RAKHINE STATE AND SOUTHERN CHIN STATE SCENARIO PLAN

Community Analysis Support System

9 April 2020
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This Scenario Plan considers possible developments in Rakhine State and southern Chin State up to November 2020. It is based upon informal consultations with international and national humanitarian responders working in Rakhine State. Recognising the limitations of forecasting scenarios in an election year while facing an unprecedented global health crisis, this scenario plan should be taken as indicative.

Armed conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar military (or Tatmadaw) escalated in late 2018 and has continued at high intensity since. The conflict in Rakhine State is the greatest military challenge faced by the Tatmadaw in at least a decade, and one of the greatest political challenges faced by Aung San Suu Kyi’s civilian government since they took power in 2015. The armed conflict presents a challenge to the peace process that her government has framed as one of its key priorities.

The conflict to date has had a mammoth impact on civilians. According to the Rakhine State government, 60,703 civilians are currently displaced by fighting in Rakhine State. Tracking of open sources shows that in 2020 to date, 66 civilians were killed by landmines, IEDs, unexploded ordnance, shelling or crossfire, while another 267 were injured. Rohingya civilians face particular vulnerabilities, as they continue to face restrictions on movement, and little access to healthcare. A government-imposed internet blackout has limited communities’ access to information about conflict dynamics, service availability and healthcare since June 2019 – a development particularly concerning in the context of the spread of COVID-19 and its unknown impacts.

The scenario deemed most likely in this paper carries a high humanitarian impact. Under the most-likely scenario, armed conflict in Rakhine State and southern Chin State expands in intensity and geographic scope. There is also the risk of this conflict fragmenting if another armed ethnic group challenges the AA or Tatmadaw in these geographic regions. Displacement is likely to increase, along with abuses of all civilians. The AA will likely expand its influence and administrative reach into villages. Food insecurity can be expected to continue into the long-term. Humanitarian responders will face Do No Harm considerations if approached by government officials to support displaced populations sheltering in government-constructed sites. Meanwhile, government issued travel authorisations for humanitarian responders will likely become further restricted, while national responders will maintain greater ability to access communities through both official and unofficial paths. The impact of COVID-19 and attempts to halt its spread are not yet fully understood. However, considerations on the likely impact of that virus for Myanmar and the response in Rakhine have been included in this plan to the fullest extent possible.
Two issues will inform the trajectory of the Rakhine State crisis into 2020: the continuation of armed conflict between the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and the Arakan Army (AA), and nation-wide elections expected for November this year. These issues are intimately intertwined. The ways in which the AA, the Tatmadaw and the civilian government approach the elections will set the trajectory for the Rakhine conflict, its impact on populations, and the humanitarian response.

This is not a conflict with a well-defined front line. The AA practices guerrilla warfare: striking security forces then disappearing into villages or the jungle. The AA seeks the support of the local population and thereby the ability to freely move in rural areas. On the other hand, the trend since late 2018 to date has been the diminishing capacity of the Tatmadaw and civilian government to access rural areas and accompanying reliance on airpower to strike the AA – a tactic with dire consequences for civilians. Elements of this conflict are also very modern, including the important role of information and disinformation. Finally, legal frameworks remain significant. On 23 March Myanmar’s Anti-Terrorist Central Committee designated the AA as a ‘Terrorist Organisation’ under the 2014 Counter-Terror law. Previous to this, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) was the only group designated under the law, reflecting attempts by the civilian and military authorities to discredit the AA in the eyes of the Myanmar public, and control the conflict narrative.

Nationwide general elections are expected for November 2020, although no date has been officially announced. Many observers and communities on the ground in Rakhine State, however, expect polls to be cancelled in many areas of Rakhine State following precedents set in 2010 and 2015, when polls were cancelled in several townships or village tract administrative units due to security concerns.

The World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a ‘pandemic’ on 11 March 2020. On 23 March, the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Myanmar. The full impact of the virus for Myanmar – and for the humanitarian response in Myanmar – remains unclear, but will certainly be substantial. As such, despite the escalation in conflict and apparent political gridlock, the need for information sharing and coordination (if not collaboration) has never been greater. The response of authorities to the crisis will have repercussions beyond the immediate impact of the virus on Myanmar’s population and its underdeveloped health system. At the present time, the government faces two stark choices: a) to lock down the country, disproportionately affecting Myanmar’s urban and rural poor who rely on daily wages, and thereby face a severe economic, and potentially political, shock; or b) to take some preventative measures, but avoid a complete lockdown and accept a higher infection and death rate.

