

# NAYPYITAWLOGY-5

## SAC Leader: The Solo Show

Snr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing's ongoing strategy of blame-game may bring him closer to his downfall.

The Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and its junta leader are facing mounting burdens after more than three years since the coup. Among the MAF's 14 Regional Military Commands (RMC), the junta recently lost the North Eastern Military Command in Lashio. Nine further RMCs are under stress within their respective territories, while the four remaining RMCs, Naypyitaw, Yangon, South Western, and Triangle Region Commands, have to share the burden by sending troops to reinforce other regions. The regime is not only losing vast amounts of territory, troops, and ammunition, and has already lost control of 74 towns, but even major cities in the central lowlands are now under threat. The socioeconomic conditions are also in the state of "helplessness," as all industries and sectors are deteriorating daily. In addition to worsening floods, the impacts of climate change pose a significant threat to the people of Myanmar.

The challenges currently faced by the junta are not due to foreign interference or pressure. Rather, they stem from the antagonism of public and the resistance forces against the junta, which is a direct consequence of the coup. Meanwhile, the people of Myanmar who have remained

within the country, face not only the hardships of the oppressive regime and natural disasters but also the "man-made disasters" caused by the junta's misguided policies. Yet after more than three years, neither the junta leader nor any senior officials have taken any responsibility or accountability for the widespread failures across various sectors.

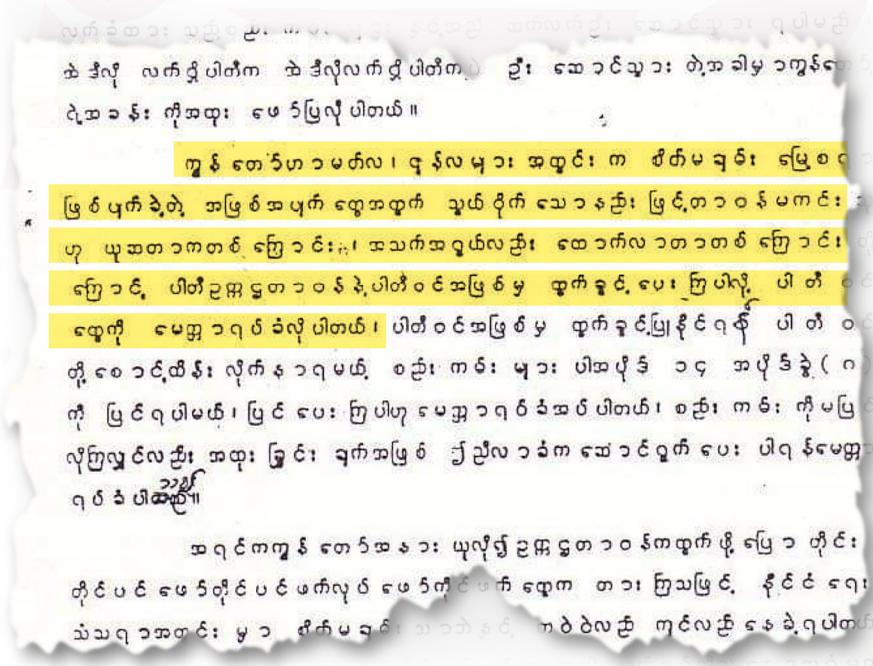
This begins with Snr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing himself, who wants to make a solo show. After the fall of the North Eastern Command on August 5, 2024, Snr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech regarding the country's security situation. In his nearly 30-minute speech, he took no responsibility for the failures and sufferings of the country under his own or the State Administration Council's (SAC) leadership. Instead, he blamed everything on all domestic forces and foreign interventions.

In Myanmar's modern history, even Ne Win, the founding father of military dictatorships in Myanmar, admitted some responsibility when he decided to step down in 1988. In an emergency meeting of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) on July 23, 1988, Ne Win personally took accountability by stating, "I consider

▶ myself partially responsible for unpleasant incidents that happened during March and June..." (English translation of the original Burmese language transcript excerpt shown in the picture below.) and acknowledged the lack of public trust in his government and party. Looking at this, it can be assessed that in the history of Myanmar's successive military dictatorships, the current junta leader stands out as the most brazen one for his lack of accountability, exemplifying a political approach focused on blaming others.

