



ARMED STRUGGLE WILL IT LEAD TO POLITICAL RESOLUTION?

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PROMOTING LEADERSHIP AND
STRENGTHENING CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar

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On August 16, 2025, ISP-Myanmar held its ninth *30 Minutes with the ISP* event, titled “Armed Struggle—Will It Lead to Political Resolution?” A bilingual recap memo, available in both Burmese and English, was produced to document the discussion and published in September 2025. This publication is part of research conducted under ISP-Myanmar’s Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies.



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CONCEPT NOTE

A series of territorial gains by the resistance forces following Operation 1027 caused a major stir in the recent past. The Spring Revolution began in 2021 as a largely peaceful uprising. But over time, armed struggle eclipsed all else. News media in exile too became dominated by military headlines: war seemed to be everything.

Yet military victories do not by themselves translate into political success, let alone lasting peace. Political success rests on turning victories into institutions. Armed struggle is only the means, not the end. As the cliché has it, “Politics is war without bloodshed, and war is politics with bloodshed.”

The public has already carried its share of the burden: marching, voting in landslides, and keeping the revolution alive with resources and resilience. They launched the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), boycotts, pot-banging protests, and silent strikes—and forgave missteps along the way. The shortfall is not in popular support but in leadership’s failure to turn it into political gains. The regime, meanwhile, has endured its gravest setbacks in decades. Operation 1027 left it humiliated and fractured; its cohesion, command, and ideology were all severely challenged. ISP-Myanmar described Naypyitaw at the time as “stormy, hollowed-out, and corroded.” (view [30 Minutes with the ISP Event No. 2, Naypyitaw-logy: Three Words Characterizing Naypyitaw](#))

But the generals are not finished. Junta forces have retaken some strategically important towns, such as Moebye and Nawngkhio, and reorganized themselves under a newly formed State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). It is also pushing ahead with plans to hold elections before the year’s end. Resistance forces, meanwhile, are preparing to disrupt the vote—though their response is likely to be more tactical than a coordinated political offensive.

The critical question is how far past military victories can be converted into political gains. Success lies in transforming battlefield momentum into institutionalized achievements, rather than letting victories dissipate. And as Myanmar's geopolitical landscape shifts, the connection between military gains and political outcomes will remain the defining issue.

The real test lies ahead. Can the resistance turn battlefield momentum into political achievement? Can fleeting victories be institutionalized into lasting gains? For Myanmar, the struggle is no longer only on the front lines but in the conversion of war victories into politics. ■



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30 MINUTES
with the **ISP**

ARMED STRUGGLE WILL IT LEAD TO POLITICAL RESOLUTION?



Htet Shein

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist



Khin Khin

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist



Naing Min Khant

Emerging Researcher
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Panelist



Su Lin Han

Emerging Researcher
Communications
Host

This event was held on August 16, 2025, exclusively for ISP Gabyin Community members. The recorded video of the event is available on ISP-Myanmar's YouTube Channel with English subtitles. DVB broadcasts the recorded video of the live event on its TV and social media channels regularly on Mondays and Wednesdays.



Su Lin Han

Emerging Researcher
Communications Department
Host

Hello and welcome, Gabyin members, to today's *30 Minutes with the ISP*. I'm Su Lin Han, your host for this session. Today's topic is "Armed Struggle— Will It Lead to Political Resolution?" Joining us are emerging researchers from ISP-Myanmar's Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies: Htet Shein, Naing Min Khant, and Khin Khin. To start us off, I'd like to invite our first panelist, Htet Shein, to begin the discussion.



Htet Shein

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist

First of all, I'd like to thank all of you for joining today's *30 Minutes with the ISP*. Today, we reflect on the four years since the military coup. After the coup, people resisted the junta through various non-violent means: marches, protests, and other civil disobedience movements. Later, armed resistance became an alternative strategy, confronting the

junta with increased strength. Within two years of the coup, numerous armed groups had sprung up across the country. In that time, they built their strength, and clashes between the resistance and the junta took place nationwide. Then came Operation 1027, which brought significant military successes. Throughout this period, armed struggle became a central means of opposing the junta. Those fighting on the frontlines were often portrayed as heroes. Both local and international media were dominated by reports of warfare; the war was the central theme of everything.

