



Bilateral Ceasefires

# Fragmentation of Elusive Peace Process in Myanmar

June 2026





## Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar

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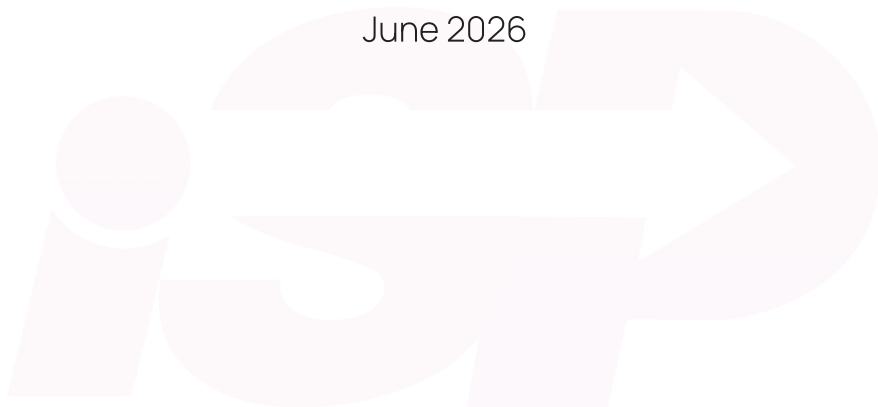
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## Abbreviations

AA	-	Arakan Army
ABSDF	-	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
AFPFL	-	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
ALP	-	Arakan Liberation Party
APLP	-	Arakan People's Liberation Party
ASEAN	-	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	-	Belt and Road Initiative
CNF	-	Chin National Front
CPA	-	Communist Party of Arakan
CPB	-	Communist Party of Burma
DKBA	-	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DKBA-5	-	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (Brigade-5)
EAOs	-	Ethnic Armed Organizations
ISP-Myanmar	-	Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar
KDA	-	Kachin Defense Army
KHRG	-	Karen Human Rights Group
KIO	-	Kachin Independence Organization
KNDP	-	Karen National Democratic Party
KNG	-	Kachin National Guard
KNLA	-	Karen National Liberation Army
KNLP	-	Kayan New Land Party
KNPLF	-	Karenni National People's Liberation Front
KNPP	-	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	-	Karen National Union
KPC	-	KNU/KNLA Peace Council
KRC	-	Kawthoolei Revolutionary Council
LDU	-	Lahu Democratic Union
MNDAA	-	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MPC	-	Myanmar Peace Centre
MPF	-	Mon People's Front
MPGCR	-	Myanmar Peace Generation Conflict Resolution
MTA	-	Mong Tai Army
NCA	-	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCCT	-	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team

NDA (Kachin)	-	New Democratic Army (Kachin)
NDAA	-	National Democratic Alliance Army
NLD	-	National League for Democracy
NMSP	-	New Mon State Party
NRPC	-	National Reconciliation and Peace Committee
NSCN-K	-	National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Khaplang
NUG	-	National Unity Government
PDFs	-	People's Defense Forces
PLA	-	People's Liberation Army
PLSA	-	Palaung State Liberation Army
PNLO	-	Pa-O National Liberation Organization
PNO	-	Pao National Organization
PPST	-	Peace Process Steering Team
PSLF	-	Palaung State Liberation Front
RCSS	-	Restoration Council of Shan State
SAC	-	State Administration Council
SLORC	-	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SNUA	-	Shan National United Army
SSA	-	Shan State Army
SSIA	-	Shan State Independence Army
SSNA	-	Shan State North Army
SSNPLO	-	Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization
SSPC	-	State Security and Peace Commission
TNLA	-	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UPC	-	Union Peace Conference
UPC21CP	-	Union Peace Conference 21 Century Panglong
UWSA	-	United Wa State Army

# Executive Summary

- This report explores the significant transformation of Myanmar's ceasefire landscape following the 2021 military coup up until March 2026. The State Administration Council (SAC) has systematically moved away from the multilateral Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) framework and adopted a strategy of bilateral ceasefires with selected Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). These new ceasefire arrangements are largely devoid of political content or inclusive participation and are being used as instruments of conflict management, fragmentation, and regime consolidation, rather than as genuine steps toward peace or federal democratic transformation.
- Drawing on relevant theoretical frameworks such as Horowitz's theory of divide-and-rule, Darby and Mac Ginty's model of inclusive peace processes, Zartman's ripeness theory, and Mampilly's work on rebel governance, the report presents a three-chapter empirical analysis. Chapter 1 examines how bilateralism has displaced the political and institutional foundations of the NCA, leading to a fragmented and depoliticized ceasefire system. Chapter 2 (section 2.2) analyzes the SAC's divide-and-rule tactics, which selectively empower certain groups while sidelining actors aligned with the National Unity Government (NUG) and People's Defense Forces (PDFs), thus weakening collective resistance. Chapter 2 (section 2.3) investigates the role of regional actors, particularly China, in shaping ceasefire dynamics that prioritize border stability and strategic interests over inclusive political solutions. Chapter 2 (section 2.4) looks at how these ceasefires are reshaping the governance behavior of EAOs, pulling them away from national-level transformation and confining them to localized administrative roles under SAC control.
- Across all chapters, the report finds that ceasefires in the post-coup context are being used to contain conflict, co-opt opposition forces, and delay political transition. Far from promoting peace, they have served to undermine unity among resistance actors, reduce the leverage of political stakeholders, and entrench authoritarianism. The analysis concludes that the SAC's ceasefire strategy represents a shift from flawed but inclusive peacebuilding to authoritarian conflict management, where deals are made to manage resistance rather than to resolve the structural causes of Myanmar's protracted conflict.
- The report concludes that these post-coup ceasefires do not promote peace or federal democracy, but rather serve as tactical instruments designed to contain conflict and entrench military rule; without a fundamental reconfiguration of this ceasefire paradigm, Myanmar risks deepening its cycle of militarized authoritarianism and missing yet another opportunity for national reconciliation and democratic renewal.

# 1. Introduction

**M**yanmar has been struggling protracted multi-party conflicts since its independence in 1948 with a varying degree of intensity. Since the February 2021 coup, Myanmar's conflict and negotiation landscape has shifted dramatically. The State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>1</sup>, replacing the elected civilian government, has moved away from the multilateral peace process once anchored by the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015 and embraced a fragmented approach based on bilateral ceasefire agreements with selected Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). These agreements are informal, opaque, and detached from any clear political roadmap. They appear designed less to initiate inclusive political dialogue than to neutralize threats, divide opposition forces, and consolidate military control.

