since twice extended its ceasefire in the north, likely compelling the TNLA and MNDAA to refrain from making any such escalation. China also asked these groups not to launch military operations close to its border

in order to maintain stability. Despite their protest against Tatmadaw operations targeting the AA, the MNDAA and TNLA may likely avoid launching military operations in solidarity with the AA during the Tatmadaw's unilateral ceasefire period.

## NCA-SIGNATORIES

### KNU External Relations Chief Publicly Discusses Internal Dynamics

In an interview with the Irrawaddy on June 30, Karen National Union (KNU) External Communications Chief Officer, Padoh Man Nyein Maung, highlighted the internal divide within the KNU by criticizing KNU General Secretary Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo.<sup>15</sup> He said that Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo is acting above the authority of the KNU Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. He also said that no final decision about quitting the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) and forming the Peace Process Consultative Meeting

(PPCM) had been reached among the top leadership, meaning that Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo went ahead with the proposal during the ethnic armed organizations' (EAO) summit in May without full authorization. Padoh Man Nyein Maung also criticized the handful of foreign advisors to the KNU, saying that they are highly influential and believe that the NCA is "useless". Padoh Man Nyein Maung's comments are a clear indicator of the persisting internal divisions within the KNU that have affected the peace process.

15 Mann Nyein Maung. (2019, June 30). နိုင်ငံခြားသားတွေ အကြံပေးလို့ တိုင်းပြည် ငြိမ်းချမ်းသွားမယ် ဆိုတာ ကျနော် မယုံကြည်ဘူး / Interviewer : Chit Min Tun. The Irrawaddy. [https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2019/06/30/196507.html?fbclid=IwAR0ZKCewU-sIN-Vs3P39dMMQd9vJwShW9zyHD0\\_W44fJYT4EPmKMxPtWk8cw](https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2019/06/30/196507.html?fbclid=IwAR0ZKCewU-sIN-Vs3P39dMMQd9vJwShW9zyHD0_W44fJYT4EPmKMxPtWk8cw)



## NCA-Signatories Step Toward UPC without KNU

The ethnic Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) expressed desire to move forward with the peace process and convene the next Union Peace Conference—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC) before the end of 2019, despite the KNU's ongoing suspension of formal negotiations and complicated internal dynamics.

Following the eventful summit in Chiang Mai between May 14 and 18, the NCA-S planned a subsequent working meeting to continue their review of the PPST and discuss the KNU's new PPCM proposal. The meeting, originally scheduled for June 9 and 10, was delayed until June 20 and 21 after Tatmadaw military attaché Brigadier General Khin Zaw asked the Thai military to block the meeting. Dismayed by the Tatmadaw's interference, the KNU did not attend the informal Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) Secretaries' meeting on June 13 and 14 in Yangon. The RCSS, however, broke with the KNU by attending the meeting alongside the smaller EAOs. The UPDJC includes members from the EAOs, government, and Tatmadaw and is tasked with convening the UPC.

Although no decisions were made during the informal UPDJC Secretaries' meeting, all participants, including the RCSS, demonstrated a willingness to move forward with the peace process and hold the next UPC before the end of the year. Sources indicated that the government is now preparing by coordinating with the Tatmadaw and parliament to hold the UPC.

During the NCA-S working meeting on June 20 and 21, KNU representatives did not show up to provide a scheduled presentation on the PPCM, so the remaining groups simply continued with their review of the PPST. Although KNU General Secretary Padoh Saw Tadoh Moo proposed to replace the PPST with the PPCM during the EAO summit in May, the KNU's leadership had not yet made any final agreement on the matter. For this reason, the KNU did not present about the PPCM during the meeting on June 20 and 21. The KNU's internal discord may complicate the other EAOs' efforts to move forward with the UPC.

## NON-SIGNATORIES

### NDAA Ceasefire Celebration Demonstrates Concept of Autonomy without Disintegration

The NDAA held large celebrations to mark its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ceasefire with the Tatmadaw at its headquarters in Mong La, Special Region 4, from June 25 to 30, 2019. Representatives from both signatories and non-signatories to the NCA, political parties, and the government's Peace Commission (PC) attended the event. MIPS was also present during the celebrations. The ceremony was marked by gestures that symbolized both the

NDAA's autonomy and integration in Myanmar.

At the start of the main ceremony, the Myanmar national flag was flown higher than both the Shan State and Special Region 4 flags. The parade then kicked off with a large banner that said "under the guidance of Nainggyandaw", meaning the central government. The first troop of marchers were comprised of government staff from the Minis-

try of Border Affairs, symbolizing the role of the central government in the region. The parade downplayed military displays, focusing more on cultural performances. Only about one quarter of marchers were security forces who did not display heavy weapons.

The NDAA has traditionally maintained good relations with the central government but moved even closer after the United Wa State Army (UWSA) seized some its territory in September 2016. The UWSA made an incursion into NDAA territory after the latter signaled a willingness to join the NCA, a move that the UWSA leadership

objected to at the time. On June 30, however, NDAA information and communications officer, U Khum Maung, indicated that the NDAA is ready to sign the NCA.<sup>16</sup> U Kyi Myint, an executive member of the NDAA's political wing, also told the media that the NDAA would sign the NCA “in the presence of foreign dignitaries, state leaders and Parliament.”<sup>17</sup> The comments indicate that the UWSA no longer objects to the NDAA's signing and that the key members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) are now stepping closer to the NCA.

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- 16 Golden Triangle Regional News - ရွှေတြိဂံဒေသသတင်းလွှာ. (2019, June 30). NCA လက်မှတ်ထိုးပြီး နိုင်ငံရေးဆွေးနွေးပွဲတွေကနေ တစ်ဆင့်သာ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံရေးလမ်းကြောင်းထဲဝင်ရောက်မယ်လို့ မိုင်းလားအဖွဲ့ဆို. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/GoldenTriangleRegionalNews/posts/2436200013109852>
- 17 Kyaw Kha. (2019, July 01). NDAA chief vows 'eternal peace' at 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary event. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/148120ndaa-chief-vows-eternal-peace-at-30th-anniversary-event.html>

## About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING JULY 2019

|

VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(8)

## OVERVIEW

- Clashes in Rakhine were frequent but less intense in July as the Tatmadaw made progress in its counterinsurgency campaign and the AA dispersed its forces. The AA may attempt to open a new front in southern Rakhine to relieve growing pressure from the Tatmadaw but will likely find that objective difficult to achieve.
- Terrorism charges brought against the AA's top leaders are likely designed in part to compel foreign countries, especially within ASEAN, to take action against AA affiliates abroad.
- The Tatmadaw is targeting some Northern Alliance positions across northern Shan State in a likely attempt to forcefully demarcate areas amid ongoing ceasefire talks. There is risk for escalation in Shan State, but spillover into Kachin State appears unlikely at this time.
- The NLD's approach to constitutional amendment strained civil-military relations and may influence the military's cooperation in the peace process. The amendment attempt also upset some EAO leaders for its failure to address issues central to the peace process.
- The KNU continued to grapple with the internal dynamics that led to its suspension of formal talks as the remaining signatories moved forward with plans to convene the UPC by year's end. The KNU's self-imposed isolation will likely continue until it overcomes these internal issues.
- The UWSA submitted a proposal for signing the NCA and will likely move toward more bilateral negotiations with the government.

## SECURITY

### Clashes in Rakhine and Shan States Persist Amid Drop in IED-Mine Incidents

At least 67 armed clashes and five incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in July for a total of 72 armed incidents nationwide, down from 83 in June, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).

<sup>1</sup> The number of IED or mine-related incidents in July was the lowest recorded of any month in 2019. Clashes between the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA) continued at much the same rate in July. In Shan State, a limited Tatmadaw offensive targeted

camps and outposts belonging to the Ta'ang National Liberation Army/ Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/ PSLF), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). Despite the escalation in Shan State, no clashes were recorded in Kachin State. Kutkai Township in Shan State experienced the highest number of clashes nationwide, primarily due to fighting between the Tatmadaw and TNLA. Kyauktaw and Buthidaung townships in Rakhine State experienced the second and third highest number of clashes, respectively.

### Rakhine Clashes Frequent But Less Intense in July as Tatmadaw Makes Progress Over the AA

The overall intensity of clashes between the Tatmadaw and AA declined in July amid heavy rains and continued Tatmadaw's progress against the AA in Rakhine and Southern Chin states. The AA responded to the increasing pressure with attacks on less-fortified targets and an apparent attempt to open a new front to the south in Myebon Township, signaling a possible change in strategy. The AA may now disperse its forces across a wider area rather than concentrate fighters in large numbers to attack and overrun Tatmadaw units and positions, but will likely find it difficult to expand its operations significantly further south. Despite Tatmadaw gains, the AA remains capable of recruiting, and also proved that it is able to maintain its command and control to maneuver fighters in coordinated attacks amidst the ongoing mobile internet shutdown. Compared to its efforts in early 2019, the AA is also intensifying its propaganda campaign to

portray that it is winning the war.

Between January and April 2019, the AA regularly deployed concentrated numbers of fighters to attack Tatmadaw positions and columns on the move. The tactic aimed to overrun Tatmadaw units in order to capture weapons and ammunition and raise morale among supporters. The number of such large-scale attacks began to decline in May, but on June 2, up to 400 AA fighters attacked a Tatmadaw battalion near Myaung Bwe, a tiny town halfway between Mrauk U and Minbya towns. After repelling the attack, the Tatmadaw seized the initiative and pursued the battered AA contingent into the nearby mountains where it discovered fortified AA positions. The Tatmadaw flew airstrikes against these positions and continued to exert pressure on the embattled AA contingent. AA fighters elsewhere in Rakhine launched limited ambushes,

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

including a rocket attack near Sittwe, in an attempt to relieve pressure on their comrades in the mountains. Sources told MIPS that the mountains near Myaung Bwe are now littered with mines planted by the AA to deter the Tatmadaw from advancing.

The Tatmadaw's counterinsurgency campaign began with efforts to find and destroy fixed AA camps and bases across northern Rakhine State and Palaw Township in southern Chin State, inserting additional units from its Light Infantry Divisions (LID) as needed. In early 2019, as the frequency of large-scale AA attacks increased, the Tatmadaw pulled back some of these frontline units to guard major towns and bases. It responded to individual attacks with heavy artillery and airstrikes against the concentrated numbers of AA fighters, often inflicting heavy losses. The Tatmadaw's heavy firepower likely dissuaded the AA from attempting as many large attacks by mid-June, at which point the Tatmadaw began intensifying its clearance operations and village sweeps targeting suspected AA fighters. The Tatmadaw's momentum continued to build through May.

After repelling the major attack in early June, the Tatmadaw had the upper hand as it pursued and engaged the large AA contingent between Mrauk U and Minbya. The Tatmadaw's gains against the AA likely contributed to the decline in the intensity of clashes in July. The intensity of the conflict was likely also dampened by heavy rains and flood conditions throughout the month.

The AA responded to increasing Tatmadaw pressure with limited and generally unsuccessful attacks designed to divert the Tatmadaw's attention. In the early morning of July 26, for example, about 80 AA fighters attacked but failed to overrun a police post manned by only 30 officers in Buthidaung Township.<sup>2</sup> After a four-and-a-half-hour siege, the attackers dispersed when a nearby Tatmadaw unit came to reinforce the police post. The Tatmadaw captured four bodies and two weapons following the clash. According to MIPS sources, many police posts in northern Rakhine State were recently rebuilt with proper fortifications and equipped with RPGs and 40mm grenade launchers to better defend against AA attacks. The event was the only major attack the AA attempted in July.

The AA also attempted to open a new front to the south on the border of Myebon and Ann Townships. The first indication of spreading violence occurred on July 5 when two Rakhine men were murdered by unknown gunmen in Pauk Tu Taung Village in Myebon Township.<sup>3</sup> Then, on July 18 and 19, the Tatmadaw and AA clashed twice about 10 miles away along the river that separates Myebon and Ann townships. The clashes marked the southern-most fighting since the conflict began.

On July 22, AA fighters launched an RPG attack against Tatmadaw naval ships anchored a mile and half from the village where the two men were murdered weeks earlier.<sup>4</sup> The rockets struck a naval landing ship that was guarded by a small gunboat,

2 Htat Naing Zaw. (2019, July 26). Four police injured in AA attack on outpost in N. Rakhine. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/four-police-injured-aa-attack-outpost-n-rakhine.html>

3 မြေပုံမြို့နယ်မှာ ဒေသခံ ရွာသားနှစ်ဦး လုပ်ကြံသတ်ဖြတ်ခံရ. (2019, July 06). RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/pauktutaung-villagers-was-killed-07062019085418.html?fbclid=IwAR1vwK-HKsXUINo06k1fdGWhyKSe24qQgSzLyRBWsoFoWJ2OaoM-DYv0T-N4>

4 Moe Myint. (2019, July 22). Army officer, 2 navy personnel killed in AA rocket in Rakhine. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/army-officer-2-navy-personnel-killed-aa-rocket-attack-rakhine.html>

killing two naval personnel. The nearby gunboat then fired back against the attackers before a local Tatmadaw unit patrolling in the area engaged the AA fighters. A Tatmadaw officer was killed in the ensuing clash. The Tatmadaw then raided nearby villages in search of AA fighters, causing hundreds of villagers to flee in fear.

The next day Development Media Group (DMG) reported a statement by AA spokesperson Khaing Thu Kha that suggested the AA would expand the conflict zone and establish a new frontline. It is possible that about 100 AA fighters involved in June's Mrauk U-Minbya battle have moved into southern Myebon township to establish a new front.

July also witnessed a shift in the nature of the AA's propaganda campaign. For example, the AA reported that a clash with the Tatmadaw on July 27 in Minbya Township lasted two hours, but a reliable source said the clash was only 15 minutes in duration.<sup>5</sup> In another report, the AA claimed it

killed 50 Tatmadaw soldiers during a single clash in Kyauktaw on July 24, the highest number ever claimed by the AA, without providing any photos to verify the claim.<sup>6</sup> An AA spokesperson said that the Tatmadaw needed six trucks to haul away its dead but featured a photo from a previous clash. As the conflict's tempo slows, the AA will likely aim to show that it is maintaining a high-intensity fight to meet the expectations of its supporters.

The AA is also working to expand its propaganda efforts. In a post to the Russian social media site VK on July 3, AA second in command, Nyo Twan Awng, described a new online campaign and called for ethnic Rakhine writers, journalists, and cartoonists to contact the AA.<sup>7</sup> One day later, Nyo Twan Awng posted a short story about a Rakhine mother with two sons.<sup>8</sup> One son joined the Tatmadaw, and the other joined the AA. When she went to pray for her sons at the pagoda in Kyauktaw, she received a divine message that her son who joined the Tatmadaw was killed in a clash with the AA.

5 Arakan Army. (2019, July 27). 2019 ခုနှစ်၊ ဇူလိုင်လ(၂၇)ရက်၊ စနေနေ့၊ ရခိုင်ပြည်တိုက်ပွဲသတင်းများ။ <https://www.arakanarmy.net/post/%E1%81%82%E1%81%80%E1%81%81%E1%81%89-%E1%80%81-%E1%80%85-%E1%80%87-%E1%80%9C-%E1%80%84-%E1%80%9C-%E1%81%82%E1%81%87-%E1%80%9B%E1%80%80-%E1%80%85-%E1%80%94%E1%80%94%E1%82%94-%E1%80%9B%E1%80%81-%E1%80%84-%E1%80%95%E1%80%8A-%E1%80%90-%E1%80%80-%E1%80%95-%E1%80%9E%E1%80%90%E1%80%84-%E1%80%99>

6 Arakan Army. (2019, July 24). ၂၀၁၉ခုနှစ်၊ ဇူလိုင်လ(၂၄)ရက်၊ ဗုဒ္ဓဟူးနေ့၊ ရခိုင်ပြည်တိုက်ပွဲသတင်း(အထူးသတင်း)။ <https://www.arakanarmy.net/post/%E1%81%82%E1%81%80%E1%81%81%E1%81%89%E1%80%81-%E1%80%85-%E1%80%87-%E1%80%9C-%E1%80%84-%E1%80%9C-%E1%81%82%E1%81%84-%E1%80%9B%E1%80%80-%E1%80%97-%E1%80%92%E1%81%B6%E1%80%9F-%E1%80%94%E1%82%94-%E1%80%9B%E1%80%81-%E1%80%84-%E1%80%95%E1%80%8A-%E1%80%90-%E1%80%80-%E1%80%95-%E1%80%9E%E1%80%90%E1%80%84-%E1%80%A1%E1%80%91-%E1%80%9E%E1%80%90%E1%80%84>

7 Nyo Twan-Awng. (2019, July 03). Everyone has a dream but not everyone has a plan. [Status Update]. VK. [https://vk.com/wall504778486\\_65857fbclid=IwAR3mx40aAYilpC9MVWEIwI3Uu\\_H3dUxB3EqHUkeilEmKbGBwlu4qUIA\\_uXc](https://vk.com/wall504778486_65857fbclid=IwAR3mx40aAYilpC9MVWEIwI3Uu_H3dUxB3EqHUkeilEmKbGBwlu4qUIA_uXc)

8 Nyo Twan-Awng. (2019, July 04). "အရှင်ဘုရားမျက်နှာလိုက်တေ". [Status Update]. VK. [https://vk.com/drnyo?w=wall504778486\\_6620%2Fall](https://vk.com/drnyo?w=wall504778486_6620%2Fall)

Sources indicate that the Tatmadaw is conducting frequent raids and setting up impromptu checkpoints across northern Rakhine. Acting off a tip on July 27, the Tatmadaw said it intercepted a car full of fresh AA recruits being moved from Ponnagyun to Buthidaung Township.<sup>9</sup> The Tatmadaw has been restricting AA movement by employing hidden checkpoints along roads in Rakhine State and appears to be receiving improved information about AA operations.

The Tatmadaw will likely use this information to conduct more targeted raids on villages suspected of harboring or supporting AA fighters, an activity that risks creating more animosity among locals. On July 28, a national staff member of Plan International was shot by the Tatmadaw in Mrauk U Township.<sup>10</sup> According to MIPS sources, the Tatmadaw had just conducted a raid on a nearby monastery after learning of an AA meeting taking place there. Sources said the Plan staff member did not heed instructions to stop and was shot by Tatmadaw soldiers who were assigned to block potential escape routes for AA members attending the monastery meeting. The Tatmadaw claimed to have

found a hand grenade among the staff member's possessions, but MIPS could not verify this claim.

To counter growing pressure from the Tatmadaw, the AA may attempt more ambushes and attacks to the south in Myebon Township. On July 18, the AA released a statement welcoming Chinese investment in Rakhine State, likely to assure China that its attempt to move south will not endanger Chinese interests at Kyaukphyu.<sup>11</sup> The AA, however, will likely find it difficult to move past Myebon Township and into Ann Township. The corridor between northern and southern Rakhine State is a natural choke point between the mountains and sea, and home to a large Tatmadaw garrison. Moreover, data from TCMS shows that unlike in Mrauk U and Minbya, initial clashes in Myebon did not precede a significant bout of fighting nearby. The pattern is indicative of the AA's limited operational capability in southern Rakhine State. Nonetheless, more IEDs along the roads in Myebon and Ann remain a possibility. Low-level conflict in other parts of northern Rakhine and Southern Chin states will continue, albeit likely with fewer large-scale attacks by the AA.

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- 9 AA အကြမ်းဖက်သောင်းကျန်းသူအဖွဲ့များနှင့် ပတ်သက်ဆက်သွယ်သူများ ထိန်းသိမ်းရမိ. (2019, July 28). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defence Services. [http://cincds.gov.mm/node/3705?fbclid=IwAR2dt-NcalY\\_L3FjfAvguc5yDel42OfW7PtNoYa69otInKE5RySejdQj-cA0](http://cincds.gov.mm/node/3705?fbclid=IwAR2dt-NcalY_L3FjfAvguc5yDel42OfW7PtNoYa69otInKE5RySejdQj-cA0)
- 10 Myanmar NGO worker shot in restive Rakhine state. (2019, July 30). Frontier Myanmar. <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/myanmar-ngo-worker-shot-in-restive-rakhine-state>
- 11 Win Ko Ko Latt. (2019, July 23). Arakan Army voices support for big Chinese projects in Myanmar's Rakhine state. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/arakan-army-voices-support-07232019152712.html>



## Singapore Extradition Follows Court Charges, Angers Rakhine Community

The Singapore government extradited six members of the Arakan Association-Singapore after accusing the group of supporting armed violence against the Myanmar government in early July.<sup>12</sup> A statement from the Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) specifically mentioned that the Myanmar government had designated the AA as a terrorist group.<sup>13</sup> Five days earlier on July 5, the Sittwe District court charged the AA's top leaders under the counterterrorism law. The government likely brought about these terrorism charges in order to request foreign assistance in dealing with AA affiliates operating abroad.

The AA accused Singapore of harming the dignity of the Rakhine people and contended that the Arakan Association-Singapore was supporting Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). It also pushed back against the notion that the AA is a terrorist organization, pointing out that the Myanmar government is being investigated by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Many ethnic Rakhine social media users mocked the Singapore government and threatened to round up Singapore nationals in Myanmar. The episode is being used as a propaganda talking point within online pro-AA circles.

12 Khin Myat Myat Wai. (2019, July 12). Singapore deports two members of Arakan Army. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/singapore-deports-two-members-arakan-army.html>

13 Ministry of Home Affairs-Singapore. (2019, July 10). MHA states on security action taken against Myanmar nationals working in Singapore, for organizing support for armed violence. <https://www.mha.gov.sg/newsroom/press-release/news/mha-statement-on-security-action-taken-against-myanmar-nationals-working-in-singapore-for-organising-support-for-armed-violence>

## Tatmadaw Targets Northern Alliance in Shan During Bilateral Talks, but Kachin Remains Stable

The Tatmadaw continued to target multiple Northern Alliance outposts and camps across northern Shan State in July, likely in an attempt to forcefully demarcate territory as it negotiates potential bilateral ceasefires with the Northern Alliance members. The strategy was met with resistance, especially from the TNLA, and poses some risk to current negotiations and the security environment in northern Shan State. The current escalation in northern Shan State, however, is unlikely to spill over into Kachin State at this time.

Despite the extension of its unilateral ceasefire, the Tatmadaw began targeting some Northern Alliance positions in Shan State before providing the groups with individual draft ceasefire proposals on June 30. Leaked details of drafts showed that the Tatmadaw asked the TNLA and MNDAA to vacate some areas and return to their points of origin. The Tatmadaw likely aims to remove certain Northern Alliance fixed positions to limit territorial claims made by the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) during ceasefire negotiations.

Most of the clashes recorded throughout northern Shan State in July took place between the Tatmadaw and the TNLA. In Kutkai Township, for example, the Tatmadaw reportedly attacked multiple TNLA bases, prompting the TNLA to respond with at least one mortar attack on a Tatmadaw base. Kutkai is a strategically important township bisected by the vital highway between Lashio and Muse.

In Namtu Township, the Tatmadaw appeared to target two separate TNLA positions near Pang Hsawt and Man San villages. Both Pang Hsawt and Man San saw fierce fighting in 2018 and early 2019 between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS) and the coalition formed by the TNLA and Shan State Progress Party/ Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA). The Tatmadaw may therefore be targeting some positions taken by the TNLA during the latter's fight with the RCSS.

In June, MIPS received but was unable to verify reports of clashes between the MNDAA and Tatmadaw. In July, however, MIPS confirmed at least seven clashes between the two sides across four townships in northern Shan State. Four of these clashes also took place in Kutkai Township, suggesting that the Tatmadaw aims to reduce or remove the Northern Alliance presence there. The Tatmadaw and MNDAA also clashed in Muse and Lashio townships where the Northern Alliance sometimes operates in combined units.

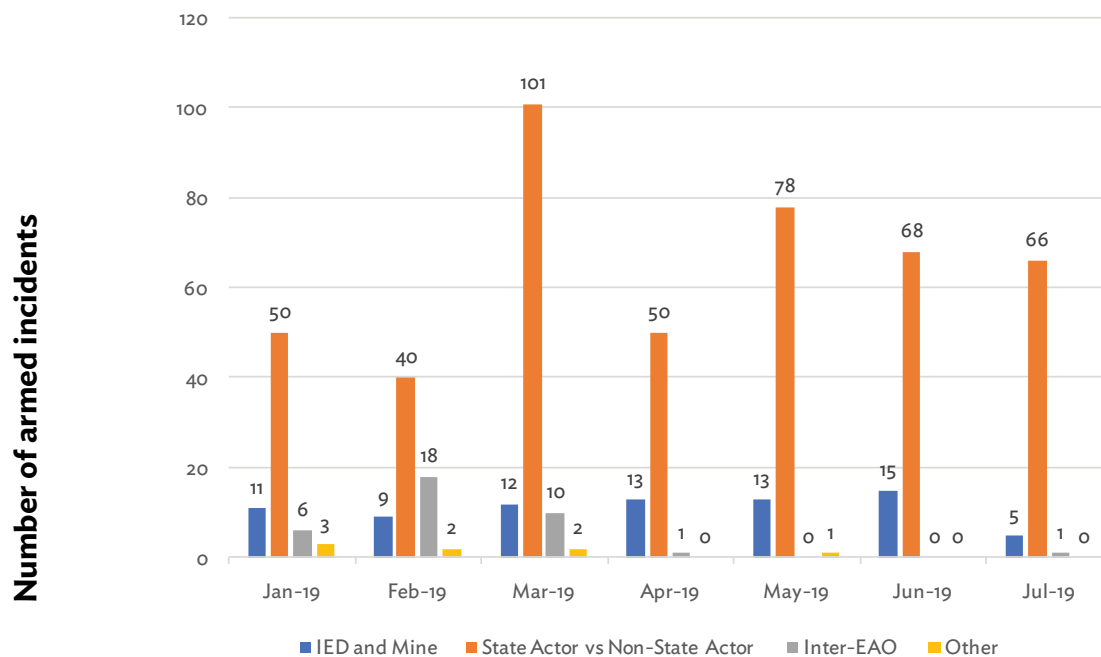
On July 10, soldiers from the Tatmadaw's 99<sup>th</sup> LID reportedly attacked a position held by the KIA Battalion 36, Brigade 6 in Muse Township. The Battalion 36 later retaliated by attacking a 99<sup>th</sup> convoy with landmines on July 24, killing three Tatmadaw soldiers and wounding 12 more.<sup>14</sup> Two days later, the Battalion 36 again ambushed the 99<sup>th</sup>, this time wounding one Tatmadaw soldier.

14 Moe Zaw. (2019, July 26). မူဆယ်မြို့နယ်တွင်းတပ်မတော်ယာဉ်တန်းတိုက်ခိုက်ခံရ. VOA. <https://burmese.voanews.com/a/mu-sal/5016416.html?nocache=1&fbclid=IwAR3x6XUh4G0PDU2fygqAOfrBaQx9X8odm8n6WEjAXidulNZ1FrbeVh8F04>

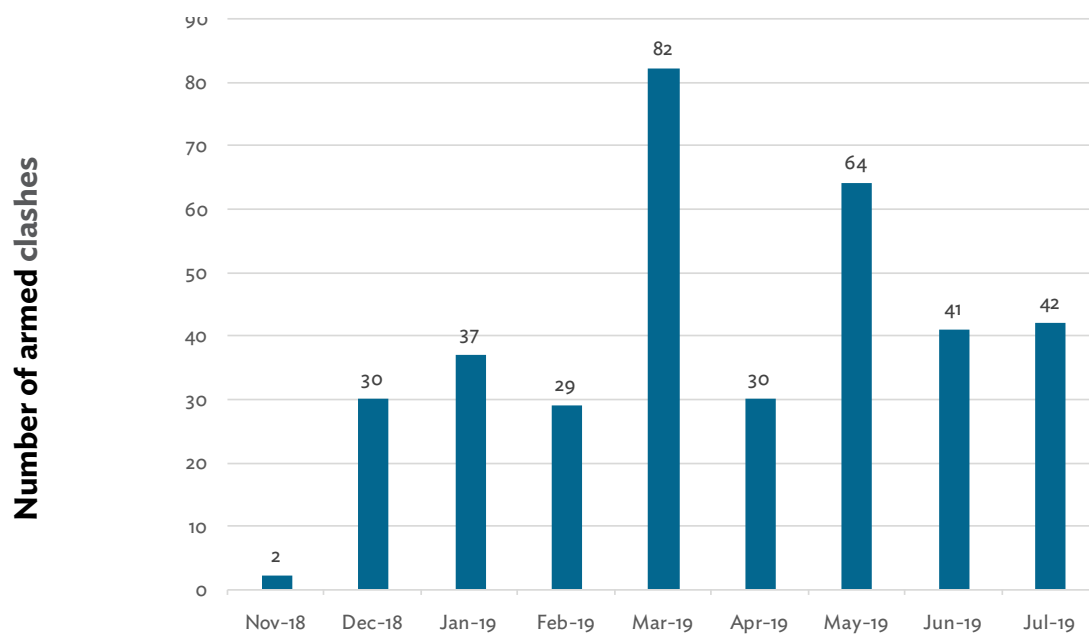
An initial statement from the Tatmadaw blamed the TNLA for the attack on July 24, while no comment was made by the central KIA leadership. The first report<sup>15</sup> of the KIA's attack instead came from Kachin News Group, a prominent Kachin news agency with ties to the Kachin National Organization (KNO), which recently called for an independent Kachin State<sup>16</sup>. The absence of official finger-pointing by either side suggests that both the Tatmadaw and KIA may consider events in northern Shan State as separate from negotiations covering the situation in Kachin State. Despite the violence in Muse, no clashes were reported throughout Kachin State in July.

