



# ON-THE-GROUND IN BURMA

A DIGITAL BRIEFER

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## MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

- In just the first week of January, the number of people fleeing from conflict [surged](#) by more than 10,000 within KNU territory in Dooplaya.
- More than [a thousand](#) civilians in Karenni state are seeking refuge from continuous artillery fire in the forests.
- According to the Chinland Defense Force, the junta conducted [eight airstrikes](#) in Mindat between January 7 and 23.
- On January 31st, the United States [imposed sanctions](#) on the junta, a move intended to block mining enterprises and energy officials.
- The military council ordered administrators to [conduct](#) a nationwide population census starting January 9 to create updated voter lists.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Hold the Junta accountable by taking tangible actions, including, but not limited to: the passage of the BURMA Act, imposing immediate targeted sanctions on Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise and the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank;
2. Provide immediate cross-border assistance directly to local civil society organizations;
3. Recognize and engage with the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate government of Burma instead of the illegal military junta;
4. Exert all possible pressure through every available means, including multilateral, regional, and bilateral engagement, to ensure that the military allows humanitarian assistance in impacted areas, immediately stops offensives throughout the country, and unconditionally releases all arbitrarily detained protesters and political prisoners.

# ANALYSIS

## Second Anniversary of the Coup: The State of International Response to Burma

Despite progress in holding the junta accountable, as seen in the UN Security Council Resolution 2669, the UN has failed to impose a global arms embargo on Burma when given the chance, as Russia and China continue to supply the junta with arms and ammunition. Countries that have pledged their support to the resistance, including the United States, must ensure that they follow through with their promises. Supplies and money will continue to flow to the Burmese military unless the international community strictly enforces their pre-existing embargos. The BURMA Act's passage was the first step, but unless weapons are prevented from being sent over, there will be no progress in the fight for democracy and justice against the junta.

### Latest Stats



**\$136 million**  
US pledge to  
Burma



**17.6 million**  
Civilians in need of aid



**1.2 million+**  
Internally Displaced  
Civilians



**1 million+**  
Refugees in  
neighboring  
countries



**19,000**  
Protestors and  
activists arrested



**3000**  
Protestors and  
activists killed

“

They don't control up to 50% of the territory right now. It's unclear how they could even hold elections. You can't have a free and fair election when you're jailing every significant opposition, when you're committing atrocities, when you're shutting down a free press.

*Derek Chollet, a senior adviser to Secretary of State Antony Blinken*

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According to Derek Chollet, senior advisor to the Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, the future of fair and free elections in Burma is [incredibly bleak](#) unless some form of action is taken against the Burmese junta. With the BURMA Act's recent passage, some have questioned its effectiveness in practice: targeted groups need assistance as soon as possible, but will the BURMA Act be able to deliver it? Chollet states that the US has already provided nonlethal support to pro-democracy opposition in Burma and has been very engaged with the National Unity Government alongside other ethnic groups in Burma. The act was passed on a bipartisan basis by both Democrats and Republicans, which is a hopeful indicator of Congress' support of it. \$136 million was pledged, and though this seems like a small amount, Chollet states the US has provided nearly \$2 billion worth of support to Burma, Bangladesh, and nearby regions.

The need for a no-fly zone has also been discussed. Chollet states that the US is adhering to ASEAN's [five-point plan](#) - the same one that is supposed to keep the junta isolated. It is important to hold global organizations such as ASEAN accountable if they have not shown any firmness in their stance against the junta. Last year in Bangkok, an ASEAN meeting hosted by Thailand [included](#) the Burmese junta's foreign minister. Thailand stated this was an "effort to support ASEAN attempts" to help Burma find normalcy again, but permitting the junta to join meetings and turning a blind eye to their crimes is shameful. Top representatives from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam were also present. The foreign ministers representing Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore [chose not to attend](#) and criticized the junta for not adhering to the five-point consensus, which shows their dedication to holding the junta accountable. In fact, all-around maintenance and adhesion to the plan has been scarce. The junta has still been [supported by global firms](#) located in major

countries including Israel, India, Russia, and China, as well as the US and UK, despite their claims that they do not support the military and have placed an embargo on them. Thus, though Chollet's statement allows us to remain hopeful about the state of the BURMA Act, it is crucial that we hold the US government accountable and ensure the best for the people of Burma.