This shift has serious implications for Myanmar's broader pro-democracy movement, particularly for the National Unity Government (NUG), People's Defense Forces (PDFs), and aligned opposition political and civil society actors. By sidelining these key stakeholders, the junta's strategy weakens efforts at collective resistance and entrenches a model of conflict management focused on short-term tactical gains. International and regional actors, including China, have played instrumental roles in brokering or encouraging such ceasefires, often motivated by border security or economic interests. As a result, ceasefire politics in post-coup Myanmar now reflect a complex mix of domestic military strategy, external coercive diplomacy, and fragmented armed governance.

This report analyzes these shifting ceasefire approaches and their consequences for Myanmar's political and conflict landscape. The study proceeds through four empirical chapters that explore impacts on the peace process, the evolution of divide-and-rule tactics, the role of regional interventionism, and the transformation of rebel governance under the SAC's bilateral model.

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<sup>1</sup> The State Administration Council (SAC) transformed itself as State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC) along with an interim government on July 31, 2025 to manage a General Election within six months.



The analyses in this report employ a qualitative, multi-disciplinary approach that grounds empirical research in established theoretical frameworks to assess Myanmar's post-coup negotiation landscape. The study applies key concepts from political science and conflict studies, including theories on divide-and-rule, inclusive peace processes, coercive diplomacy, regional hegemonic interventionism, and rebel governance, to contextualize the conflict. This foundation is supported by robust data collection by ISP-Myanmar between the 2021 coup and early 2026, tracking bilateral engagements between the State Administration Council (SAC) and at least eight Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). The analysis is further strengthened by document and discourse analysis of conflict events, and observations in resistance-controlled areas, and detailed geospatial mapping of territorial controls updated as of May 2026.

Despite offering a comprehensive analysis, this report acknowledges inherent limitations stemming from the highly volatile and opaque nature of Myanmar's ongoing conflict. Temporally, the research focuses on the period between the February 2021 military coup and March 2026, specifically examining the administrations of the State Administration Council (SAC) and the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). Consequently, it does not address policy shifts or ceasefire developments that emerged after the regime's subsequent transition into a disguised civilian government. Additionally, the SAC's preference for informal, verbal agreements established behind closed doors makes it exceedingly difficult to independently verify the exact terms of these ceasefires. Finally, rapid shifts on the ground—driven by the conflict's tactical fluidity, sudden alliance breakdowns, and ongoing territorial disputes—create constraints on data tracking, meaning localized dynamics will likely continue to evolve well beyond the scope of the data captured here.

## 1.1 Background Context

Myanmar's history of ceasefire negotiations spans several decades, beginning with isolated bilateral truces in the early 1990s between the military regime and splinter groups of the Communist Party of Burma. These agreements prioritized military de-escalation and informal arrangements over political settlement. By the mid-2000s, the government had signed bilateral deals with over two dozen armed groups, but these lacked mechanisms for political dialogue or reform. A more structured peace process emerged under President Thein Sein's administration (2011–2015), which led to the creation of the NCA, a multilateral framework that linked ceasefires to federalism, constitutional reform, and national reconciliation. The process continued, albeit with growing challenges, under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government until the military coup disrupted this fragile institutional framework in 2021.



In the post-coup context, the SAC abandoned multilateralism and reverted to its earlier model of ad hoc bilateral negotiations. Talks with certain groups, such as the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), New Mon State Part (NMSP) and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA-5) have occurred behind closed doors, while powerful EAOs in the north, including the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Arakan Army (AA), have engaged in Chinese-brokered ceasefires intended to preserve border stability. These developments reflect a shift from negotiated political reform toward localized conflict management through selective bargaining, often at the expense of national dialogue and democratic transition.



## Seven Circles of Peace-Making in Myanmar (1958-2021)

Cycle	Successive Myanmar Governments	Armed Resistance Groups that Engaged in Peace Talk	Negotiation Terms	Armed Resistance Groups that Reached Agreements with Government	Type of Negotiation
<b>Cycle 1</b>	AFPFL (1958)	KNU, PNO, APLP, MPF	"Arm for democracy" _ allowed ethnic armies to set up political party and contest elections after disarming	PNO, APLP, MPF	Bilateral
<b>Cycle 2</b>	Military Caretaker Government (1960)	KNU	Surrender and join the government's police force	PNO, APLP, MPF	Bilateral
<b>Cycle 3</b>	Revolutionary Council Government (1963)	CPB, CPA, KIO, KRC, KNPP, NMSP, SSIA, and SNUA	No pre-conditions	KRC	Bilateral
<b>Cycle 4</b>	Burma Socialist Programme Party (1980-81)	KIO, CPB (Informal)	Holding arms temporarily, need to join the people's militia or police force when necessary	KIO (Ceasefire agreement)	Bilateral
<b>Cycle 5</b>	SLORC/SPDC (1989-2011)	CPA, NDA (Kachin), KIO, PSLA, MNDAA, KDA, UWSA, NDAA, SSA, SSNA, PNO, SSNPLO, MTA, KNG, KNDP, KNLP, KNPLF, DKBA, NMSP, MPGCR	Hold arms, and maintain territory until the new constitution was drafted	CPA, NDA (Kachin), KIO, PSLA, MNDAA, KDA, UWSA, SSA, SSNA, PNO, SSNPLO, MTA, KNG, KNDP, KNPLF, DKBA, NMSP, MPGCR	Bilateral
<b>Cycle 6</b>	USDP (2011-2016)	ABSDF, DKBA, NDAA, RCSS, UWSA, ALP, KPC, PNLO, NSCN-K, CNF, KNPP, KNU, NMSP, SSPP, KIO, DKBA-5, LDU, AA, MNDAA, TNLA	NCA/UPC	KNU, RCSS, CNF, PNLO, DKBA, KPC, ALP, ABSDF	Bilateral/ Multilateral
<b>Cycle 7</b>	NLD (2016-2021)	ABSDF, DKBA, NDAA, RCSS, UWSA, ALP, KPC, PNLO, NSCN-K, CNF, KNPP, KNU, NMSP, SSPP, KIO, DKBA-5, LDU, AA, MNDAA, TNLA	NCA/UPC21CP	NMSP, LDU	Bilateral/ Multilateral

## 2. Analysis and Implications

**T**o guide the analysis, this report draws on a concise set of theoretical perspectives. First, Horowitz's concept of the divide-and-rule strategy helps explain how the SAC uses selective engagement with armed groups to fragment the opposition and prevent unified resistance. Second, peace process theory, particularly the work of Darby and Mac Ginty, emphasizes the dangers of excluding key stakeholders from negotiations, warning that exclusion undermines legitimacy and sustainability. Third, the lens of coercive diplomacy and regional interventionism, particularly through the realist framework of Mearsheimer and the concept of strategic leverage (George), informs the analysis of China's role in brokering and shaping ceasefire deals along Myanmar's border. Lastly, rebel governance theory (Mampilly) provides insight into how ceasefire arrangements affect the internal political behavior of EAOs, including their territorial priorities, civilian relationships, and willingness to engage in national-level resistance coordination. Rather than presenting these frameworks as stand-alone sections, this report applies them directly across the four empirical chapters, each focused on a distinct yet interconnected dimension of Myanmar's ceasefire trajectory.