The ongoing clashes between the Northern Alliance and Tatmadaw in northern Shan may not spill over into Kachin, but further escalation in the former remains a possibility. The fighting may also complicate efforts to reach agreements on demarcation and troop positions amid ongoing negotiations. At the time of writing in early August, multiple reports indicate ongoing fighting between the Tatmadaw, TNLA and MNDAA across northern Shan, including an alliance attack on a Tatmadaw base.<sup>17</sup> On August 2, government spokesperson U Zaw Htay said that the Northern Alliance members declined a recent invitation to meet again in Mong La, Shan State.<sup>18</sup> U Zaw Htay reported that Northern Alliance officials said it was “difficult” to go to Mong La, but did not elaborate further.

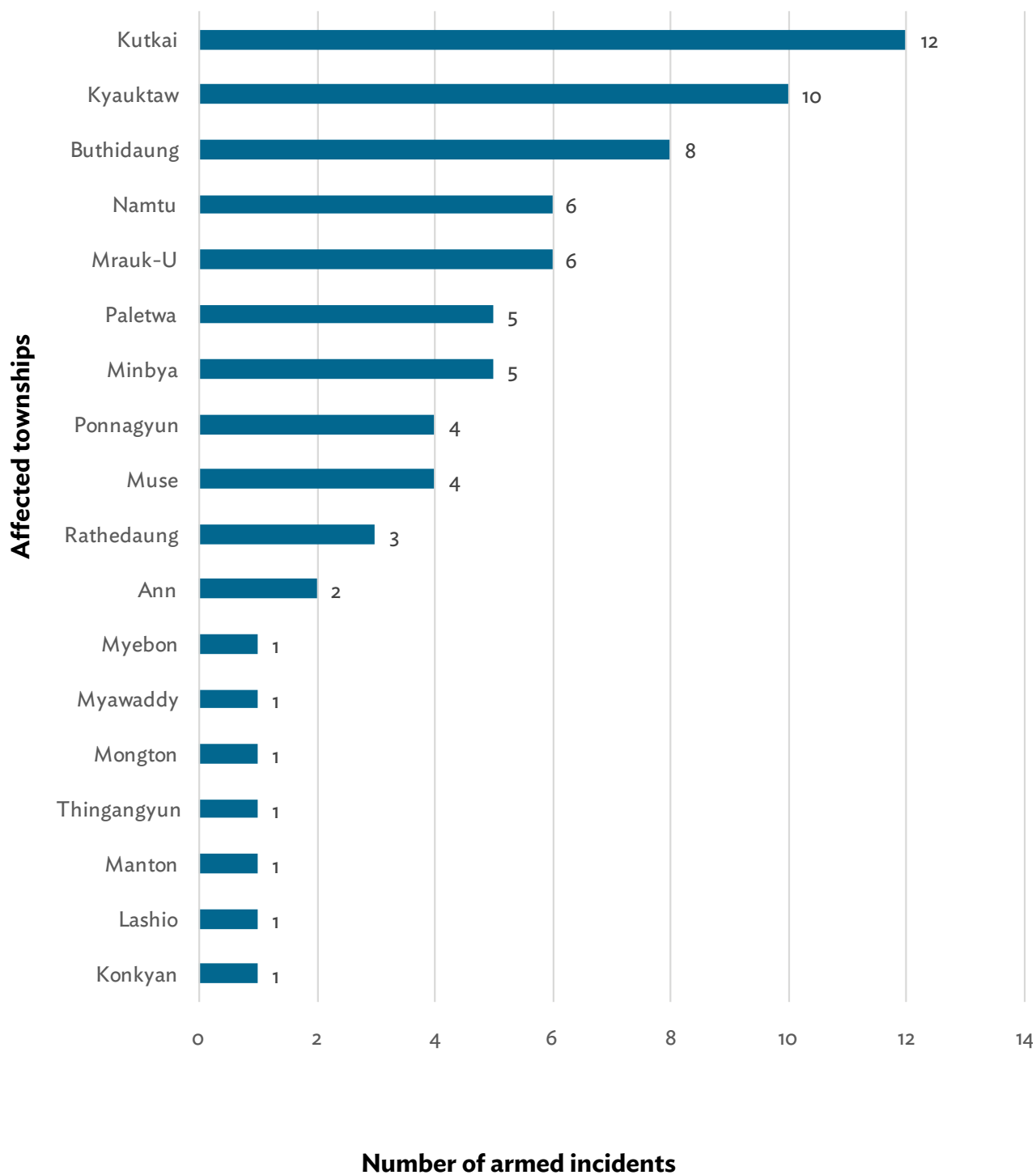
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- 15 Kachin News Group. (2019, July 27). မိုးကိုသို့ ဦးတည်သော တပ်မတော်ယာဉ်တန်းကို KIA မိုင်းဖြင့် ခုခံ တိုက်ခိုက်. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/theKachinNews/posts/1951283654971368>
- 16 Kachinwaves. (2019, January 31). ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေး ဖြစ်စဉ်အတွက် ဆူးငြောင့်ခလုတ်အဖြစ် ဝေဖန်ခံရသည့် ထုတ်ပြန်ကြေညာချက်. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/kachinwavesnews/posts/2316305255049240>
- 17 ရှမ်းမြောက် တာမီးည မြန်မာစစ်ခန်းကို မြောက်ပိုင်းမဟာမိတ် ဝင်တိုက်. (2019, August 09). Kachin News Group. <https://burmese.kachinnews.com/2019/08/09/%e1%80%9b%e1%80%bd%e1%80%99%e1%80%b9%e1%80%b8%e1%80%b1%e1%80%bb%e1%80%99%e1%80%ac%e1%80%80%e1%80%b9-%e1%80%90%e1%80%ac%e1%80%99%e1%80%ad%e1%80%af%e1%80%b8%e1%80%8a%e1%80%b2-%e1%80%bb%e1%80%99%e1%80%94/?fbclid=IwAR2wcJ87hpUzB2NPARrRX3OdC-dC-daQaUNfy6eC7SFANnUCW1SZ4eXzfbvU>
- 18 Myanmar President Office. (2019, August 02). နိုင်ငံအတွင်းလတ်တလောဖြစ်ပွားနေသောနိုင်ငံရေး၊ စီးပွားရေး၊ လူမှုရေးများနှင့်ပတ်သက်သည့် သမ္မတရုံး သတင်းစာရှင်းလင်း [Press Release]. One News Myanmar. <https://www.facebook.com/onenewsmyan/videos/432556054000058/>



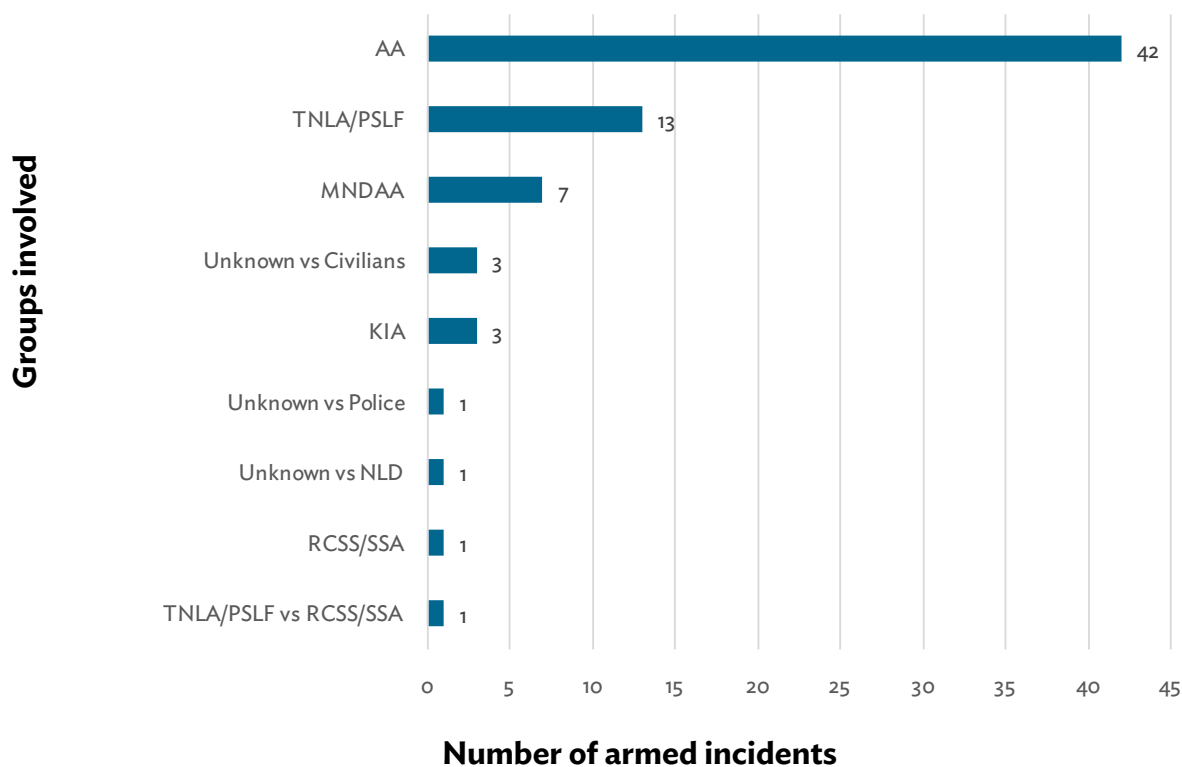
**Figure 1: Armed incidents from January 2019 to July 2019**



**Figure 2: Clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw from November 2018 to July 2019**



**Figure 3:** Townships affected by armed incidents in July 2019



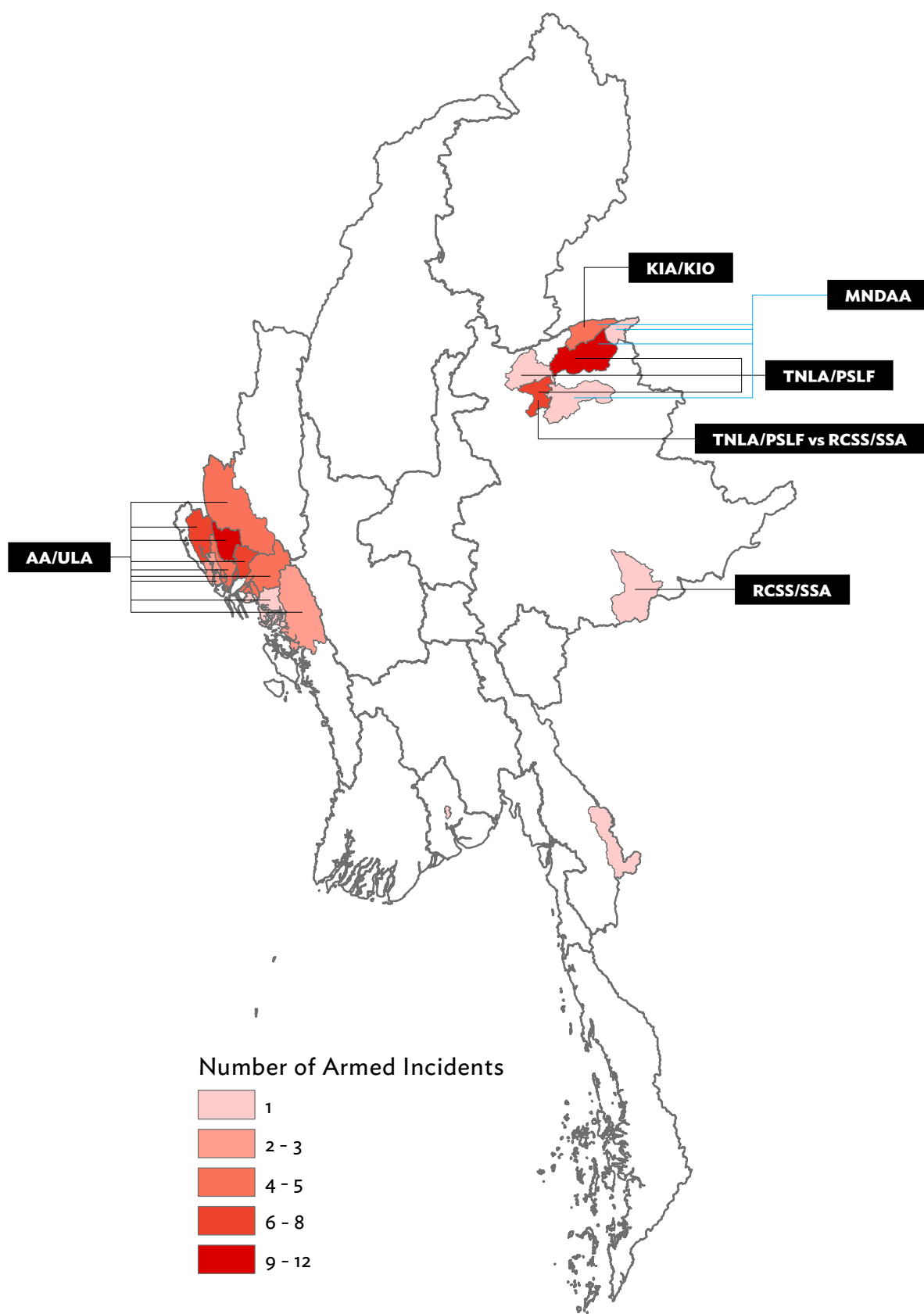
\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine.

EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 4:** Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in July 2019

Meetings	Number
JMC Meeting/Workshop	1
Meeting between Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and KHCC	1
NCA-S EAOs Meeting/Workshop	1
NMSP and Mon Parties Meeting	1
NRPC and KNPP Meeting	1
NRPC and KNU Meeting	1
NRPC and RCSS Meeting	1
Tatmadaw and RCSS Meeting	1
<b>Total Number of Meetings</b>	<b>8</b>

**Figure 5:** Significant meetings related to the peace process in July 2019



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
 EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 6: Armed incidents in July 2019**

## GOVERNMENT

### **Push for Constitutional Change Strains Civil-Military Relations, Likely to Impact Peace Process**

The Union Parliament's Charter Amendment Committee delivered its report containing 3,765 recommendations for constitutional change to the Union Hluttaw on July 15.<sup>19</sup> The committee was established on February 19, 2019 and is made up of 45 members tasked with reviewing the 2008 Constitution. The recent push to amend the constitution has heightened tensions between the military and the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) government and brings implications for the peace process.

The non-elected Members of Parliament (MP) from the Tatmadaw and elected representatives from the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) originally protested the formation of the committee on the grounds that it violates Chapter 12 of the 2008 Constitution. In a display of respect for the majority decision, however, the Tatmadaw MPs appointed to the committee ultimately attended all meetings but refused to participate in any of the discussions.

The USDP initially proposed to amend Article 261 of the 2008 Constitution, which grants the president the power to appoint state and region chief ministers, on February 13, 2019. The amendment would instead allow state and region legislatures to appoint their own chief minister—a step toward decentralization that won support from Ethnic Po-

litical Parties (EPP). The NLD likely felt that the amendment opposed its interests in two ways.

First, amending Article 261 would diminish the NLD's power to appoint loyal party members as chief minister in ethnic states. Second, approval of the amendment would represent a political win for the USDP in the eyes of EPPs since the USDP, and not the NLD, proposed the amendment first. The NLD formed the 45-member Charter Amendment Committee less than a week later, leading to its recent submission of 114 proposals for amendments and repeals, none of which made any mention of Article 261.

Nor did any of the 3,765 proposals touch upon the 51 points agreed to by participants of the Union Peace Conference—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC). Sources told MIPS that the absence of peace-related issues in the current constitutional amendment efforts has upset members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) and diminished their confidence in the NLD. On August 1, an independent MP from Kayah proposed to synchronize the 3,765 proposals by forming a committee that includes representatives from the EAOs. Although unlikely to succeed, the NLD's efforts to amend the constitution have strained its relationship with both the military and EAOs.

19 Nan Lwin. (2019, July 18). Key facts & figures on Myanmar charter amendment recommendations. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/key-facts-figures-myanmar-charter-amendment-recommendations.html>



## NCA-SIGNATORIES

### Signatories Look to Jumpstart Peace Process as KNU Faces Self-Imposed Isolation

The ethnic NCA-S worked to jumpstart the peace process and convene the UPC before the end of 2019 while the Karen National Union (KNU) continued to struggle with the internal challenges that led to its suspension of formal peace talks in 2018. In contrast to the KNU, the influential RCSS made several efforts to solve outstanding issues in the peace process. The KNU's self-imposed isolation will likely continue so long as it is unable to find internal agreement on matters related to its approach to the peace process and resume its formal participation.

After initially aligning itself with the KNU, the RCSS coordinated with the smaller EAOs and government by attending an informal Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) Secretaries meeting in mid-June. During the meeting, which the KNU did not attend, the government and EAOs agreed to plans to organize the UPC by the end of 2019. Then, on July 3, the EAOs held an internal working meeting to discuss UPDJC-related matters, again without the KNU's attendance. The UPDJC includes members from the EAOs, government, and Tatmadaw and is responsible for

convening the UPC.

In the meantime, relations between the RCSS and government showed signs of improvement. For example, the RCSS met with the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) in Nay Pyi Taw on July 11 before meeting with the Tatmadaw on July 12. The meetings led to an agreement for the RCSS to hold the sub-national dialogue in Langkhio, Shan State. The location of the Shan State sub-national dialogue was a major deadlock issue between the Tatmadaw and RCSS in 2018.

On July 17, the Shan State Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) held in an informal meeting. Less than one week later, the RCSS mentioned in a statement that it would seek discussions on amending the procedures of the JMC.<sup>20</sup> The announcement indicates a likely willingness to solve JMC-related issues and re-engage in formal meetings from which it suspended participation in last year. Sources also told MIPS that the RCSS decided to reposition some troops to avoid clashes with the Tatmadaw during an internal meeting on July 24.

20 သျှမ်းပြည်ပြန်လည်ထူထောင်ရေးကောင်စီ (RCSS) ၏ ၂၀၁၉ခုနှစ်(၆)လပတ်အစည်းအရုံးထုတ်ပြန်ကြေညာချက်. (2019, July 23). Tai Freedom. <https://bur.taifreedom.com/2019/07/23/%e1%80%9e%e1%80%bb%e1%80%be%e1%80%99%e1%80%ba%e1%80%b8%e1%80%95%e1%80%bc%e1%80%8a%e1%80%ba%e1%80%95%e1%80%bc%e1%80%94%e1%80%ba%e1%80%9c%e1%80%8a%e1%80%ba%e1%80%91%e1%80%b0%e1%80%91%e1%80%b1%e1%80%ac/?amp%3Bfbclid=IwAR2-bhk4y-pz7iZ3Fb3UM3YSzYFCPX84Y270BuyxgFbDM0kcy5uqXyru-1Kg>

The KNU held an informal meeting with the NRPC in Yangon on July 8. The meeting aimed to address issues related to the “Interim Arrangement” described in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). The working meeting established mutual understanding between both sides, and a subsequent meeting was planned to explore an implementation mechanism to provide peace dividends for communities in conflict zones.

The KNU then began its 22<sup>nd</sup> Central Committee meeting in Hpa An Township on July 22.<sup>21</sup> The meeting will last two weeks and cover the internal issues preventing the KNU’s formal participation in the peace process. Until these issues are solved, the NCA-S will likely continue to move forward without the KNU.

## NON-SIGNATORIES

### UWSA Sends Government a Proposal to Sign NCA

During a press conference on July 9, government spokesperson U Zaw Htay revealed that the United Wa State Army (UWSA) submitted a proposal to the government outlining its terms for signing the NCA. It now appears that the UWSA is moving forward with informal bilateral negotiations with the government while softening its stance toward the NCA. Sources said that the UWSA informed other Federal Political Negotiation and Consul-

tative Committee (FPNCC) members that they should move forward with bilateral ceasefire negotiation. The UWSA also reportedly said that those groups who are ready may sign the NCA. This new stance is what prompted the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) to publicly announce its intention to sign the NCA. The UWSA will likely move toward more bilateral negotiations with the government.

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21 KNU central committee holds annual meeting. (2019, July 24). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/knu-central-committee-holds-annual-meeting>

## FPNCC Shows Signs of Disunity

The relationship among members of the FPNCC appears incohesive. First, the UWSA seems uncomfortable with the KIA's leadership role within the Northern Alliance. This uneasiness was demonstrated by the absence of UWSA observers to the government's meeting with the Northern Alliance in Mong La in June. Even within the Northern Alliance, the KIA has distanced itself from the other three groups. In April, the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA issued a condemnation of the Tatmadaw's offensive in Rakhine, but the KIA did not sign the statement. Despite more clashes in northern Shan State in July, both the KIA and Tatmadaw

were able to avoid any clashes in Kachin State the same month.

During recent attempts to hold the next round of ceasefire negotiations, the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA were hesitant to attend any meeting held inland. They instead preferred to meet in China or Panghsang, the UWSA's headquarters. The groups did not agree to the government's proposal to hold a meeting at Mong La but, according to MIPS sources, the KIA was flexible over the location of the meeting.

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## About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING AUGUST 2019

|

VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(9)

## OVERVIEW

- The “Three Brother Alliance’s” offensive in Shan State was likely intended to demonstrate its ability to cause widespread disruption throughout the vital corridor linking Myanmar and China, but failed to control any critical part of the Lashio-Muse trade route.
- The Tatmadaw succeeded in taking control of the major highway and repelling the bulk of the Shan offensive, but has not waged a larger counteroffensive because it still likely wants to achieve bilateral ceasefires with the Northern Alliance groups, albeit strictly on its own terms.
- AA attempts to stage large attacks in Rakhine State in synchronization with the offensive in the North were unsuccessful in August. The Tatmadaw will likely capitalize on its growing momentum and continue to batter the AA. A ceasefire in Rakhine State appears unlikely at this time.
- Despite the Three Brother Alliance’s declaration of unilateral ceasefire and its scheduled meeting with the government in the second week of September, clashes will likely continue even if they reach an agreement on a statement of preliminary ceasefire.
- The KNU rejoined the peace process and the future of the PPST now appears more certain. Lingering issues within the PPST and a limited capacity on both sides, however, will continue to pose a challenge.
- Both the government and NCA-Signatories are now moving toward convening the next UPC-21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong while they are still exploring the agenda to be discussed and agreed upon at the peace conference.
- Myanmar-made weapons captured in Bangladesh were likely sold on the black market and not covertly supplied by the Tatmadaw.
- MIPS conducted an initial fact check on the UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission report and discovered numerous factual errors.

# SECURITY

## Nationwide Total Skyrockets After EAOs Launch Shan Offensive

At least 174 armed clashes and 16 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in August for a total of 190 armed incidents nationwide, up dramatically from 72 in July, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> The sharp rise was attributable to the coordinated offensive by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA) in Shan State. Accordingly, Kutkai Township experienced at least 80 armed in-

cidents as the Tatmadaw moved to repel the “Three Brother Alliance’s” offensive and secure the main road in northern Shan State. In Minyba Township, Rakhine State, at least 18 clashes took place as the AA reportedly mobilized large numbers but was dispersed by the Tatmadaw before carrying out any major attack. Lashio Township in Shan State experienced the third highest number of clashes with fighting again occurring between the Three Brother Alliance and Tatmadaw. Conflict-affected areas elsewhere remained quiet, with only one armed incident recorded in Kachin State.

## Tatmadaw Repels Alliance Offensive in Shan, Is Yet to Launch Counteroffensive

On August 15, 2019, the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA, calling themselves the “Three Brother Alliance,” launched a combined offensive with initial attacks on five targets in Pyin Oo Lwin and Naung-hkio townships in northern Shan State. MIPS released a preliminary analysis on August 24 that addressed the possible reasons behind the offensive, the Ethnic Armed Organizations’ (EAO) strategy, the Tatmadaw’s response, and the implications for the peace process.<sup>2</sup>

There are now several key assessments to add. The first is that the Three Brother Alliance’s primary aim in launching the offensive was to demonstrate its capability to inflict widespread disruption along

the primary transport corridor linking Myanmar and China as leverage against the government. Second, the EAOs were unable to capture Tatmadaw positions after the first day of the attack and could not hold their own positions against Tatmadaw counterattacks along the Lashio-Muse Highway. Third, the Alliance began targeting civilian vehicles with small units to avoid Tatmadaw columns after their attempt to take control of critical areas along the trade route failed. Fourth, the Tatmadaw demonstrated some level of restraint in two ways. Chiefly, the Tatmadaw did not immediately launch a major counteroffensive nor did it change its policy regarding ongoing negotiations with the Northern Alliance groups. The Tatmadaw instead left the

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

2 MIPS. (2019, August 24). Focal points: TNLA, MNDAA, and AA launch coordinated attacks, conflict likely to escalate (Annual Peace & Security Review 2018 (Myanmar)). <https://mips-mm.org/download/focal-points-tnla-mndaa-and-aa-launch-coordinated-attacks-conflict-likely-to-escalate/>

door open for continued negotiations because it still likely wishes to reach an agreement, albeit only on its own terms.

Initially, MIPS assessed that the EAO attacks on infrastructure were possibly designed in part to divert the Tatmadaw's attention from an impending attack on some other primary target. It is now clear, however, that the Alliance's primary strategy was to only disrupt regular activity and access to the main roads linking Myanmar and China in northern Shan State. Nearly all of the clashes recorded in August occurred directly along the Lashio-Muse Highway, the Hseni-Chinshwehaw Road, or the Kutkai-Tarmoenye Road. The EAOs' disruption strategy entailed three types of operations.

First, the Alliance attempted to destroy hard infrastructure, namely bridges. In the opening days of the offensive the EAOs chose soft targets like the Gote Twin Bridge in Naunghkio Township and three small, unguarded bridges along the road between Hseni and Chinshwehaw. At Nam Hkai in Kutkai Township, the TNLA attempted for days to overrun Tatmadaw and militia forces guarding a 200-foot bridge. Despite all efforts, the EAOs failed to destroy any additional bridges guarded by security forces after the opening days of the offensive.

Second, the EAOs attacked Tatmadaw bases and units up and down the Lashio-Muse Highway, with the most intense fighting concentrated in two areas. The first was near Loi Sam Hsip, a mountain situated along the Lashio-Muse Highway about four miles south of Kuktkai. The EAOs began assaulting Tatmadaw units in the area on August 17, with subsequent clashes reported almost every day for the remainder of the month. The second site of heavy fighting was in and around Nam Hpat Hkar, where the Alliance also began an attack on August 17. Alliance operations in the area included an attack on Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB) 123's base along the Lashio-Muse Highway nearby.

The Tatmadaw responded to the offensive by first alerting units already in the area and consolidating smaller outposts to guard critical positions and bridges. After defending against the first wave of attacks, the Tatmadaw inserted additional units to reopen the Lashio-Muse road to civilian traffic that had been cut off by fighting to the north and south of Kutkai Town. By the end of August, the Tatmadaw had pushed the bulk of EAO forces back from the main roads and large-scale attacks began to subside.

With Tatmadaw counterattacks and firepower making it exceedingly difficult to regroup and maneuver large units along the roads, the EAOs began to insert smaller teams to obstruct traffic. On August 18, Alliance fighters reportedly destroyed a pineapple truck along the Lashio-Muse Highway near Nam Hpat Hkar. The next day, fighters destroyed three cars to create a roadblock nearby. On August 29, the EAOs reportedly burned a number of trucks and vehicles on the highway near Kutkai. Reports of similar activities persisted into early September.

Other than the surprise attack at the Gote Twin police post and bridge on August 15, the EAOs failed to overrun any other Tatmadaw or militia post, base, or camp. Nor could they hold the hilltop positions they had taken overlooking the highway north and south of Kutkai Town. In less than just two weeks, the Tatmadaw had largely succeeded in reopening the roads and dispersing the largest EAO contingents. Testimony from multiple ground sources indicates that the EAOs suffered high losses in the past three weeks.

The Tatmadaw appeared to demonstrate some degree of restraint by forgoing a counteroffensive and keeping the door open for continued negotiations. At a press conference on August 23, the Tatmadaw expressed that it would still negotiate with the Northern Alliance groups but warned that if the EAOs continued to fight, then it was "ready to respond". Yet

the Tatmadaw's response has only been to reopen and secure the roads. It has not responded by attacking EAO bases and positions elsewhere in northern Shan State. MIPS assesses that the Tatmadaw has at least five infantry divisions available for a counteroffensive, meaning that its limited response was not likely influenced by a lack of military capacity.