In December, the US and the UK both demanded a UN Security Council resolution that would criticize the military regime for its violence and detainment of President Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi. A [no-fly zone](#), similar to the one NATO (especially the US) placed over Bosnia, would allegedly allow the fighting to re-balance between civil and ethnic armed groups in Rakhine, Chin, Sagaing, and Kachin provinces. The Burmese military has used airpower in order to maintain their control over these regions - for example, the bombing of the Kachin Independence Army's music event in October 2022 that led to the murder of about 60 people, as well as bombs falling on Camp Victoria which caused over 20,000 refugees to flee from Burma. The need for a no-fly zone is clear, though US officials such as Chollet have stated that there are no intentions of



enforcing one for now.

*Camp Victoria destroyed after military airstrikes.*

*Photo Cred: Myanmar Now*

International bodies, such as the United Nations, also continue their lack of action against

the junta. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has [estimated](#) that at least 17.6 million people in Burma need aid. Despite this, the United Nations has failed to impose a global arms embargo on Burma when given the chance. Russia and China, two countries known for still supplying the junta with arms used in their crimes against humanity, abstained from voting. And even then, countries with pre-existing sanctions (including the European Union, United States, and Canada) are not rigorous enough in their enforcement of these embargos.



*Women protesting the military coup.  
Photo Cred: Reuters*

Throughout the month of January, airstrikes have continued. The two-year anniversary of the overthrow of Burma's democratically elected government is rapidly approaching, and anti-military activities, alongside pro-military activities, are [expected to occur](#) on February 1st. Since the coup began, the Burmese military has arrested [at least](#) 19,000 protestors and activists and has killed 3000 more. Their crimes against humanity have included arbitrary arrests, torture sexual violence, mass killings, and mass

killings. The military has also attacked civilians and minority populations in states across Burma, even employing "scorched earth" methods in both Sagaing and Magway regions. The coup has displaced [over 1 million people](#) within the country and has forced approximately 70,000 others to flee to nearby countries such as Thailand, India, and Malaysia.

If we truly want to put an end to the military junta's regime, we must tell governments to stop being hypocritical in producing statements of condemnation that demand immediate action despite not taking any action themselves. International bodies, such as the United Nations and ASEAN, have yet to enforce targeted sanctions on Burma, which allows the military to continue purchasing weapons and supplies to kill civilians and wreak havoc in the country. At the same time, countries who have pledged their support to the resistance, including the United States, must ensure that they follow through with their promises. Supplies and money will keep finding their way to the Burmese military unless our governments strictly enforce their pre-existing embargos. The BURMA Act's passage was the first step, but unless weapons are prevented from already being sent over, there will be no progress in the fight for democracy and justice against the junta. On January 31st, the United States [imposed sanctions](#) on the junta, a move intended to block mining enterprises and energy officials. We can hold our officials accountable and ensure that these sanctions are enforced to work towards a more just future.



## **RECOUNTING 2 YEARS SINCE THE COUP**

*Interview with Ko Arkar (speaker's real name has been changed for safety)*

*To read the interview in its entirety, please [click here](#)*

On the morning of February 1, 2021, I was going for a walk with my mother at the park. When we arrived at the park, it was peaceful. After a short while, I saw many military vehicles and police cars on the road. I wondered what was happening and knew something was up, so I returned home. I turned on my TV and learned that the military had seized power.

At first, I did not believe the news. My uncle is from the National League for Democracy (NLD) so I called to ask him, but the phones did not work. At that time, my father was at work at the office, so I could not reach him on the phone. My father came back at around noon and asked if the military had taken over. When I said yes, my father said it is just like what happened in 88; we can't do anything.

After they seized power, I did not know what to do. I thought that our lives were over, the goals we had dreamed of had fallen into darkness. Because of the coup, I do not think our education will be better than before. Only by resisting this coup can we create a better future for the lives of our youth. I had a thought that their studies and work opportunities will be brighter.

Three days after the coup, we started discussing and protesting. I was not able to participate in the protests. My parents did not let me go because I was a government servant. So, I was not there. I didn't even get to freely participate in pot banging. But during the digital strike, I started to express people's voices on Twitter. I started six months after the coup.