So today, we should ask: have these military gains translated into political outcomes? How important is it to transform military gains into political achievements? How do civil wars typically conclude across different countries? And do those endings actually deliver the fair outcomes that people desire? What results have we seen in Myanmar's own history? And in today's context, what scenarios or possibilities are unfolding? We'll discuss all this in three parts in today's program.

First, I want to briefly discuss today's situation. After Operation 1027, resistance groups achieved many military successes and expanded their territories. Such outcomes

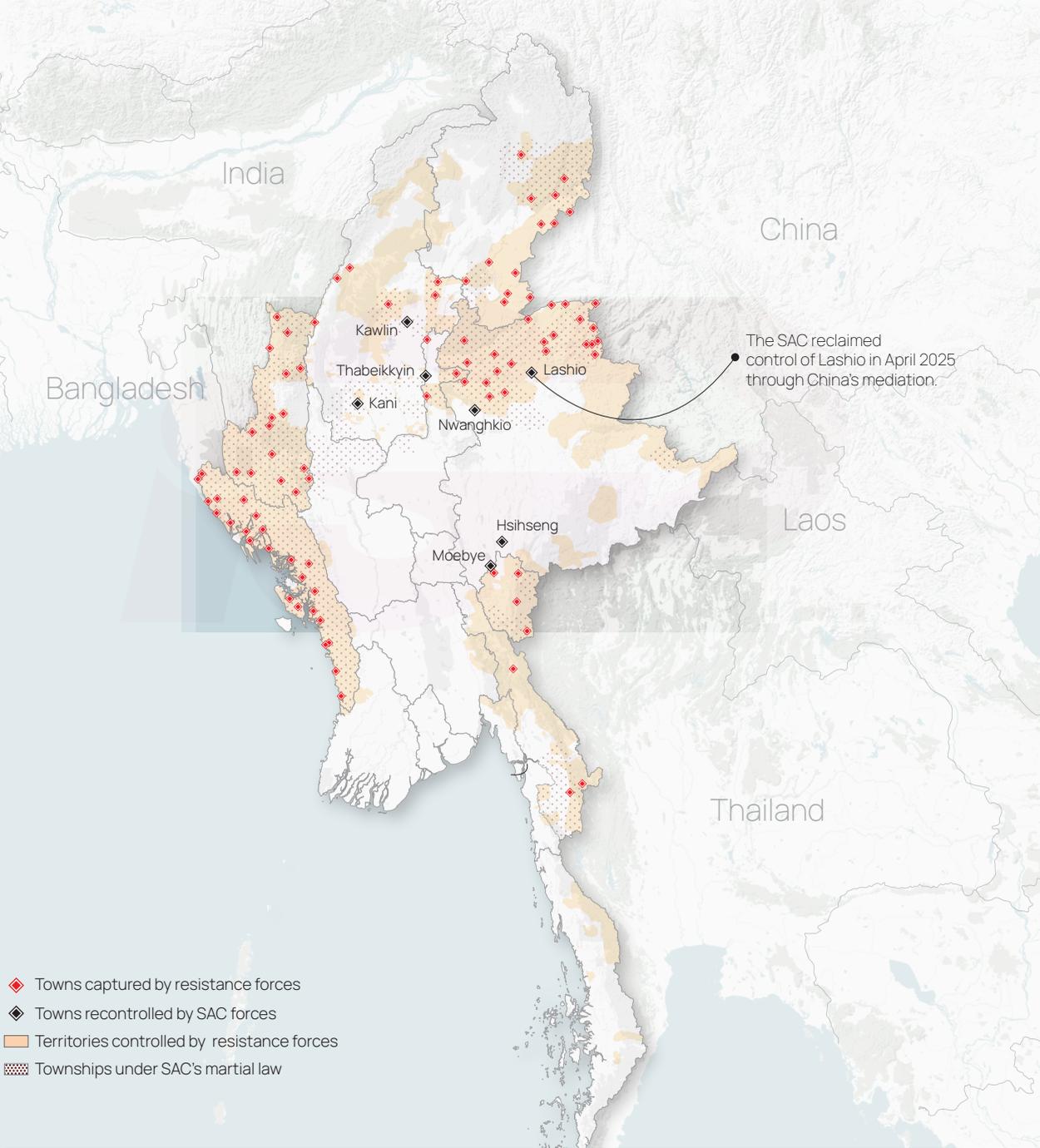
► came at the cost of enormous sacrifice from fighters on the ground. As a result, the groups leading these offensives gained recognition and expanded control. The public praised them, saying: “Any freedom won is freedom for all.” In these areas, they also initiate both governance and economic activities. This is most evident in resource-rich areas like Mogoke and Thabeikkyin. Despite these offensives, there were no significant political agreements between the leading armed groups, especially those in northern Myanmar, and the National Unity Government (NUG). Their cooperation did not go beyond jointly fighting the regime as a common enemy. Meanwhile, the junta itself was collapsing in terms of military, moral, ideology, and technologies. Within four months of Operation 1027, the junta lost around 40 towns, including its Northeastern Command. But at that time, the junta received help from China, a powerful neighbor. With China’s backing, they regained control of Lashio from the resistance. Now, they’ve also managed to retake some strategically important areas. At least seven towns have been retaken in Mandalay, Shan, and Sagaing. Though still few in number, it marks a turning point. The junta has also reformed itself as the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC) and is preparing for elections. This, too, can be seen as a political offensive.