The Tatmadaw may be prolonging a major military response because it still wants to achieve bilateral ceasefires, albeit strictly on its own terms. Although it did not attend the meeting between the Northern Alliance and National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) in Keng Tung on August 31, the Tatmadaw extended its unilateral ceasefire again for three weeks.<sup>3</sup> Sources told MIPS that Tatmadaw may attend the upcoming meeting with the Northern Alliance scheduled for September 16 and 17, suggesting that the ceasefire extension is likely intended to leave room for the talks.<sup>4</sup>

There are several looming obstacles any upcoming talks will face. According to MIPS sources, the EAOs provided the NRPC with an eight-point proposal during the meeting in Keng Tung. The Tatmadaw and government are generally fine with seven of the points. The eighth point calls for China to play a role in ceasefire monitoring, which neither the Tatmadaw nor government accept. Moreover, the Tatmadaw may insist that the groups sign any initial agreement separately, but the EAOs have so far only demonstrated a willingness to sign collectively.

With entrenched positions and distrust on both sides, clashes will likely continue even if both sides

reach an agreement to sign a document outlining preliminary ceasefire because the Tatmadaw has agreed to pause the fighting but not troop movements. The Tatmadaw's position on the AA's presence in Rakhine remains unchanged and the Tatmadaw will likely maintain its military pressure in Rakhine State. This scenario might cause discomfort among the Alliance.

In effect, the Tatmadaw has extended a 'last chance' offer to the EAOs to agree to its terms for ceasefire. If no agreement is struck at the upcoming meeting, however, the Tatmadaw may not extend its unilateral ceasefire and could possibly wage a major offensive by targeting EAO strongholds, especially against the TNLA. MIPS estimates that up to 100,000 civilians, especially Palaung people spread across Shan State and Mandalay Region, could be at risk for displacement if the Tatmadaw launches a major offensive.

A final important variable is China's role: Although China condemned the Alliance attacks and asked the EAOs to halt their offensive, the Alliance continued to maintain its military momentum to cut off the road.<sup>5</sup> Under Chinese pressure, the Alliance issued a statement dated September 2 first in Chinese language and later in Myanmar and English. Attacks on civilian vehicles continued for about one day after the statement was released, while the number of clashes reduced in the following days. With China's facilitation, the government and the Alliance will likely meet for the next round of talks. An actual ceasefire, however, may still be difficult to achieve, especially in Rakhine.

3 Reliefweb. (2019, August 29). Northern alliance agrees to meeting with Myanmar government negotiators. <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/northern-alliance-agrees-meeting-myanmar-government-negotiators>

4 Lawi Weng. (2019, September 02). Govt peace team 'just for show': TNLA official. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/meeting-rebels-myanmar-govt-peace-team-just-show-tnla-official.html>

5 Nan Lwin. (2019, August 19). China condemns Myanmar's ethnic rebels for Shan state fighting. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/china-condemns-myanmars-ethnic-rebels-shan-state-fighting.html?fbclid=IwAR24uyqPMvIPg-dWASsUVqFYrYpnFFh8iV6h5ZjpWd9bvOaGgQ6lVMixYmng>



## AA Fails to Pick Up the Tempo in Rakhine

The intensity of the conflict in Rakhine State continued along a low trajectory in August as the Tatmadaw carried the upper hand and the AA failed to successfully launch any large-scale attacks. The intensity of the conflict had begun to decline in July as the Tatmadaw made progress over the AA, forcing the ethnic Rakhine fighters to disperse. As the EAO offensive in Shan State unfolded in mid-August, the AA mobilized large numbers in Minbya Township in an apparent bid to launch attacks synchronized with the Shan offensive. Preemptive Tatmadaw attacks on AA units converging in the area prevented a major AA assault, but the ensuing clashes displaced a particularly large number of civilians near Pan Myaung Village. The AA also continued efforts to open a new front in southern Rakhine State, although with little success so far.

The most significant fighting between the AA and Tatmadaw in August occurred in and around Pan Myaung Village in Minbya Township. Pan Myaung and its surrounding villages are about five miles directly to the east of Mrauk U Town. The area was the site of a major battle in June involving a large contingent of AA fighters who then fled into the nearby mountains. A subsequent Tatmadaw operation to pursue the fleeing AA units uncovered multiple camps in the mountains. Pan Myaung and the nearby villages are likely being used as a staging ground and support base for AA fighters in the area. The village occupies a strategic location with access to both the AA's mountain hideouts and operational areas in Mrauk U and Minbya Townships.

The most significant fighting near Pan Myaung Village began on August 22 and lasted until Au-

gust 29. Throughout the week, the Tatmadaw fired heavy artillery nearly every day and flew attack helicopters against the AA at least three times. Media reported that the Tatmadaw was firing mortars from a hill in the middle of village.<sup>6</sup> On August 24, three children were killed in Pan Myaung Village by a mortar shell that landed on their home. The Tatmadaw and AA both accused one another of firing the shell. The Rakhine Ethnic Congress (REC) estimated that 4,000 civilians from seven nearby villages had fled by August 29. There is a high risk for further civilian displacement in the area.

Sources told MIPS that large numbers of AA fighters were spotted mobilizing near Pan Myaung in the days after the August 15 attacks in Shan State. The subsequent series of Tatmadaw artillery strikes and airstrikes in the area beginning August 22 appeared to have preempted any major AA attack in Minbya Township so far. In Mrauk U Township, however, as many as 150 AA fighters attacked a Tatmadaw post on Lin Mway Taung Hill. The AA claimed that it overran the Tatmadaw, but MIPS was able to verify that the Tatmadaw repelled the attack. Sources said the AA dragged multiple bodies from the battlefield but was forced to leave six dead behind. There were no other major AA attempts or successful attacks elsewhere in August.

Further to the south, however, the AA continued its attempt to open a new front in Myebon and Ann Townships. On August 26, for example, the AA carried out a small ambush against the Tatmadaw along the Yangon-Sittwe Highway in Ann Township, while light clashes were reported in Myebon on August 18 and 26. The AA is likely aiming to open a southern front to relieve Tatmadaw

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6 Min Tun. (2019, August 25). Villagers flee from houses due to artillery fire. DMG. <https://www.dmediag.com/news/576-vff>



pressure to the north and to meet the expectations of supporters at a time when the overall tempo of the conflict is slowing. So far, however, the AA's capability to wage significant operations in Myebon and Ann appears quite limited.

On August 31, the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC) lifted the restriction on mobile internet services in five of the nine affected townships. The restriction remains in place in Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun, Mrauk U, and Minbya townships. Together, these four townships comprise the heart of the AA's stronghold and are where the most significant fighting continues to occur. In the June edition of the monthly "Peace & Security Brief", MIPS assessed that the mobile internet shutdown was designed to disrupt the AA's command and control between leaders in Lai

Zar, Kachin State, and fighters on the ground in Rakhine State. The restoration of mobile internet outside the AA's primary Area of Operations (AO) supports the assessment that the shutdown was intended to disrupt the command and control AA's capability.

The number of large-scale AA attacks began to decline in May as the Tatmadaw exacted a heavy toll on the concentrated numbers of AA fighters needed to launch such operations. Yet despite the Tatmadaw's dominance, the AA has proven pugnacious and continues to plan attacks against fixed Tatmadaw positions and columns. Such attempts are therefore likely to continue, but appear increasingly less likely to succeed. The Tatmadaw will almost certainly capitalize on its growing momentum and continue to heighten its pressure on the AA.

## Targeted Killings Occur in Rakhine Following AA Threat to Police

On August 12, the AA warned police not to participate in military operations alongside the Tatmadaw in Rakhine and threatened to treat police as enemy combatants. On August 19, the police chief of Kyauktaw Township was stabbed. A rumor circulated on social media that the police chief's men saw the attack but did not attempt to arrest the perpetrator. On August 20, a convoy of five police trucks was ambushed with IEDs along the Yangon-Sittwe Highway in Ponnagyun Township. One policeman was killed and three wounded. On September 1, another police officer was stabbed to

death at a local market by several unidentified men in Ponnagyun Township.

The same day, a husband and wife pair of shopkeepers were stabbed to death in Kyauktaw Township. The Tatmadaw blamed the AA and said the couple was targeted for providing information about the AA to security forces.<sup>7</sup> Generally, knife attacks are more difficult and riskier for an attacker who may otherwise have access to a firearm. The string of stabbings in August could be the work of AA operatives or vigilantes inspired by the AA's threats to police.

7 AA အကြမ်းဖက်သောင်းကျန်းသူ အဖွဲ့၏ အမတ်များက ဝါးတောင်ကျေးရွာ၌ အပြစ်မဲ့ ပြည်သူနှစ်ဦးအား အကြောင်းမဲ့ သတ်ဖြတ်. (2019, September 03). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defense Services.

## Bangladesh Security Forces Capture Myanmar-made Weapons from Local Insurgents

On August 18, two Bangladesh military patrols were ambushed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts near the Myanmar border. Three soldiers were injured and another was killed. An initial report<sup>8</sup> from Bangladesh media blamed the AA, but on August 23 Officers from Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) fought with a local Bangladesh insurgent group and captured seven

Myanmar-made weapons<sup>9</sup>. Local media subsequently accused the Tatmadaw of covertly supplying Bangladesh rebels, but the weapons captured were either police-issued or the obsolete G3 rifle often given to police. At this time, it appears more likely that the weapons were sold by corrupt Myanmar security personnel on the black-market and ended up in Bangladesh.

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8 Uttom, S. (2019, August 20). Myanmar rebels accused of attacking Bangladesh military. UCA News. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/myanmar-rebels-accused-of-attacking-bangladesh-military/85919>

9 Alam, I. (2019, August 23). Myanmar supplies insurgents in Bangladesh with weapons. Bangladesh Defense & Security Analysis. [https://www.defseca.com/national-security/myanmar-supplies-insurgents-in-bangladesh-with-weapons/?fbclid=IwAR0vvCp-kXMJOyL1vEdnF\\_YvI\\_9IIARBFSS1KdkedsE0IH9rNA5BuzDUPqjg](https://www.defseca.com/national-security/myanmar-supplies-insurgents-in-bangladesh-with-weapons/?fbclid=IwAR0vvCp-kXMJOyL1vEdnF_YvI_9IIARBFSS1KdkedsE0IH9rNA5BuzDUPqjg)

# GOVERNMENT

## Fact-Finding Mission Report Worries Business Community

The UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Myanmar released its report on the Tatmadaw's business operations and interests on August 5.<sup>10</sup> The report focused in particular on the Tatmadaw's two primary enterprises, Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), and their various subsidiaries. It also examined donations from private businesses made during the Rakhine Crisis in 2017.

Despite its numerous factual errors, the report's focus on the donations made in 2017 sent a shockwave through Myanmar's business community. According to various contacts in the private sector, there is a common concern that what some

considered a goodwill gesture is now relevant to an international accusation of genocide. The spotlight on the donations, however, is not new. A report by Amnesty International in 2018 condemned Japanese brewer Kirin for donating to the Tatmadaw during the clearance operations against the Rohingya.<sup>11</sup>

MIPS conducted an initial fact check on the report and discovered numerous errors. For example, the report names multiple MEHL or MEC subsidiaries that no longer exist. Although the government rejected the report, it did not point out any specific contextual issues. MIPS will brief relevant stakeholders on its full findings in the near future.

10 The UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Myanmar. (2019, August 05). UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar exposes military business ties, calls for targeted sanctions and arms embargoes.

11 Amnesty International UK. (2018). Does your pint support ethnic cleansing? <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/kirin-funded-myanmar-army-rohingya-crisis>

Number of armed incidents

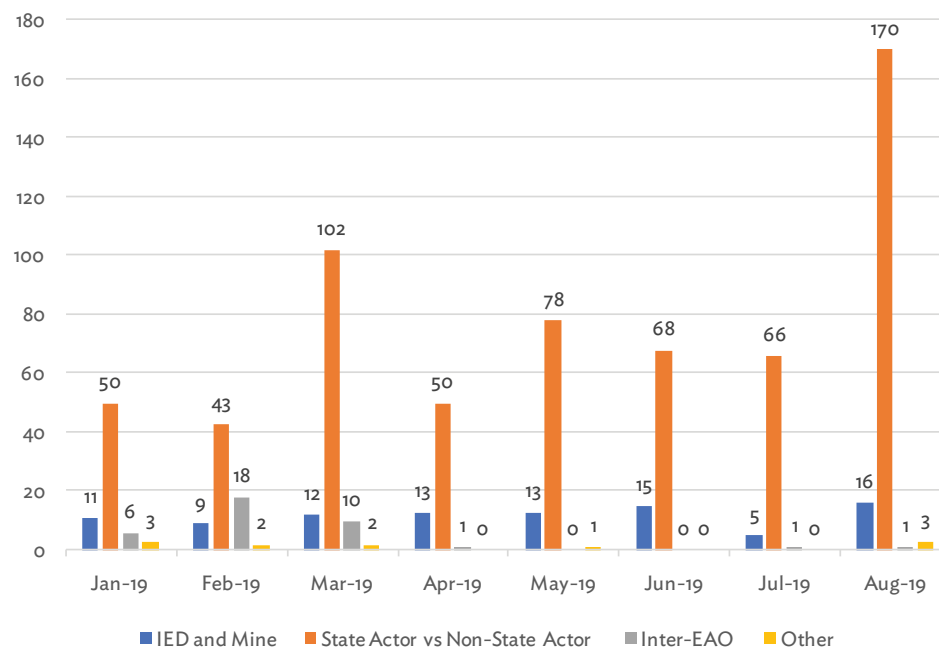
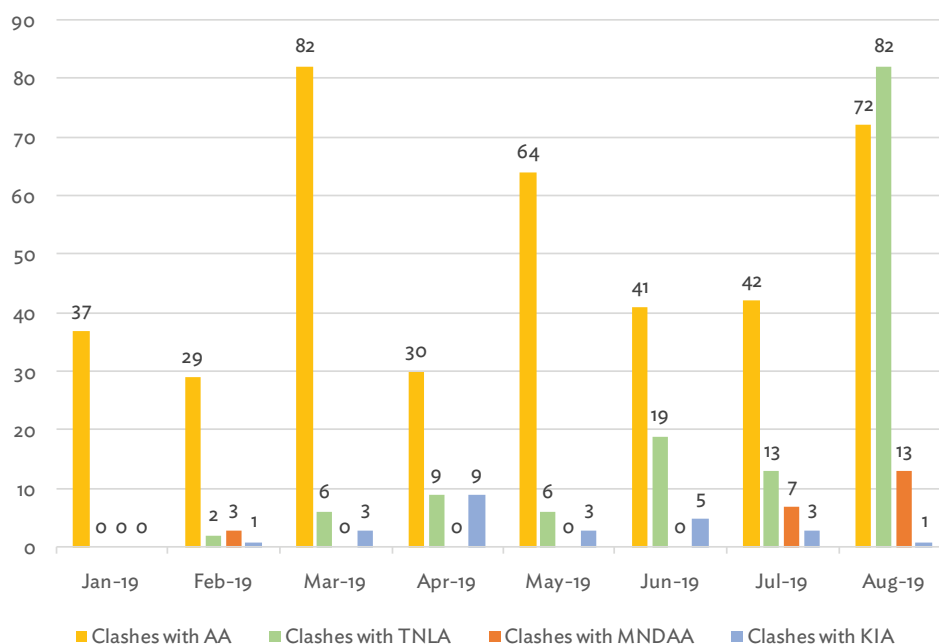


Figure 1: Armed incidents from January 2019 to August 2019

Number of armed incidents



\*18 of the clashes involving the AA in August occurred in northern Shan State.

Figure 5: Armed incidents involving Northern Alliance groups from January 2019 to August 2019

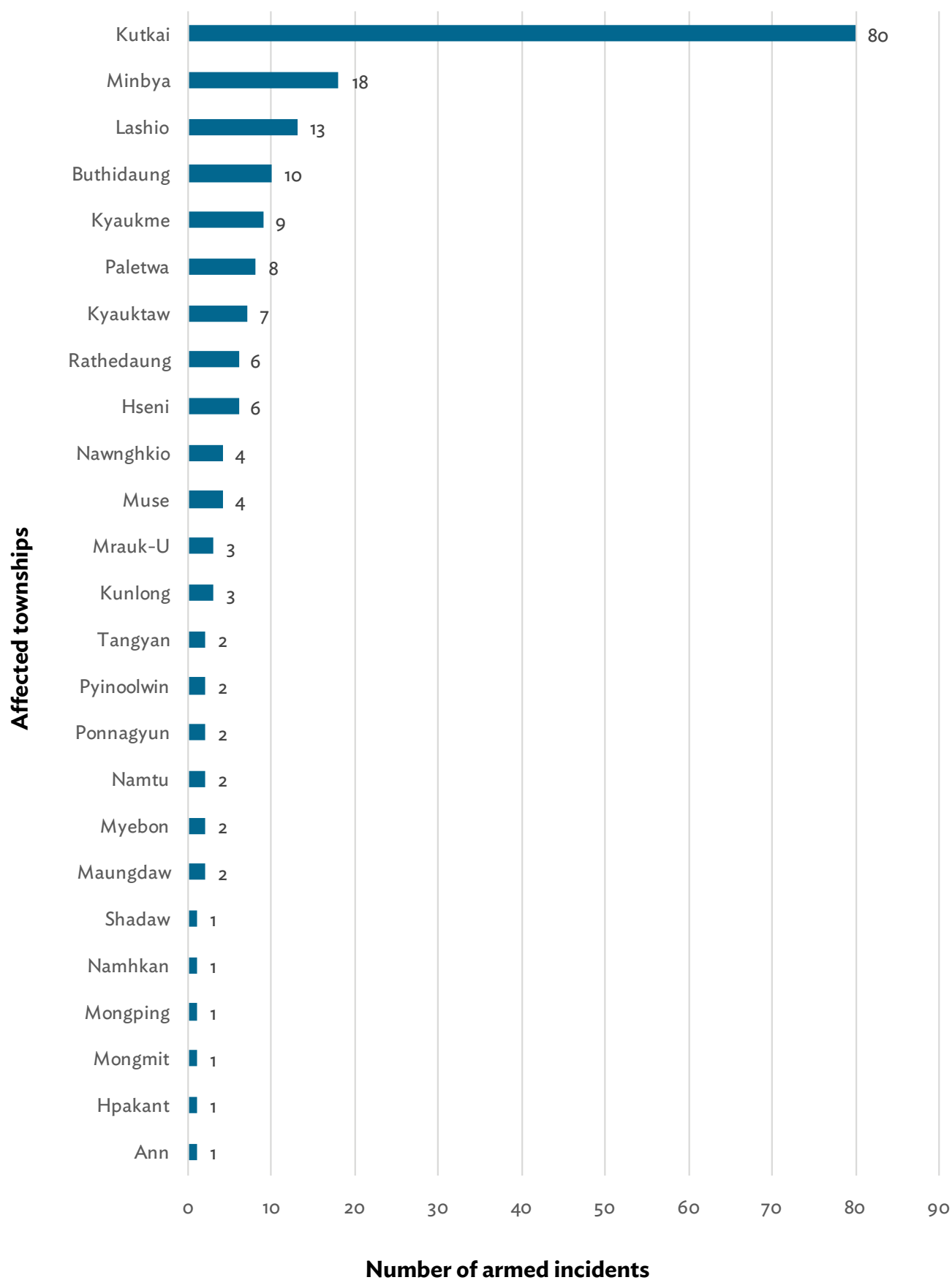
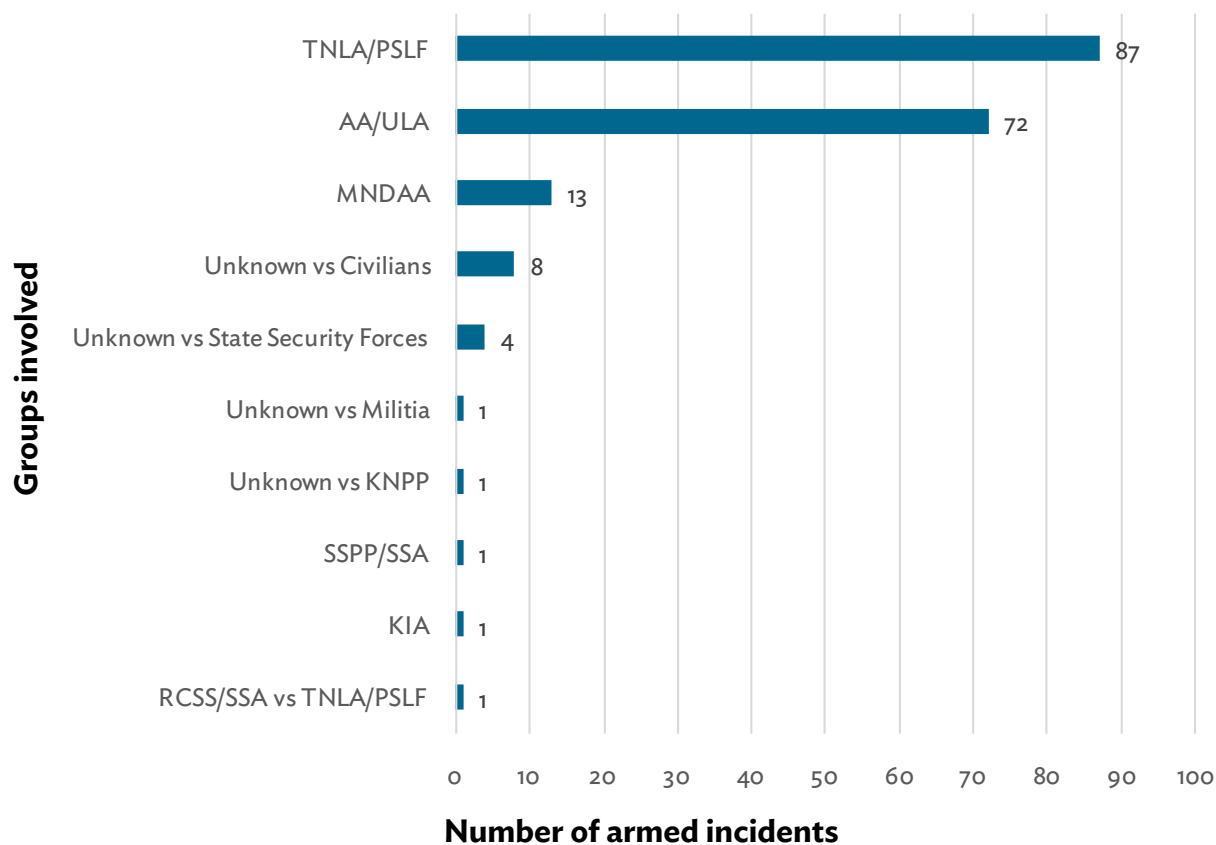


Figure 3: Townships affected by armed incidents in August 2019



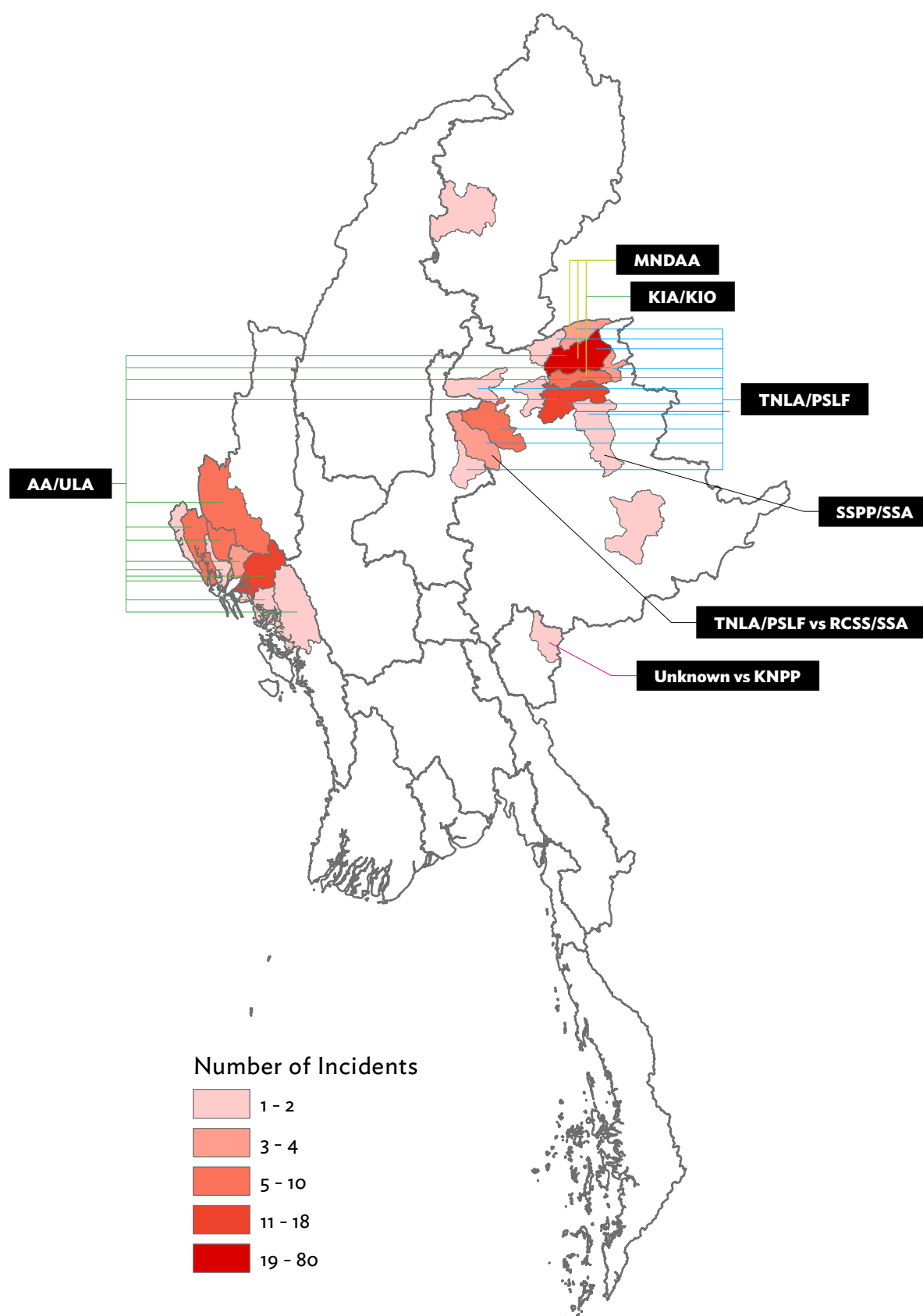
\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine.

EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 4: Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in August 2019**

Meetings	Number
China Border Trade and Security Official of Yunnan Province and KIO Meeting	1
FPNCC and China Meeting	1
JMC Meetings/Workshops	6
NCA-S EAO Meetings	3
NCA-S EAO PPST Meeting	1
NRPC and KNPP Meeting	1
NRPC and KNU Meeting	1
NRPC and NCA-S EAO Meeting	1
NRPC and RCSS Meeting	1
Peace Commission and Northern Alliance Meeting	1
Total Number of Meetings	17

**Figure 4:** Significant meetings related to the peace process in August 2019



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 5:** Armed incidents in August 2019



# NCA-SIGNATORIES

## KNU Rejoins Peace Process, But Capacity Issues Linger

The Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) convened its meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand between August 21 and 25. The most significant outcome of the meeting was the Karen National Union's (KNU) decision to resume its formal participation in the peace process. The discussions were led by the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and reached several additional outcomes. While the meeting ended on a positive note, there are lingering tensions within the PPST in addition to the obstacles that will continue to challenge the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) moving forward.

The KNU had requested that the PPST meeting be delayed until it concluded its Central Committee meeting held between July 22 and August 9. Afterward, the RCSS invited members to convene the PPST meeting and took the lead to ensure the PPST's survival. A KNU proposal to replace the PPST with the Peace Process Consultative Meeting (PPCM) in May had unsettled the smaller EAOs and left the future of the body uncertain. Although the KNU appears to have settled the internal disputes that led to its suspension from formal peace talks, sources told MIPS that some elements within the KNU are still thinking about alternatives to the PPST.

Following the PPST meeting, a government delegation met with the signatories and provided them with a four-point proposal based upon two letters the KNU and RCSS sent to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi last year. The four points include a review of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement's (NCA) implementation, what the peace process should look like before and after 2020, which principles of federalism should be negotiated in the Union Peace Conference—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC), and peace dividends for conflict-affected communities in the interim.<sup>12</sup>

The NCA-S also officially admitted the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) to the PPST and formed both a political and military negotiation team. The political team is comprised of 10 members, one from each EAO, and is focused on overall implementation issues and political dialogue. The military affairs team is tasked with negotiating ceasefire issues with the Tatmadaw.

The new negotiation teams are designed to facilitate a shift in the EAOs' approach to the peace process. Rather than negotiate point-by-point, the EAOs first want an overall picture of what negotiations will look like. Therefore, the EAOs would

12 PPST drafts framework for NCA implementation. (2019, August 29). BNI Multimedia Group. <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/ppst-drafts-framework-nca-implementation>

like to set the agenda and sequencing of negotiations before discussing the particulars of each issue. Such an approach requires greater strategic vision and planning from the EAOs and government. Based on current capacities, however, both sides may find it difficult to implement this strategy.

The PPST and government are planning a working group meeting on September 11. Sources told MIPS that both sides may attempt to hold a top-leader meeting on the anniversary of the NCA in October. The Tatmadaw has been quiet during the past month and did not provide any specific proposal or indicate any particular preference toward recent developments.