[1] Formed under the tutelage of the Kachin Independence Army near the Chinese border in 2009, the AA established itself as a well-trained and well-equipped force by 2014. The group and its followers cite grievances including the historical and contemporary neglect of Rakhine State by the central government and the suppression of ethnic Rakhine voices in electoral politics. Publicly led by a set of charismatic young men, the AA also justifies its claims with narratives of Arakan’s historical independence from the Myanmar state. As such, the AA began to advance militarily in southern Chin State in 2015. The conflict has been intensifying since 2015, with a rapid escalation in hostilities beginning in November and December 2018.

[2] The year is also central to the AA’s ‘2020 Arakan Dream’ rhetoric.

[3] Despite being officially banned from Facebook, the AA have a sophisticated online presence. They are as effective in highlighting Tatmadaw abuses as they are in online recruitment. Similarly, the Tatmadaw and civilian authorities have hit back with their own information campaign, characterising the AA as ‘terrorists’ and charging alleged supporters under Myanmar’s Counter-Terror Act. For a deeper consideration of these dynamics, see CASS paper Arakan Onslaught: The Escalation of Armed Conflict in Rakhine State.

[4] This has been the path followed by the Myanmar government to date. Cinema and other places are closed, and the government has provided guidance on avoiding crowds and other non-pharmaceutical approaches to prevention.
Security Incidents in Rakhine State and Southern Chin State in 2019 and 2020 (as of 25 March)

Legend

2019 2020

● AA-Tatmadaw Armed Clashes

★ Civilian Casualties from Landmine, IEDs, Shelling or Crossfire

‡ Other/ Unconfirmed Security Incident

Town
Main Road
Township Boundary

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The Rakhine State Government reports that as of 16 March there are 60,703 persons currently displaced by armed conflict in Rakhine State. Humanitarian responders in Chin State report another 1,823 others displaced in southern Chin State. Rakhine Ethnics Congress, a Sittwe-based civil society organisation, reports that a total of 60,844 conflict-affected people are currently in displacement sites across Rakhine State, and that another 96,447 conflict-affected civilians remain outside of displacement sites.

Armed conflict has had an immense impact on agriculture and livelihoods in Rakhine State, and acute food needs can be expected to continue for years after any peace settlement. A significant decrease in rice yields was noted across Rakhine State, and particularly in its northern and central townships in 2019-2020, largely attributable to inaccessibility of fields for both planting and harvest. The shortfall will mean farmers will face capital constraints to planting next seasons' crops, and the financial difficulties will also be felt elsewhere. School attendance rates can be expected to fall as families struggle to pay fees. Compounding these difficulties, the presence of landmines, IEDs or unexploded ordnance in and around villages means that many communities are unable to return home, and displacement can be expected to be long term. The presence of armed groups inevitably results in a range of human rights abuses and protection concerns: forced portoring, abductions, mass arrests or detentions, sexual violence and extortion.

Civilian casualties in Rakhine and southern Chin states have been high, but escalated especially in 2020. By 24 March 2020, some 66 civilians were killed by landmines, IEDs, unexploded ordnance, shelling or crossfire, while another 270 were injured. A rapid increase in the use of landmines, previously rare in Rakhine State, means many communities are unable to return home, and displacement can be expected to be long term. The presence of armed groups inevitably results in a range of human rights abuses and protection concerns: forced portoring, abductions, mass arrests or detentions, sexual violence and extortion.

Rohingya communities are extremely vulnerable. Facing discrimination and harsh restrictions on movement and access to healthcare, education and livelihoods, they are unable to flee sites of active conflict. Of the 336 civilian casualties documented by CASS in 2020 up to 24 March, 86 have been Rohingya.

While there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Rakhine State or southern Chin State at the time of writing, Myanmar continues to confirm more cases in different states and regions following first confirmation of the presence of the virus on 23 March. Many of the 23,000 migrant workers who returned from Thailand in late March will return to villages in Rakhine State, risking the transfer of the virus to conflict-affected areas. An outbreak would have a huge humanitarian impact on both displaced and non-displaced communities in Rakhine State.