So overall, despite their battlefield success, the resistance has not been able to translate their military victories into political achievements. Yet, one could argue that the revolution is not over yet; new offensives may still strike the junta. Some will say there are wins and losses in battles, but overall, a war is taking shape. Despite that, it is clear that the junta gains more manpower through conscription, receives weapons and technology from neighboring powers, and enjoys geopolitical cover. So, unlike before, it will be much harder to hit the junta where it truly hurts. But that does not mean the resistance will collapse. It means the armed conflict has reached a strategic stalemate where neither side can claim a decisive victory. At this stage, politics must be considered alongside the conflict. This is my overall analysis of the current situation. Please continue with the second part of the discussion, Khin Khin.

● Significant Territories Under The Resistance's Hand

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Following Operation 1027, resistance forces captured significant territory, leading the State Administration Council (SAC) to lose control of **98 towns** and several key outposts. In response, the junta, now operating as the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC), imposed martial law in **63 townships**. With newly acquired troops and technology, the SSPC has launched counteroffensives, reclaiming **seven towns** across Shan State, Mandalay, and Sagaing Regions to date.

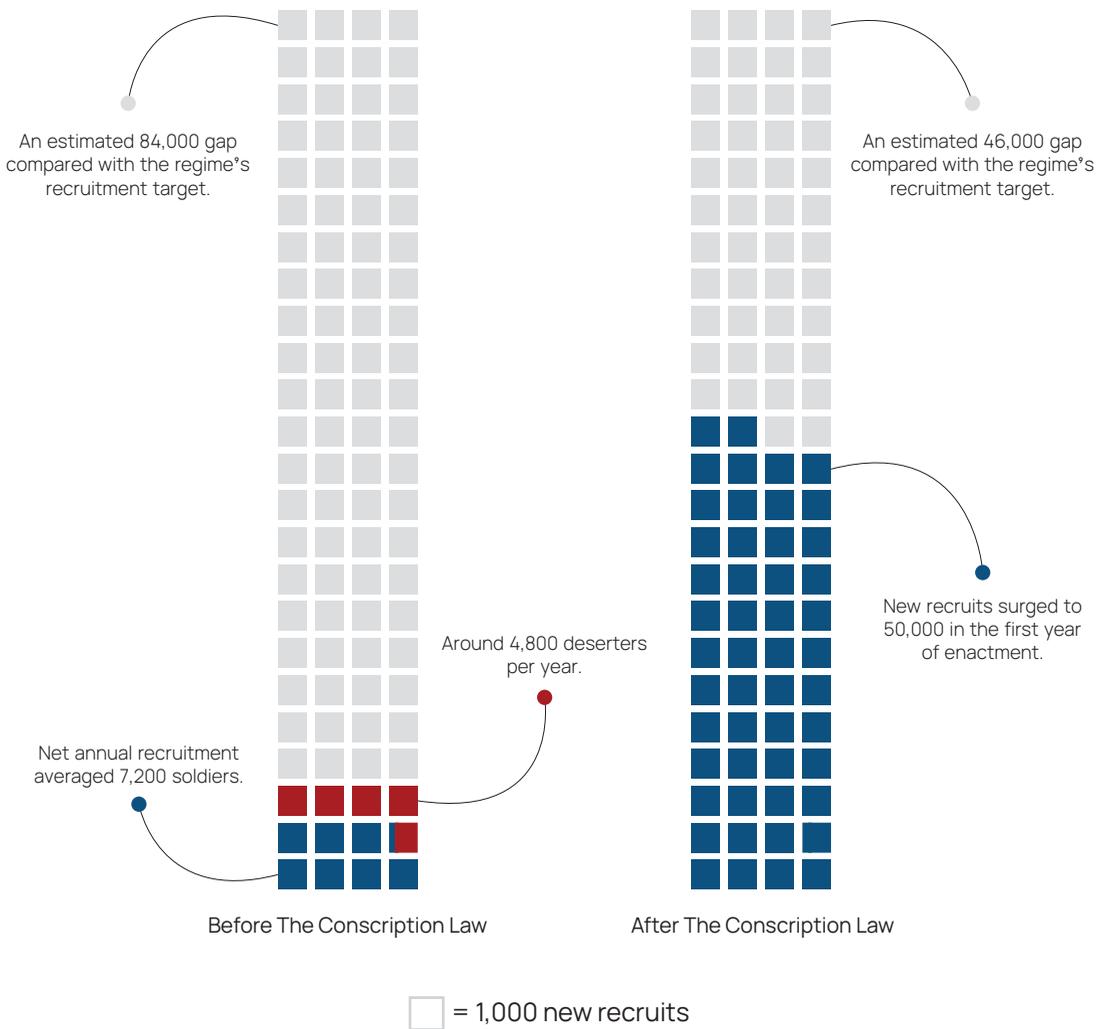


Data as of August 15, 2025, is based on ISP-Myanmar's research. It may vary from other sources due to differences in methodology and data availability.

● Junta Troop Numbers Swell Sevenfold After Conscription Law

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The regime once aimed to enlist **96,000 recruits** annually—10 recruits per battalion, or 8,000 across all battalions each month. In practice, between the years 2000 and 2020, it managed only 12,000 annually on average, with a net recruitment of just **7,200** after desertions. That changed abruptly with the enactment of the People's Military Service Law: in its first year alone, **more than 50,018** were drafted, nearly **seven times** the previous rate.