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### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING SEPTEMBER 2019

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VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(10)

## OVERVIEW

- The Tatmadaw did not yet launch a major counteroffensive in response to the August attacks in Shan State. Instead, it appears to be adhering to its containment policy by targeting new EAO positions and ensuring the security of the economic corridor in northern Shan State. Although frequent clashes continue, the risk of reescalation remains low for now.
- Despite two meetings in Keng Tung, bilateral ceasefire agreements between the Tatmadaw and Northern Alliance groups remain difficult even if both sides reach a preliminary agreement.
- The AA continued its effort to open a new front in southern Rakhine State while the Tatmadaw moved to prevent it from establishing any camps or bases. A number of favorable conditions could lead the Tatmadaw to launch a renewed offensive, but political considerations may compel it to implement a containment strategy instead.
- The AA is apparently attempting to circumnavigate the internet shutdown by coordinating command and control with satellite phones.
- A new trend of knife killings in Rakhine State is likely aimed at intimidating police and other groups.
- Panic caused by a mishandled intelligence report was seemingly amplified by a US Embassy warning and the recent arrest of AA operatives found with explosives in Mandalay.
- The next UPC was postponed until early 2020 but the current pace of negotiations will still make it difficult to set an agenda by then. Other efforts to move the peace process forward fell short in September.

## SECURITY

### Nationwide Total Declines in September as Shan Offensive Winds Down

At least 83 armed clashes and 21 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in September for a total of 104 armed incidents nationwide, down significantly from 190 in August, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> The total sharply declined because the Tatmadaw largely succeed in repelling the August 15 Offensive in northern Shan State and major attacks did not subsequently continue. TCMS recorded only 38 clashes between the Tatmadaw and Three Brother Alliance forces in northern Shan in September, compared to 116 in August.

The number of clashes between the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/

ULA) also declined in September. TCMS recorded 40 clashes in Rakhine State and only one clash in Chin State in September, compared to 47 clashes in Rakhine State and 8 clashes in Chin State in August.

Kutkai Township in Shan State experienced the highest number of armed incidents in September after residual fighting primarily between the Tatmadaw and Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF) continued. Minbya Township in Rakhine State and Kyaukme Township in Shan State experienced the second and third highest number of armed incidents, respectively.

### Northern Shan Sees Continued Fighting as Residual Effect of Offensive

Fighting in northern Shan State was reported nearly every day in September, although the Tatmadaw did not launch any major counteroffensive in response to the Three Brother Alliance's offensive. Instead, the Tatmadaw appears to be sticking to a policy of containment by conducting 'cleanup' operations along the economic corridor and by targeting Ethnic Armed Organization (EAO) bases or positions in areas where it does not accept their presence. Only two major battles occurred in September while the remainder of clashes throughout the month were generally light and likely residual effects of the offensive.

It now appears that the Tatmadaw will not launch a counteroffensive in response to the Three Brother Alliance's offensive in August. Several possible factors explain this decision. First, a major counteroffensive will likely cause mass displacement and draw a level of international criticism that the Tatmadaw wishes to avoid. A major operation would also require the Tatmadaw to deploy more resources and could extend well into 2020.

Instead, the Tatmadaw appears to be sticking mainly to a containment strategy by targeting newly established EAO bases or camps, and by further secur-

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS and consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

ing the economic corridor and site of the Alliance offensive. For example, the Tatmadaw attacked the TNLA after the latter took position atop a pagoda overlooking Namhsam Town. The Tatmadaw began shelling the pagoda on September 13 and had captured the position by the morning of September 17. An elderly man and a 10-year-old boy were killed by artillery shells during the fighting.

The second significant battle of the month was fought near Loi Hsam Hsip, south of Kutkai Town. Loi Hsam Hsip saw some of the most intense fighting during the offensive in August. On September 24 and 25, the Tatmadaw attacked a TNLA base in the area. The TNLA reportedly vacated the position but not before a Tatmadaw Lieutenant Colonel was killed in the attack. The base was not new, likely used as a staging point for the August offensive.

With the offensive over, the Tatmadaw may resume efforts to demarcate certain areas by force in line with its demand that the EAOs return to their points of origin. The Tatmadaw began a limited effort to enforce this policy in late June by targeting some EAO camps and outposts throughout northern Shan State, including some positions held by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Muse Township. The effort was likely intended to prevent the EAOs from claiming those positions in future bilateral ceasefire agreements. In September, the Tatmadaw again clashed on separate occasions with the KIA and Myanmar National Democratic

Alliance Army (MNDAA) in Muse Township. The KIA said the clashes occurred when the Tatmadaw came to patrol in its area. Although September saw no clashes in Kachin State, the Tatmadaw and KIA may still fight in northern Shan, where the Tatmadaw does not recognize the KIA's presence.

September also saw an increase in mine-related injuries to civilians, likely as a residual effect of the August offensive. Armed actors often plant mines to protect themselves after moving into operation areas where they expect enemy forces might enter, and mines are also regularly used during major battles. It is common to observe a spike in mine-related incidents in the month following a major bout of fighting. MIPS recorded at least eight cases in September that resulted in injury for at least 10 civilians throughout northern Shan State.

Although the Three Brother Alliance announced a unilateral ceasefire on September 9, the Tatmadaw did not renew its own unilateral ceasefire after it expired on September 21. Following the EAOs' announcement, the TNLA did not appear to launch any major attack on the Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw will likely continue to target new EAO bases and any EAO activity that threatens the economic corridor. Regular clashes are likely to continue, but a major escalation on the scale of the August offensive appears unlikely. The political dimension of the conflict and prospects for ceasefire are discussed in the Non-Signatory section below.

## AA Continues Effort to Open Southern Front, Tatmadaw Works to Contain Expansion

The AA continued its attempt to open up a southern front in Myebon and Ann townships in September and also moved to retake positions in northern Rakhine State that were previously lost to the Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw responded by attacking known AA bases or camps with airstrikes and artillery in an effort to prevent AA expansion or resurgence. The overall intensity of the conflict in September remained low in comparison to early 2019, but the month was marked by a string of civilian deaths and alleged Tatmadaw abuses. With the fighting season approaching, reports from MIPS sources indicate that the Tatmadaw now occupies many strategic positions in northern Rakhine and that a naval and land blockade is beginning to squeeze AA supply lines.

Clashes in Myebon Township first began in July after the Tatmadaw won a major battle against a large AA contingent in June. The AA likely aimed to open a new front to the south to relieve pressure from the Tatmadaw and demonstrate its growing reach. Between September 22 and 26, MIPS recorded a round of intense fighting near Taunggyi and Yoe Sa Nwin villages in northern Myebon. Sources told MIPS that the Tatmadaw discovered an AA base in the jungle nearby, which borders the Yangon-Sittwe highway. The Tatmadaw flew multiple airstrikes throughout the week in an apparent attempt to dislodge the AA positions. The AA was likely using the base as a staging point for its operations further to the south.

In August, sources told MIPS that the Tatmadaw pre-empted a major AA attack by targeting converging units of AA fighters in and around Pan Myaung Village, Minbya Township. The subsequent round of fighting displaced a high number of

civilians, with multiple killed and injured. In September, sources told MIPS that the AA returned to the area to retake positions that the Tatmadaw had pushed it out of in August. TCMS recorded at least seven clashes in September throughout the nearby mountains where the AA is known to have held fortified positions in the past. Another source said that the Tatmadaw has a new policy that prevents soldiers from laying mines outside of their defensive perimeters.

The fighting near the highway in Myebon Township and around Pan Myaung Village highlights a trend in AA activity. In both cases, the AA reportedly built bases or camps on the edge of mountainous jungle near villages. Such locations offer the protection and secrecy of the jungle as well as access to support from the local population. A source in the security community said that whenever a string of clashes occurs in a small area, it is likely because the Tatmadaw is attacking a recently discovered AA camp or base. The AA will likely continue its attempts to establish fixed positions and the Tatmadaw will in turn try to prevent the EAO from gaining any new foothold.

Other clashes in September were less intense but led to significant civilian suffering when the Tatmadaw responded to AA ambushes launched in nearby villages. On September 2, for example, the AA ambushed a Tatmadaw unit near a village in Kyauktaw Township. Eight civilians were wounded in the ensuing clash, after which the Tatmadaw reportedly looted the village, an accusation the Tatmadaw denies.<sup>2</sup> In Kyauktaw Township on September 15, the AA purportedly ambushed some Tatmadaw boats. The Tatmadaw returned fire, and five civilians were wounded by explosions in their

2 Win Nyunt. (2019, September 04). Villagers claim commodities from village market lost during gunfire in Kyauktaw township. DMG. <https://www.dmediag.com/news/619-vms>

village nearby. Civilian deaths are likely to occur when the Tatmadaw responds to AA attacks from within or nearby villages with its superior firepower and artillery. The Tatmadaw's current rules of engagement allow its soldiers to return fire regardless of what lies in the background of where they intend to shoot.

Another significant case involving civilians happened in Meewa Village, Kyauktaw Township on September 29 when the AA reportedly ambushed a Tatmadaw unit transporting food. Two villagers were injured by explosions during the attack. Then, just after midnight on October 1, five civilians from the village were seriously injured by an exploding shell. The village administrator accused the Tatmadaw of deliberately firing on the village.<sup>3</sup> The Tatmadaw responded by saying it was defending itself from another AA attack. MIPS did not record a clash in the area on September 30.

There are two likely scenarios that may play out in the coming months. The first is that the Tatmadaw

launches a major offensive to root out the AA from its stronghold in Minbya and Kyauktaw Townships. According to MIPS sources, a Tatmadaw land and naval blockade is now in full swing, blocking rivers and streams used by the AA for resupply. From a military sense, the improving weather and the Tatmadaw's strengthened position provide favorable conditions for a major counterinsurgency operation. If the Tatmadaw decides to prioritize political considerations, however, it may refrain from launching a renewed offensive that will invariably lead to more civilian injuries and death.

Alternatively, the Tatmadaw may simply aim to contain the AA by targeting known camps and pursuing AA fighters into the jungle. The AA will likely continue its attempt to open a southern front as it carries out its routine, small-scale ambushes in northern Rakhine State. It may also attempt some occasional larger attacks against Tatmadaw columns or bases, although these have become exceedingly rare. A low intensity conflict will drag on with enduring costs on civilians.

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3 Zarni Htun. (2019, October 01). Mortar explosions injure five civilians in Myanmar's war-torn Rakhine state. RFA. [https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/mortar-exposions-injure-five-civilians-10012019154516.html?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/mortar-exposions-injure-five-civilians-10012019154516.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter)



## Mandalay Seizure Highlights AA Operational Tactic

Police in Mandalay Region apprehended five AA operatives on September 10.<sup>4</sup> The men were found with a cache of explosives, bomb making equipment, and 40 satellite phones. The AA is likely attempting to import satellite phones into Rakhine State to coordinate command and control in the

absence of internet. As MIPS wrote in early July 2019, the internet shutdown in Rakhine State was likely aimed at disrupting the AA's command and control between fighters on the ground and war planners in Lai Zar. The AA is likely using satellite phones as a way to circumvent the shutdown.

## Clear Knife Killing Trend Emerges in Rakhine

A clear pattern of knife killings across northern Rakhine State emerged in September, with several particularly brutal cases suggesting an intent to intimidate local police and residents. The knifings first began in August after the AA warned police not to conduct military operations in coordination with the Tatmadaw and multiple police officers were subsequently killed.

In the grisliest example of the month, two beheaded men were found on display in a market in Kan Htaung Gyi, Myebon Township on September 10. Although photos were widely shared on Facebook, the killings were not extensively covered by the me-

dia, possibly due to the fear the crime caused. In another case, a fisherman was abducted at sea by men in two speedboats. His body was later found with 13 knife wounds.

Other cases include a policeman who was stabbed to death in front of his house in Kyauktaw, a Tatmadaw veteran who was murdered in Buthidaung, and a policeman who went missing in Mrauk U. All three incidents occurred on September 22, suggesting coordination behind the murders and disappearances. Such knife attacks are likely aimed at intimidating police and other Rakhine residents, and will likely continue.

4

Kyaw Ko Ko. (2019, September 18). Mandalay on alert against Arakan Army operatives. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/mandalay-alert-against-arakan-army-operatives.html>

## Inaccurate Intelligence Report Upsets EAOs, Causes Panic

On September 25, the US Embassy Rangoon issued a security alert to US citizens warning of planned attacks in major cities. The warning was picked up by local media, resulting in a degree of panic among both foreign and local residents in Yangon and elsewhere. The panic was likely magnified by the recent apprehension of AA operatives carrying explosives in Mandalay on September 10.

The source of the warning appears to be an inaccurate classified intelligence report that was shared

among government ministries and subsequently leaked to Facebook. The report named the Chin National Front (CNF) and the Karen National Union (KNU), prompting the EAOs to file complaint letters with the government. The CNF has no history of bombings and although some rogue KNU elements carried out bombings in the past, the KNU does not engage in such activity today. The situation appears to have been mishandled by government agencies that failed to process the raw intelligence.

## GOVERNMENT

### New Technical Secretariat Announced

Spokesperson U Zaw Htay announced the government's intention to establish a new National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) Peace Secretariat comprised of experts and civil servants.<sup>5</sup> Further de-

tails of the plan have yet to emerge and MIPS is not yet aware of what the secretariat will look like. MIPS will provide an updated assessment of the new peace secretariat when more information is available.

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5 Chit Min Tun. (2019, September 11). Myanmar gov't negotiation body to form peace secretariat. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-govt-negotiation-body-form-peace-secretariat.html>

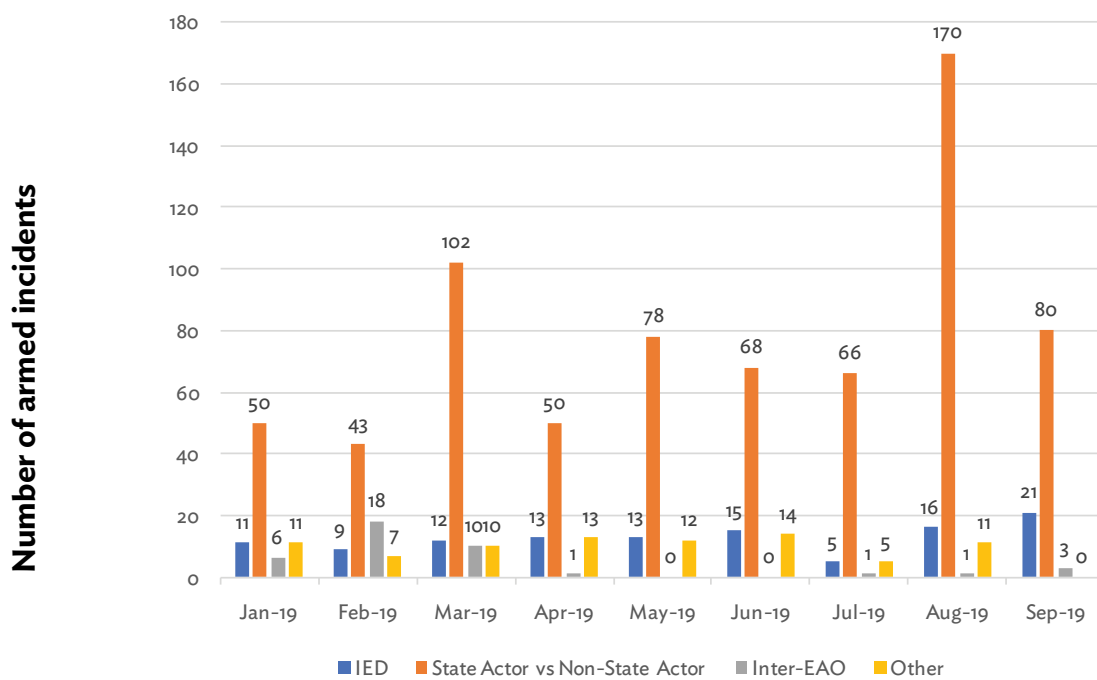
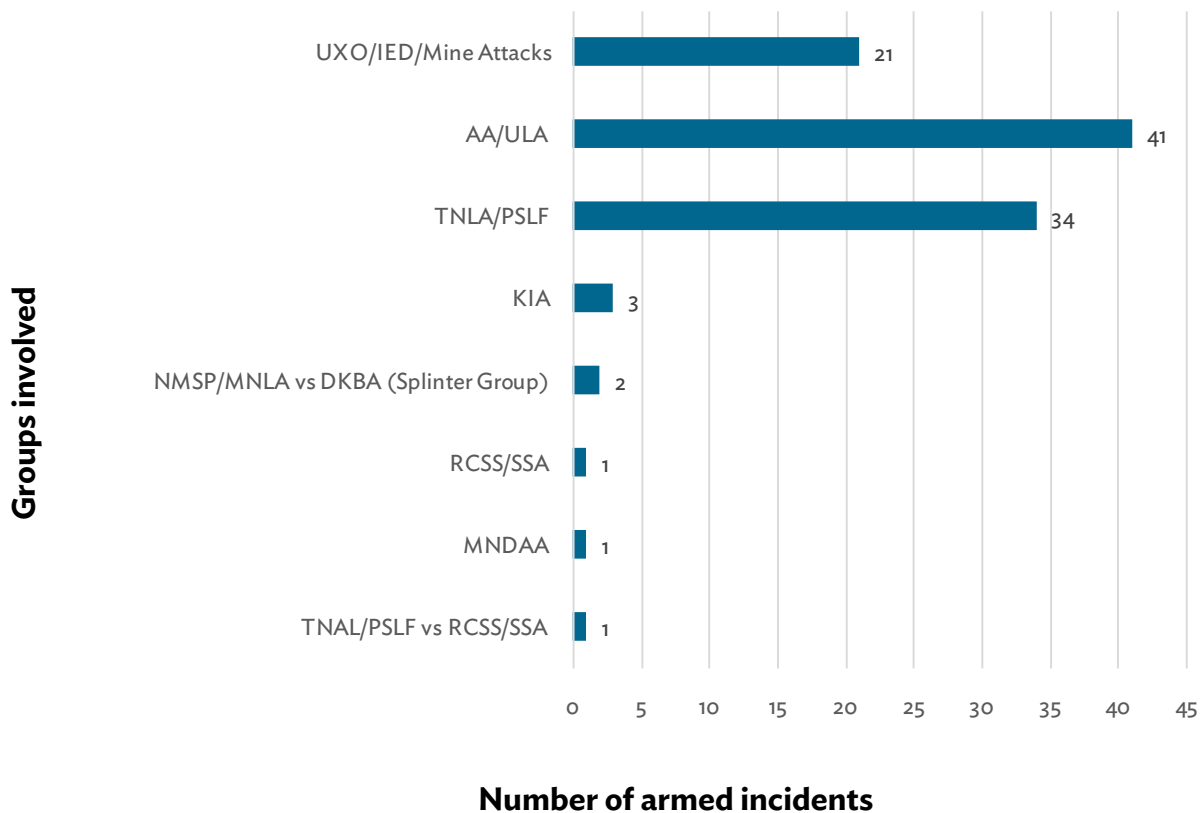
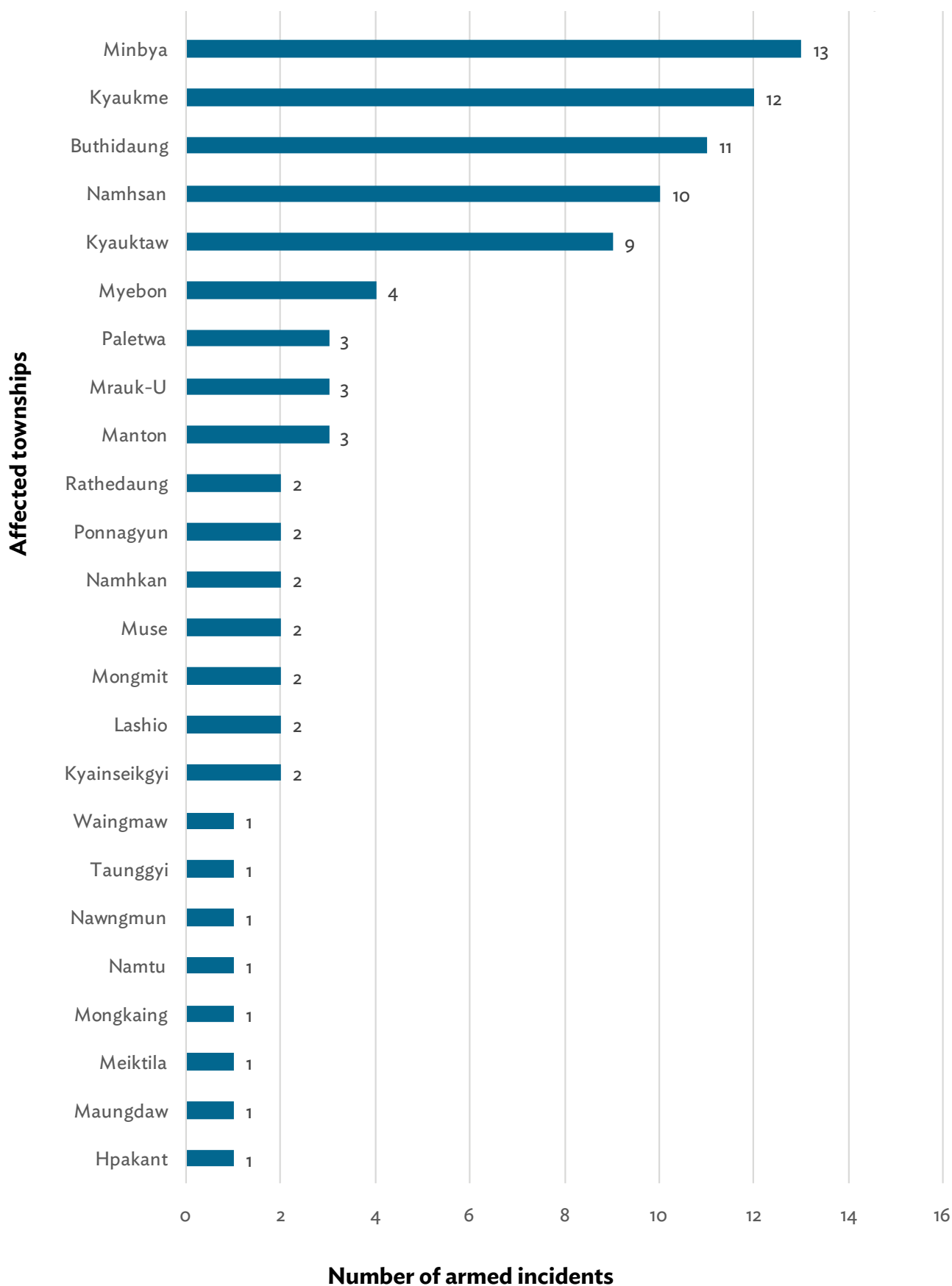


Figure 1: Armed incidents from January 2019 to September 2019



\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine. EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

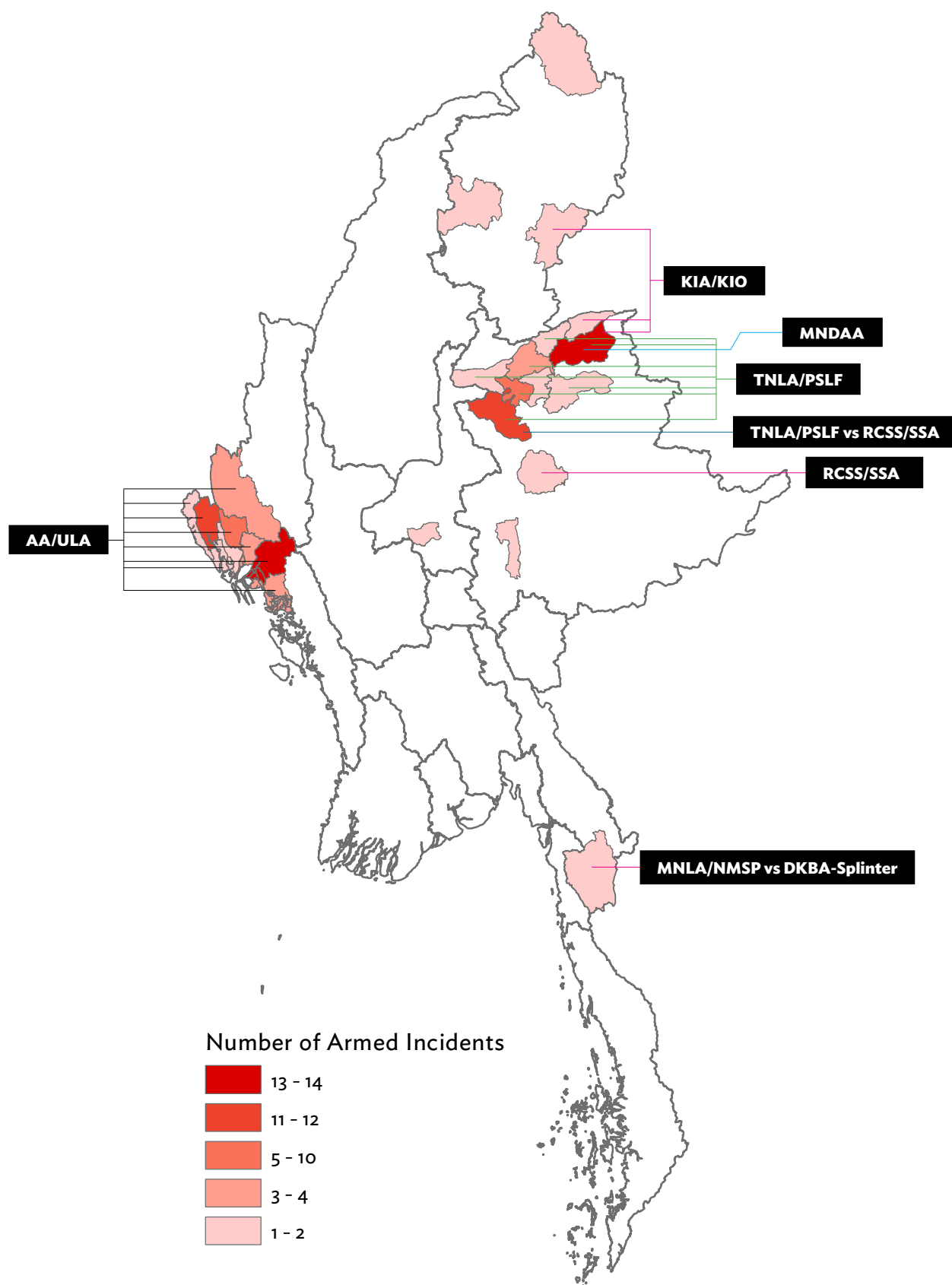
Figure 2: Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in September 2019



**Figure 3:** Townships affected by armed incidents in September 2019

Meetings	Number
Government and NCA-S EAO Coordination Meeting	1
NCA-S EAO Coordination Meeting	1
NRPC and KNU Informal Meeting	1
NRPC and Tatmadaw Meeting with Northern Alliance	1
Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing Meeting with KBC Chairperson Dr Hkalam Sam Sun	1
Total Number of Meetings	5

**Figure 4:** *Significant meetings related to the peace process in September 2019*



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 5: Armed incidents in September 2019**

## NCA-SIGNATORIES

### Government and EAOs Lumber Toward UPC

Despite the KNU's recent resumption of formal participation in the peace process and several rounds of informal talks, the prospective date of the next Union Peace Conference—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC) has already been pushed from late 2019 to early 2020. Even with the delay, the current pace of negotiations suggests that it will be difficult for all sides to agree on a concrete agenda before early 2020.

The KNU met informally with the NRPC on September 6, but sources told MIPS that the discussion did not produce any concrete result. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) then held a coordination team meeting in Yangon between September 7 and 9 where they prepared a draft negotiation agenda for discussions between now and the next UPC.

The NCA-S then met with the NRPC and Tatmadawon September 10. The EAOs, government, and Tatmadaw had initially planned to discuss the agenda for the upcoming UPC, as well as the EAOs' response to the government's four-point proposal. The meeting, however, was cut short and ended without any substantive discussion about agenda setting.

In late September, the government, EAOs, and political parties sent their Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) secretaries on a study tour to Switzerland. The original idea was to use the trip as an opportunity to foster informal dialogue and possibly resolve a number of outstanding issues in the peace process. At the time of writing, the trip has reportedly yielded little discussion about such issues. The lack of a clear agenda for negotiations will likely continue to slow progress and may result in further delay to the UPC.

## NON-SIGNATORIES

### Prospects for Bilateral Ceasefires Appear Slim

All four members of the Northern Alliance met with the government for talks in Keng Tung on August 31. The Tatmadaw did not attend the meeting but decided to extend its unilateral ceasefire agreement until September 21 in northern Shan State, likely to give cover for the next meeting scheduled for September 17. MIPS assessed in early September that the Tatmadaw likely wants to achieve bilateral ceasefire agreements with the four EAOs, but only according to its own terms. Although both sides appear committed to pursuing ceasefire in princi-

ple, several substantial issues render an agreement unlikely at this time.

First, the two sides have yet to agree on a preliminary document that will open the door toward actual bilateral ceasefire talks. The idea for a preliminary document was proposed by the EAOs, who insisted on signing any initial agreement together. The Tatmadaw, however, insists that the four groups sign preliminary documents individually. Both sides may likely be satisfied if, for example,

the four EAOs each sign individual copies of the same preliminary agreement at the same time.