### 2.1 Impacts on the Peace Process: From Inclusive Dialogue to Fragmented Containment

The NCA, signed in 2015, was a landmark attempt to institutionalize a multilateral ceasefire framework in Myanmar. Under the NCA, eight EAOs initially signed, with two joining later. Importantly, the NCA introduced sequencing between ceasefire implementation, political dialogue, and federal constitutional reform. It created a tripartite structure: signatory EAOs, the government, and the parliament, supported by third-party monitors and civil society observers. Mechanisms such as the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC), Union Peace Conferences (UPC), and tentative interim governance arrangements reflected this vision of structured, inclusive dialogue (Aung Thu Nyein, 2020).



The February 2021 coup abruptly halted this trajectory. The SAC's abandonment of the NCA framework in favor of bilateral negotiations marks a clear structural break, not just in modality but also in intent. Whereas the NCA sought a political settlement through comprehensive reform, the SAC's ceasefire strategy now serves as a conflict management tool: short-term, fragmented, and devoid of national-level political engagement.

This shift aligns with Horowitz's (1985) theory of divide-and-rule, where dominant actors intentionally prevent unity among adversaries by negotiating with them separately. By offering selective ceasefires to groups like the RCSS, NMSP, and DKBA, often accompanied by military restraint or economic incentives, the SAC neutralizes individual threats while avoiding concessions to the broader resistance movement. It further blocks coordination among revolutionary groups aligned with the Spring Revolution by avoiding any negotiation with the NUG or PDF networks. Darby and Mac Ginty (2003) argue that the inclusivity of peace processes is central to their legitimacy and durability. The risks of exclusion are particularly acute in Myanmar's current context, where the most politically mobilized and popular anti-junta forces, the NUG, PDFs, and mass civil society, are entirely excluded from SAC's ceasefire efforts. This exclusion deepens the legitimacy crisis surrounding post-coup ceasefire deals.

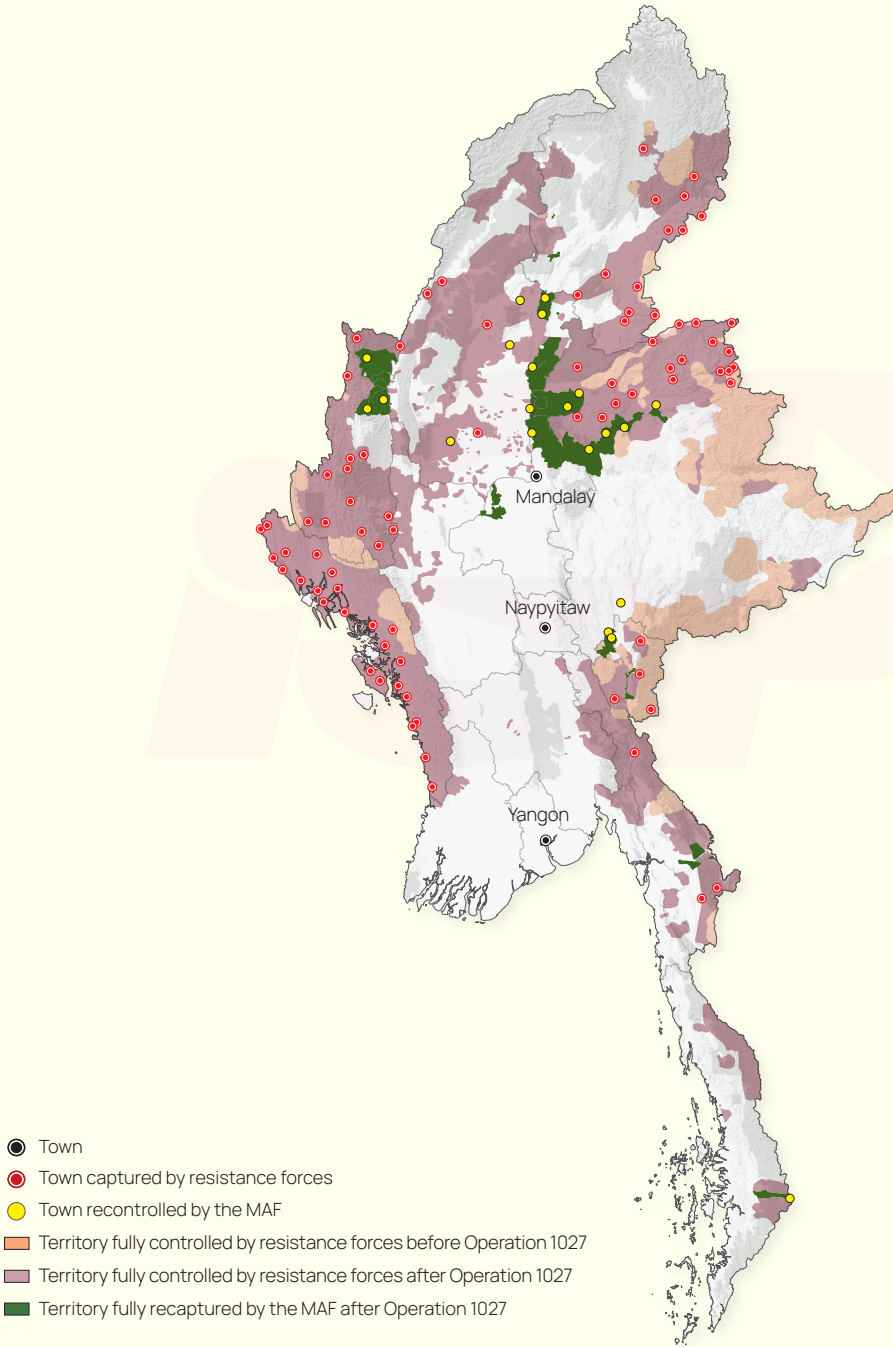
Empirical data from ISP-Myanmar (2025a) illustrates how this exclusion undermines credibility. Public opinion in resistance-controlled areas shows widespread distrust of SAC-initiated negotiations, particularly in ethnic communities affected by recent airstrikes or scorched-earth campaigns. Several EAOs aligned with the Spring Revolution, such as the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Chin National Front (CNF), have publicly denounced the bilateral talks and warned that they amount to co-optation without political substance. The SAC's selective engagement also breaks the unity of EAOs that had previously negotiated together through the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) and Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) platforms, which were the key institutions of the NCA. In early 2023, internal PPST records revealed splits over whether to respond to SAC's propositions. While some, like the RCSS, opted for informal talks and troop repositioning, others, such as the KIO, refused, fearing it would undermine joint resistance efforts and legitimize the military junta.

