



CURRENT SITUATION

2021 Military Coup. Following 10 years of gradual progress on political and economic liberalization — and a landslide victory for the National League for Democracy in the 2020 election — the Burmese army took power in a coup on February 1, 2021. The army quickly reversed hard-won progress toward democracy and human rights in Burma.

In response, millions of people from all walks of life joined a civil disobedience movement and mass public protests across the country to prevent the military from consolidating power — as well as demand the reinstatement of the elected government and constitutional reform to constrain the military. The army, in turn, used violent force to crack down on the movement, killing scores of protesters and creating an environment of chaos and terror.

Burma has endured more than 75 years of civil war, but the coup has radically shifted the conflict landscape in Burma, spurring the emergence of new armed actors and strengthening ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) that have fought the Burmese military for decades.

Burma Since the Coup. The entire country is now engulfed in war and is the site of one of the world's greatest humanitarian crises, with tens of thousands killed. Nearly one-third of the population faces acute food insecurity, and over five million people are displaced or seeking asylum. These include nearly one million Rohingya in Bangladesh who face no chance of a dignified return to Burma as long as the genocidal junta regime is in power.

Over four years into the conflict, violence has escalated dramatically and the resistance movement continues to make steady gains against demoralized and depleted junta forces. But there is no resolution in sight. With the military stretched thin and facing increasingly sophisticated and coordinated armed groups on multiple fronts, the resistance sees this an historic opportunity to eliminate the country's primary agent of instability — the Burmese military — from power. The junta is at its weakest point in decades as a result of historic losses, but it has been able to sustain itself through forced conscription,



powerful systems of internal control, and extractive economic policies that generate up to \$5 billion in foreign exchange annually. It has also tilted toward China, which has exerted pressure on resistance forces to help shore up the military's position with an eye toward consolidating Chinese influence in the India Ocean region — a direct threat to U.S. interests in a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The junta now controls less than 21 percent of Burma's territory. In areas liberated from the military junta, resistance forces have established local governance systems, law enforcement institutions, schools, and health infrastructure to support local communities. Political dialogue between resistance actors that aims to achieve a shared vision for the future continue, but have thus far failed to achieve a clear political roadmap that could unite the resistance movement.

Meanwhile, criminal actors and junta-aligned militias have forged new alliances in the border areas with China and Thailand to conduct massive illicit business. Since the coup, Burma has become the world's largest source of opium, methamphetamines and cyberscam operations, which directly threaten U.S. national security.

USIP'S WORK

Active in Burma since 2012, USIP addresses the threat to U.S. national interests posed by the junta's ongoing war against the people of Burma, as well as the support the junta receives from malign actors such as China and Russia.

Exposing Transnational Organized Crime. Because of instability caused by the coup, Burma has become a global epicenter of transnational cyberscam operations — which currently steal billions of dollars a year from Americans — as well as narcotics production, causing direct harm to U.S. national security interests. USIP produces detailed research and provides pragmatic options for how law enforcement officials and civil society can respond to threats from transnational organized crime not only in Burma, but across maritime and mainland Southeast Asia.

Tracking China's Influence. USIP tracks and exposes the impact of China's activities in the country. The People's Republic of China props up the withering Burmese military so that it can extract valuable resources — including rare earth resources, oil, gas and critical minerals — and project maritime power in the Indian Ocean.

USIP's initiatives in Burma also include:

- In-depth analysis of the ongoing conflict.
- Support for efforts to end the Burmese military's atrocities.
- Support dialogue and negotiations towards lasting peace in Burma.
- Support for local community security initiatives and faith-based groups as a way to protect communities and reduce violence.
- Engagement with regional actors, including India and ASEAN, on international avenues to resolve the conflict.