The two sides agreed on seven points to be included in the preliminary document during the meeting on September 17. Together, the seven points are essentially an agenda for what future bilateral ceasefire negotiations will look like. The EAO representatives at the meeting said they were not authorized to sign the preliminary document, however, and a subsequent meeting was scheduled for October.<sup>6</sup>

Even with a preliminary agreement, achieving bilateral ceasefires will be a significant challenge. The Tatmadaw will likely uphold its demand that the TNLA and MNDAA return to their points of origin, and may enforce this policy on the ground. The Tatmadaw's effort to remove some EAO camps and bases in June and July is one of the reasons the EAOs cited for launching the August offensive. The Tatmadaw will likely continue to uphold its policy not to accept an AA presence in Rakhine either.

The Tatmadaw also did not extend its unilateral ceasefire, explaining during a press conference that no progress was made during the ceasefire period anyway. It also complained that the EAOs attacked it while the ceasefire was still in place, and again on the same day they announced their own ceasefire. Both sides have now attacked each other under their own self-proclaimed ceasefires.

Moreover, the Tatmadaw may see little military need for a ceasefire in northern Shan State. Despite their efforts, the EAOs failed to capture or hold any significant military objectives in August, and the Tatmadaw reopened the roads to civilian traffic and secured the economic corridor in just two weeks. Although other political considerations may compel the Tatmadaw to pursue agreements, the absence of a major military threat may allow it to take a long-term approach to bilateral ceasefire and meanwhile adhere strongly to its demands.

6 NRPC, Northern Alliance agree to meet in October. (2019, September 18). Eleven. <https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/nrpc-northern-alliance-agree-to-meet-in-october>

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### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING OCTOBER 2019

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VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(11)

## OVERVIEW

- The Tatmadaw is maintaining the momentum of its military operations in Rakhine State by targeting AA posts while the AA attempts to retake areas previously lost. The tempo of fighting in Rakhine State will likely continue in the coming months and the security situation there will likely remain unstable well into 2020.
- The AA's ferry hijacking in Rakhine State was retold by the Tatmadaw, the AA, and 12 escapees, but all accounts contain contradictions. The incident is being used as propaganda on both sides.
- The AA's abduction of an NLD lawmaker from Paletwa exacerbated interethnic tension between Rakhine and non-Rakhine in the area. Some non-Rakhine minority groups in Paletwa and northern Rakhine may form militia units armed by the Tatmadaw to ward off the AA.
- The TNLA and Tatmadaw continue to contest areas that were fought over during the August offensive, but the overall frequency and intensity of clashes throughout northern Shan declined in October.
- Kachin State remains relatively stable despite a clash between the Tatmadaw and KIA there in October.
- The KNU and NMSP clashed several times after a territorial dispute. The issue was apparently solved after the two sides met twice, but on the ground, the situation remains tense.
- The Tatmadaw restricted the RCSS from using an overland route to attend the NCA anniversary. The move was likely meant to prevent the RCSS from campaigning along the way. The incident upset the RCSS but the government is working to ease tensions.
- The KNU appeared satisfied over separate meetings with the State Counsellor and Commander in Chief, indicating a marginal improvement.
- The KIA signaled an intent to reach bilateral ceasefire with the Tatmadaw, but the three other Northern Alliance members presently appear unwilling to seek separate bilateral ceasefires. This calculus could change over time.

# SECURITY

## Fighting Picks Up in Rakhine, Raising Nationwide Total

At least 93 armed clashes and 30 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in October for a total of 123 armed incidents nationwide, up from 104 in September, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> The majority of armed clashes took place in northern Rakhine State where the Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA) attempted to retake positions previously lost and the Tatmadaw brought more firepower to deny its opponent any foothold. Rathedaung and Minbya townships experienced the highest number of armed clashes accordingly.

Fighting between the Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/

PSLF) in northern Shan State continued in October as well, although clashes were less frequent than in September and August. Fighting there was primarily concentrated in Kutkai Township, which experienced the third highest number of clashes in October. Several clashes also took place between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Tatmadaw in Kachin State, but the situation is unlikely to escalate.

A brief episode of fighting took place in Kayin State when the Karen National Union (KNU) and New Mon State Party (NMSP) fought several times over territory near Three Pagoda Pass. The situation was diffused after the two sides met twice, but tensions on the ground linger. TCMS also recorded 11 IED or mine-related incidents involving civilians.

## Tatmadaw Increases Operational Tempo, AA Attempts Counterattacks

Fighting in Rakhine State raged throughout October as the Tatmadaw increased its operational tempo to go after AA units that were attempting to retake previously held positions. The Tatmadaw likely intends to uphold a policy to deny the AA any bases in Rakhine State, and in October liberalized its use of airstrikes to target AA positions and units spotted by aerial reconnaissance. The AA responded by carrying out several large-scale counterattacks, but these attempts were largely unsuccessful and likely resulted in losses. Likewise, the AA's attempt to open a new front in southern Rakhine State also made little progress. Although the AA still enjoys widespread support, it may be facing shortages of ammunition as the Tatmadaw's

full-fledged blockade continues. The month was also marked by several high-profile AA operations against soft targets—possibly a reaction to the Tatmadaw's tightening squeeze. More fighting is expected for reasons outlined below.

In the previous edition of the “Peace & Security Brief”, MIPS assessed that conditions were favorable for a renewed Tatmadaw offensive in Rakhine State. With the end of rainy season, a blockade in full-swing, and its momentum continuing to build, the Tatmadaw increased its operational tempo in October by further liberalizing the use heavy firepower and targeting AA units wherever they converged. According to MIPS sources, the regional

1 TCMS is a conflict monitoring system developed by MIPS that consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

commander is now authorized to launch airstrikes without the need to seek permission from the command headquarters in Nay Pyi Taw. The Tatmadaw conducted more frequent airstrikes in October with its MI-35, MI-17, and MI-2 gunships stationed in Buthidaung Township after spotting AA units with drones and reconnaissance aircraft.

The AA also demonstrated its ability to mobilize and counterattack the Tatmadaw with large numbers throughout October, but the Tatmadaw largely appeared to repel these attempts and inflict losses on the AA. On October 17, a colonel claimed to the media that the Tatmadaw had captured about 150 AA bodies that month.<sup>2</sup> A MIPS source echoed this claim, asserting that the Tatmadaw received 140 AA bodies in mid-October. MIPS cannot independently verify these claims, but did see several recent photos posted to Facebook by Tatmadaw supporters that depict numerous captured AA bodies. The AA usually works hard to retrieve its dead, so these photos indicate a new trend.

A source also told MIPS that some AA bodies captured in October were found with as few as 50 rounds of ammunition, suggesting that AA fighters could be facing a shortage of ammunition. MIPS reported in mid-October that the Tatmadaw's blockade was heavily restricting both land and water resupply routes since early September. Despite its continued losses and possible shortage of supplies, however, the AA still enjoys widespread support from the Rakhine community and maintains a robust ability to recruit new fighters. Videos and photos from the battlefield suggest these recruits are often in their late teens.

The AA has likely aimed to open a southern front in Myebon and Ann townships since clashes and IED-related incidents began there in July 2019. Opening a new front could help the AA relieve growing pressure from the Tatmadaw, while satisfying the expectations of supporters by demonstrating a growing reach. In October, however, TCMS recorded only one clash in Ann Township on the last day of the month. No clashes or IED attacks were recorded in Myebon Township. The AA's attempt to open a new front has yielded little success so far.

The AA also carried out several high-profile raids and mass-abductions. On October 11, the AA stopped a bus and detained 31 people, including 19 firefighters. Twelve of the passengers were released on October 28 after the AA deemed them civilians, but the group continued to hold the firefighters on suspicion of being auxiliary soldiers. The AA eventually released 18 of the firemen on November 6, but confirmed in a statement that one of the men had died in their captivity.<sup>3</sup>

On October 26, the AA commandeered a ferry traveling from Sittwe to Buthidaung. According to the government, the AA abducted 58 people, including 14 soldiers and 29 policemen returning from leave to their assigned positions, as well as two government prison employees and 13 civilians. In a third incident, the AA abducted 10 men travelling in two speedboats on November 3, including a Chin Member of Parliament (MP) representing the National League for Democracy (NLD) and several Indian nationals. These two incidents are discussed further in separate subsections below.

2 Khit Thit Media. (2019, October 17). တပ်မတော်သား ၄၁ ဦးကျဆုံးဟု AA ထုတ်ပြန်ချိန် AA အလောင်း ၁၅၀ ရရှိထားဟု မိုင်းပူကြီးဝင်းဇော်ဦးပြော. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/748739025563446>

3 Sit Htet Aung. (2019, November 07). Arakan Army releases 18 detained firemen. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/arakan-army-releases-18-detained-firemen.html>

The objectives of both sides continue to appear diametrically opposed. The Tatmadaw has likely maintained a policy to prohibit any AA bases in Rakhine State since early 2019. In contrast, AA leaders have publicly claimed that they will establish a headquarters in Mrauk U by 2020. The AA appears determined to maintain the tempo of the conflict and claim some extent of territorial control in northern Rakhine State to reflect progress toward this goal. This fundamental contradiction sets the stage for continued fighting.

There are several factors that may influence the intensity of the fighting to come. First, the Tatmadaw currently appears to be in a position of military dominance in Rakhine State. According to MIPS sources, senior Tatmadaw officials feel the AA is suffering significant losses. Moreover, Tatmadaw spokespersons indicated a hardline position

throughout October by using words like “eradicate” to describe efforts against the AA. Such rhetoric coupled with the current military situation on the ground suggests that the Tatmadaw will at least maintain its assault on the AA.

On November 11, however, a comment from NLD spokesperson Dr. Myo Nyunt indicated the government’s dismay over the AA’s refusal to release the Chin lawmaker who was abducted on November 3, and suggested that the government will “do what is necessary”.<sup>4</sup> If the government imposes certain measures in Rakhine State, or instructs the Tatmadaw to impose certain measures, then the Tatmadaw may escalate its offensive against the AA. Either way, a ceasefire in Rakhine State that includes a recognition of the AA’s foothold there is unlikely to occur in the near future.

## Interethnic Tensions Rise After AA Abducts Chin Lawmaker

The AA abducted ten men travelling in boats from Paletwa Township, Chin State to Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State on November 3. The men included five Indian nationals working on an infrastructure project in Chin State, as well as U Hawi Tin, an NLD MP representing Paletwa. The AA said that one of the Indian men died from exhaustion as they came to shore. Eight men were released on November 4, but the AA continues to hold U Hawi Tin. The incident has prompted public back-

lash against the AA and heightened the tension between Chin and Khumi ethnic groups and the AA.

Chin political parties and civil society organizations (CSO) were outraged by the AA’s refusal to release U Hawi Tin. On November 11, 43 Chin organizations signed a statement demanding for his immediate release and warned that failing to do so “could further increase unwanted misunderstanding and tensions between the Chin people

4 Thant Zin Oo. (2019, November 11). ချင်းအမတ်ကိုလွှတ်မပေးရင် AA အတွက်ထိခိုက်မှုရှိလာနိုင်ဟု NLD ပြော. RFA. [https://www.rfa.org/burmese/program\\_2/nld-said-about-chin-mp-case-11112019062317.html?fbclid=IwAR38CyRn5AUzGz\\_raYwY9qc--VJpVXEEY-IFsW6p8gdncJLYEqsIVGUxSewc](https://www.rfa.org/burmese/program_2/nld-said-about-chin-mp-case-11112019062317.html?fbclid=IwAR38CyRn5AUzGz_raYwY9qc--VJpVXEEY-IFsW6p8gdncJLYEqsIVGUxSewc)

and the AA.”<sup>5</sup> A statement from the Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD) on November 5 also demanded U Hawi Tin’s release, explaining its view that since 2015 the AA’s presence in Chin State has brought only grief for local people. The CNLD mentioned that 10 civilians were killed, 82 abducted, and 4,000 displaced in Chin State since then.

The AA responded that it is holding the Chin lawmaker to interrogate him on his relationship and suspected cooperation with the Tatmadaw. Some non-Rakhine ethnic groups in Palatwa are now considering forming a militia armed by the Tatmadaw to ward off the AA’s presence in their areas. Interethnic tensions between Rakhine and non-Rakhine in Palatwa are rising and may escalate in the near future.

## Conflicting Narratives Prevail Over Rakhine Ferry Incident

On October 26, the AA intercepted a civilian ferry, the Shwe Nadi, travelling from Sittwe to Buthidaung. According to all available accounts, the boat made an unscheduled stop in Rathedaung where 10 to 15 people embarked. Soon after, the AA fired warning shots and the ferry came to shore. The passengers disembarked to find AA fighters waiting. After separating women and children, the AA fighters left with the men. Available accounts of the events that followed were given only by the Tatmadaw, the AA, and 12 escapees, among them police and soldiers, interviewed by the media. The narratives provided by these sources are unsurprisingly contradictory and accusative.

What is clear is that the incident culminated in rescue attempt involving a Tatmadaw attack helicopter. In a statement soon after, the AA said that the Tatmadaw inadvertently killed some of its own soldiers when the helicopter fired on AA fighters transferring the detainees in boats.<sup>6</sup> The Tatmadaw denied this account, saying that it did not fire directly at the boats, and accused the AA of executing some of the detainees.<sup>7</sup>

The statements by the Tatmadaw and AA were the primary sources of information about the rescue until a three part series of interviews with 12 escapees was published beginning on November 5.

5 Chin Human Rights Organization. (2019, November 11). ချင်းအဖွဲ့အစည်း (၄၃) ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံအတိုင်းပြန်ချက်. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/ChinHumanRightsOrganization/posts/2717202644997930>

6 ရခိုင်တောင်မြို့နယ်၊ ရေမျက်ကျေးရွာအနီးဖြစ်ပွားသော “ရွှေနီ” လူစီးအပြန်ယာဉ်နှင့်ပတ်သက်၍ ထုတ်ပြန်ကြေညာချက်. (2019, October 27). Arakan Army. <https://www.arakanarmy.net/post/%E1%80%9B-%E1%80%9E-%E1%80%90-%E1%80%84-%E1%81%BF%E1%80%99-%E1%82%95%E1%80%94%E1%80%9A-%E1%80%9B%E1%80%99-%E1%80%80-%E1%80%80-%E1%80%9B-%E1%80%A1%E1%80%94-%E1%80%96%E1%80%85-%E1%80%95-%E1%80%9E-%E1%80%9B-%E1%80%94%E1%80%92-%E1%80%9C-%E1%80%85-%E1%80%A1-%E1%80%99%E1%80%94-%E1%80%9A-%E1%80%A5-%E1%80%84-%E1%80%95%E1%80%90-%E1%80%9E%E1%80%80-%E1%80%91-%E1%80%90-%E1%80%95%E1%80%94-%E1%81%BE%E1%80%80-%E1%80%84-%E1%80%81-%E1%80%80>

7 A police member among abductees kidnapped by AA insurgents rescued. (2019, October 28). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defense Services. <http://cincds.gov.mm/node/5101>

According to MIPS sources, the interviews were arranged by the Tatmadaw and took place during a two-hour period in which each man provided his general overview before taking questions. The interviewees spoke in front of microphones from the Tatmadaw's Myawaddy Daily, state-owned MRTV, Skynet, and Eleven Media. Some Rakhine journalists complained online that they were not invited to the interview.

The accounts provided by the interviewees, which included seven police and soldiers and five civilians, largely mirrored the Tatmadaw's account of the incident. In short, the interviewees said that after releasing the women and children that the AA moved the men to a second location where Rakhine-speaking men were also released, leaving 58 detainees. Local villagers, including elderly and children, allegedly beat, mocked, and robbed the detainees before the 58 men were eventually loaded onto three boats. As the first two boats travelled upstream and the third boat loaded, a Tatmadaw attack helicopter spotted the group and passed them above.

According to the escapees, the AA fighters quickly diverted the boats up a narrow creek before one fighter fired at the helicopter—the Tatmadaw later confirmed the pilot was slightly injured—before

the helicopter returned “warning shots”.<sup>8</sup> Nearly all the interviewees took care to explain that the helicopter did not fire at the boats. At this point, the scene became chaotic and the prisoners attempted to escape by jumping off the boats and into the water. Some of the escapees said that AA fighters fired on them as they swam or ran. According to rescued policeman Sai Naing Aung, the AA shot three men he was tied together with before pushing them into the water. The 15 “rescued” prisoners were later picked up by the Tatmadaw after escaping the fleeing AA fighters.

There are several glaring contradictions throughout these accounts. First, the AA eventually released 25 of the detainees on November 5, calling them “real civilians”.<sup>9</sup> The AA's count of civilians among the 58 detainees is therefore different than the number released by the government, who said there were 13. Next, a Tatmadaw spokesperson said that, according to a rescued policeman, the AA executed some of the prisoners before the helicopter opened fire.<sup>10</sup> This detail is not reflected in any of the accounts provided by the 12 interviewees. Third, a Tatmadaw spokesperson said they found Sai Naing Aung with his hands still tied.<sup>11</sup> Sai Naing Aung said in an initial interview that he had untied himself and fled.<sup>12</sup>

8 Tatmadaw saves 14 of those kidnapped by AA insurgents. (2019, October 27). Office of the Commander-in-chief of Defense Services. <http://cincds.gov.mm/node/5089>

9 Min Thein Aung. (2019, November 05). Rebel Arakan Army frees 25 captives, calling them civilians. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/captives-11052019171748.html>

10 DVB TV News. (2019, October 28). ရဟတ်ယာဉ်နှစ်စင်းတို့ကိုမိမိကတည်းကအေးအေးကပ်ပစ်ခဲ့တယ်လို့တပ်မတော်ပြော. [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/DVBTVNews/videos/2500863660192175/>

11 The Irrawaddy. (2019, October 28). “AA ကထုတ်ပြန်သလိုကျနော်တို့ရဟတ်ယာဉ်ပေါ်ကပစ်လိုသေကုန်တယ်ဆိုတာမဟုတ်ပါဘူး” တပ်မတော်မှပြော. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/theirrawaddyburmese/videos/2398463150408130/>

12 Content no longer available. Originally accessed at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=496017447660354&mp;id=100017563090868](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=496017447660354&amp;id=100017563090868)

It is possible that in the early days after the incident that spokespersons from both sides did not have complete information, thus explaining some discrepancies, or that the narratives simply evolved to fit each side's propaganda. There were seemingly

no other witnesses to corroborate the events and MIPS was unable to verify the accounts provided by both sides. The incident appeared to anger some online ethnic-Bamar users and is being used as propaganda by both the Tatmadaw and AA.

## **Rakhine Execution Video Posted to Pro-Tatmadaw Accounts**

A video and some images of an execution were posted to multiple pro-Tatmadaw Facebook accounts on October 30. In the one-minute video, a man kneels before a ditch as Rakhine-speaking men ask him if he has any last words. The prisoner is then bludgeoned to death with a heavy stick. Images taken from a different angle show multiple fighters with tactical vests, black t-shirts, and AK-47s, as well as several plain-clothed men.

According to MIPS sources, the video was found on the phone of an AA commander killed by the Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw may have captured the phone used to record the incident and leaked the video and photos to disparage the AA. The video

sparked online outrage from many non-Rakhine social media users. Pro-AA users expressed an understanding for the execution of an alleged traitor, but admitted that such images make the Rakhine look bad.

Sources also told MIPS that the Tatmadaw is making significant efforts to extract data from the phones of people it arrests in Rakhine State. The Tatmadaw may sometimes keep incriminating or embarrassing videos or images to use as propaganda at a strategic time. The recent execution video, for example, emerged after the Tatmadaw received bad press over the AA ferry hijacking and rescue attempt on October 26.



## TNLA-Tatmadaw Contest Continues in Shan; Kachin Appears Stable Despite Clash

Fighting between the Tatmadaw and TNLA in northern Shan State continued in October as the two sides vied for areas fought over during the August offensive. The overall number of clashes, however, were far fewer than in September since the Tatmadaw has largely secured the economic corridor from major disruption. In Kachin State, the Tatmadaw targeted one or more KIA camps in a disputed area, but a spokesperson for the KIA downplayed the incident. The situation in Kachin remains relatively stable amid signs that the EAO is planning for bilateral ceasefire.

The TNLA and Tatmadaw continued to clash along northern Shan's main highway in October. The most significant incident of the month occurred on October 9 when the TNLA reportedly attacked a Tatmadaw convoy on the edge of Hseni Town. Media reported that three Tatmadaw soldiers were killed and another three wounded. Seven civilians were also injured by exploding mortar shells that fell on as many as four houses.<sup>13</sup>

Other significant fighting occurred in the mountains near Tarmoenye, a town where all four

Northern Alliance members are known to operate. The TNLA and Tatmadaw fought a three-day battle there between October 24 and 26, with the Tatmadaw flying airstrikes against the TNLA's positions. The TNLA is likely trying to maintain or retake some positions it used to stage the August offensive, while the Tatmadaw is targeting any Ethnic Armed Organization (EAO) positions that threaten the economic corridor. Clashes will likely continue throughout November but not at the rate or intensity seen in August and September.

The KIA and Tatmadaw clashed in Mohnyin Township, Kachin State on October 15. According to Kachin News Group (KNG), five KIA troops engaged in a small gunfight with the Tatmadaw's frontline.<sup>14</sup> The Tatmadaw responded in the evening by attacking and occupying a nearby KIA camp. In its Kachin language edition, KNG said that two KIA troops were killed,<sup>15</sup> but KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu appeared to downplay<sup>16</sup> the incident by saying the troops were only missing. The KNG Burmese language edition did not mention the deaths of the KIA troops.

13 Lewi Weng. (2019, October 09). Three Myanmar soldiers killed as TNLA attacks army convoy in northern Shan state. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/three-myanmar-soldiers-killed-tnla-attacks-army-convoy-northern-shan-state.html#4>

14 ကချင်ပြည်နယ်တွင် မြန်မာစစ်တပ် နှင့် KIA တိုက်ပွဲ ပြန်လည် ဖြစ်ပွားလာ. (2019, October 16). Kachin News Group. <https://burmese.kachinnews.com/2019/10/16/%E1%80%80%E1%80%81%E1%80%BA%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%BB%E1%80%95%E1%80%8A%E1%80%B9%E1%80%94%E1%80%9A%E1%80%B9%E1%80%90%E1%80%BC%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%BB%E1%80%99%E1%80%94%E1%80%B9%E1%80%99%E1%80%AC/?fbclid=IwAR2n44yh1bUp9EQnJxIIXJQnQK5zO1J-hKLwEJv3MzwdetJSFJBU5Bc0COW>

15 Myen ni sa wang gap ai kaw KIA tsi sara hte hpyenma, asak ap nawng. (2019, October 18). Kachin News Group. <https://kachin.kachinnews.com/2019/10/18/myen-ni-sa-wang-gap-ai-kaw-kia-tsi-sara-hte-hpyenma-asak-ap-nawng/?fbclid=IwAR2ihE-daTegfnVIVaRiAJbUptNuZXaa6212-QQ7WBAWKPFdAYEEc-RdicYk>

16 Moe Zaw. (2019, October 18). KIA နှင့်မြန်မာစစ်တပ် တစ်ခုစလုံး ပထမဆုံးအကြိမ် တိုက်ပွဲငယ်ဖြစ်ပွား. VOA. [https://burmese.voanews.com/a/kia-and-myanmar-soldiers-fighting-/5129551.html?fbclid=IwAR3q4XVYdtYaS11qvz\\_o7Moz9IY4y7FdnTzyA-g5cw3SGnrNot-7QqCTKRu4](https://burmese.voanews.com/a/kia-and-myanmar-soldiers-fighting-/5129551.html?fbclid=IwAR3q4XVYdtYaS11qvz_o7Moz9IY4y7FdnTzyA-g5cw3SGnrNot-7QqCTKRu4)

Offering a different explanation for the event, a source told MIPS that the Tatmadaw targeted a newly-placed KIA camp in the area. Since its major offensive against the KIA ended in mid-2018, the Tatmadaw has periodically demarcated disputed areas by targeting small KIA outposts.

These events are often downplayed or ignored by KIA spokespersons, and since 2018 have not resulted in wider escalation. The incident is unlikely to cause an escalation between the two sides that have maintained relative stability for about a year.

## NMSP and KNU Clashes Lead to Agreement

On October 17, the KNU launched simultaneous attacks on the NMSP's Phalae Don Phike camp in Ye Township and an NMSP position near Three Pagoda Pass in Kyaing Seik Gyi Township. The NMSP deputy commander of Phalae Don Phike was reportedly killed. The two sides met to discuss the fighting on October 20, but clashed again the next day.

A second meeting was held on October 22, where the NMSP and KNU agreed to inform one another of military movements via the liaison office and pledged to rotate troops involved in the recent fighting.<sup>17</sup> Another clash occurred on October 23 but the confrontation appears to have ended now.

According to various reports, two NMSP troops and two KNU troops were killed during the ep-

isode. Two civilians were wounded by landmines and an unknown number displaced by the fighting. The KNU arrested but immediately released 12 villagers during the clash on October 23, and a Mon media outlet also reported allegations that a KNU soldier intentionally discharged his weapon near a mother holding a baby in order to scare them.<sup>18</sup>

The fighting was apparently sparked when the NMSP removed a KNU flag near Three Pagoda Pass, prompting the KNU to attack the next day. The issue was quickly resolved through available channels, and the leaders from both sides demonstrated a desire to avoid further escalation. However, tension remains high among local commanders from both sides. The KNU and NMSP fought fiercely for control of the Three Pagoda Pass area in the late 1980s.

17 Hurfom. (2019, October 25). Armed clashes continue despite negotiation; Schools closed and villagers flee homes. Rehmonnya. <http://rehmonnya.org/archives/5565>

18 Hurfom. (2019, October 22). Clash between KNU and NMSP injures civilians; houses and shops destroyed. Rehmonnya. <http://rehmonnya.org/archives/5555>

# GOVERNMENT

## Government Marks NCA Anniversary

The government hosted the ethnic signatories to mark the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in Nay Pyi Taw on October 28. Speaking at the ceremony, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi explicitly mentioned the government's intent to pursue a federal system. This intent was also mirrored by the Commander in Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who stressed that federalism means different things for different countries. He then alluded

to India as model for Myanmar's future federal system.

The State Counsellor also outlined a three-point plan to move the stalled peace process forward. This includes convening the Union Peace Process—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC) and developing a roadmap for the NCA's implementation, adding more points to the Union Accord, and setting the priority agenda beyond 2020.

## Tatmadaw Blocks RCSS Caravan En Route to NCA Ceremony

The Tatmadaw blocked the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army's (RCSS/SSA) leaders from travelling overland via Taunggyi to Nay Pyi Taw to mark the fourth anniversary of the NCA, alongside the nine other ethnic signatories.<sup>19</sup> The Tatmadaw informed the RCSS on short notice that it could not use the route, citing security concerns. The government then attempted to facilitate flights for the RCSS, but by this time RCSS Chairperson General Yawd Serk was upset and refused to attend amidst a tight schedule.

The RCSS later suggested that the Tatmadaw blocked the route to prevent it from holding

meetings with Shan constituents along the way. The Tatmadaw might have sought to prevent RCSS grassroots campaigning along the travel route. The Tatmadaw blocked the RCSS from holding state consultations in 2018 for similar reasons, leading to a major deadlock in the peace process.

The incident caused a temporary setback for Tatmadaw-RCSS relations but is unlikely to result in a major fallout. The government is working to resolve the tensions, an effort which the RCSS later expressed appreciation for during its briefing.