Beyond agriculture, tourism has in recent years created work opportunities in the service industry. However, both domestic and international tourism to the ancient city of Mrauk U in central Rakhine State has disappeared almost completely. The future of these sites is further threatened by the continual damage done by stray shells and bullets, some of which are fired above temples sheltering IDPs. In Mrauk U, IDPs have settled on land previously designated for a new airport, designed to boost a now dead tourism industry.

## Table 1: Current displacement figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>No. Displaced (RSG)</th>
<th>No. Displaced (REC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ponnagyun</td>
<td>1779</td>
<td>1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyauktaw</td>
<td>4188</td>
<td>11584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrauk U</td>
<td>16089</td>
<td>16415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minbya</td>
<td>4024</td>
<td>4111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauktaw</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sittwe</td>
<td>1641</td>
<td>3454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myebon</td>
<td>3914</td>
<td>4742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rathedaung</td>
<td>15061</td>
<td>8732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buthidaung</td>
<td>13064</td>
<td>8606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maungdaw</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paletwa(^2)</td>
<td>3671</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[5\] Based on numbers provided by the Rakhine State Government dated 16 March 2020.  
\[6\] Based on numbers provided by Rakhine Ethnics Congress dated 1 April.  
\[7\] Paletwa figures are not counted by the Rakhine State Government or REC, but reported by humanitarian organisations.

\[8\] In early April the Tatmadaw True News Team spokesperson Brigadier General Saw Min Tun reportedly said that calls for a ceasefire to tackle COVID-19 were ‘not realistic’. https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tatmadaw-rejects-call-ceasefire-during-pandemic.html
Population Displacement in Rakhine State and Southern Chin State (as of 17 March 2020)

Legend

Township name
No of displaced sites
Displaced population

Size of displaced population
Largest
Smallest

Source: Rakhine State Government and Partner Organizations

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Scenarios

The following section details the three most likely scenarios to occur in Rakhine State leading up to nationwide elections expected in November 2020. This scenario plan comes with the disclaimer that the Rakhine State crisis represents a complex set of rapidly evolving variables. The unpredictability of the 2020 elections make planning in this year particularly difficult. Additionally, the World Health Organisation’s declaration of the COVID-19 virus as a ‘pandemic’ and the spread of the virus across the world makes scenario planning all the more challenging.

This scenario plan is built upon informal consultations with observers, and national and international humanitarian workers in Yangon, Rakhine State, Bangladesh and elsewhere, and with the writers’ combined 20 years of experience with Rakhine State and other humanitarian emergencies. This scenario plan is designed to assist humanitarian responders to forecast and plan for potential future impacts to existing programmes and to plan for future interventions.

It is important to note that these scenarios do not exist in isolation; indeed, elements of different scenarios are likely to occur in tandem with elements of others. For each scenario below, the general trajectory of events is followed by a description of well-informed assumptions. Scenarios are further informed by practical analysis based on the current context in Rakhine State, key actor incentives and disincentives, and lessons from Myanmar’s other internal conflicts. Each scenario is accompanied by a set of indicators which signal that the scenario is increasingly likely to take place. Importantly, the humanitarian impact relevant to each scenario is also assessed.

**LIKELIHOOD, IMPACT**

The likelihood of scenarios is judged through a series of consultations with analysts, response actors and other observers who have a deep familiarity with the context. Impact is calculated by considering the likely ramifications for populations including displacement, human rights abuses, and impact to livelihoods, and the impact to the humanitarian response, including on existing capacity, resource availability and access of responders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Impact*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Low (1)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The chance of this scenario occurring before November is remote.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligible (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are a small number of people affected by disaster. Emergency responders’ face no difficulties in responding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low (2)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the absence of a major shift in national or geopolitical dynamics, this scenario is unlikely before November.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency responders’ are able to support vulnerable populations to a large extent. There are few adverse impacts on the response.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate (3)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a viable chance that this scenario will occur before November.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency responders’ capabilities are partially sufficient to respond to affected populations. Responders face challenges to serving populations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High (4)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under current conditions, there is a significant chance that this scenario will occur before November.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency responders’ are unprepared to respond to an emergency on this scale. The scenario results in additional barriers to a response.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very High (5)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the absence of major contextual changes, this scenario has a very high chance of occurring before November.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency responders’ capabilities are highly insufficient to deal with the scenario. Responders face significant barriers to providing support to affected populations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘Emergency responders’ refers to government, UN agencies, NGOs and host communities.