Khin Khin

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist

In this second part, I'll approach the question of how civil wars end by drawing on international examples and looking at it from a research perspective. Civil wars and armed conflicts are not unique to Myanmar; they happen worldwide. What makes Myanmar's case different is its unusually prolonged and complex nature. We can describe it as a multi-

party civil war involving numerous actors. This point is crucial because the more groups there are, the more diverse their political goals, positions, and strategies become.

When we study how armed conflicts come to an end, there are generally three main outcomes: (1) Rebel Victory, (2) Incumbent Victory, and (3) Negotiated Settlement. But in practice, the outcomes are rarely this simple. Let's take a look at this chart and consider the first scenario: a Rebel Victory. One possibility is that a single resistance group achieves complete victory and control over the entire country. However, given Myanmar's historical and current circumstances, we assess this outcome as highly unlikely. A second possibility is that an alliance front of resistance groups could prevail together. For those strongly opposed to the dictatorship, this would be regarded as the most desirable outcome. But we view it more as a fascination than a reality in Myanmar's context. Practically speaking, such a victory is very difficult to achieve. The third scenario is a failed state or state collapse, where the state disintegrates entirely and rebel forces prevail by default. As long as the junta keeps receiving support from powerful states, like China, India, and Russia, we assess that this outcome too remains unlikely, as Htet Shein noted. We have seen such cases in countries like Syria and Yemen.