19 Nyein Nyein. (2019, October 29). Could a logistical issue overturn Myanmar's peace talk? The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/logistical-issue-overturn-myanmars-peace-talks.html>

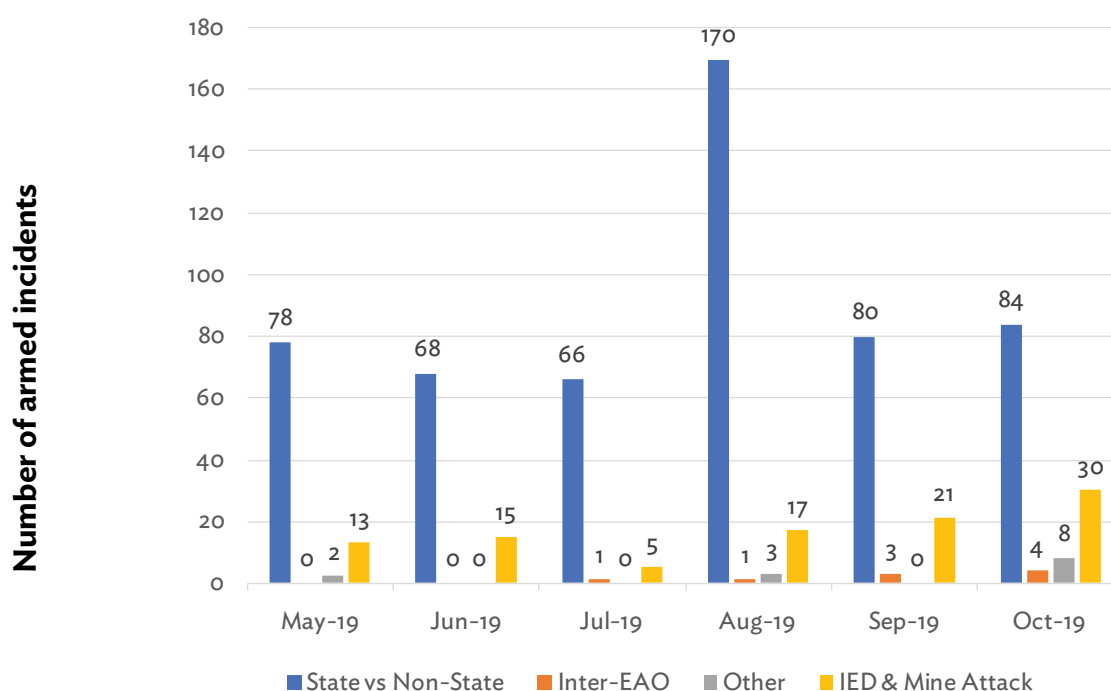
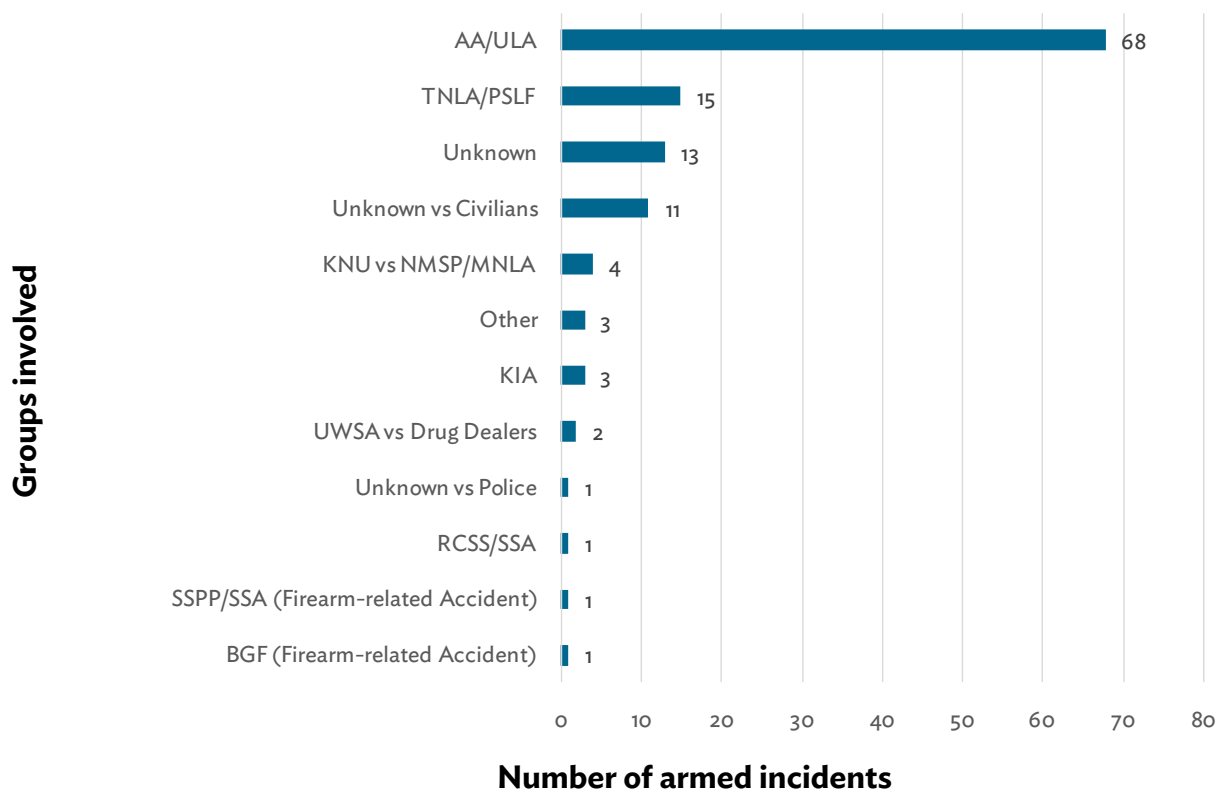
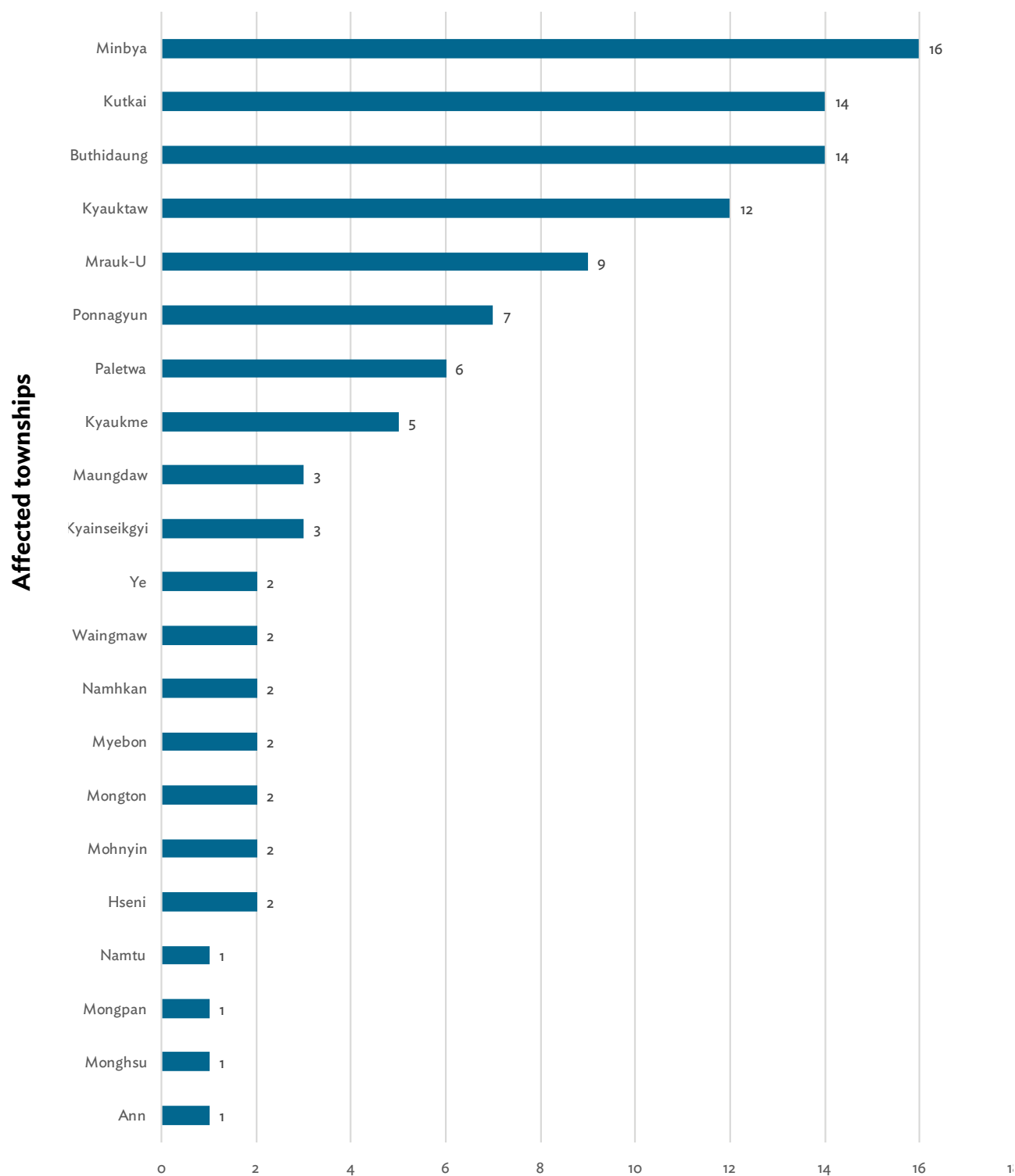


Figure 1: Armed incidents from May 2019 to October 2019



\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine. EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

Figure 2: Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in October 2019

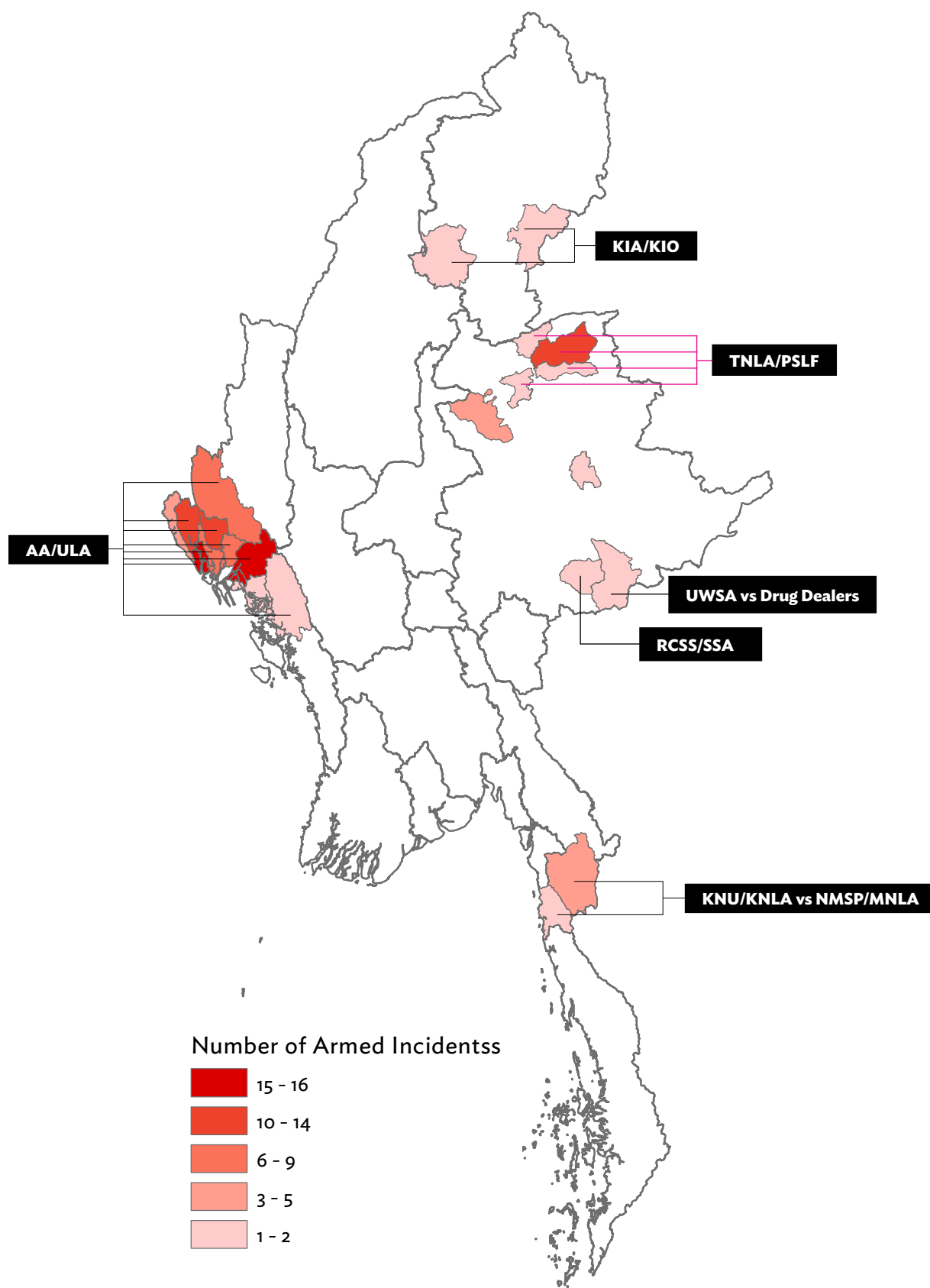


### Number of armed incidents

Figure 3: Townships affected by armed incidents in October 2019

Meetings	Number
JMC Meeting/Workshop/Conference	3
NCA-S EAOs Meeting	3
Chinese Special Envoy and Northern Alliance Meeting	1
Commander-in-Chief and KNU Chairperson Meeting	1
Commander-in-Chief and NCA-S EAOs Meeting	1
Northern Alliance Meeting	1
PC and KIA Meeting	1
PC and KNPP Meeting	1
PC and RCSS/SSA Meeting	1
PPST Meeting	1
State Counsellor and KNU Chairperson Meeting	1
TNLA/PSLF, AA/ULA, and MNDAA Meeting	1
Total Number of Meetings	5

**Figure 4:** Significant meetings related to the peace process in October 2019



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.

EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 5: Armed incidents in October 2019**

## NCA-SIGNATORIES

### **KNU Meets with State Counsellor and Commander in Chief**

A KNU delegation led by Chairperson Saw Mutu Say Poe met separately with the State Counsellor and Commander in Chief in Nay Pyi Taw on October 28 and 29, respectively. The KNU and State Counsellor discussed ways to resume the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) func-

tions but made no final decisions on the matter. The KNU and Commander in Chief discussed road construction in Kayin State, but it was not clear if both sides reached an agreement. The KNU appeared satisfied with the meetings and the relationship seems to be improving.

## NON-SIGNATORIES

### **Apparent KIA Willingness for Bilateral Ceasefire Not Shared by Alliance Partners**

A KIA delegation led by General N Ban La met with the government's Peace Commission (PC) in Chiang Mai on October 17. In a speech one week later, General N Ban La said that the KIA is working to achieve a bilateral ceasefire with the Tatmadaw. He also said important issues like Internally Displaced Person (IDP) returns will be discussed with the government.

The KIA's willingness, however, does not appear to be shared by the three other members of the Northern Alliance. On October 20, the TNLA, AA, and

Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) held a meeting in Mongla before traveling to meet the KIA leaders in Lai Zar the same day. According to a KNG report, the three groups told the KIA that they will not follow it toward bilateral ceasefire. It appears the TNLA, AA, and MNDAA have no appetite for a bilateral ceasefire at this time. Instead, their position continues to call for a multilateral ceasefire. A source told MIPS that the three groups have been moving closer to the United Wa State Army (UWSA) which at least partly supplied weapons and ammunition to the alliance.



In the previous edition of the “Peace & Security Brief”, MIPS noted discussions between the Northern Alliance and government over a preliminary agreement. The preliminary agreement is essentially an agenda for what bilateral ceasefire talks would look like. The Tatmadaw wants all groups to sign a preliminary agreement individually, but the EAOs have insisted on signing together. The

idea to sign together was originally designed by the KIA to save face and demonstrate its stance on inclusivity—the issue that led to a last-minute fall-out during the final stage of NCA negotiations in 2015. Although a preliminary agreement on agenda-setting could still happen, the KIA may part from the three groups by reaching a bilateral ceasefire without them.

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### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING NOVEMBER 2019

|

VOLUME NO.(3), ISSUE NO.(12)

## OVERVIEW

- The conflict in Rakhine State intensified in November as both sides kept up the pace of their operations. Major fighting was recorded near to mountainous areas on the edge of the flat plains, indicating the AA's operational shift to areas with tactical depth. More clashes were also recorded further south, where the AA is attempting to open a new front.
- The AA has effectively weakened the government's civilian administrative structure in northern Rakhine State and will continue to assert its influence by collecting "taxes" from businesses next year.
- The Tatmadaw carried out a limited offensive against the TNLA and is likely working to contain the group within the Palaung SAZ. TNLA fighters continue to operate along the main economic corridor linking China, setting the stage for more fighting.
- The surface-to-air missile captured from the TNLA was likely inoperable. Shoulder fired surface-to-air missiles are not new to the battlefield in northern Myanmar, and similar units were smuggled to Myanmar from the Middle East via arm traffickers in Thailand before.
- Clashes between the KIA and Tatmadaw are being consistently downplayed by the KIA leadership and appear unlikely to spark a wider confrontation as the two sides negotiate a possible bilateral ceasefire.
- The government and NCA-S have not agreed on a date to hold the JICM, where they plan to set the date for the UPC. Although both sides still aim to hold the UPC before April 2020, the KNU's position on whether to hold the JICM in December is still unclear.
- Military issues like the Tatmadaw's road construction in Kayin State could impede efforts to convene the JICM. The UPC cannot take place until the JICM is convened.
- The UWSA is seriously negotiating terms for signing the NCA with the government as the relationship between the two sides improves.

## SECURITY

### Nationwide Number of Clashes Climbs As Fighting Intensifies in Rakhine and Shan States

At least 127 armed clashes and 19 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in November for a total of 146 armed incidents nationwide, up from 123 in October, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> The majority of armed incidents took place in northern Rakhine State where fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army (AA) intensified in November as both sides kept up the pace of

their operations. TCMS also recorded a significant number of clashes in northern Shan State where the Tatmadaw launched a limited offensive against the Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF). Two clashes involving the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) were recorded in Kachin State, as well as two significant clashes between the New Mon State Party/Mon National Liberation Army (NMSP/MNLA) and Tatmadaw in Kayin State.

### Fighting in Rakhine State Intensifies, Spreads Further South

The overall security situation in Rakhine and southern Chin states deteriorated further in November as both the intensity and frequency of clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw increased. The Tatmadaw appears to be maintaining the momentum of its offensive by bombarding AA bases and units wherever they are found. It is also conducting regular patrols to uphold its blockade, deny the AA operational freedom of movement, and prevent AA expansion into southern Rakhine State. Despite these efforts, however, the AA has proved resilient and also appears to be maintaining its operational tempo by moving back into areas previously lost to the Tatmadaw, attacking Tatmadaw naval patrols, and by continuing its attempt to open a southern front. The intensification of fighting in November expectedly coincided with multiple civilian casualties.

The majority of the clashes in both October and November took place in villages located on the edge of the jungle in both the Rathedaung-Buthidaung area and the Minbya-Mrauk U area. The pattern indicates that the AA is primarily operating out of villages that afford it immediate access to the jungle where they have set up a number of bases. Doing so may allow AA fighters to more easily withdraw into mountain hideouts where they can store weapons and supplies, tend to wounded, and wait for the Tatmadaw to leave. The pattern of clashes is different to the trend seen in the opening months of the conflict when the AA often engaged the Tatmadaw out in the open. The Tatmadaw's heavy use of artillery and airstrikes is likely what pushed the AA to base its fighters in villages on the edge of the jungle.

1 TCMS is an advanced monitoring system developed by MIPS that consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

In addition to engaging AA fighters nearby villages, the Tatmadaw also attacked known jungle bases with heavy artillery and airstrikes. In September, a source in the security community told MIPS that the presence of an AA base could be inferred by a string of concentrated clashes accompanied by Tatmadaw airstrikes. MIPS recorded two such incidents in November—both of which were in the jungle near the villages where the majority of clashes took place. Another source confirmed that the Tatmadaw knows of existing AA bases and has begun using 240mm—rather than the smaller 122mm—rockets to bombard the bases. The Tatmadaw therefore appears to upping its use of firepower and engaging the AA wherever and whenever it emerges. This strategy of sustained pressure is likely intended to wear out AA fighters and discourage the local population from providing support.

Despite the Tatmadaw's sustained pressure, the AA has also managed to keep up the fight. In Minbya Township, for example, the AA has reinserted itself into the area surrounding Pan Myaung Village. Pan Myaung and the surrounding villages became a flashpoint for heavy fighting in late June after the AA ambushed a Tatmadaw column a few miles to the south. In August and September, sources indicated that heavy Tatmadaw barrages succeeding in dispersing AA fighters there. Between November 26 and 28, however, the AA said it fought a battle over 'Hill 112', which overlooks the Pan Myaung area.

As a part of its efforts to blockade AA supply routes, the Tatmadaw has been conducting regular naval patrols up and down the vital waterways in northern Rakhine State. In November, MIPS recorded as many as eight incidents where the AA attacked Tatmadaw boats patrolling on the river. In

Paletwa, the AA targeted boats carrying equipment bound for construction projects apparently linked to India's Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. Attacks on similar soft targets and Tatmadaw naval vessels may likely continue.

The AA also enjoyed a win after fighting with the Tatmadaw near Pakar Wa Village in Paletwa Township on November 19. The AA claimed that it killed nine Tatmadaw soldiers and captured 13 more. The Tatmadaw, however, denied that its soldiers were captured and said the clash near Pakar Wa never happened. In response, the AA recorded and released a video in which it interviewed the captured soldiers one by one, asking them their names, ranks, and identification numbers. The AA's video was likely authentic, an assessment reflected by multiple sources. The incident was an embarrassment for the Tatmadaw leadership that continued to deny that it had happened.

Another significant development in November was the increase of clashes and mine-related incidents to the south in Myebon and Ann Townships. The AA's attempt to open a southern front began as early as May, but the momentum of initial attacks there did not continue. In November, however, MIPS recorded as many as 12 incidents in Myebon and three incidents in Ann, including four AA ambushes, two attempted mine attacks, and two Tatmadaw airstrikes. The significant uptick in fighting suggests the AA is continuing its efforts to open a southern front and that the Tatmadaw is responding to contain the expansion.

In December, MIPS recorded clashes even further to the south in Taung Gok Township, and sources indicated that the AA has been sending fighters to open a front there as well. Taung Guk is a strategic area connected by road to both Pyay and the rest of southern

and northern Rakhine State. A foothold in Taung Guk could shorten the AA's supply line from central and northern Myanmar, and serve as a second entry point for supplies bound for northern Rakhine State. Its dense jungles and access to the Rakhine mountains also affords good protection for fighters.

Despite these benefits, however, the AA would face significant challenges in Taung Guk. First, the township neighbors the economic zone at Kyaukphyu and the important tourist area of Thandwe and Ngapali. The Tatmadaw will likely respond swiftly to activity there, possibly by imposing checkpoints that could adversely affect the flow of goods throughout the whole of Rakhine State. Second, the AA might find less sympathy from local civilians in the south who may be more reluctant to support the arrival of armed conflict in their area than their counterparts in the north.

On December 10, the AA announced that it would levy "taxes" on large infrastructure projects and major businesses in Rakhine and Chin States, including the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transportation Project backed by India. AA chief Major General Tun Myat Naing explained the plan as a part of the group's effort to exert its authority over the region. Since the beginning of the conflict, the AA has worked to dismantle the government's administrative infrastructure and replace it with its own.

The AA has so far made significant progress toward this goal in northern Rakhine State where most villages no longer have functioning administrations. Even in major towns like Minbya and Kyauktaw, government staff are reportedly too afraid to carry out basic administrative tasks. Sources even said that in Sittwe the Chief Minister's authority has become limited. Despite these deficiencies, however, the Rakhine State government and the Union government appear reluctant to allow the military to take control of northern Rakhine State under martial law. Sources told MIPS that the Tatmadaw is working hard to prevent a similar breakdown in government structure in southern Rakhine State.

Similar dynamics are expected in the coming months. The Tatmadaw will likely keep up its pressure by targeting AA troops whenever they converge and by shelling or bombing bases wherever they are found. It will also work hard to contain the spread of the conflict to southern Rakhine State by responding promptly to AA activity there. It is unclear, however, if the Tatmadaw will follow the current phase of operations by conducting intensive raids in villages to capture or kill AA fighters, a move that will invariably lead to more civilian deaths, potential human rights abuses, and greater public scrutiny. In the meantime, the AA's proven resilience suggests that fighting will continue well into 2020.

## Civilians Continue to Bear High Costs in Rakhine State

The intensification of fighting in November corresponded with multiple civilians being shot by the Tatmadaw, killed in the crossfire of clashes, and maimed or killed by mines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). The Tatmadaw has been increasing the use of hidden watch posts close to villages to intercept AA fighters in civilian clothes moving from one place to another.

On November 10, a pregnant woman from Myebon Township was shot and killed by the Tatmadaw while she was returning home from the market on a small boat with her husband. According to Narinjara, Tatmadaw soldiers on the riverbank instructed the boat driver to stop.<sup>2</sup> A neighbor explained that the driver likely did not hear the command because the boat engine was very loud. Tatmadaw spokesperson Colonel Win Zaw Oo responded to a reporter's question by seemingly suggesting the reporter was a member of the AA. No further explanation was provided.

On November 27, DMG reported that the Tatmadaw shot a man as he returned home with his cows.<sup>3</sup> The man was brought to the Mruak U hospital where he died the next day. No further details are available. In yet another incidence on No-

vember 28, the Tatmadaw reportedly shot a man as he was travelling by boat to sell wood.<sup>4</sup> After shooting him twice, the Tatmadaw administered aid and proceeded to investigate him. They later determined he was just a merchant and let him go to the hospital.

Multiple civilians were killed or injured during clashes as well. On November 21, for example, a clash broke out near a Tatmadaw base in Rathedaung Township. Villagers said they heard artillery fire ten times. An explosion in the nearby village killed one man and seriously injured another. Tatmadaw Colonel Win Zaw Oo confirmed the clash. On November 22, two civilians were wounded by explosions after the AA engaged a Tatmadaw naval boat in Kyauktaw Township.

In Rathedaung Township, a 14-year-old boy was killed by a mine or possibly a UXO explosion on November 30. Then, in what became a highly publicized incident on December 2, an explosion killed three civilians, including two children, and injured six more in Mruak U Town.<sup>5</sup> Both local civilians and the AA accused the Tatmadaw of shelling the town, but the Tatmadaw denied this claim and said the explosion was caused by UXO. Accusations

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- 2 Thein Zaw, Maung Taw. (2019, November 10). မြေပုံမြို့နယ်မှ ကိုယ်ဝန်ဆောင်အမျိုးသမီးတစ်ဦး သေနတ်ပစ်ခတ်ခံရပြီး သေဆုံး. Narinjara. <https://burmese.narinjara.com/news/detail/5dc8c8237138e7041e261c9f>
  - 3 Win Nyunt. (2019, November 27). မြောက်ဦးတွင် နားလွှတ်ရန်သွားသည့် ရွာသားတစ်ဦး ကျည်ထိမှန်. DMG. [https://www.dmgburmese.com/%E1%80%9E%E1%80%90%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B8/mun.html?fbclid=IwAR3qccMKTjn5q8nZTdKxjRhHe7\\_zeRNcoqMLndJvG8Dvjez4oXwdAqVk6g](https://www.dmgburmese.com/%E1%80%9E%E1%80%90%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B8/mun.html?fbclid=IwAR3qccMKTjn5q8nZTdKxjRhHe7_zeRNcoqMLndJvG8Dvjez4oXwdAqVk6g)
  - 4 Saung Zar Chi. (2019, November 29). ဗလကပ်မြို့နယ်ဒေသခံတစ်ဦး သေနတ်ပစ်ခတ်ခံရပြီး ဆေးရုံတင်ရ. Narinjara. <https://burmese.narinjara.com/news/detail/5de0de9b7138e7041e261d31?fbclid=IwAR1rcpSjunJdUAAttXfZhtCWZXoQrU8SnACS7G5q9tjvk26f-n84BnOuw-EY>
  - 5 Min Thein Aung. (2019, December 03). Shelling blast kills mother and two small children in Myanmar's Rakhine state. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/shelling-blast-kills-mother-12032019155609.html>

against the Tatmadaw for shelling villages <sup>6</sup> when no clash <sup>7</sup> happened nearby is a growing trend in Rakhine State. The trend coincides with an increasing number of villages that are providing strong support to the AA's insurgency. For example, AA fighters continue to reside in villages with weapons hidden nearby, and some Buddhist monks reportedly served as unit commanders, according to sources.

It is in fact nearly impossible to determine the origin or cause of explosions without collecting forensic evidence on the ground. Explosions that kill civilians could be from mines, UXO, shells fired during battle by either the AA or Tatmadaw, or shells deliberately fired at villages by the Tatmadaw as a form of collective punishment against civilians. More civilian deaths and injuries are expected in the coming months if this trend continues.

## Tatmadaw Launches Limited Offensive in Northern Shan State

The conflict between the TNLA and Tatmadaw intensified in November as the Tatmadaw launched a limited offensive on the edge of the Palaung Self-Administered Zone (SAZ) and fighting spilled back onto the main highway to the north and south of Kutkai Town. The Tatmadaw likely aims to corral the TNLA back into the Palaung heartland, but may stop short of launching an offensive into the group's stronghold. It is also working to maintain the security of the economic corridor by targeting TNLA positions and units that continue to operate in the vicinity of the main highway road. The fighting in northern Shan State is set to continue.

The Tatmadaw claimed to occupy 41 TNLA outposts during an offensive carried out between November 13 and 22. <sup>8</sup> According to TCMS, the fighting concentrated on the edge of the Palaung SAZ between Namhsam and Kyaukme townships. The Tatmadaw sent reinforcements into the area and used heavy artillery and helicopter gunships to attack TNLA positions. Clashes, however, appeared to end on November 22 and did not move deeper into the SAZ, suggesting that the Tatmadaw's policy is still to contain the TNLA to its stronghold in Namhsan and Manton townships. Up to 1,000 civilians were displaced during the episode.