The "Lashio Model"<sup>2</sup> describes a pattern of China-brokered ceasefires between the SAC and northern EAOs, including the MNDAA, TNLA, and AA, outside any ►

2 ISP coined the term "Lashio Model" in its publication titled "O' Northern Roads: Subcontracting Sovereignty," published on May 8, 2025. In the Lashio event, the MNDAA removed its flags and Special Region No. (1) flags raised in Lashio and transferred back to the junta forces between April 21-23, 2025. The transition is largely brokered by China. Lashio, a major city in Northern Shan State, and Northeastern Regional Military Command (RMC) were attacked and seized by the MNDAA and allied forces in August 2024.

## Resistance Forces' Control Areas Expanded After Operation 1027

Due to Operation 1027 and subsequent battles, Myanmar Armed Force has suffered significant territorial losses across the country. Up until now, Myanmar Armed Force has lost control of **81 towns**, while successfully reclaiming **21**. Currently, **39.34%** of the nation's total landmass (**266,147.9 square kilometers**) remains out of Myanmar Armed Force's control.



Data as of May 27, 2026, is part of research conducted by the ISP-Myanmar's Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies. It may vary from other sources due to differences in methodology and data availability. This map excludes both the active and ruling areas of armed resistance forces. It reflects only the controlled areas directly linked to Operation 1027.

► national framework. In late 2023, Chinese officials facilitated talks in Lashio aimed at stabilizing border trade routes and securing BRI infrastructure projects. ISP-Myanmar (2025b) and field reports confirm that these talks led to a temporary cessation of hostilities and redeployment of SAC troops from northern Shan State to central resistance zones in Sagaing and Magway Regions. From a realist lens (Mearsheimer, 2001), this reflects regional hegemonic intervention, where China acts not as a neutral peace broker but as a coercive mediator seeking to restore buffer-zone stability. These externally brokered ceasefires prioritize geostrategic interests over national reconciliation and reinforce the SAC's model of conflict compartmentalization.

The post-coup ceasefire architecture now resembles conflict containment, not transformation. SAC's ceasefires lack political dialogue mechanisms, transitional justice commitments, or timelines for constitutional reform. They are tactical arrangements aimed at dividing the opposition, de-escalating pressure on specific battlefronts, and projecting a smokescreen of stability for foreign engagement. Zartman's (2001) "ripeness theory" underscores that peace talks succeed when conflicting parties experience a mutually hurting stalemate. However, Myanmar's current environment is far from ripe. The SAC does not perceive itself in strategic deadlock, as evidenced by its continued offensives in resistance strongholds, even while entering ceasefires elsewhere. For example, the November 2022 humanitarian ceasefire in Rakhine, with the AA, was quickly followed by a major military campaign in Sagaing, where SAC airstrikes displaced over 25,000 civilians in two months (OCHA, 2023). This behavior reflects what Bünthe and Dressel (2021) call "ceasefire opportunism," where temporary agreements are used to recalibrate military positions, not build trust. The SAC's reliance on bilateral ceasefires as a substitute for political negotiation risks hardening military control, while sidelining demands for federalism and democracy.

Consequently, the cumulative effect of this shift is a profound delegitimization of the peace process. SAC-led ceasefires are widely viewed as performative, non-binding, and divisive. The absence of inclusivity and sequencing has derailed the momentum built under the NCA. The result is a negotiation environment defined not by shared vision or structural reform, but by fragmentation, foreign brokerage, and military expedience. The peace process, once fragile but aspirational, has now become a tool of authoritarian conflict management, manipulated to disorganize opponents, manipulate regional diplomacy, and delay genuine political transition.

## 2.2 Divide-and-Rule and the Fragmentation of Resistance

The SAC's post-coup ceasefire policy exemplifies a deliberate divide-and-rule strategy, aimed at fragmenting the armed resistance by selectively engaging in bilateral negotiations with individual EAOs. Rather than reviving or expanding the ►



- ▶ multilateral frameworks established under the NCA, the junta has sought to exploit intra-EAO rivalries, geographic divisions, and tactical vulnerabilities to secure localized deals that serve its own military and political objectives.

Drawing on Horowitz's (1985) theory of ethnic conflict, the divide-and-rule approach involves engaging adversaries separately, raising inter-group mistrust, and undermining collective bargaining. In Myanmar, this approach has gained momentum as the SAC targets non-signatory or loosely aligned armed groups with offers of ceasefires, military non-engagement, or economic incentives, while excluding actors aligned with the NUG or the broader Spring Revolution. The strategy is not merely opportunistic. It reflects a calculated effort to dismantle resistance alliances and to deny the emergence of a unified federal-democratic coalition. Through this strategy, the SAC maintains maximum maneuverability, which implies negotiating security guarantees with some groups, while simultaneously deploying force against others.

Field evidence and tracking by the ISP-Myanmar show that between 2021 and early 2025, the SAC entered into direct talks or informal truces with at least eight EAOs, often under the guise of "peace overtures" or security stabilization. These included the RCSS, NMSP, KNU/KNLA Peace Council, and the DKBA, among others. These engagements were not conducted within the NCA framework and lacked a transparent roadmap for political dialogue.

While the SAC publicly claimed that more than a dozen groups responded to its calls for peace talks, these engagements occurred separately, often in Naypyitaw or regional capitals, and without inter-group coordination<sup>3</sup>. The result has been a patchwork of fragmented ceasefire arrangements that mirror SLORC-era strategies of the 1990s, when similar deals were used to neutralize ethnic opposition without political concessions.

In some cases, it is proven that these ceasefires have led to intra-ethnic splits. For instance, within the Karen resistance movement, factions aligned with the KNU/KNLA Peace Council engaged with SAC representatives, while the mainstream KNU continued its alliance with the Spring Revolution and refused bilateral talks. This internal divergence weakened coordination and led to clashes over territorial control and legitimacy within Karen areas (KHRG, 2023). Moreover, the SAC's efforts to offer bilateral deals to northern groups such as the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA (the Three Brotherhood Alliance) have been influenced by external pressure from ▶

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3 At the meeting of National Security and Defence Council meeting 1/2025 on January 31, 2025, Min Aung Hlaing reported he conducted 114 meetings for peace with seven NCA-signatories parties, and six non-signatories parties since 2022. He then declared the year of 2022 as a "Year of Peace". He also met political parties 21 times in regards of peace-building and other organizations aspiring for peace ten times.