● How Armed Conflicts Usually End?

ISP-DM2025-171

Multi-party civil wars tend to end in one of three ways: a rebel victory, an incumbent victory, or a negotiated settlement. The first two are decided on the battlefield; the third at the negotiating table. Settlements may take either a military nature or a political nature. Which model prevails depends on the actors involved, the issues at stake, and the political tide.

- 1 A single armed group achieves decisive military victory.
- 2 Alliance front of resistance groups secures victory.
- 3 Military victory emerges amid state collapse and institutional breakdown.

Model (1)
**Rebel
Victory**

Model (3)
**Negotiated
Settlement**

Model (2)
**Incumbent
Victory**

- 1 The incumbent defeats all resistance forces.
- 2 The regime wins sequentially against fragmented resistance groups.
- 3 Resistance collapses, leading to swift and uncontested incumbent victory.

- 1 A comprehensive peace process outcome.
- 2 Bilateral negotiations.
 - Ceasefire negotiation (military negotiation)
 - Power-sharing arrangement (administrative or political negotiation)

But we must note that Myanmar's military and political conditions are quite different from those countries. We also assess that the second scenario, an outright military victory by the junta, is also highly unlikely in Myanmar. And the possibility of completely defeating each armed group individually also appears very unlikely, considering the prolonged conflict. Finally, scenarios where some groups collapse or merge into others are also difficult to foresee in Myanmar's context. So, looking at the research data overall, a decisive victory by the ruling junta appears very unlikely in Myanmar.

Last but not least, let's consider the third type of outcome: a negotiated settlement. In Myanmar, this phrase itself has often carried a sense of political red line. Such a process can take many different forms, depending on the context, actors, background conditions, and balance of power. Scholars often classify these into several sub-categories. But we'll simply explain it in just two broad types. The first is a comprehensive peace agreement, leading to political settlements and security sector reforms. For the nation, that'd be like hitting a jackpot, but realistically speaking, it's easier said than done. The long but failed NCA (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement) is a cautionary example. Especially in a country like Myanmar, with such a long history of armed conflict, with numerous armed groups and differing political positions,

and with diverse ethnic and political grievances, we assess that such a comprehensive peace process would be very challenging. The second type tries to resolve issues group by group. It can differ depending on whether they focus on merely military, political, or administrative arrangements.

For example, some ceasefires may only be temporary without addressing any politics. This was the pattern seen with the KIA before 2010. Sometimes a ceasefire was apolitical and tied to business deals under 'regional development.' It's just like former Gen. Khin Nyunt's model: "surrender the path of armed struggle and return to the legal fold". But such arrangements really just favor the junta. Groups that accept the deal become the Border Guard Forces (BGF), as seen in Myanmar. Another type is granting significant administrative authority. This is done in Myanmar through the framework of Self-Administered Zones. Internationally, some cases went further, granting both administrative powers and partial federal arrangements. We can see certain arrangements in Aceh, Indonesia, or in Nepal, for example. Such models were also studied by different groups during the NCA process. But they were never practiced. In summary, it is hard for Myanmar to imagine only one model or single formula succeeding. With that, I'll hand over to Naing Min Khant for the next part.



Naing Min Khant

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist

In this final section, I would like to discuss my assessment of the most likely outcome for our country. But before that, let's reflect on some of our country's basic historical patterns. Looking back through history at times of popular uprising, the people always took part fully, pushing and resisting together. In elections, they voted in

overwhelming numbers for landslide victories. In the armed revolution, too, they gave support from all sides. Across generations, we can say that people have fulfilled their responsibility. Even when mistakes or setbacks occurred, people did not harshly blame their leaders. Instead, they understood and forgave them. Yet throughout history, leaders often rode the wave of public support but failed to translate it into meaningful political gains for the people. Rarely did they transform it into true political progress. Now, as Htet Shein explained earlier, Myanmar's armed resistance has reached its strongest state when compared to the past movements. Even neighboring countries and the international community acknowledge that the Myanmar Armed Forces now face unprecedented pressure. However, this success must be translated into tangible political outcomes. In other words, military achievements must be capitalized into political gains. Basically, these victories need to become institutionalized gains.