Scholars have noted that dictators often shift blame rather than take responsibility. By blame-shifting, they seek to redirect public focus, uplift the spirits of their followers, and justify to themselves that their harshness, lack of accountability, and shortcomings result from others' actions. Some dictators, motivated by sheer ego, narrow-mindedness and selfishness, may employ blaming others as a political tactic. However, when such shameless blame-shifting politics persist, the dictator inevitably faces downfall. Particularly when more than one of the following conditions ▶

### ■ Former Junta Ne Win's Confession



Excerpted from Ne Win's Speech transcript during the BSPP Emergency Party Conference, held on July 23, 1988, at Sayar San Hall, Kyite Ka San Stadium, Yangon.

▶ occur: public support is lost; the economy collapses; when the dictator loses control over the security forces—leading to defections, demoralization, and even internal splits or counter-coups; public uprisings and armed resistance gain momentum; or international sanctions and isolation push the country to the brink of collapse. Historical examples include the downfall of Romanian dictator Ceaușescu, Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, and the recent fate of Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina. Snr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing's ongoing strategy of blame-game may bring him closer to his downfall.

In modern Myanmar history, despite a period of democratic reforms, the MAF never fully stepped back from political power, nor did it make efforts to cooperate with civilian political leaders. After the coup of 2021, the MAF leadership, under Commander-in-Chief Snr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, takes the front role to govern the country as he took power himself. However, over three years later, the SAC he led neither resemble a party-led regime nor even a collective military-led regime. Instead, it has become a government dominated by a solo individual, functioning as a personalist regime.

### Personalist Regime

The junta leader, Snr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing is not a cooperative leader. The formation of the SAC after the coup was seemingly an effort to project collective leadership, given its inclusion of civilian and military members. But as time went on the junta leader's personalistic decisions became prominent. The equal split between

military and civilian members in the council also became merely symbolic. ([View Naypyitawlogy-1](#))

On the other hand, there have been multiple reshuffles involving reassignments, new appointments, dismissals, or transfers within the SAC cabinet. ([View Naypyitawlogy-4: SAC's Ricketty Administration](#)). Currently, 155 changes have been made to the top officials involved in the SAC and its administrative machinery (including council members, ministers, deputy ministers, and chief ministers of states and regions). This echoes the Myanmar proverb, "*Min Kha Youkja, Kan Nar Thit Pin,*" which suggests that someone close to power is offered many advantages, but also faces the risk of sudden downfall, much like a tree near a river. This proverb reflects the inherent instability and unpredictability of such positions. The number of cabinet changes has set a record, surpassing those of previous governments, indicating the unpredictable and erratic nature of the current junta leadership. Such actions are characteristic of what scholars studying personalist regimes describe as narrowing the leader's inner circle and the increasing difficulty of predicting the leader's decisions—a common trait of personalist regimes.

Leaders who govern through personalist rules do not tend to rely on institutional systems. Instead, they place trusted loyalists in critical positions of power. These leaders often depend on a patronage system and close personal networks within their administrations. As a result, predicting or explaining their policies becomes challenging, as these

- ▶ leaders operate politically on personal whims. This makes it difficult to analyze the type and predict the direction of their governments based on available data.

In this context, examining from where the junta leader draws advice and with whom he forms decisions is essential. Shortly after the coup in 2021, on February 18, the "Advisory Board to the State Administration Council's Chairman" was formed, led by former Lt. Gen. Than Tun Oo (DSA 24). The advisory body includes seven civilians. Than Tun Oo, the head of the group, was formerly the Special Operations Bureau No. 6 Commander based in Naypyitaw and later was being sent to the reserve list. Similarly, Lt. Gen. Lu Aye (DSA 26, former Military Appointments General) was also included in the group. One member, former Col. Htein Lin, was later appointed Chief Minister of Rakhine State. The group's role mainly involved reading and drafting advisory letters, which were then reviewed and filtered by Lt. Gen. Than Tun Oo. According to research findings, if he dared not approve, the advisory letters would not be forwarded any further.