- ▶ China, which has its own interest in dividing opposition actors along strategic corridors. These deals further complicated coordination among the Three Brotherhood Alliance, even as they maintained public unity against the SAC.

Before the coup, multilateral negotiation bodies such as the NCCT and PPST provided platforms for EAOs to engage the government with a common political agenda. These structures, though fragile, created space for consensus-building, collective bargaining, and shared federal aspirations. After the 2021 military coup, these platforms have largely collapsed or been sidelined. The SAC has intentionally bypassed them, reverting to one-on-one meetings with EAOs while refusing to convene national-level dialogues or restore the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM). This is a classic divide-and-rule logic of dismantling collective agency.

The consequences are evident in the resistance landscape. Joint military coordination between EAOs and Spring Revolution forces has been inconsistent. Some groups, such as the KNU, CNF, KNPP, and KIA, have maintained strategic coordination with PDFs and the NUG. Others have opted for neutrality or limited ceasefire talks, fearing isolation, encirclement, or punitive SAC operations if they refuse engagement. This fragmentation has a material impact on conflict dynamics. Areas under loosely allied groups have seen sporadic de-escalation, while regions controlled by anti-SAC coalitions remain under heavy assault. This differential pressure has further undermined trust among groups, weakening the momentum of the revolution as a whole.

From a rebel governance perspective (Mampilly, 2011), many EAOs function as subnational political authorities with bureaucracies, taxation systems, and quasi-legal regimes. For such actors, bilateral ceasefires offer short-term governance stability, especially in contested zones where armed confrontation disrupts public administration, trade, and service delivery. The SAC appears to exploit these opportunities by offering recognition, autonomy, and trade permissions in exchange for non-aggression. In practice, this enables the SAC to divide governance priorities from revolutionary commitments. For instance, groups that maintain cross-border economic relationships or semi-official local administrations, such as the RCSS or the KNU/KNLA-PC, have demonstrated greater willingness to engage in SAC-offered ceasefires.

However, this kind of accommodation often comes at the expense of popular legitimacy, especially in communities aligned with the Spring Revolution. There have been reports of local protests against EAO leaders entering deals with the junta, particularly when such arrangements led to de facto SAC control of checkpoints, roads, or resource-rich zones.



This dynamic illustrates how the SAC's divide-and-rule strategy not only fragments military resistance but also manipulates the internal governance pressures of armed actors, further weakening the potential for a unified federal-democratic movement.

The fragmentation of resistance groups through bilateral ceasefires has created a decentralized, opaque, and exclusionary peace landscape. Without a shared negotiation table, national dialogue, or sequencing mechanisms, the path to a political settlement has been displaced by a patchwork of localized arrangements. They are vulnerable to collapse, contain no enforceable mechanisms, and fail to address the political roots of the country's prolonged conflict. Moreover, SAC-led fragmentation directly undermines the credibility of any future peace process. As long as groups engage independently and on unequal terms, trust-building among opposition actors will remain elusive, and the prospects for a federal settlement will be further delayed.

Theoretically, this reflects how divide-and-rule approaches, while tactically effective for authoritarian regimes, tend to undermine structural peacebuilding and lead to enduring instability. In Myanmar's case, it sustains a cycle of conflict management over conflict transformation, with grave implications for democratization, ethnic equity, and long-term reconciliation.

### 2.3 Coercive Diplomacy and Regional Hegemonic Interventionism

Myanmar's internal conflict dynamics have long been shaped by its geographic position and regional entanglements, particularly its shared borders with China, India, and Thailand. Since the 2021 military coup, regional powers, especially China, have taken an increasingly assertive role in brokering or pressuring ceasefire arrangements between the SAC and armed actors along strategic frontiers. This involvement is motivated less by humanitarian or democratic considerations and more by concerns over border stability, refugee flows, economic corridors, and the spillover of insurgency.

This type of intervention is well captured by Alexander George's theory of coercive diplomacy (1991), which describes how powerful states use pressure, economic, political, and military, to force weaker actors to alter behavior without formal conflict. In Myanmar, China has used its regional influence, trade leverage, and security cooperation mechanisms to compel both the SAC and EAOs to de-escalate hostilities along the Yunnan border, particularly near Muse, Lashio, and Laiza.



Simultaneously, this behavior reflects John Mearsheimer's (2001) realist concept of regional hegemony, in which dominant powers actively shape outcomes in neighboring states to maintain hierarchical order and strategic depth. As applied to Myanmar, China's interventions are not neutral peacebuilding efforts but calculated strategies to safeguard its national interests, especially the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and oil-gas pipelines running through northern Shan State and Rakhine State.

One of the most visible examples of Chinese coercive diplomacy is the "Lashio Model", a term used to describe the brokered ceasefires in 2023-2025 between the SAC and members of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, MNDAA, TNLA, and AA. Following intense clashes in northern Shan State in late 2023, Chinese officials arranged a series of meetings in Lashio and Kunming, which resulted in temporary ceasefires. These ceasefires led to the redeployment of SAC troops out of northern Shan State, the stabilization of key roads, and the resumption of cross-border trade (ISP-Myanmar, 2025b). Moreover, the SAC's application of this strategy demonstrated that the "Lashio Model" clearly extended to Mogoke and Mongmit.

However, these ceasefires were not part of the NCA framework, nor did they include any provision for political dialogue, accountability, or federal reform. They were informal and geared toward immediate stabilization, particularly for Chinese economic infrastructure. As ISP notes, these deals were often accompanied by Chinese humanitarian aid shipments, local security guarantees, and veiled threats of diplomatic embarrassment should the SAC or EAOs resume full hostilities in these zones. From a peace process perspective, these ceasefires represent containment rather than transformation. There was no effort to bring the NUG, PDFs, or civil society into the process, reinforcing what Darby and Mac Ginty (2003) call "elite-driven exclusion." While the short-term gains included reduced violence and improved access to displaced communities in Kokang and Lashio, the long-term costs include the further fragmentation of Myanmar's peace architecture, the erosion of any nationally owned political roadmap, and territorial partitioning.

Although China has been the most active external actor in post-coup ceasefire diplomacy, other regional states, such as Thailand and India, have also taken a selective interest in conflict stabilization, albeit in more indirect ways. Thailand's military-backed government has quietly facilitated communication channels between the SAC and Karen-based armed groups, particularly along the Myanmar-Thai border, where SAC offensives threatened to destabilize trade routes and displace tens of thousands of refugees.