But, as Khin Khin discussed earlier, if we look back at Myanmar's history, most disputes were settled through formal documents, agreements, and treaties. Yet, when we examine the outcomes, expectations, and results, they rarely match. They rarely succeeded. From the Panglong Agreement to the NCA, we are still

► far from a concrete solution. Most peace processes relied on informal talks, based solely on trust, understanding, and fragile power-sharing arrangements. But if we look at them constructively, we can see that foreign countries did not step in to impose their own solutions. Myanmar resolved its domestic issues through its own ways and means. However, the situation has shifted significantly. Today, Myanmar's conflict actors are unable to solve problems on their own. That is why China has stepped in, pushing for solutions that suit its own interests. That's just a bitter reality to resist. If the conflict actors in Myanmar fail to grasp this reality, it will be like sleepwalking, not knowing where they are headed, only to wake up and find themselves being used at the will of a great power. That would be a grave danger.

Currently, all sides are striving to maximize their own interests. The SSPC, formerly known as SAC, has used military, political, and diplomatic means to secure what it wants. The resistance has also committed all its resources to shaping the desired conditions. But for a real political breakthrough, the current military gains must be used like a political tool to create a tangible, institutionalized political shift. Therefore, it is important and pragmatic to turn these military gains

into an institutionalized political shift. And when we speak of political shifts or outcomes, multiple interpretations and approaches can be applied. Looking at Myanmar, a sudden, overnight change is unlikely. It is a situation where we must build and change incrementally. And this gradual path is the more realistic possibility. However, if we fail to create such conditions, the people will continue to struggle with hardship. I'd like to conclude the initial part of our discussion with this remark.



Su Lin Han

Emerging Researcher
Communications Department
Host

Thank you, our panelists,
for your presentations. We'll now
move on to the Q&A session.
We've gathered some questions
in advance from our Gabyin members.
We've combined them into two
questions to discuss today.
Here's the first question:

Between 2010 and 2020,
efforts were made to push
for a political reform. But
when the regime seized power
again, all progress collapsed.
So, how can we ever trust
a regime that keeps destroying
what has been achieved?



Htet Shein

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist

That's right. If we look at history, it's understandable to say that the regime's political intentions cannot be trusted. In times of intense conflict, mistrust between both sides is natural. And this isn't unique to Myanmar—any civil war, anywhere in the world, shows the same pattern. That's why, when it comes to negotiations, we often see powerful

countries or international organizations step in as mediators. However, there's a perception that the side initiating talks does so from a position of weakness. So, as I mentioned earlier, transforming military results into political outcomes is just one of the methods. It's not the sole path, and it's certainly not the final destination. In negotiations, the stronger side typically holds more influence and bargaining power. This is exactly why it is important to realize how the already achieved military gains can be strategically used as bargaining power in producing political outcomes. And for that, what matters is how strategically we prepare and plan in advance.



Su Lin Han

Emerging Researcher
Communications Department
Host

Thank you for the insight, Htet Shein.
I'd like to continue with the second
question:

What role do neighboring
countries play as conflicts
move toward political resolution?



Khin Khin

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist

According to research, neighboring countries want Myanmar's conflicts to de-escalate. However, many view de-escalation solely through economic incentives. For example, in northern Shan State, the junta has launched offensives. These offensives occur along trade routes, which favors China. Similarly, in Karen State, if offensives target the

Asian Highway, which is an economic incentive for Thailand. So, in our assessment, in places like Chin State or Rakhine State, the junta is likely to link its offensives to neighboring countries' trade routes and conduct operations accordingly. Thank you.



