

Myanmar: Vigil InSight Situation Report

16 April 2021

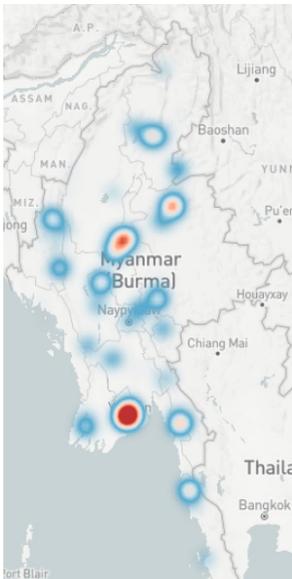
Protests continue despite a death toll of over 700. Resumption of widespread ethnic separatist violence sees thousands held at Thai border. Increased tensions with China and India.

This document provides an analysis of the current situation in Myanmar and the implications for aid agencies working in the area. [Watch the Vigil InSight video.](#)

SUMMARY

- International focus remains on the continued protests against the military coup, which are becoming increasingly violent.
- A significant increase in violence has been seen, linked to the country's various ethnic separatist insurgencies, particularly along the Thai and Chinese borders.
- This has led to rising numbers of displaced persons and pushbacks of them by Thai authorities though India is now letting them through.
- Chinese troops have been deployed to the border, likely to secure gas supplies.

Heat map showing the location of violent incidents in Myanmar. Incidents range from 01 to 26 March 2021.



Note: This map is based on the ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) data set.¹ Incidents include protest-related incidents, attacks on civilians, displacement, looting and property destruction, violent crime, and military activity.

PROTESTS CONTINUE ALONGSIDE A STEEP RISE IN SEPARATIST VIOLENCE

Demonstrations against the 01 February military coup continue despite a rising civilian death toll likely intended to intimidate. Restrictions on internet services have increasingly hindered the coordination of, and reporting about, the protests.

The epicentre of the protests remains in Yangon and Mandalay. Protests have reduced somewhat in the capital, Naypyidaw, as public sector employees, including health workers, teachers, civil servants, transport workers, and bank employees remain the main drivers of the movement.

Although the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is meeting to discuss the crisis, with Junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing agreeing to join, anger at this meeting within Myanmar is rising. The newly formed opposition-led National Unity Government (NUG) has demanded attendance.

Wider international efforts have stalled, with the Myanmar armed forces (known as the Tatmadaw) refusing to allow the UN special envoy for Myanmar to visit the country, and China and Russia blocking action by the UN.

[WATCH THE VIGIL INSIGHT VIDEO](#)

There has also been a significant increase in violence linked to the country's various ethnic separatist insurgencies, particularly along the Thai and Chinese borders. This has led to the March 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement between the government and representatives of various ethnic insurgent groups, officially known as "ethnic armed organisations" (EAOs), effectively collapsing. There are also growing signs of cooperation and agreement between coup-protesters and the EAOs.

Media reports suggest that Chinese troops have been deployed to Jiegao town, opposite the Shan State border town of Muse, in response to the EAO violence. It is likely that Beijing is concerned about imports along the 794-kilometer gas pipeline (which runs from the port of Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State through the Magwe and Mandalay regions and Shan State) and the parallel, though less significant, crude oil pipeline. There are however no reports of significant IDP flows in the area.

The Thai border has been affected with the Thai authorities forced to deny on 31 March that more than 2,000 refugees fleeing Tatmadaw air strikes had been pushed back across the border. Some have managed to cross, but they are being held near the border area with aid organisations reporting that they have been denied access.

MITIGATION FOR AID AGENCIES

Increased security force activity and targeting of health workers, students and educators combined with media blackouts means the threat from the security forces to aid activities is HIGH. Although aid agencies will need to continue their own assessments of how to adjust their security strategies, there are options available:

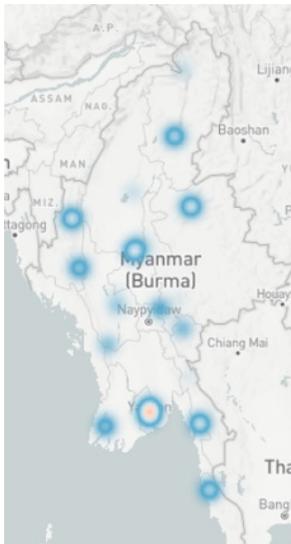
- Ensure planners and other staff maintain a high degree of situational awareness and draw on all available information support in order to assess route planning and other activities.
- Avoid planned or likely protests.
- Consider wearing PPE in high-risk areas at all times, in particular for high level passengers or those exposed to particular risks, such as drivers.
- Carry suitable medical and breakdown kits at all times and ensure staff are trained to use them, regularly.
- Routes should be varied if possible, despite the increased security presence on main roads.
- Restrict circle of knowledge of travel for security communications.
- Use vehicle trackers/ check-in with office.
- No social media activity surrounding travel for high-risk projects and individuals.