In 2022, Thai intermediaries supported ad hoc de-escalation talks between the SAC and splinter groups of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA-5), reportedly mediated in Tak and Mae Sot. However, these discussions remained ▶

► unstructured, opaque, and short-lived, serving primarily to reduce clashes near key border trade posts. Like the Lashio Model, these initiatives prioritized border stability over political inclusivity, offering little to the cause of federal dialogue or justice. ISP-Myanmar discussed China brokered for return of Lashio city to Myanmar military, in return of cessation of attacking MNDAA. The approach was seemingly Myanmar authority “subcontracting part of its sovereignty” to China, with no apparent political dialogue, but by maintaining ceasefire for trade and commerce.

India’s approach has been even more reserved but is driven by concerns over cross-border insurgency in its Northeast region. New Delhi has maintained contact with the SAC to ensure the containment of armed groups operating near the Sagaing-Nagaland frontier, but has refrained from overt mediation. India’s silence on political repression, however, has emboldened the SAC’s impunity and weakened broader international efforts to tie ceasefires to democratic transition. These regional dynamics reflect what Goh (2008) terms “hierarchical regional order”, a system in which neighboring states tolerate internal repression in return for stability at their own peripheries. In this context, ceasefire diplomacy becomes a tool for conflict displacement, not resolution.

The externally driven and coercively mediated ceasefires usually have several unintended consequences. First, they undermine the agency of Myanmar’s domestic resistance actors, particularly the NUG, civil society, and EAOs operating in other regions. Ceasefires imposed through Chinese or Thai leverage often exclude local consultations, creating resentment and eroding trust in both national and international peacemaking.

Second, these ceasefires enable the SAC to redistribute military resources. Following the November 2022 ceasefire with the AA in Rakhine, for example, SAC units were quickly redeployed to Sagaing Region, where airstrikes and scorched-earth campaigns intensified throughout early 2024 (Arnold, 2024). Rather than reducing the overall scale of violence, coercive diplomacy has allowed the SAC to strategically pause in some areas to strike harder in others, reinforcing its warfighting posture.

Third, these regionally negotiated ceasefires weaken horizontal coordination among resistance groups. The MNDAA and TNLA, while publicly remaining members of the Brotherhood Alliance, have experienced increased pressure to prioritize local stabilization over collective strategy, especially when incentives are offered through Chinese intermediaries. This dynamic fragments cohesion of the opposition groups and increases the risk of political drift or tactical betrayal, echoing Horowitz’s theory of divide-and-rule enabled through third-party manipulation. Lately, on March 15, 2026, MNDAA forces attacked and purged TNLA forces from Kutkai Township, northern Shan State. There has been long disputes ►

# Haigeng Talks Under China's Mediation



## SAC-EAOs Bilateral Talks Under China's Mediation

<p><b>Bilateral talk with MNDA</b></p> <p><b>Mediator:</b> Deng Xijun (Chinese Special Envoy)</p> <p><b>SAC:</b> Lt. Gen. Ko Ko Oo (Commander- No. 1 Bureau of Special Operations)</p> <p><b>MNDAA:</b> Peng Kun (Foreign Affairs Head), Li Jar Wen (Spokesperson)</p> <p><b>Key Topics:</b> SAC demanded that MNDAA withdraw from Lashio, and MNDAA refused, SAC sought release of high-ranking officers and soldiers captured during the fall of Lashio</p> <p><b>Major Results:</b> No substantive result</p>	<p>Dec 15, 2024</p>	<p><b>Bilateral talk with MNDA</b></p> <p><b>Mediator:</b> Deng Xijun (Chinese Special Envoy)</p> <p><b>SAC:</b> Lt. Gen. Ko Ko Oo (Commander- No. 1 Bureau of Special Operations)</p> <p><b>MNDAA:</b> Peng Kun (Foreign Affairs Head), Li Jar Wen (Spokesperson)</p> <p><b>Key Topics:</b> MNDAA's phased withdrawal from Lashio, cessation of airstrikes, border trade reopening, and POW exchange</p> <p><b>Major Results:</b> MNDAA's phased withdrawal from Lashio, ceasefire, SAC pledged to stop all airstrikes and artillery shelling, China immediately reopened critical border gates, MNDAA was pressured to distance itself from NUG and PDFs publicly</p>
<p><b>Bilateral talk with TNLA</b></p> <p><b>Mediator:</b> Deng Xijun (Chinese Special Envoy)</p> <p><b>SAC:</b> Lt. Gen. Ko Ko Oo (Commander- No. 1 Bureau of Special Operations)</p> <p><b>TNLA:</b> Lt. Gen. Tar Jok Jar (First Vice Chairperson, Central Committee Member), Gen. Tar Moe Hein (Executive of External Affairs)</p> <p><b>Key Topics:</b> SAC demanded TNLA's withdrawal from all seized towns apart from Namhsan and Mantong, TNLA demanded a halt to SAC's military operation and recognition of their seized territories as "Ta'ang State"</p> <p><b>Major Results:</b> No substantive result</p>		<p>Jan 16-18, 2025</p>
<p><b>Bilateral talk with TNLA</b></p> <p><b>Mediator:</b> Deng Xijun (Chinese Special Envoy)</p> <p><b>SAC:</b> Lt. Gen. Ko Ko Oo (Commander- No. 1 Bureau of Special Operations)</p> <p><b>TNLA:</b> Lt. Gen. Tar Jok Jar (First Vice Chairperson, Central Committee Member)</p> <p><b>Key Topics:</b> SAC demanded that TNLA hand back Mogoke and Mongmit, TNLA demanded that the airstrike and artillery attacks to cease</p> <p><b>Major Results:</b> TNLA relinquished Mogoke and Mongmit, in exchange, SAC pledged to cease all airstrikes and ground offensives</p>	<p>Feb 16-18, 2025</p>	
		<p>Apr 28-29, 2025</p>
	<p>Oct 27-28, 2025</p>	



► over territorial ownership and administration following since their claims of territories since Operation 1027. In addition to Kutkai, MNDAA is launching attacks on TNLA positions in Namkham Township, Nam Hpak Kar, and Muse (105) Mile, and Kyinsankyawt (Jin San Jiao) Gate, two strategic trade points on the China-Myanmar border. China and the SAC were silent on the development and it is the explicit infighting within the Three Brotherhood Alliance. The territorial conflict between the MNDAA and the TNLA in northern Shan State escalated significantly in March 2026, stemming from unresolved disputes over administrative control and tax collection in Kutkai Township. Following a period of localized friction, the MNDAA launched a coordinated offensive on March 14 using drone strikes and heavy artillery, resulting in the total seizure of Kutkai and the capture of approximately 100 TNLA personnel. As of April 2026, the situation has stabilized under a ceasefire that effectively ceded Kutkai to the MNDAA, while the TNLA has shifted its strategic focus toward diplomatic engagement with the newly established military-led government in Naypyitaw.