The junta leader has numerous advisors. On February 1, 2023, the Central Advisory Board to the State Administration Council was formed. Comprised of nine members, it was led by former Navy officer Saw Tun Aung Myint. During the SAC reshuffling on February 1, 2023, previously sidelined SAC members were given positions on this advisory board. These SAC members had been removed from their positions due to disagreements with the junta leader over the new Political Parties Registration Law. Although they were placed on the Central

Advisory Board, they were not provided with proper offices for an extended period, suggesting they were sidelined and neutralized from going against the junta leader.

In the military sector, the Advisory Board for the MAF's Commander in Chief, is led by Lt. Gen. Yar Pyae, SAC minister of Home Affairs. Another key figure advising the junta leader is Lt. Gen. Nyo Saw (DSA 23), who assumed the role of Adviser to the SAC Chairman (Union Minister Level) as of July 5, 2023. Previously, he served as Quartermaster General and Chairman of the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC). He is believed to have a close personal relationship with the junta leader and is considered to be the key person to manage the finances and budgets. He was not only promoted to the rank of Union Minister but also given a position as a member of the State Administration Council. Based on news reports, he has been promoted in official protocol of events. Not long ago, Gen. Moe Aung (DSA 28), former Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, was appointed a National Security Advisor. He is the son of the late Aung Thaung, who wielded significant power under the previous military regime.

The SAC has also established the "National Solidarity and Peace-Making Negotiation Committee" (NSPNC) under the pretense of advancing the peace process. The NSPNC is essentially viewed as the advisory and executive body for the junta leader concerning peace issues. The chairman of the National Solidarity and Peace-Making Committee (NSPC) central committee is the junta leader, Snr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing (DSA-19), while the

▶ operational committee is headed by Vice Snr. Gen. Soe Win (DSA-22). Initially, Lt. Gen. Aung Lin Dwe (DSA-25) served as the secretary, with Lt. Gen. Min Naing (OTS-66) as the operational committee secretary. In September 2023, the NSPNC was organized, and Lt. Gen. Yar Pyae (DSA-22) became chairman. By 2024, Border Affairs Minister, Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung (DSA-25), had replaced him as chairman.

In reality, the junta leader does not use the NSPNC as a significant institutional mechanism. In April 2022, he tried to personally engage with ethnic armed

organizations for peace talks, but failed. Later, after Operation 1027 and the commencement of the China-supported Haigeng meeting, the NSPNC was not assigned any role. More concerning is that the junta leader sent his personal aide de camp, Gen. Moe Myint Swe (OTC-23), to the Haigeng meetings instead. Although he lacks an official appointment, the junta leader has been using Gen. Moe Myint Swe in a personalized manner for military consultations and peace negotiations, rather than relying on an institutional approach, as noted in ISP-Myanmar's research findings.

## Naypyitawlogy

"Naypyitawlogy," ISP-Myanmar dubbed this terminology inspired from the extensive literature on close societies, such as the usage of "Kremlinology," "Pyongyangology," and "Pekingology," which tried to explain the nature and intricacies of these societies. Similarly, ISP-Myanmar endeavors to understand "Naypyitawlogy" on the nature of a closed dictatorship, underpinning ideology, the military and political strategies of the generals, as well as its system, governance, and institutional formations, ideologies and relations, geopolitics, economy, and public support. encompassing the whole setting.