WORKING WITH LOCAL STAFF AND LOCAL PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

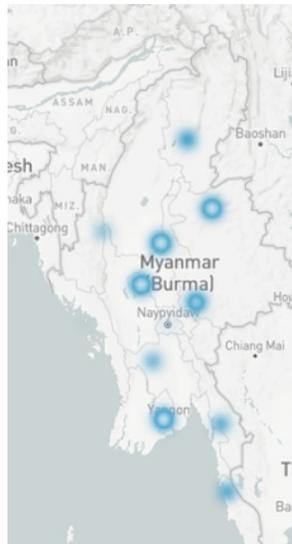
- Consider the role of local staff and partner organisations in relation to the political conflict as well as any reputational risks issuing from funding or other relationships for individuals and local organisations.
- Consider the difficult working environment for partner organisations including difficulties in accessing health care, education for staff members' children and general disruption to everyday life.
- Consider ways to provide indirect protection to local staff and local partner organisations and their staff.

Heat maps showing the location of protests (map 1), protests with intervention from security forces (map 2), military activity (map 3), and incidents affecting aid, education and health care (map 4) in Myanmar.²

Map 1



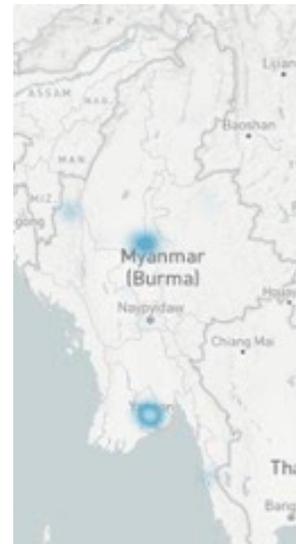
Map 2



Map 3



Map 4



Note: These maps are based on the ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) data set³ and data from Insecurity Insight.⁴ Incidents include protests (peaceful and violent; map 1); protests where arrests were made and/or excessive force was used (map 2); armed clashes, use of shelling, artillery, missiles and IED's, landmines and remote explosives, including an area reported to have suffered airstrikes marked in red (map 3); obstruction of health care and attacks on health and aid workers, local NGO's, hospitals, facilities, and ambulances, plus targeting of educational establishments (map 4).

TREND ANALYSIS

- The available data from the period before the military coup shows a relatively low security risk atmosphere for INGOs and other aid providers to work in.⁵ The main risks being road traffic accidents (RTAs), petty crime and other relatively low-level threats.
- March 2021 data (seen maps above) however shows that the situation has changed significantly, particularly in the major towns and cities (map 1 and 2)
- While protests were peaceful to start with, casualty figures have climbed steeply as they have become more violent – with frequent forceful interventions from security forces (map 2). This has led to a reduction in overt marches and rallies and a shift to smaller scale protests which tend to be more peaceful in more rural areas.
- Local non-governmental organisations providing emergency medical assistance and funeral services have been attacked and obstructed from aiding injured protesters. Aid offices and organisations' storerooms containing medical equipment were raided after the organisations had provided medical care to protesters (map 4).
- Private clinics and hospitals across the country were issued with official directives mandating that injured civilians could not be seen or treated without first notifying the military. This has led to health care facilities becoming increasingly difficult for protestors and civilians to access.

VIOLENCE AGAINST HEALTH CARE IN MYANMAR

A new report by Insecurity Insight highlights 109 incidents of violence against health workers, facilities and transport in Myanmar between 11 February and 12 April 2021. Health workers were arrested, injured and killed and hospitals raided and occupied by Tatmadaw soldiers or associated police forces.

Read the [report](#). Download the [dataset](#).