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- 6 Khin Myat Myat Wai. (2019, August 26). Three dead, four injured in blast. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/three-dead-four-injured-blast.html>
- 7 Zarni Htun. (2019, October 01). Motor explosion injure five civilians in Myanmar's war-torn Rakhine state. RFA. [https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/mortar-exposions-injure-five-civilians-10012019154516.html?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/mortar-exposions-injure-five-civilians-10012019154516.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter)
- 8 ရှမ်းပြည်နယ်(မြောက်ပိုင်း)၊ နမ့်ဆန်မြို့နယ်၊ ဟူးခင်ကျေးရွာအုပ်စု၊ ဟိုမိန်းကျေးရွာနှင့် အနီးတဝိုက်မှ လက်နက်၊ ခဲယမ်း အမြောက်အများ ဖော်ထုတ် သိမ်းဆည်းရရှိ (2019, November 23). Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services. [http://cincds.gov.mm/node/5441?fbclid=IwAR0MaHhBr\\_Slq2u\\_k-s4qkjGfUYQu-F5hYQ0NFdBmkdb-FI-NkxfNa9sxzE](http://cincds.gov.mm/node/5441?fbclid=IwAR0MaHhBr_Slq2u_k-s4qkjGfUYQu-F5hYQ0NFdBmkdb-FI-NkxfNa9sxzE)



MIPS also recorded at least seven clashes along the main highway road to the northeast between November 12 and 15. According to the Tatmadaw, the fighting took place when multiple teams of Palaung fighters attempted to collect tolls from passing vehicles.<sup>9</sup> On November 13, videos emerged on Facebook of TNLA troops fighting behind civilian vehicles stopped along the road. The TNLA is known to periodically collect fees from cars and trucks travelling along the highway.

At least nine more clashes also took place in the countryside and mountains to the east and west of Kutkai Town. The Tatmadaw and TNLA have fought regularly in the area since the Brotherhood Alliance launched a major offensive along the highway on August 15. The Tatmadaw has since regularly targeted TNLA positions that

threaten the security of the main economic corridor linking Myanmar and China. The TNLA is still active in the area and in November demonstrated its ability to insert small teams onto the road and disrupt traffic for a limited period of time.

The Tatmadaw will likely continue efforts to maintain security along the economic corridor by clearing TNLA positions used to stage the August Offensive and by targeting TNLA units operating near the road. It may also launch more operations to clear TNLA positions that are not in the immediate vicinity of the main highway, but are outside of the Palaung SAZ. Fighting in northern Shan State will likely endure as the TNLA continues to operate in or nearby to Palaung villages scattered throughout the region.

## Tatmadaw Seizes TNLA Weapons Stash After Likely Tip Off

The Tatmadaw discovered three TNLA weapons caches in the middle of the Palaung SAZ on November 22. According to the Office of the Commander-in-Chief, Tatmadaw soldiers captured 40,000 rounds of ammunition and 170 weapons, including an FN-6, a Chinese-made shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile. The FN-6 is not new to the battlefield in Myanmar, and such weapons were smuggled from various origins including the Middle East. The FN-6 unit captured from the TNLA appeared to be missing a critical component and

was probably non-functional.

The story of the weapons seizure appears to begin with a clash between the Tatmadaw and TNLA on the morning of November 22. Following the clash, the Tatmadaw detained 80 civilians, including a village administrator, and moved them two miles away to the village of Ho Mong on the border of Namhsam and Manton townships.<sup>10</sup> The Tatmadaw allegedly beat the village administrator severely.

<sup>11</sup> It then discovered three different weapons caches

9 Htet Naing Zaw. (2019, November 13). TNLA တလမ်းပေါ်တက်ဆက်ကြေးတောင်း၍တိုက်ပွဲဖြစ်ရဟုတပ်မတော်ပြော. The Irrawaddy. [https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2019/11/13/208252.html?fbclid=IwAR1zBQkPdr3YcRenGtdVKe8rKGIPrwEgrXEubeN-054fFnKThs-RhirG\\_FTw](https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2019/11/13/208252.html?fbclid=IwAR1zBQkPdr3YcRenGtdVKe8rKGIPrwEgrXEubeN-054fFnKThs-RhirG_FTw)

10 Ta'ang Women's Organization – TWO. (2019, November 22). မြန်မာ့တပ်မတော် တပ်မတော်မှ ရွာသား ၆၂ ဦးကို ဓားစာခံအဖြစ် ခေါ်ဆောင်သွားပြီး အတွင်းရေးမှူးကို ရိုက်နှက်. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/taangwomenorganization/posts/2575271896077977>

11 Lei Lei. (2019, November 22). တပ်မတော် ခေါ်သွားသည့် နှိမ်ဆန့်ရွာသား ၆၂ ဦး ပြန်လွတ်လာ. The Irrawaddy. [https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/short-news/2019/11/22/208895.html?fbclid=IwAR0RfCsykng0qEpeEC7QTimar8Fv4mqhAJZsSdrbn2ecvVMo0gE98\\_phVFI](https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/short-news/2019/11/22/208895.html?fbclid=IwAR0RfCsykng0qEpeEC7QTimar8Fv4mqhAJZsSdrbn2ecvVMo0gE98_phVFI)



in and around Ho Mong Village before releasing the civilians. The Tatmadaw may have received information about the weapons from one of the civilians it arrested. A MIPS source in Shan State, however, said that the TNLA suspected that local media told the Tatmadaw about the weapons.

The inclusion of the FN-6 among the captured weapons invited much speculation about its origin and meaning for the future of warfare in Myanmar. Man-portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS), however, have been used by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) against the Tatmadaw on at least two occasions. In December 2012, for example, the KIA used a MANPADS to damage a Tatmadaw MI-35. The helicopter was forced to make a crash landing in Tatmadaw controlled territory. During the Mongko Offensive in 2016, a Northern Alliance missile damaged a Tatmadaw Hongdu JL-8 (Karakorum 8) light attack aircraft, but the pilot was able to return to an airbase.

While it is well-known that the United Wa State Army (UWSA) fields the FN-6, the unit captured from the TNLA was not necessarily transferred by the Wa. It is possible that the unit was smuggled from the Middle East, perhaps Syria, where it is widely used by rebels, via Thailand. In 2013, for example, Thai police seized four surface-to-air missile launchers from men preparing to smuggle them to Shan State.<sup>12</sup>

Expensive and sophisticated weapons like surface-to-air missiles are a favorite for smugglers because non-state fighters usually lack the technical expertise to determine the condition of the weapon. It is therefore easy to sell weapons that do not work. In addition, advanced weapons need to be stored properly and require proper training to be used effectively. It is unlikely that EAOs in Myanmar currently have access to such technical training from a state actor, a development that would invariably lead to more downed Tatmadaw aircraft.

## KIA Downplays Clash with Tatmadaw

The Tatmadaw and KIA clashed in Namsan Yang, Kachin State on November 29. On December 4, the Tatmadaw released photos of weapons it captured during the clash and said that it had captured the body of a KIA soldier. A report from Kachin News Group (KNG) confirmed that one KIA soldier was killed. Numerous pro-KIA accounts on Facebook expressed outrage over the incident.

Despite the anger, however, the KIA leadership appeared to downplay the clash by omitting in-

formation about its dead soldier. Meanwhile, one pro-KIA user that provides regular battlefield information described in a post that he had been instructed not to release information about clashes with the Tatmadaw.

The KIA leadership appears reluctant to discuss matters that may anger its constituents as it tries to negotiate a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the Tatmadaw. Periodic clashes or Tatmadaw attacks on new KIA outposts may continue, but appear unlikely to spark a wider confrontation.

12 Aung Moe Myint. (2019, July 15). Thai police seize Myanmar-bound weapons. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/ammunition-07152013175254.html/>

## **Tatmadaw and BGF Occupy NMSP Base**

On November 27, a unit from the Tatmadaw's Tactical Operation Command (TOC) in Three Pagoda Pass approached an NSMP checkpoint on the way to the Thai border. According to both the NMSP and Tatmadaw, an NMSP soldier began shooting while the Tatmadaw unit was asking for permission to pass. The Tatmadaw unit retreated, gathered the local Border Guard Force (BGF), and returned to attack the checkpoint and the NMSP base near Japan Well Village. The Tatmadaw and BGF occupied the NMSP base after nearly two hours of fighting. One civilian was reportedly wounded and up to 500 more fled to Thailand. An unknown number of NMSP troops were also reportedly wounded.

A delegation from the NMSP travelled to the Tatmadaw's Southeastern Command on December 2 to discuss the incident. The NMSP demanded that the BGF give back the base at Japan Well Village and that the Tatmadaw return another nearby outpost taken in the past, but no agreement was reached. Numerous conflicting reports emerged over whether the Tatmadaw or BGF had withdrawn. MIPS sources said that the Tatmadaw left the base but that the BGF remains. The NMSP filed a complaint in the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee Union-level (JMC-U), and both sides expressed willingness to reduce further tension and resolve the issue peacefully.

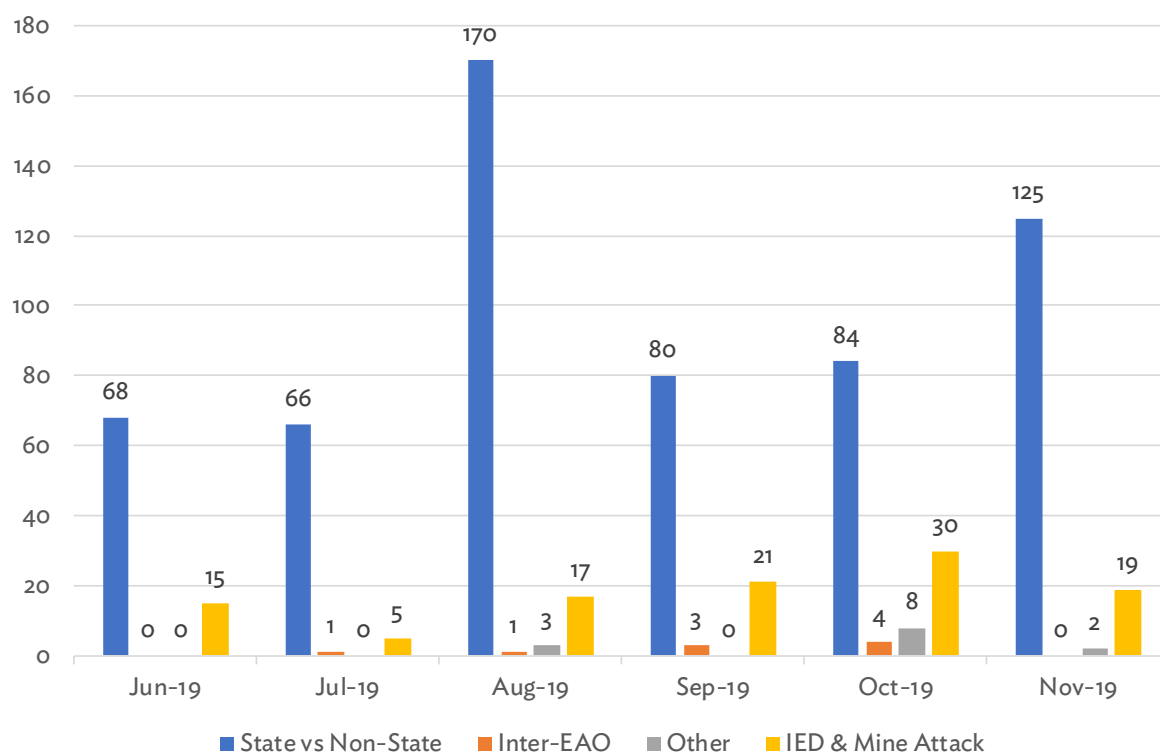
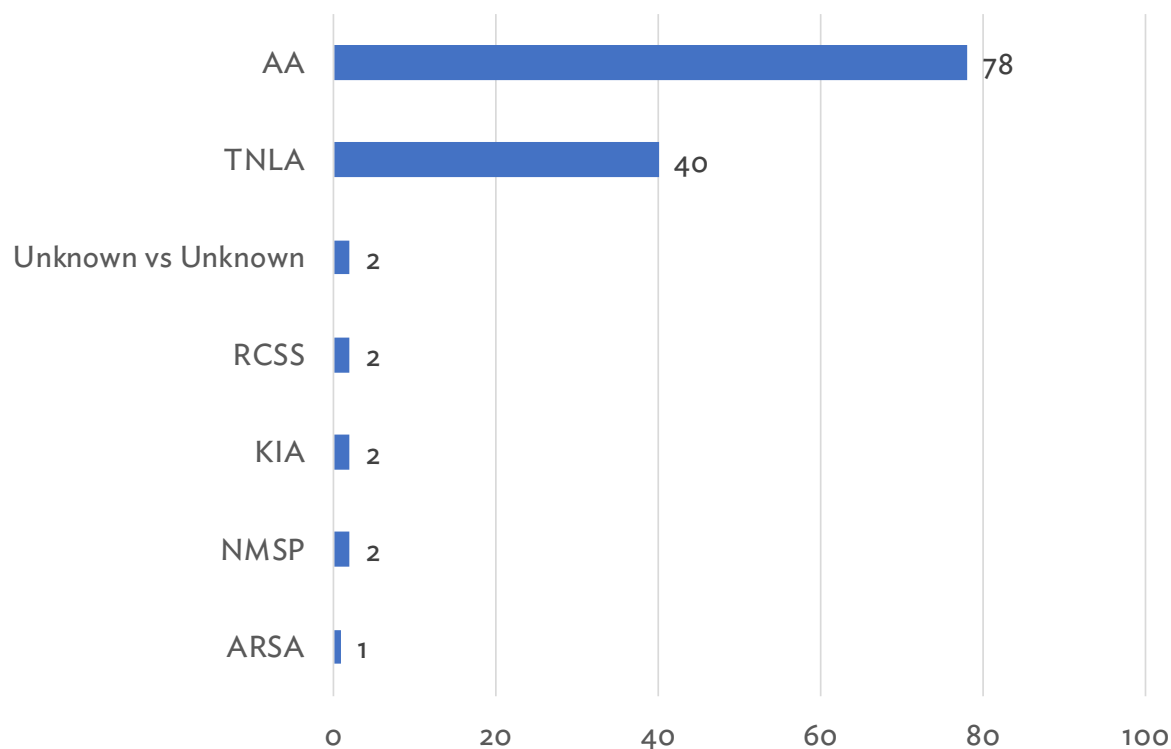
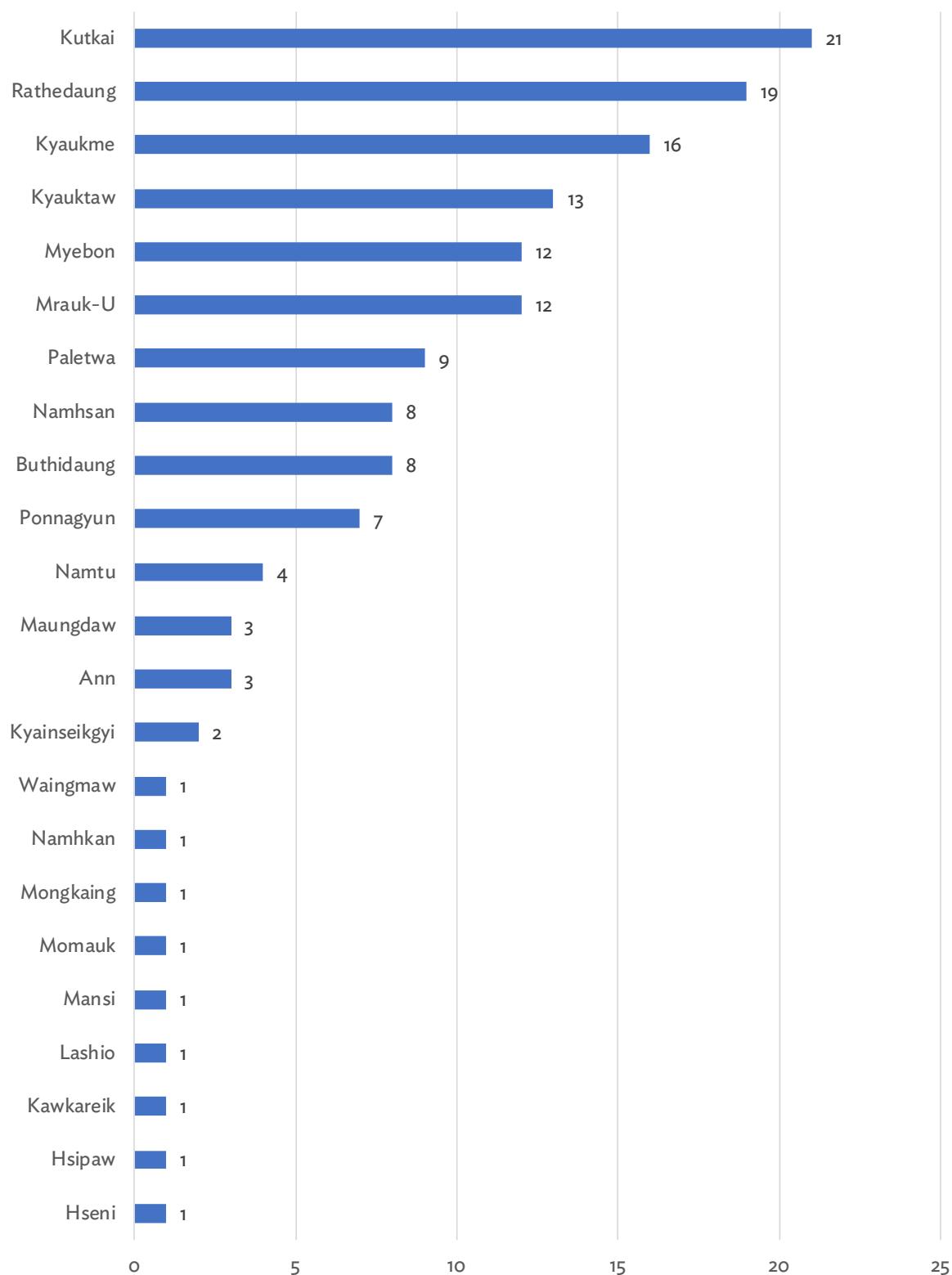


Figure 1: Armed incidents from June 2019 to November 2019

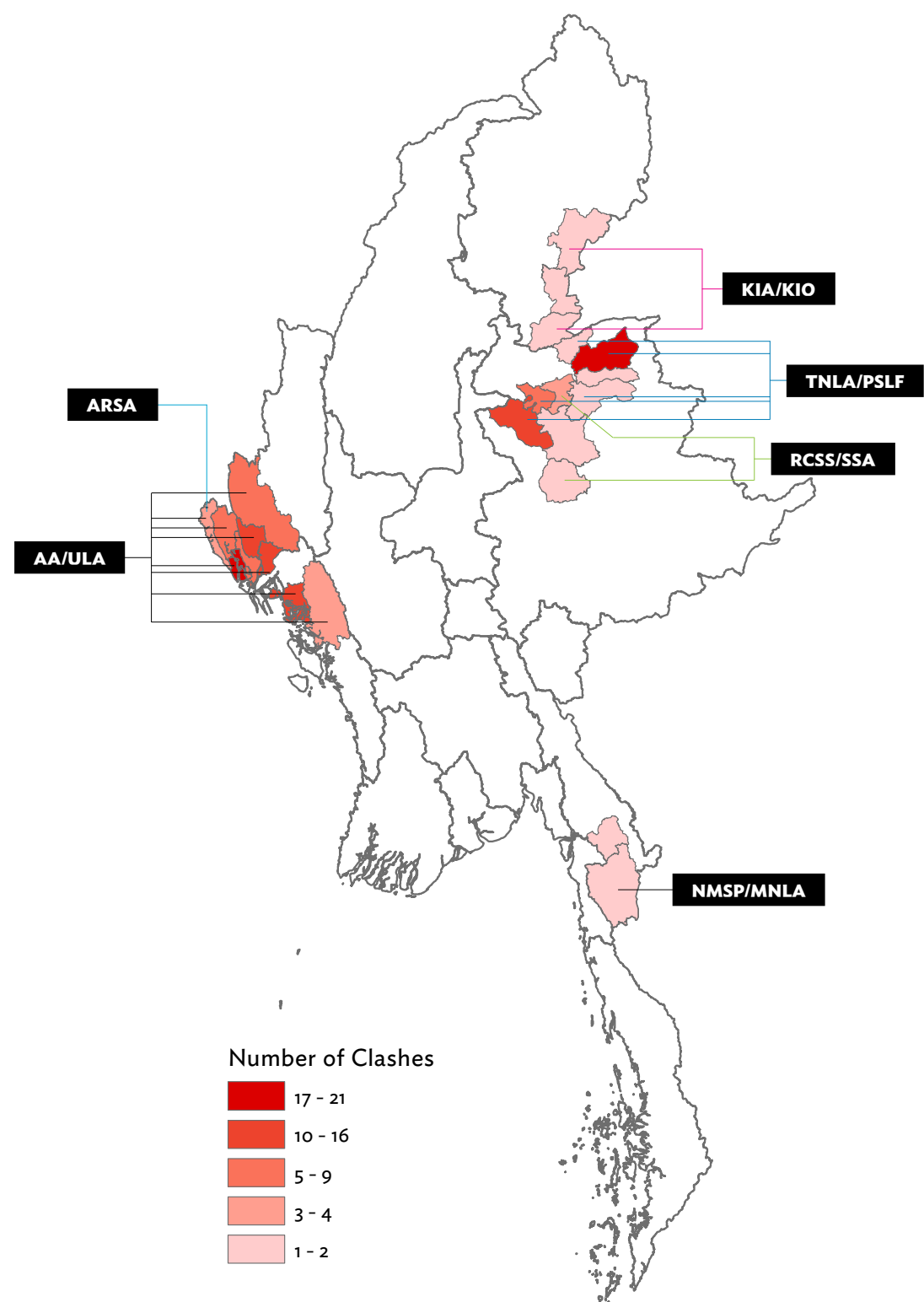


\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine. EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

Figure 2: Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in December 2018



**Figure 3:** Townships affected by armed incidents in November 2019



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 4:** *Armed incidents in November 2019*

Meeting	Number
KNU Central Standing Committee Meeting	1
NCA-S EAOs Meeting	1
Peace Commission and NCA-S EAOs Meeting	1
Tatmadaw and PNO (BGF) Meeting	1
JMC Meetings/Workshops	8

**Figure 5:** Significant meetings related to the peace process in November 2019

## GOVERNMENT

### Government Heads to The Hague for ICJ Oral Observation

A government delegation led by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi travelled to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague for an oral observation brought forth by The Gambia on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The Gambia filed the case against Myanmar for violation of Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It also asked the court to consider six provisional measures to protect the Rohingya that are not listed under the Genocide Convention in accordance with ICJ statutes and rules of the court.

The OIC had contacted Myanmar regarding Rohingya issues before The Gambia filed the case with the ICJ, and the government apparently knew of the impending trial as early as September 2019. Its legal team included Professor William Schabas, a Canadian expert in international law and human rights. Professor Schabas was assisted by five other lawyers, including two who are not trained in international law.

Ahead of the oral observation the government faced the decision over whether it would accept or reject the provisional measures brought forth by The Gambia. Accepting the provisional measures, however, would have implied acceptance over the related charges pertaining to Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The government fully rejected the provisional measures at the oral observation, citing Article 6 and 8 of the Genocide Convention to underscore its reservations.

During the hearing the government presented its legal arguments against the provisional measures but did little to respond to the details of alleged crimes and behaviors described by The Gambia's legal team. Although the hearing divided Civil Society Organizations (CSO) across the country, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's popularity at home soared and her opening and closing remarks were especially well received by Myanmar viewers. A source also told MIPS that the State Counsellor told the military during a meeting in 2018 that she would face any international trial, suggesting that her trip to The Hague was not a pre-election tactic.

# NCA-SIGNATORIES

## Military Issues May Impede Plans for UPC

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) met with the government's Peace Commission (PC) in Chiang Mai, Thailand from November 19 to 22. The two sides discussed convening the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM) as a venue to agree on when to hold the next Union Peace Conference—21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC).<sup>13</sup> The government proposed to convene the JICM meeting before Christmas, but the NCA-S said that they would let the government know after holding the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) meeting in early December.

The PPST convened in Chiang Mai from December 2 to 4 where it reportedly produced a counter-proposal for setting the date for the JICM. Then, on December 8, the KNU announced that a meeting with the Tatmadaw on December 11 and 12 would be a critical factor in determining if or when

it could attend the JICM. Sources told MIPS that discussions over the Tatmadaw's road building in Kayah State and JMC-related issues on December 11 did not go well, although the issue was later resolved to some extent by interlocutors.

In a meeting the next day, the KNU did not give a definitive answer to whether it agreed to move forward with the JICM. If the JICM is not held, then the UPC, currently scheduled for March 2020, cannot convene. There is also a risk for clashes in the Karen National Liberation Army's (KNLA) Brigade 5 and Brigade 3 areas if the Tatmadaw continues its road projects there without agreement from the KNLA. So far, sources said the Tatmadaw agreed not to expand the width of the existing road but to repair it by clearing the dirt and foliage on the top of it. Both sides agreed to allow their ground commanders to coordinate in this regard.

13 Myanmar gov't, NCA signatories eye resumption of formal talks next month. (2019, November 22). The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-govt-nca-signatories-eye-resumption-formal-talks-next-month.html>

# NON-SIGNATORIES

## UWSA Sends NCA Proposal to Government

According to MIPS sources the UWSA is seriously negotiating with the government over two preconditions to sign the NCA and has already submitted a proposal to do so. First, the UWSA would like to add a conflict resolution procedure into an agreement for signing the NCA. The idea is that the procedure can be followed if any disagreement breaks out during the implementation of the NCA. Second, it demands the right to withdraw from the

NCA if, in the event of a dispute, the conflict resolution procedure fails to provide a solution. These preconditions appear as a way for the UWSA to sign the NCA without upending the current status quo. The relationship between the government and UWSA continues to improve, as reflected in the latter's support for the State Counsellor's trip to the ICJ.<sup>14</sup> The government delegation is scheduled to meet with the UWSA in mid-December.

14 Tun Tun. (2019, December 02). UWSA, NDAA support state counselor's defense of Myanmar at ICJ. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/uwsa-ndaa-support-state-counselors-defense-myanmar-icj.html>

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### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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# PEACE AND SECURITY BRIEF

COVERING DECEMBER 2019

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VOLUME NO.(4), ISSUE NO.(1)

## OVERVIEW

- The Tatmadaw is accelerating its offensive by more frequently using airstrikes and heavy artillery to bombard AA units and bases wherever they are spotted. The Tatmadaw is unlikely to slow its operations in Rakhine due to the Brotherhood Alliance's unilateral ceasefire.
- The AA launched multiple rounds of coordinated, large-scale attacks against Tatmadaw bases across northern Rakhine in December, but did not manage to overrun them and sustained losses. It also carried out a string of abductions which are likely part of its effort to dismantle the civil administration in Rakhine. It may also be attempting to destabilize additional areas.
- The Tatmadaw may have abandoned its policy to contain the TNLA to its stronghold in the Palaung SAZ by inserting the 88<sup>th</sup> LID to dislodge fixed TNLA positions in Namhsan Township.
- The Tatmadaw and KNLA reached an agreement over road construction in Kyaukkyi after the issue led to increased tensions and clashes in Kyaukkyi and Hpapun townships.
- The government and NCA-S convened the JICM, marking the official resumption of formal peace talks, where they agreed on 8 points and to hold the UPC within the next four months.
- A meeting between the NRPC and UWSA went well, and prospects for a Wa signing of the NCA are growing.

## SECURITY

### Total Number of Clashes Nationwide Declines, but Fighting Intensifies in Rakhine

At least 101 armed clashes and 19 incidents involving mines or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) took place in December for a total of 120 armed incidents nationwide, down from 146 in November, according to information logged in the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS).<sup>1</sup> Paletwa Township, Chin State, experienced the highest number of armed clashes as the Arakan Army/United League of Arakan (AA/ULA) attempted multiple large-scale attacks

against the Tatmadaw. Namhsam Township in northern Shan State saw the second highest number of clashes after the Tatmadaw inserted a division to target fixed positions held by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front (TNLA/PSLF). Following that, Myebon and Mrauk U Townships were most affected, since the Tatmadaw upped the tempo of its operations and the AA carried out coordinated attacks there as well.

### AA Attempts Several Large Attacks as Tatmadaw Increases Pressure

The month of December witnessed the AA carry out multiple coordinated attacks against Tatmadaw positions, although none succeeded in overrunning Tatmadaw encampments. At the same time, the Tatmadaw increased its operational tempo by more frequently pounding AA positions or units with heavy artillery and airstrikes. Further south, the Tatmadaw inserted at least one additional division to expel AA units attempting to establish a foothold in the area along the Yangon-Sittoung Highway in Myebon and Ann townships. A bombing in Kyaukphyu shows that the AA may be attempting to destabilize additional areas, a plan which will likely provoke stiff Tatmadaw opposition. The month was also characterized by a string of abductions against government officials and civil servants, an effort which may be part of the AA's plan to dismantle the civil administrative structure in northern Rakhine and southern Chin states.

In the early morning of December 9, the AA carried out at least three coordinated attacks against Tatmadaw positions in Paletwa Township, Chin State. On December 11, the AA launched coordinated attacks against three Tatmadaw outposts in Minbya Township. The AA also launched a large-scale attack against a Tatmadaw position in Mrauk U on December 5. Overall, December saw the highest number of large-scale, coordinated attacks by the AA since March 2019, when the AA launched an offensive near Mrauk U Town. Sources indicated that the AA suffered heavy casualties in the attacks, which did not succeed in overrunning their targets.