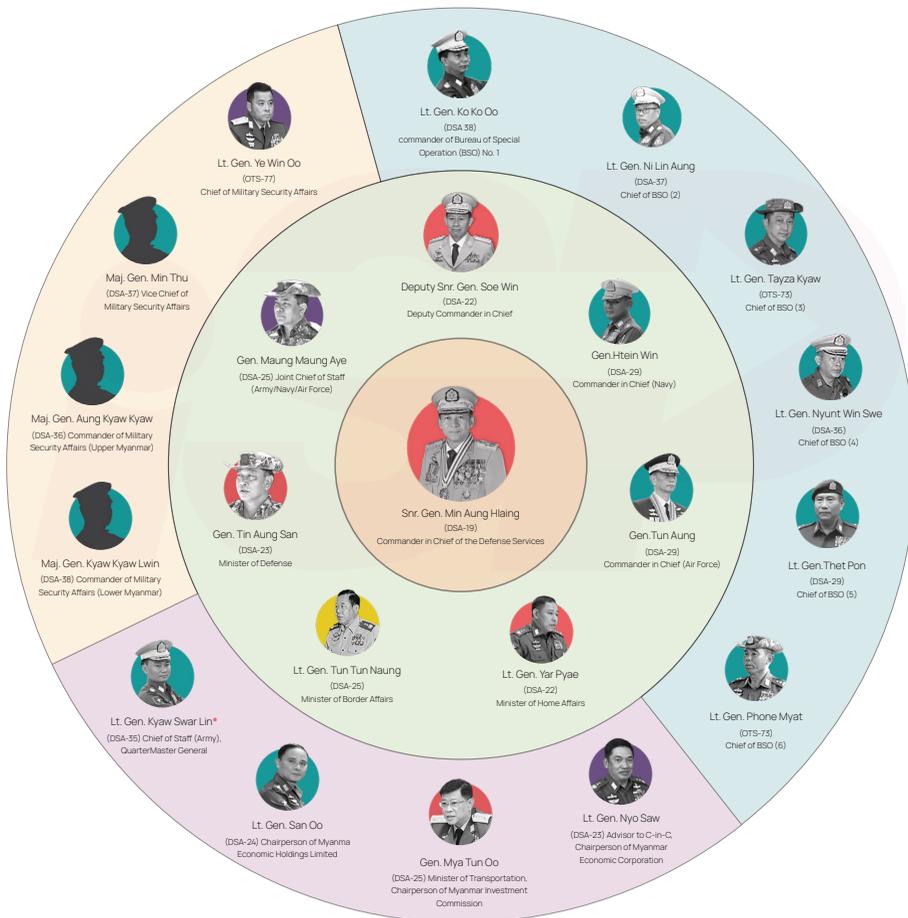
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## ■ Analyzing the Top Leadership within the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF)

Top leaders within the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) can be analyzed in three areas; Military Operations, Finance and Business, and Intelligence. The inner circle of MAF's leadership comprises a Joint Chief of Staff (Army/Navy/Air Force), two Commander in Chiefs (Navy and Airforce), Defence, Home and Border Affairs Ministers. For the outer circle, Military Operations are led by Commanders of Bureau Special Operations (BSO), Finance and Business by the Adviser to the SAC Chairman, Lt. Gen. Nyo Saw (DSA-23), Chairs of Investment Commission and Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and Myanma Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL), Army Chief of Staff and Quartermaster General. The Intelligence operations are led by one Lieutenant-General and Major Generals of the Military Affairs Security Department.



- Center of Power
- Inner Circle of Leadership
- Military Operations
- Finance and Business
- Intelligence
- SAC and Government members
- SAC Members
- Government members
- High-ranked Military Officers

\* Chief of Staff (Army) Lt. Gen. Kyaw Swar Lin was last seen in public during his visit to the military-owned textiles and fabric industry in Thamine on June 10, 2024. Then, on July 14, 2024, CJ Platform and Ayeyarwaddy Times news media reported that he had been removed from his position as Chief of Staff (Army), but this news has not yet been confirmed by other independent sources.

Additionally, the SAC has advisory bodies like the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS), affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the junta leader mainly uses them as proxies—mouthpieces that carry out his orders rather than offering independent advice. Furthermore, appointing junior officers as consultants has never worked in the MAF's institutional tradition. Regardless of how many advisory bodies or advisors, Snr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing calls the show for final decisions. At this point, he acts as the system, the government, and the institution in one, making final decisions alone on international relations, politics, economics, military affairs, and administrative matters. The security sector under the junta's leadership is currently facing unprecedented losses, unlike anything seen in the history of the MAF. These losses have already resulted in the relinquishment of one entire RMC, indicating that the remaining 13 RMCs will also likely be affected in time. The junta leader has now taken over the Acting President position from Myint Swe, who stepped down due to health conditions, and has also extended the state of emergency period for another six months, thereby extending the SAC's rule.