At first, I thought it would end like this with reconciliation, but I was wrong. What I particularly remember was when I had to take the money out. Early in the morning before sunrise, we would wait and stand in line at 2 or 3 AM. When it was our turn, the machine ran out of money. What a waste. I did not have food and I was sitting in the sun and waiting. That day at around 7 PM, my mother and I went to another place to withdraw money. When I was returning home with my mother, the soldiers and police asked, "Where are you going? Why are you running?" I answered that we have returned after withdrawing money. It was during curfew and it was so quiet, it felt like there was a ghost on the street.

Even though I did not protest, I joined the digital strike and started working together with the revolutionary group forces. We were sharing news, doing campaigns together, and we had fun. It was both successful and beneficial. Because of my work in the revolution, I am very careful in my daily life. If I have business and need to go outside, I leave my phone behind at home, or if I need to bring my phone with me, I delete everything related to the revolution from my phone. I am worried that if I get arrested, the people who work with me will also get arrested.

I am requesting that the international community impose strong and effective sanctions on MOGE and punishments on the Burmese military such as a GLOBAL ARMS EMBARGO and other measures. In addition, it has been one year since ASEAN imposed the 5 point consensus on the Burmese military and there has been no development or improvement. The UN should not

give space to the Burmese military and should recognize the National Unity Government. The

international courts need to prosecute the Burmese military as soon as possible

## **AN OVERVIEW OF BURMA**

### **CHIN**

On January 10, the junta [bombed](#) the headquarters of the Chin National Front Army for two consecutive days, killing five resistance fighters. One of these bombs landed on Indian soil and alarmed the Indian armed forces. According to the Chinland Defense Force, the junta conducted [eight airstrikes](#) in Mindat between January 7 and 23. On January 22, [Matupi Township](#) authorities found six corpses after a clash between the junta and resistance group. Two of the bodies were civilians of the Nga Lai Village which was raided on January 15. The other four victims could not be identified as they were badly burned. On January 23, regime airstrikes on a makeshift IDP camp in Mindat Township [injured five civilians](#) and destroyed two homes in the nearby village. On the same day, the junta also fired heavy artillery at the Mindat General Hospital, preventing injured victims from seeking medical attention.

### **KARENNI**

A 23-year-old private from the junta's 66<sup>th</sup> Division [defected and joined](#) the Civil Disobedience Movement with full weapons. On January 20, the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force and several Peoples' Defense Force (PDF) groups [seized and burned](#) down a junta outpost in Bawlakhe Township, killing five soldiers and obtaining ammunition and weapons. Airstrikes and shelling have become more prevalent as the junta does not have the necessary forces for ground operations. On January 22, the junta's air force [bombed](#) an IDP camp east of Loikaw and, on January 23, carried out more bombings in Demoso Township. The next day, the junta launched an aerial bombing attack with three fighter jets on an IDP camp in Tee Lon village, although there was no ongoing fighting with PDFs. Six IDPs were wounded in the artillery strike on January 24 when four shells exploded. More than [a thousand](#) civilians are seeking refuge from continuous artillery fire in the forests.

## KACHIN

Junta fighter jets started [firing](#) at two villages in Myitkyina Township on January 3, killing a man and injuring at least 37 others. The reason for the attack is unknown because there was no fighting in the area. After resistance forces used drones to attack a government office in Mohnyin several times, the junta [installed](#) a jammer in early January. This has been blocking the internet of town residents. A landmine explosion [killed](#) a ten-year-old and two other children near a junta militia camp in Waingmaw Township on January 10. Both the junta and the Kachin Independence Army are competing for control of the gold mines in Hukawng Valley, and miners are suffering the consequences. [100 junta soldiers](#) were sent to villages near the mines on January 14. They kicked out miners and blocked nearby roads, inconveniencing farmers as well. The junta soldiers plan to seize ten excavators.