The growing influence of regional hegemons in Myanmar's ceasefire landscape reveals the limits of international peacebuilding norms in contested or semi-authoritarian spaces. While ASEAN, the UN, and Western actors have called for inclusive dialogue, regional powers with strategic interests, especially China, have reshaped the ceasefire terrain into one of localized containment.

For peacebuilding practitioners, this reality demands a recalibration of expectations. Myanmar's post-coup ceasefires are no longer primarily negotiated within national frameworks, but through regional power structures, economic calculations, and coercive leverage. Without coordinated pressure or incentives from the international community, and without the participation of legitimate domestic stakeholders, these ceasefires risk becoming obstacles to peace rather than pathways toward it.

## 2.4 Impacts on Rebel Governance and Political Behavior

Myanmar's ethnic armed landscape is not composed solely of insurgent actors operating in isolation from civilian life. Rather, many of the country's longstanding EAOs, such as KIO, KNU, the AA, and the United Wa State Army (UWSA), function as hybrid governance entities, operating parallel administrations that provide services, collect taxes, and maintain law enforcement structures in areas under their control.

This phenomenon is well theorized in Zachariah Mampilly's rebel governance framework (2001), which conceptualizes armed actors not only as military organizations, but as political authorities managing civilian populations. Their legitimacy derives not just from firepower, but also from their ability to offer ►



- ▶ stability, services, and a degree of autonomy. Ceasefire arrangements can therefore significantly shape rebel governance, influencing whether such groups prioritize local control and political consolidation or pursue broader alliances and revolutionary aims.

In the post-coup context, the SAC has deliberately used bilateral ceasefire arrangements to reshape the incentives facing these actors, rewarding those who disengage from national resistance with tacit recognition of their local authority, and punishing those who remain aligned with the Spring Revolution. One of the most pronounced effects of SAC's bilateral ceasefire strategy is the recalibration of EAO behavior away from coordinated national resistance and toward territorial consolidation. For groups with extensive governance structures, entering into local ceasefires with the junta offers short-term security and operational space. In some cases, such as with the RCSS and the KNU/KNLA Peace Council, these agreements have allowed actors to retain control over their administrative zones, resume cross-border trade, or collect taxes along highways and checkpoints with less interference from the military.

Field reports from Karen State and northern Shan State suggest that bilateral ceasefires have created micro-orders, where certain EAOs enjoy relative stability and local autonomy while distancing themselves from national-level opposition. These groups have been reluctant to openly support the NUG or coordinate with PDFs, fearing military retaliation, economic disruption, or internal community backlash.

This aligns with Mampilly's observation that rebel leaders must often balance external resistance with internal governance needs. In contexts of resource scarcity and limited external support, the lure of localized stability and economic recovery, offered conditionally through ceasefire deals, can outweigh the uncertain dividends of prolonged revolutionary alignment.

However, this localist turn comes at a political cost. In areas where local populations are sympathetic to the Spring Revolution, EAOs that engage in ceasefire arrangements with the SAC have faced legitimacy challenges. Reports from civil society organizations and community-based media have documented public criticism, protests, and reputational damage aimed at EAO leaders perceived as compromising or collaborating with the military junta.

For instance, in Mon State, some communities have opposed the New Mon State Party's (NMSP) involvement in SAC-sponsored events, viewing such gestures as betrayals of the wider democratic movement. Similarly, factions within the Karen resistance have clashed, both politically and militarily, over divergent ceasefire strategies, resulting in a fractured governance landscape with overlapping claims to legitimacy and authority.



These tensions illustrate the dual accountability pressures facing EAOs in the post-coup era. On one hand, entering into ceasefires with the SAC may reduce armed clashes and allow for continued service provision. On the other hand, such engagement can alienate the very civilian base that sustains the EAO's long-term political legitimacy, especially in the revolutionary climate sparked by the 2021 coup.

Prior to the coup, efforts were underway to coordinate EAO governance structures within a broader federal framework. Under the NCA process, discussions had been held about interim governance mechanisms, the recognition of EAO education and health systems, and possible power-sharing models. The PPST and related working groups represented an embryonic attempt to link ceasefire monitoring with governance harmonization.

However, the shift to SAC-led bilateralism has collapsed these efforts. Without a multilateral forum, EAOs now govern in isolation, under vastly different rules of engagement and political positioning. Some are under de facto military protection while others face open attack. In this fragmented environment, interoperability among rebel governance systems has declined, and with it, the vision of a future federal governance compact.

This has practical consequences. Health workers and education providers operating in Spring Revolution-aligned areas have reported that cross-jurisdiction coordination has become more difficult, as some EAO zones no longer cooperate with NUG-backed service structures. This reflects the disconnect between armed governance and national political strategy, fostered by SAC's manipulation of ceasefire incentives. At its core, the SAC's strategy seeks to transform EAOs from political actors into conflict administrators, managing local order in exchange for disengagement from national politics. This logic is visible in the way some ceasefire arrangements include vague language on regional peace or local coordination, while omitting any reference to political dialogue, federalism, or constitutional transition.

The implication is that armed governance becomes an end in itself, decoupled from broader political vision. As a result, some EAOs risk drifting into quasi-clientelist relationships with the military regime, functioning as tolerated but politically neutralized actors. For groups like the Wa or the RCSS, this is already partly the case. For others, such as the KNU or KIO, resisting this trajectory requires both military resilience and ideological clarity, conditions made more difficult by the SAC's ongoing use of divide-and-rule and selective engagement. The erosion of coordinated rebel governance has serious implications for Myanmar's future federal transition. The vision of a bottom-up federal union, once championed by EAOs, civil society, and democracy advocates alike, depends on the capacity of armed actors to negotiate, align, and reform their governance institutions in the context of broader political change.



However, SAC's bilateral ceasefire model fragments this process, leaving behind a landscape of uncoordinated administrative enclaves, tenuous political legitimacy, and fractured resistance. While some EAOs may continue to perform governance functions, their role as drivers of political change risks being diminished unless new frameworks for shared resistance, joint negotiation, and inclusive dialogue can be re-established.

## 2.5 The Path to Fragmentation

The evolution of ceasefire strategies in post-coup Myanmar demonstrates a clear transition from inclusive peacebuilding to tactical conflict management. Under the NCA, the peace process was anchored in multilateral engagement, sequencing, and long-term reform goals, including federalism and constitutional change. The SAC, however, has deliberately dismantled these structures in favor of selective bilateralism, reducing ceasefires to isolated, transactional arrangements devoid of political vision. This pattern is consistent across all the contexts of Myanmar's conflict and peace situation: ceasefires now serve as tools of military convenience and political control, allowing the SAC to manage resistance rather than address the root causes of the prolonged civil war. This aligns with Horowitz's theory of divide-and-rule, where fragmentation replaces negotiation as the regime's dominant strategy.