On the other hand, after taking action against his trusted Gen. Moe Myint Tun for corruption, significant succession crisis has emerged within the MAF ([View Naypyitawlogy 2- A Few Good Men: The Military's Succession Crisis](#)). Although Lt. Gen. Kyaw Swar Lin (DSA 35) is speculated the successor as the Commander in Chief (Army), it is pointed out that he still lacks the necessary

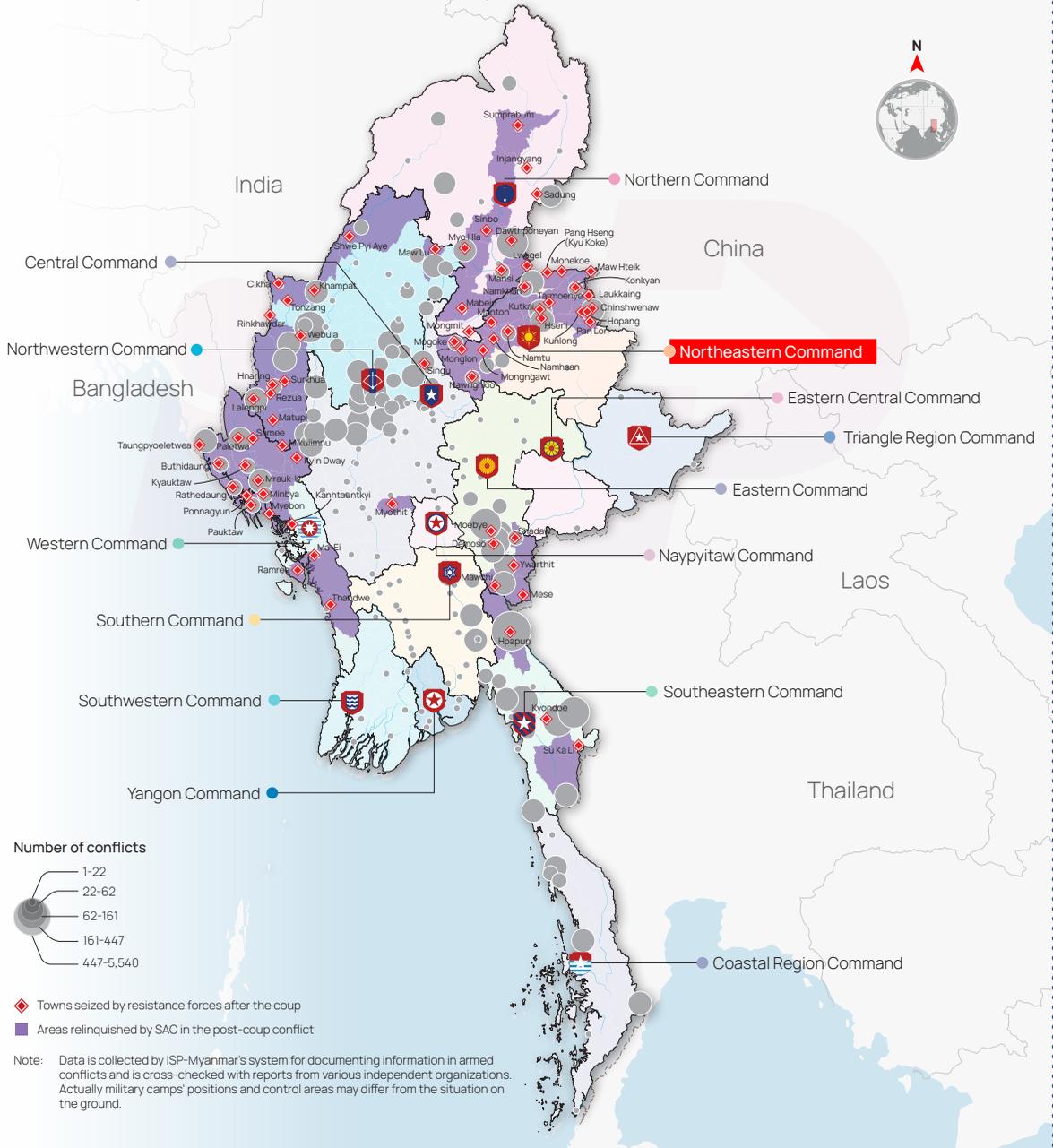
experience and qualifications. Recently, in July 2024, Lt. Gen. Zwe Win Myint (DSA-30), the Commander in Chief (Navy), submitted his resignation not even six months after his appointment, leading to the appointment of a new Commander in Chief (Navy). Media reports indicate that he resigned as he refused the junta leader's order regarding the Rakhine battlefield and is currently being held and interrogated under court-martial. Furthermore, following significant defeats in military operations, the junta leader has imposed severe penalties on senior military officers, including executions and imprisonment, leading to a considerable depletion of manpower. According to a *BBC Burmese* report from August 8, 2024, over 50 top Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) officials were dismissed. These dismissals affected ranks ranging from Major General to Brigadier General, with some officers being transferred to the reserve force, stripped off of their ranks, forced into retirement, or facing punishment.