The pattern of clashes throughout 2019 shows that the AA cannot usually sustain the momentum of large attacks. Generally, there is a dip or pause from large scale attacks in the month after any major attempt. This is likely because the AA needs time to

1 TCMS is an advanced monitoring system developed by MIPS that consists of 75 acceleration and deceleration indicators of conflict dynamics nationwide.

regroup, refit, and reorganize before it can again carry out large scale attacks in an attempt to overrun Tatmadaw positions. Usually, however, the AA is able to continue frequent ambushes and IED attacks in the interim, demonstrating its ability to keep up constant engagement with the Tatmadaw.

The Tatmadaw appears to have shifted its strategy by liberalizing the use of firepower, especially airstrikes. In November, MIPS reported that the Tatmadaw regional commander was given the authority to launch airstrikes without the need to seek permission from command headquarters in Nay Pyi Taw. In the past, the Tatmadaw's doctrine was to fly airstrikes only in support of infantry operations. Now, however, the Tatmadaw is beginning to change its concept of airpower by flying airstrikes in the absence of infantry operations. In December, the Tatmadaw more frequently used airstrikes and artillery to attack AA units and bases wherever they were spotted. The Tatmadaw's growing experience with airpower was recently reflected in comments by the Commander-in-Chief made during an event to mark the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the air force's founding.<sup>2</sup>

According to MIPS sources, the Tatmadaw inserted at least one division into the Taung Guk-Ann-Myebon area, possibly as early as November, in an effort to expel AA units attempting to open a southern front, and to cut off an AA supply route via Taung Guk. In December, the Tatmadaw targeted AA encampments along the Yangon-Sittwe highway that runs through the area. A source told MIPS that the Tatmadaw discovered over one-hundred foxholes

near the highway in Myebon township as it moved in to dislodge the AA forces there, who then withdrew into the mountains to the east. It is likely that the AA has a base in the area, and that the Tatmadaw will move to dislodge it once it is discovered.

On December 11, the AA reportedly attacked a Tatmadaw convoy with a roadside bomb in Kyaukphyu on Ramree Island, home to a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and pipeline linking China's Yunnan Province to the Indian Ocean. Although the AA has not yet proven its ability to wage sustained, high intensity operations further to the south, the IED attack in Kyaukphyu indicates a possible AA plan to destabilize additional areas outside of the main conflict zone. On December 19, three small explosions occurred on Manaung Island, which lies off the coast of Ramree Island, just hours ahead of the State Counsellor's visit, but the AA denied any involvement. Such attempts may continue, but will likely be met by swift Tatmadaw efforts to thwart any expansion.

December also saw the AA carry out a number of high-profile abductions. On December 11, the AA kidnapped U Ye Thein, the Chairperson of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Buthidaung Township, while he travelled to organize a rally in support of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The AA soon admitted<sup>3</sup> to taking U Ye Thein for questioning, but on December 25 said he was killed<sup>4</sup> in a Tatmadaw mortar attack the day before. The Tatmadaw denied that any clash took place on either day, suggesting that the AA executed him.

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- 2 Htat Naing Zaw. (2019, December 17). Myanmar air force benefits from experience fighting rebels, says spokesman. The Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-air-force-benefits-experience-fighting-rebels-says-spokesman.html>
  - 3 Sit Htet Aung. (2019, December 13). Arakan Army admits seizing local party leader in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/arakan-army-admits-seizing-local-party-leader-myanmars-rakhine-state.html>
  - 4 Thant Zin Oo. (2019, December 26). Local NLD leader killed by motor blast in Myanmar's war-ravaged Rakhine state. RFA. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/local-nld-leader-killed-12262019160625.html>

On December 23, the AA abducted U Zaw Tun Aung, the Mytel director for Rakhine State, and his driver in Kyauktaw Township. On December 24, the AA abducted three staff members of the Department of Immigration and Population in Buthidaung Township. And finally, on December 31, the AA took 16 civil servants off a boat in Rathedaung township, but released them several days later. The abduction of government officials, civil servants, and business people linked to the government or military is likely part of the AA's effort to dismantle the civil administrative structure of Rakhine State, a goal it has made much progress toward.

Despite this success, however, the AA appeared to revise the timeline for one of its most important objectives and propaganda slogans. In line with the “Arakan Dream 2020”, the AA has long said that it would establish its headquarters in Mrauk U by 2020. In a sweeping<sup>5</sup> three-part<sup>6</sup> interview<sup>7</sup> with the Irrawaddy in December, AA chief Tun Mrat Naing appeared to shift that timeline to 2025, hinting that something critical would happen before then. Either way, sources told MIPS that there is currently a rift between the government and Tatmadaw over how to best reassert government control. The Tatmadaw wishes to impose martial law, but the government so far appears reluctant to allow this to happen.

Instead, the Tatmadaw has responded to the AA's dismantling of civil administration by stationing bases inside villages, where it can directly assert its presence and authority. The tactic has unsurprisingly led to more displacement among civilians who then find themselves wedged between the authority of both sides. According to the Rakhine Ethnic Congress (REC), up to 100,000 were displaced at some point in 2019. Most of the displaced, however, returned to their villages after an incident of displacement. A report from the REC on December 14 said that 34,740 IDPs were residing in the camps. Some IDPs also migrate out of state or go to live with family members elsewhere in Rakhine.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, the Tatmadaw appears to be gaining momentum by increasing the tempo of its attacks on AA units and bases, especially with the use of frequent airstrikes and heavy artillery barrages. The coming months will likely see the Tatmadaw accelerate its offensive, an effort that is unlikely to be influenced by the Brotherhood Alliance's extension of the unilateral ceasefire. The AA will also likely attempt periodic large-scale attacks punctuated by regular ambushes, IED attacks, and other activities such as kidnappings.

5 Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint. (2019, December 07). ဘယ်သူက လူဆိုးလဲဆိုတာ မြင်သွားတာပေါ့ဗျာ. The Irrawaddy. [https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2019/12/07/210143.html?fbclid=IwAR2zXXypBv9xZ\\_iZrBPAGScQ3X46Z55MXkobQ-gGQJLYy8p2qnd-N5xJEeLo](https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2019/12/07/210143.html?fbclid=IwAR2zXXypBv9xZ_iZrBPAGScQ3X46Z55MXkobQ-gGQJLYy8p2qnd-N5xJEeLo)

6 Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint. (2019, December 11). ဘင်္ဂါလီ၊ ရိုဟင်ဂျာ အမည်နာမ ပြဿနာနှင့် AA ပြောတဲ့ရပ်တည်ချက်. The Irrawaddy. [https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2019/12/11/210449.html?fbclid=IwAR2hmiaHCl9tp7t7Ho-XOk7iRwrhNzbTiK8gQ-SBMG0LZ8OiFo2\\_OXiLBsl](https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2019/12/11/210449.html?fbclid=IwAR2hmiaHCl9tp7t7Ho-XOk7iRwrhNzbTiK8gQ-SBMG0LZ8OiFo2_OXiLBsl)

7 Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint. (2019, December 17). ၂၀၂၅ မတိုင်ခင် အပြောင်းအလဲကြီးတခု ခန့်မှန်းထားတယ်. The Irrawaddy. [https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2019/12/17/210953.html?fbclid=IwAR1P4e9tldJRR4q5fCCoaf\\_HHsF1VXaFKs1zjZz-f7ohqSegje0z4d1eb50](https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2019/12/17/210953.html?fbclid=IwAR1P4e9tldJRR4q5fCCoaf_HHsF1VXaFKs1zjZz-f7ohqSegje0z4d1eb50)

8 Rakhine Ethnic Congress. စစ်ဘေးသင့်၊ စစ်ဘေးဒုက္ခသည်အရေအတွက်ကို တင်ပြခြင်း. [Status Update]. Facebook. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=726793774512484&id=250589055466294](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=726793774512484&id=250589055466294)

## **Tatmadaw Asserts Pressure on TNLA Inside Palaung SAZ**

The Tatmadaw may have abandoned its policy to contain the TNLA to the Palaung Self-Administered Zone (SAZ) by sending its 88<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Division (LID) into Namhsam Township in search of fixed TNLA positions. In December, MIPS recorded at least 12 clashes in Namhsam, most of which appeared to be Tatmadaw assaults on TNLA positions. In most cases, the TNLA withdrew after thirty minutes or one hour of fighting.

The 88<sup>th</sup> LID was stationed in northern Shan State for nearly two years in 2017 and 2018 and therefore knows the area well. The current operation there does not appear to be a full-scale offensive, since that would require the insertion of additional divisions. The Tatmadaw is likely acting off intelligence and conducting targeted operations to

dislodge fixed TNLA positions. Since at least early 2018, the Tatmadaw's policy has been to contain the TNLA to the Palaung heartland in Namhsam and Manton, but its current operations suggest a deviation from this strategy.

On January 1, the Brotherhood Alliance extended its unilateral ceasefire, which covers northern Shan State. The extension, however, appears to have had little effect on the Tatmadaw's behavior. Elsewhere in the area, the Tatmadaw continued to target TNLA positions and units operating along the major economic corridor which was disrupted by the Brotherhood Alliance's August offensive. More clashes along the corridor and a new phase of clashes within Namhsam are likely in the coming months.

## Tatmadaw Road Work Raises Tensions with KNLA, but Two Sides Later Reach Agreement

On December 2, the Tatmadaw arrived in Muthe Village in Kyaukkayi Township with two bulldozers assigned to clear and upgrade the existing road eastward to Maw Law. On December 6, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops destroyed one of the bulldozers. Sources told MIPS that the KNLA troops moved into the area to plant explosives on the bulldozer at night.

According to a Free Burma Rangers (FBR) report, the local Tatmadaw command issued a curfew and a shoot on sight order for anyone travelling along certain sections of the road at any time on December 9.<sup>9</sup> The same FBR report included multiple pieces of photographic evidence documenting the Tatmadaw's conduct, but provided no evidence of the shoot on sight order or curfew. After reaching out to its network of media members and sources in Kayin State, MIPS was unable to verify the existence of any curfew or shoot on sight order.

On December 11 and 12, top leaders from the Karen National Union (KNU) met with the Tatmadaw in Nay Pyi Taw where they discussed the road issues in Kyaukkayi and Hpapun townships. The two sides agreed that the Tatmadaw's Southern Command and the KNLA's District Command should meet to resolve the issue.

A clash later broke out on December 26 after the Tatmadaw reportedly inserted additional units into the Muthe area. The two sides then held

the commander-level meeting at the KNU's liaison office in Kyaukkayi on December 27, but the meeting did not appear to resolve the issue. In early January, several more clashes were reported in the Brigade 5's area in Hpapun Township, where the Tatmadaw intends to link the road from Kyaukkayi.

The Tatmadaw likely plans to upgrade the numerous roads that connect its network of bases that span from Kyaukkayi to the border with Thailand. Although these roads already exist, many segments are not motorable by four wheeled vehicles. The KNLA does not want these roads, which cut through the heart of its Brigade 3 and 5 areas, to facilitate Tatmadaw vehicles. Tatmadaw efforts to expand and upgrade the roads has been met by consistent opposition from local civilians and the KNLA alike.

On January 10, however, the KNLA and Tatmadaw met for a second time at the KNU's liaison office in Kyaukkayi. The KNLA agreed to allow the Tatmadaw to improve the road from Than Bo to Muthe to Baw Sal Kho Hti, but only for one-way traffic.<sup>10</sup> It was also agreed that the Tatmadaw would not provide any security to the road construction crews as they worked, and that civilians can freely travel along the road without any interrogation from either side. The Tatmadaw and KNLA agreed to inform one another of movements along the road ahead of time as well.

9 Free Burma Rangers. (2019, December 22). Shoot-on-sight orders given by Burma army as they impose curfew and restrict movement for villagers in Kyaukkayi township. <https://www.freeburmarangers.org/2019/12/22/shoot-sight-orders-given-burma-army-impose-curfew-restrict-movement-villagers-kyaukkayi-township/>

10 Khit Thit Media. ကျောက်ကြီးတွင် တင်းမာနေသော တပ်မတော် လမ်းဖောက်လုပ်မှုကို KNU သဘောတူခွင့်ပြု. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/825160117921336>

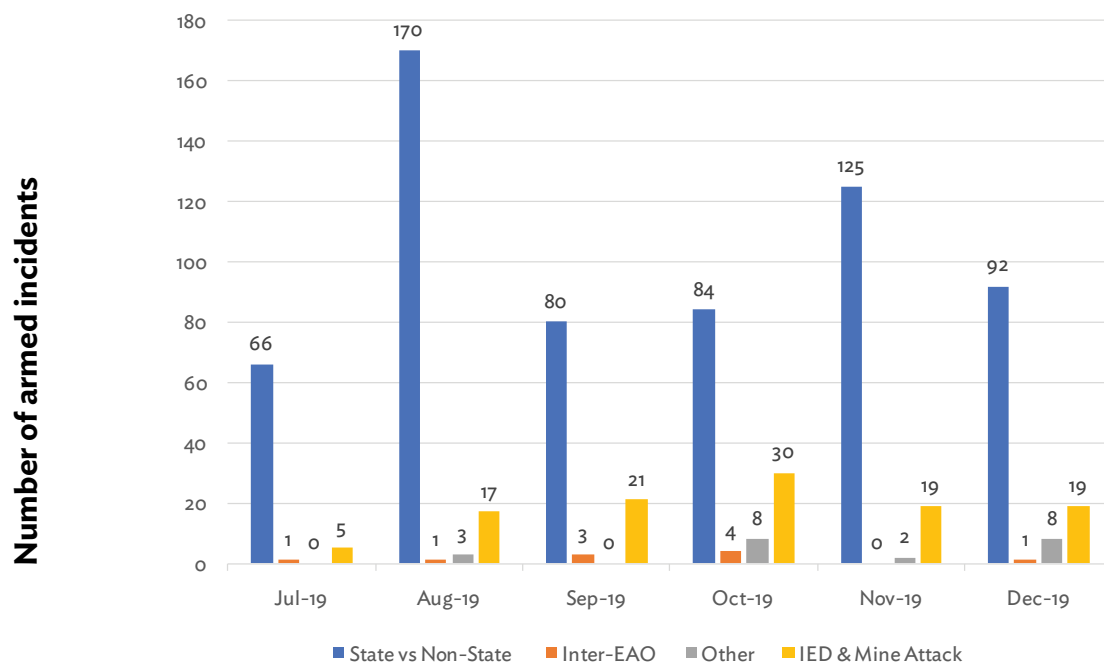
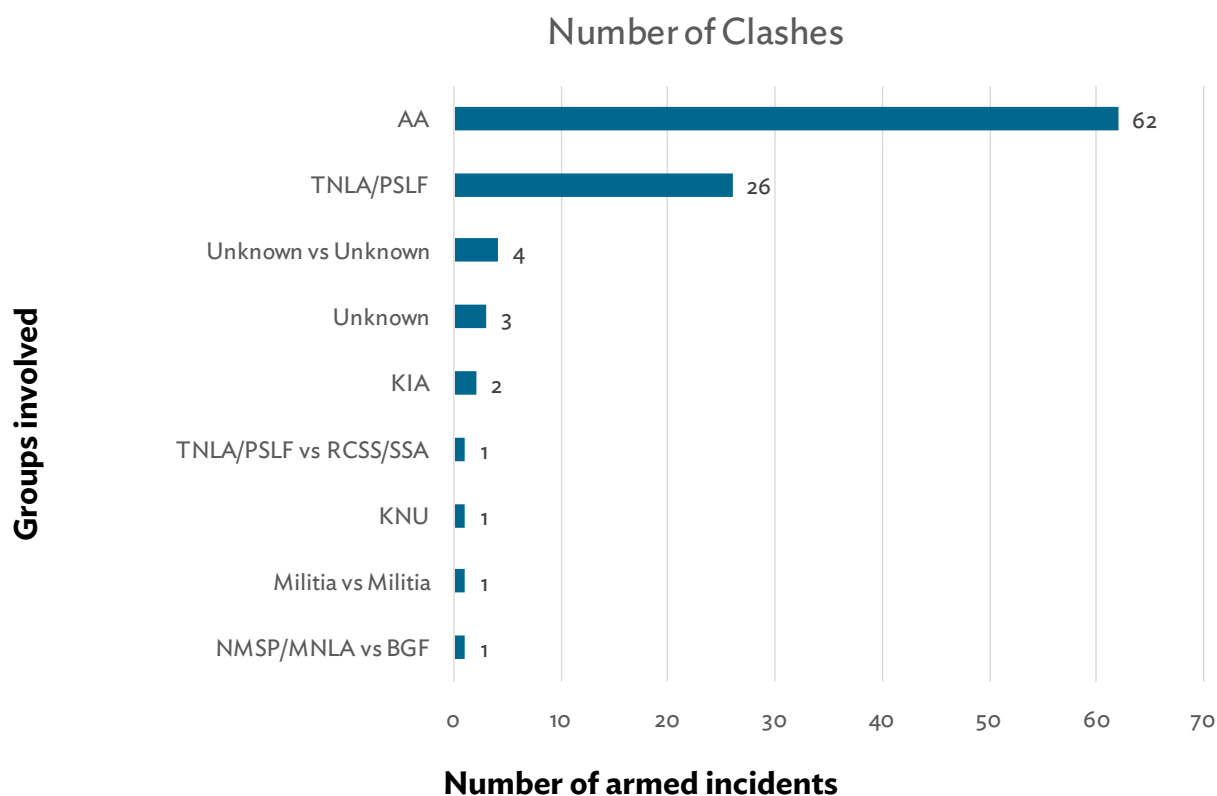


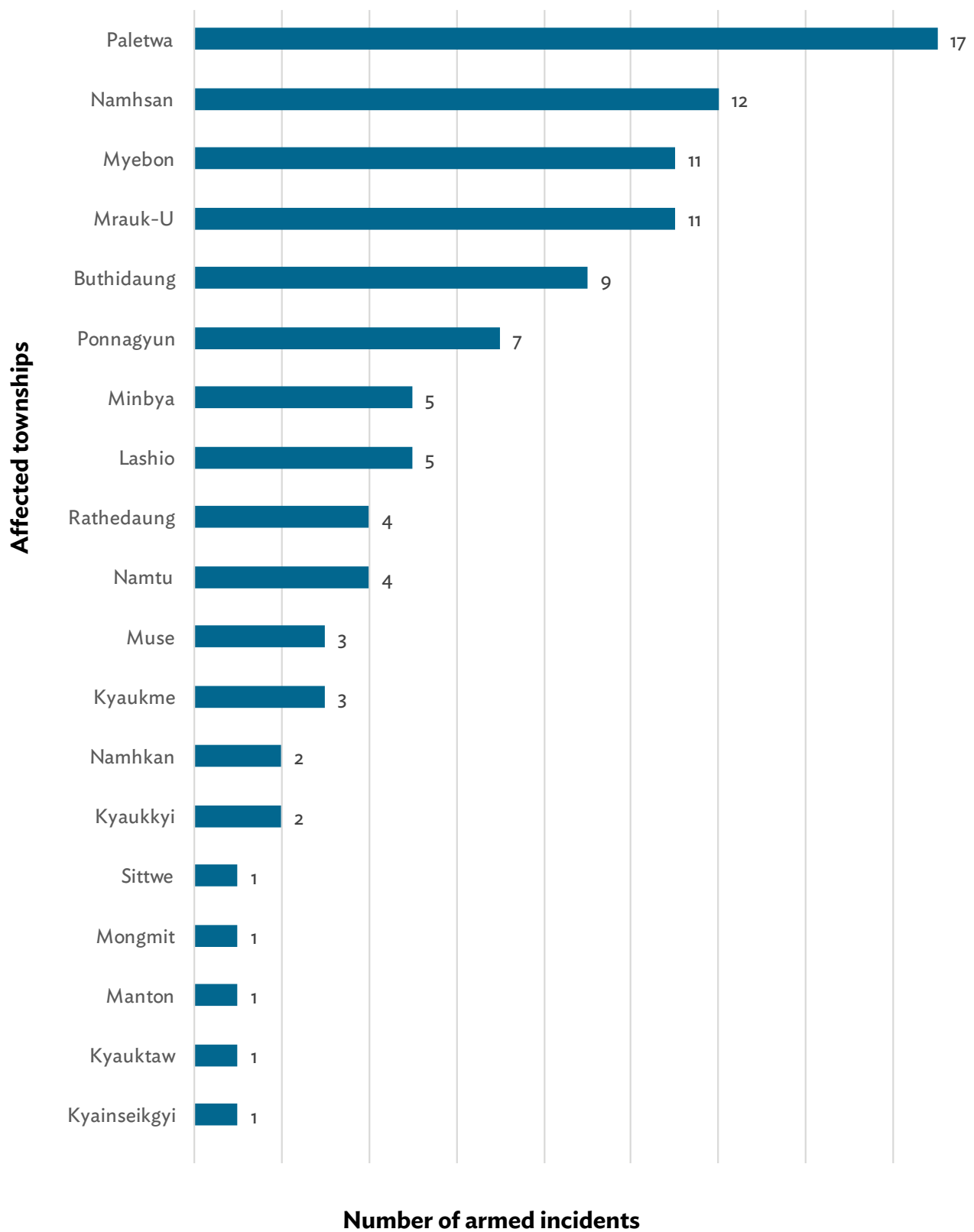
Figure 1: Armed incidents from July 2019 to December 2019



\*Incidents involving civilians injured by land mines in which the conflicting parties accused one another of laying the mine.  
EAOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

Figure 2: Groups involved in armed incidents with the Tatmadaw and other EAOs in December 2019

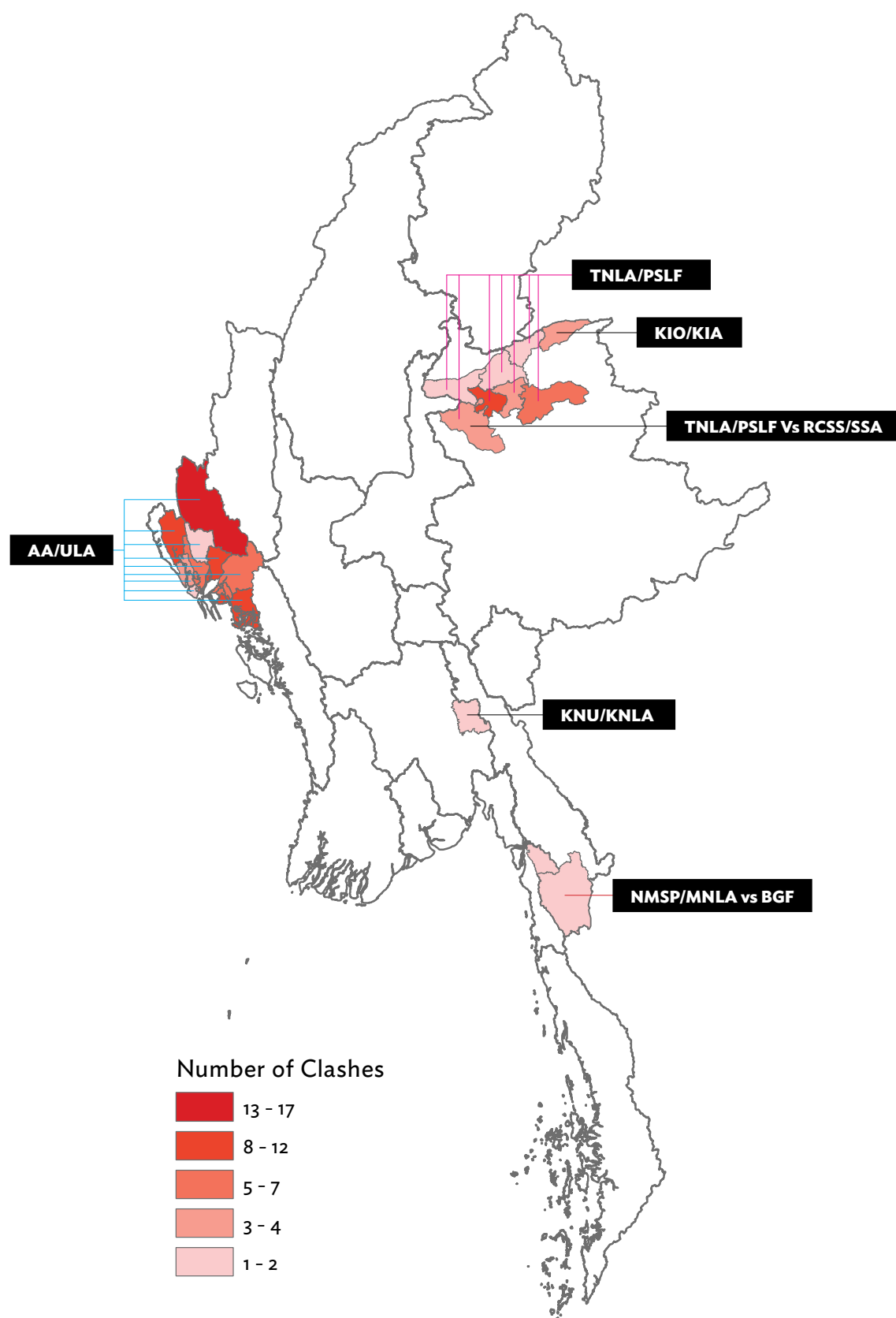




**Figure 3:** Townships affected by armed incidents in December 2019

Meetings	Number
JMC Meetings/Workshops	8
Tatmadaw and NMSP Meeting	2
Tatmadaw and KNU Meeting	2
NCA-S EAO Meeting	2
PPST Meeting	1
KNU and Karen Parties Meeting	1
NRPC and KIA, TNLA, MNDAA, AA Meeting	1
NMSP Conference	1
Total Number of Meetings	18

**Figure 4:** Significant meetings related to the peace process in December 2019



Incidents in unlabelled townships involved mines or IEDs planted by an unknown actor.  
EOs listed alone indicate clashes between the Tatmadaw and that EAO.

**Figure 5: Armed incidents in December 2019**

# NCA SIGNATORIES

## Government, Tatmadaw, and Signatories Convene JICM with Eye on UPC

The government, military, and Nationwide Cease-fire Agreement Signatories (NCA-S) convened the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM) in Nay Pyi Taw on January 8.<sup>11</sup> The original idea behind convening the JICM was to use the meeting as a venue to set the date for the next Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panglong (UPC). It was also slated to symbolize the official resumption of formal peace talks.

The JICM was attended by the State Counsellor, Deputy Commander-in-Chief Vice-Senior General Soe Win, and RCSS Chairman General Yawd Serk. The meeting produced an 8-point agreement that includes a plan to convene the UPC within

the first four months of 2020, and to hold the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) and Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) meetings within the next two months.<sup>12</sup>

According to MIPS sources, the RCSS said it does not want to continue formal peace talks after June 2020 in order to give leeway for the upcoming election. The government, which had originally stated that it would not negotiate in 2020, appears in line with this position. Both the government and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) demonstrated willingness to hold the 4<sup>th</sup> UPC in the first quarter of 2020, and both sides will seek a set of agreements on federal principles.

# NON-SIGNATORIES

## NRPC Meets UWSA En Route to Northern Alliance Meeting

Representatives from the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) met with leaders from the United Wa State Army (UWSA) on December 14 before travelling onwards to meet with the Northern Alliance on December 15. Sources told MIPS that the meeting between the NRPC and UWSA went well and that the prospect of the UWSA signing the NCA is growing.

The NRPC met with all four members of the Northern Alliance in Kunming, China the next

day. According to MIPS sources, the Northern Alliance proposed three points as preconditions to bilateral ceasefire. First, they asked that individuals in contact with the groups not be arrested. Second, they proposed a release of current detainees on both sides. Finally, the alliance proposed the formation of a conflict resolution mechanism that involves other members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) and China.

11 Than Htike Aung. (2020, January 09). JICM reaches 8-point peace process agreement. Mizzima. <http://www.mizzima.com/article/jicm-reaches-8-point-peace-process-agreement>

12 Myanmar State Counsellor Office. Govt, EAOs reach eight agreements at 8<sup>th</sup> JICM in Nay Pyi Taw. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/state.counsellor/posts/1806287702838771>

The Northern Alliance told the government that once the three pre-conditions were met, there could be a temporary cessation of hostilities followed by bilateral discussions to work out more details. Many of the issues discussed at the meeting were similar to those discussed at the previous meeting in Keng Tung held in mid-September. The government did not respond specifically to any of these points.

On January 1, the Brotherhood Alliance, which excludes the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), extended its unilateral ceasefire until February 29. The announcement had no apparent effect on the

Tatmadaw's conduct in northern Rakhine State, nor on its operations against the TNLA in northern Shan State.

The negotiations with the Northern Alliance may not produce any substantial result in the near future, but the KIA and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) are likely to maintain the current trend of conflict de-escalation in 2020. The fighting between the Tatmadaw and AA is likely to continue throughout the year in Rakhine State, and low-intensity clashes with the TNLA may likely continue in 2020 as well.

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### About MIPS

Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, independent research-based policy “think-and-do-tank” aiming to support the peace process and security transition, working closely with principal stakeholders.



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