The SAC's engagement patterns reflect a regime focused primarily on survival amid deep instability, weak legitimacy, and declining state capacity. While the SAC has sought to exploit divisions among resistance actors by selectively engaging some EAOs while isolating others, particularly those aligned with the NUG and PDFs, its broader political weakness has limited the effectiveness of this strategy. This approach echoes the bilateral ceasefire practices of the 1990s SLORC era that prioritized containment over genuine conflict resolution. Although the SAC has invited some EAOs to discuss changes to the 2008 Constitution, these proposals have offered little meaningful political incentive or credibility for most armed groups. On the other hand, the resistance landscape has become increasingly fragmented, limiting its ability to present a unified political front or a common platform for international engagement.

As detailed above, coercive diplomacy, particularly from China, has reinforced this fragmentation. Rather than pressing for inclusive negotiations, regional powers have focused on conflict displacement, using their influence to compel ceasefires that serve border stability and strategic infrastructure interests. These ceasefires, especially under the 'Lashio Model', have been instrumental in allowing the SAC to redeploy troops, consolidate control, and suppress resistance in other regions like Sagaing and Magway. These dynamics confirm Mearsheimer's theory of ▶



- ▶ regional hegemonic interventionism: Myanmar's internal war is being shaped by the external calculations of powerful neighbors, not by a domestic or internationally supported peace process. The absence of coordination among regional powers has further undermined the UN and ASEAN frameworks, leaving Myanmar's internal stakeholders increasingly isolated.

Moreover, ceasefire dynamics are reshaping how EAOs govern. Groups that once played a dual role, as military actors and political representatives, are now increasingly reduced to territorial administrators. Bilateral ceasefires offer short-term stability but disconnect governance from national transition. This creates a strategic tension: EAOs seeking to protect their communities and institutions must choose between local autonomy under SAC tolerance and national resistance under constant threat. This tension is further compounded by community expectations: while some civilians welcome stability, others view engagement with the junta as betrayal, leading to erosion in popular legitimacy for groups that take the ceasefire path. The net result is the weakening of both armed and political resistance infrastructures, thereby fulfilling the SAC's core objective: disorganizing its opponents without making any political concessions.

As such, the current ceasefire agreements lack any institutional foundation. There are no monitoring mechanisms, sequencing roadmaps, or enforcement provisions. Agreements are mostly verbal, poorly documented, and occur outside public scrutiny. There is no integration with past commitments under the NCA, no involvement of civil society, and no interface with political stakeholders such as the NUG or Parliament.

This void has two key implications: first, it confirms Zartman's warning that ceasefires made outside conditions of a mutually hurting stalemate can easily be instrumentalized rather than transformed into peace processes. Second, it explains why these agreements are inherently fragile and prone to collapse, co-optation, or abuse. Rather than enabling transformation, the ceasefires have become tactical pauses, used by the SAC to regroup, redeploy, and manipulate the battlefield.

In sum, Myanmar's ceasefire landscape has morphed from a flawed but aspirational peace process into a model of authoritarian conflict management, where negotiation is decoupled from political dialogue and used as a tool of fragmentation and control. This model is not merely a setback; it poses a long-term threat to prospects for federalism, democratization, and national unity. The challenge now is not only to revive negotiations, but to re-legitimize the idea of inclusive peace, reconnect governance with resistance, and resist the normalization of conflict as a political tool.

### 3. Conclusion

**T**he transformation of Myanmar's ceasefire landscape since the 2021 military coup reflects a broader shift in the country's conflict dynamics, from an imperfect but aspirational peace process to a model of authoritarian conflict management. The SAC has strategically abandoned the multilateral frameworks established under the NCA and replaced them with a fragmented, bilateral ceasefire approach. This model is not intended to produce political solutions or enable federal transformation, but rather to serve as a tactical mechanism for dividing the resistance, reducing battlefield threats, and sustaining military rule.

The evidence presented across this report's chapters demonstrates that bilateral ceasefires under the SAC are structurally exclusionary, procedurally opaque, and politically hollow. They systematically exclude key actors, such as the NUG, PDFs, and civil society, from any meaningful role in conflict resolution. Instead, ceasefires are negotiated selectively with individual EAOs, often based on geographical or strategic expediency.

This divide-and-rule strategy has fractured the opposition landscape, dismantled collective negotiation platforms, and undermined the coherence of the broader resistance movement. It has also enabled regional powers, particularly China, to impose coercive diplomacy in pursuit of their own geostrategic interests, further reinforcing a pattern of conflict containment rather than transformation. Ceasefire arrangements in this context function less as steps toward peace and more as militarized pauses, designed to facilitate redeployment, co-opt local actors, and isolate revolutionary forces.

At the same time, the SAC's ceasefire model has reshaped the internal behavior of EAOs, incentivizing a shift from national resistance to localized governance under conditions of strategic accommodation. This evolution risks transforming these armed actors from political stakeholders in a federal future into passive administrators of conflict zones with no role in national decision-making. As rebel ▶



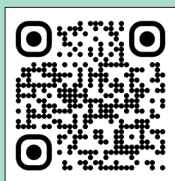
- ▶ governance becomes increasingly fragmented and de-linked from national-level transition, the possibility of a coherent federal settlement grows more distant.

In sum, the SAC's post-coup ceasefire strategy has moved Myanmar away from a political settlement process and toward a security-centric, authoritarian mode of conflict management. Without structural reforms, inclusive dialogue, and international pressure to restore a genuine peace framework, these ceasefires are likely to deepen political exclusion, prolong armed resistance, and entrench authoritarianism. Rebuilding momentum toward a federal and democratic future will require not just a revival of negotiations, but a reconfiguration of the ceasefire paradigm itself, one that centers inclusion, political legitimacy, and shared transformation.

Ceasefires are not inherently peace-promoting; if misused, they can actively entrench authoritarianism and deepen fragmentation. Myanmar's experience since the 2021 coup underscores the urgent need to re-politicize these agreements, reconnecting them with inclusive negotiation, transitional justice, and federal reform. To counter the regime's strategy, stakeholders must demand inclusive negotiations that integrate the NUG, PDFs, and civil society, while rejecting exclusionary bilateral deals and establishing minimum standards for future agreements. Furthermore, sustainable peace through multilateral inclusion is more beneficial for the neighboring countries and international community. Thus, the international community must pressure regional powers like China to support genuine political resolution over mere border stability, expanding assistance beyond humanitarian relief to foster the cross-EAOs coordination required for a durable federal democracy. Ultimately, the international community, regional powers, and resistance actors must act decisively to ensure that ceasefire agreements once again serve as entry points for peace, not exits from political responsibility.

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