Another critical issue is that the leader of the junta often issues orders and directives that do not align with the established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) within the military, based on ISP-Myanmar's research findings. This is particularly noticeable in implementing the four main military stratagem, traditionally abbreviated as "Advance, Attack, Defend, and Retreat," where the SOPs and military traditions are not fully utilized. An example can be seen in northern Shan State during Operation 1027, where after the fall of Mongkoe, the next defence line must be retreated to Nam Hpat Kar, otherwise it will lead to the loss of Laukkai. Similarly, the retreat from

## ■ One RMC Has Fallen With Nine Others On the Frontlines

(February 1, 2021 - August 3, 2024)

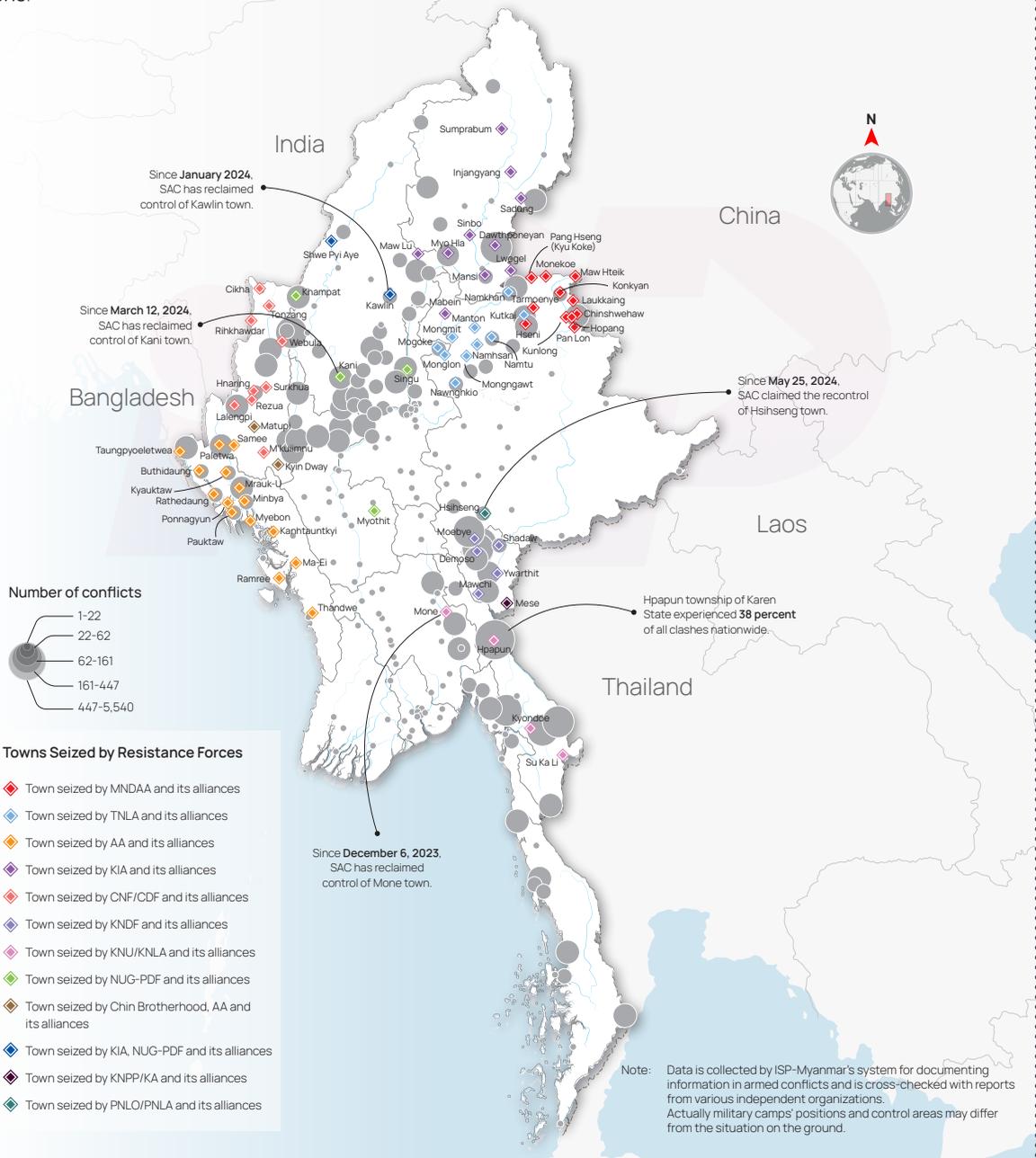
This map illustrates the current status of the regional military commands (RMCs) under the State Administration Council (SAC) amidst ongoing armed conflict following the coup. At the moment, the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) had seized **19 towns** within the Northeastern Command area, and had recently seized the Northeastern RMC itself. Therefore, the SAC has lost **one** out of its **14 RMCs**, and **nine RMCs** are on the frontlines. Meanwhile, Naypyitaw Command, Yangon Command, Southwestern Command, and Triangle Region Command are reallocating their troops to the battlefield in other regions.