Su Lin Han

Emerging Researcher
Communications Department
Host

Thank you for your response, Khin Khin. Now, we'll take one question and one comment from our participants. We'll turn on the mic for our Gabyin member. Please go ahead with your question or comment.

As the earlier speakers have discussed, relying only on the military path has brought us no solution, even after over 70 years. We have not seen clear success on one side, nor outright victory on the other. So if the military path alone is not the answer, what would be the strategic way forward? I'd like your thoughts on this.



Htet Shein

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist

Given the time limit, I'd like to provide a brief answer based on our study.

It's true, when we look back at Myanmar's history, we see nearly 80 years of civil war. The struggle has been fought militarily, but no solution has yet emerged. As we discussed earlier, political outcomes are crucial. Whether it is military action,

political action, or public pressure, it is not a matter of using one method alone or switching completely to another. These methods must rather be used strategically, by deciding when and to what extent each should be applied. That's the key point I'd like to emphasize. It does not mean we should abandon armed struggle altogether.

To resolve our problems, we must consider which tools and which methods to use. Our toolbox should carry both hammers and saws. If we only hold a hammer and try to hit everything, nails or wood, it won't solve the whole problem. We need to know when to use the hammer for nails and when to use the saw for wood. Based on the right timing, actors and contexts involved, we need to coordinate multiple approaches. This is because Myanmar's conflict involves numerous actors with diverse objectives. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to achieve a single result through a single path. That is as much as I can answer within the available time. Thank you.



Su Lin Han

Emerging Researcher
Communications Department
Host

Thank you, Htet Shein, for sharing your thoughts. Now, I'd like to open the floor for comments. Participants, you're welcome to share your views on today's discussion. We'd love to hear from you. I see one participant with their hand raised. Please go ahead and share your comment on today's session.

My question is about what Naing Min Khant mentioned, "the need to turn military gains into an institutionalized political shift." What exactly does that mean? What kind of model or structure do we call something 'institutionalized'? If you could give a definition and explain its process, that would be even better.



Naing Min Khant

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist

When we talk about institutionalized results, it's really about how to weaponize the military achievements to secure a political solution. As I mentioned earlier, the SAC, or the SSPC, is also making efforts, in its own way, to shape the results it wants. Right now, they're emphasizing the election. On the resistance side, progress is seen both in military

victories and in political dialogue and coordination. There are also military successes on this side. Meanwhile, the SAC is pushing its own election agendas and seeking to secure the outcomes it desires. The resistance must figure out how to leverage and translate their military gains against this. As Htet Shein also discussed earlier, there are many sides to this conflict. There will be different events and different timings. It depends on which strategies are used accordingly. And what I urged for here is to transmit a political shift through these strategies.



Su Lin Han

Emerging Researcher
Communications Department
Host

Thank you for your thoughts, Naing Min Khant. Due to time limitations, we'll conclude our Q&A session here. Before we end, I'd like to ask our panelists—do you have any final points to add on to today's discussion?



Htet Shein

Emerging Researcher
Conflict, Peace, and Security Studies
Panelist

Alright, I will pull out three key points from what we've discussed today to wrap it up. First, as we've already discussed, translating military successes into an institutionalized political shift is crucial. If we fail to do that, those military results may only make political settlement harder for all in the long run. Second, if we really want to move toward



► the political results we're aiming for, we need to use a range of tools and approaches, timed and adapted to the situation. That can mean military pressure, popular pressure, international pressure, and so on. These are methods, not end goals, not the final destination; they're simply means along the way. If we wrongly interpreted these means as end goals, it would be like reading a map upside down and hunting for the treasure. Third, we must always ask whether the methods we're using are truly leading us to the political outcome we want. Are they actually bringing us closer to that goal? We need to constantly reflect on this. If not, the military gains and successes we achieve might end up wasted—spent without ever turning into political results. And with that thought, I'd like to conclude today's discussion.



Su Lin Han

Emerging Researcher
Communications Department
Host

Thanks for the insight, Htet Shein. For additional research, you can visit our website at www.ispmyanmar.com or our social media platforms. I'd like to conclude today's program by expressing gratitude to all of you for being here.



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