- A number of schools and universities have been occupied by military forces and teachers have been arrested after students led many anti-coup protests (map 4).
- There has been a significant rise in the numbers of armed clashes reported in areas covered by the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement between the government and EAOs – suggesting that this has effectively collapsed (map 3). This is particularly evident along the Thai and Chinese border areas, with multiple and rising media reports of artillery fire/ and air strikes, mainly in rural areas (map 3 shows a significant number of incidents along both borders border) with media reports that Myanmar may be using Chinese airspace to launch airstrikes.⁶
- There is likely a degree of under-reporting that may well be clarified in the coming weeks as more data becomes available from sources that are unable to get regular access to the mobile networks or the internet.

PREDICTIONS

- There is no sign the protests will ease given the Tatmadaw's hard-line stance and the deficiency of regional and international diplomacy. The security forces are consequently almost certain to continue clashing with protesters and use lethal force although the protesters themselves are moving to limit larger gatherings to reduce casualty numbers.
- Further crackdowns on civil liberties as well as media and internet services are highly likely as the Tatmadaw tries to control the flow of information to stifle the coordination and spread of protests. This will likely result in a further under-reporting of violence and other incidents as well as making the coordination of aid work more difficult and dangerous.
- There is a significant risk that the Tatmadaw will intimidate and even target international aid and media organisations more directly as they try to control the flow of information out of the country. The number of casualties from protests coupled with the fact that they operate across more sparsely populated areas will likely mean that health workers will be a particular focus. Health and food security will suffer further as the humanitarian situation deteriorates.
- Local partner organisations may not be considered independent and neutral even when providing impartial care to protesters.
- Collaboration with ethnic-based organisations may be viewed with increasing suspicion in the future.
- Critical statements by foreign leaders or international organisations that aid agencies are associated with may risk access for further work and put local partners at risk.
- Violence by and against the EAOs (and civilians in their areas) will likely also increase, further increasing cooperation between them and the anti-coup protest leaders.
- China has previously shown that it will act ruthlessly to secure its economic and political interests and could use limited military force if it feels its gas supplies are threatened.
- Although the flow of displaced persons looks likely to continue, the numbers may begin to reduce slightly in the weeks ahead as many will choose to stay in their home areas despite the violence – or the realisation that they will be unable to cross into Thailand. Nonetheless, there is a significant risk that informal IDP camps will begin to spring up on the border.

- Although the numbers of displaced persons crossing into India is relatively low at present, this is likely to rise in the coming weeks with the risk that significant amounts of accommodation will be needed. One positive is that Delhi's changing stance means that INGOs may be able to work through the Indian border. Elsewhere, more aid organisations are likely to follow the example of the Japanese government and withdraw completely.
- The growing nexus between the political protest movement and the various ethnic and regional insurgencies could see civilians and militias join forces in some areas although their long-standing differences means that this risk is much lower than the Tatmadaw may claim. The prospects of a civil war are therefore extremely limited at present.

ABOUT VIGIL INSIGHT

This incident analysis is part of Vigil InSight, a joint initiative by HawkSight, DHC, Gunn and Insecurity Insight. It is prepared from information available in local, national and international news outlets, consultations with key informants and data from Insecurity Insight Aid in Danger project and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). The incidents reported are not a complete nor a representative list of all events that affected the provision of aid delivery and have not been independently verified. All decisions made, on the basis of, or with consideration to, such information remains the responsibility of their respective organisations.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- The wet season (Monsoon) generally begins in May with high winds, heavy rainfall and temperatures rising significantly. This may also mean some rural regions becoming inaccessible.
- The Tatmadaw's one-month unilateral ceasefire (announced on 31 March) concludes at the end of April, which may result in a further rise in violence between it and EAOs.
- Labour Day, on 01 May, may also see increased public protests as public sector workers highlight their grievances.
- The full moon days of Kason (25 May) and Waso (23 July) could also see increased public protests.

¹ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) database [attribution policy](#). Accessed 06th April 2021.

² Incidents for map 1, 2, and 3 range from 01 March to 26 March 2021. Incidents for map 4 range from 11 February to 12 April 2021.

³ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) database [attribution policy](#). Accessed 06th April 2021.

⁴ Insecurity Insight collated data from multiple public sources and confidential contributions from aid agencies. The data may differ from other sources. The data is part of the Aid in Danger project. For more information on Insecurity Insight visit our [website](#) on Aid Security and Bi-weekly News Brief, or [subscribe](#) for updates.

⁵ Crime In Myanmar: Numbeo statistics 2020: Dec 2020 https://www.numbeo.com/crime/country_result.jsp?country=Myanmar

⁶ BNI: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/burma-army-launch-airstrikes-against-kia-china>