## MON

On January 1, two women were [shot in the back](#) by Burmese junta soldiers. On January 2, the Ye Balu resistance force [attacked](#) ten Burmese soldiers at a Mytel tower in Ye Township. On January 5, the Burmese Army [blocked off roads](#) leading to Mawlamyine airport in order to send supplies to Karen State. On January 6, the Ye Balu resistance group [attacked](#) the General Administration Department office. On January 7, after the People's Defense Force [raised the Gaint Force flag](#) in Ye Township, Burma Army soldiers raided the village, forcing many villagers to flee. On January 16, Burmese soldiers [fired artillery shells](#) into Winkan Village, Kyaikhto. 8 days later, soldiers fired additional shells, forcing around 3,800 villagers to flee. On January 18, six Rohingya were [arrested](#) at a checkpoint in Kyaikhto Township after being locked behind a truck.

### **KAREN**

On January 1, the Karen National Union (KNU) [issued](#) a statement urging locals not to cooperate with the junta and for civil servants to resign from their positions. On January 4, more fighting occurred between resistance forces and junta soldiers, displacing over 3,000 residents. On January 3, the KNU reported that the junta [dropped](#) more than 50 bombs into multiple villages. More airstrikes were [carried out](#) on January 7, 12, and 13. On January 7 alone, the junta dropped 5 bombs into the Me Thu village tract, killing 6 civilians. Laywar village was bombed on January 12, resulting in 4 injured and 5 deaths including 2 Christian pastors, 2 civilians and a child. Then, on the morning of January 13, armed conflict [broke out](#) between joint resistance forces led by KNLA and junta troops in Ahlel and Tadaru villages of Kyainseikgyi township, injuring 3 civilians. As a result, in just the first week of January, the number of people fleeing from conflict [surged](#) by more than 10,000 within KNU territory in Dooplaya.

### **SHAN**

Soldiers at security checkpoints are harassing women under the pretext of searching them. On January 2, a soldier [sexually assaulted](#) and injured a woman at a checkpoint between the towns of Pindaya and Ywangan. Soldiers in Nyaungshwe Township [abducted](#) five farmers to use them as porters on January 3. The junta is starting to crackdown on CDM members in northern Shan State. With the help of informants, the military [arrested](#) two teachers in Hsipaw on January 15. The next day, a junta artillery shell hit an IDP camp in Moebye, [killing](#) one person and injuring two others. During a battle with PDF forces on January 24, the military's artillery shelling [damaged](#) several houses in Pekon Township. Five others were arrested in Hsipaw recently. Another eight were arrested in Lashio, six of which were government staff. [Opium cultivation](#) is up 39% in Shan State, the highest increase in the country. Conflict, especially in northern Shan State, has left farmers with few other options to survive.

### **RAKHINE**

On January 1, four people who were arrested for suspected ties to the Arakan Army were [released](#). On January 2, seven people [were arrested](#) for suspected ties to the Arakan Army. Their families were not notified of their arrests, and they must reappear in court a week later. On January 3, the USDP, the military-backed party, offered around [100 bribes](#) to local residents to oppose the UN Security Council's resolution regarding Burma. On January 4, the chief of staff of the Arakan Liberation Party along with two other leaders were [assassinated](#) in Sittwe. On January 10, the Burmese junta [launched an airstrike](#) on the headquarters of the Chin National Front, killing five CNF members and injuring at least ten. On [January 18th](#), a 20-year old man lost his leg from a landmine explosion. Even after announcing an informal ceasefire, the junta has not swept areas for potential landmines.

### **CENTRAL BURMA**

With the junta planning to hold elections this year, the military council ordered administrators to [conduct](#) a nationwide population census starting January 9 until the end of the month to create updated voter lists. Following this, on January 11, an alliance of urban guerilla forces including Freeland Attack Force set off a bomb in Yangon's Tamwe Township, sending another warning to junta-appointed administrators collecting data in the township's Tar Mway Gyi Ward. On January 12, 2 more bombs [exploded](#) in Mandalay townships, followed by members of the PDF [attacking and torching](#) a local junta office. On January 16, around 100 soldiers began to raid villages in Magway. As of now, the collection of census data in these areas have been put on hold. On January 17, a convoy of 70 junta troops [looted](#) Shwe Pauk Pin Kyun village and burnt down at least 39 houses. At the time of the reporting, residents had still not resettled. This is the second time the village has been attacked.