## ■ SAC Relinquished 60 Percent of Towns in Northern Shan

(February 1, 2021 - July 31, 2024)

In the three years since the coup, at least 14,457 clashes have occurred in over 233 townships across the country. During these clashes, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and resistance forces seized up to 74 towns. Notably, the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) relinquished 21 out of 35 towns (60 percent) in northern Shan State following Operation 1027. Of these 21 towns, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) seized 11, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) seized nine, and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) seized one.



▶ Nant Salat during the fall of Laukkai also resulted in the loss of Hseni, as well as the loss of Kyauktaw after the fall of Paletwa in Rakhine. Moreover, during the second phase of Operation 1027, the situation in the North Eastern Command lacked proper preparation for defensive warfare (despite knowing that an attack was imminent), and critical communication lines were even severed during the battle. These incidents highlight the breakdown in command and communications within the MAF, revealing the inability to fully adhere to established SOPs.

Therefore, the junta leader set records in single-handedly doing whatever he wants in his solo show across different sectors. When unsuccessful, he points his finger at anyone but himself.

### All Great Losses

Personalist leaders tend to consolidate power and control information, often stifling innovative ideas and creative thinking. In problem-solving, these leaders themselves become the source of problems. For such highly individualistic leaders, laws, institutions, and accountability blur, leading to failures that are not just personal but have far-reaching consequences for an entire nation and its people.

Economic development plan, one of the junta leader's key plans, have also fallen short. According to the World Bank's

assessment, Myanmar's economic growth rate is projected to be just one percent in the coming year, with nearly half of the population living in poverty. Various sectors, including production, consumption, and trade, face severe crises.

Back in 1988, after Gen. Saw Maung's coup and the set up of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the country reportedly only had USD 70 million in foreign reserves. However, at the beginning of the current junta's rule, foreign reserves were reportedly as high as USD 6.8 billion across 14 international bank accounts (though the US government froze USD one billion of these funds as part of its sanctions following the coup). After three years, however, foreign reserves have been depleted with no visible results, and the nation teeters on the brink of collapse.

To conclude, the junta leader's performance over the past three years has proven ineffective. The current situation underscores the MAF's failure in upholding their "Three Main National Causes." Their self-proclaimed role as the "Guardian of the Nation" is being seriously challenged, particularly in the security sector. Despite facing multiple crises and systemic failures, the kind of accountable and institutional leadership that Myanmar desperately needs is strikingly absent among its ruling elite. ■