[9] Indicators will continue to be tracked in the CASS Weekly Update, accessible from http://cass-mm.org.
Scenario 1: Escalation, Potential Fragmentation of Conflict

LIKELIHOOD: 4/5   IMPACT: 3/5

In this scenario, the AA continues to posture as if seeking a dialogue with the Tatmadaw and civilian government for a bilateral settlement, to allow polls to take place, to contain COVID-19 or for other stated motivations. The Tatmadaw rejects this advance. The scale and geographic scope of conflict widen and fighting continues through the rainy season, if slightly reduced in intensity.

The AA escalates attacks on Tatmadaw positions and movements. There is an increase in abductions and targeted killings of security forces, and administrators and civilians deemed a threat. The nature of strikes on the Tatmadaw are likely to be similar to attacks to date: ‘hit and run attacks’ on the Tatmadaw while maintaining efforts to set up a base on the Paletwa-Buthidaung-Kyauktaw-Bangladesh border. The Tatmadaw refrain as much as possible from travelling through destabilized rural areas, instead opting to shell suspected AA locations from land, air and naval positions.

As the AA seeks to consolidate their control of administrative areas in Paletwa Township and rural central and northern Rakhine State, they increasingly strike the Tatmadaw in urban areas, including Kyauktaw, Mrauk U and perhaps even the state capital Sittwe.

The AA simultaneously steps up attacks on the Tatmadaw in southern townships of Rakhine State, including Ramree, Kyaukphyu and Taungup. The modality is IED attacks on Tatmadaw movements and raids on police stations. Tatmadaw strikes back at the AA in southern Rakhine with the usual modality of airstrikes. The Tatmadaw continues its ‘four cuts’ strategy against the AA, attempting to cut the AA’s supply of information and food by forcing displacement of villagers deemed sympathetic to insurgents.

The conflict in southern Chin State’s Paletwa Township may fragment as an armed group claiming to represent Chin communities mobilises to confront the AA. This group may ally, at least temporarily, with the Tatmadaw. Heavy fighting continues in Paletwa where the AA is increasingly distrusted by villagers. Regardless, the AA maintains a strong presence in the hilly border regions.

Arrests of ethnic Rakhine people accused of association with the AA increase, with prosecutions under the Unlawful Associations Act and Counter-Terror Act. This, along with the Tatmadaw and Union civilian government’s refusal to talk with the AA, prompt a further deterioration in relations between the Rakhine State parliament (dominated by Arakan National Party MPs) and both the NLD-led Union government and Rakhine State government (led by NLD MP U Nyi Pu).

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) may seek to capitalise on the Tatmadaw’s preoccupation with the AA to strike Myanmar security forces – whether Tatmadaw or Border Guard Police. However, ARSA is likely to continue to face resource challenges and is unlikely to be able to execute sophisticated attacks. Any successful, large-scale, attack by the ARSA on Myanmar security forces resulting in a significant loss of life would likely prompt a Tatmadaw reprisal attack on Rohingya civilians in Maungdaw. This would involve mass arrests and other human rights violations, especially in villages suspected of hosting ARSA fighters. However, the reaction would unlikely be on the scale of the 2017 violence against Rohingya communities due to the international backlash and international accountability mechanisms which followed the 2016 and 2017 violence, as well as the lowered threat perception given the mass exodus of Rohingya at that time.

Meanwhile, confirmation of COVID-19 cases in conflict-affected areas emerge. Cases, and deaths, may not interact with Myanmar’s healthcare system, particularly in rural areas. The full extent of the virus’ presence remains unknown, doing little to encourage the belligerents to talk.

Elections are held in urban Sittwe, areas of rural Sittwe Township, but are not held in rural areas of central and northern Rakhine State or many areas of Paletwa Township. Polls are held...
Forecasted Trajectory of Rakhine Conflict 2020

Legend

- Forecasted conflict trajectory 2020
- 2019-2020 Conflict hotspots
  - 2019-2020 Armed Conflicts/ Security Incidents
- Township Boundary
- Town
- Main Road

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in some urban areas (township capital towns) outside of Sittwe, but others remain beyond the control of Naypyidaw and polls are cancelled. Rakhine ethnonationalism, already at a high level, may be mobilised in a movement to boycott elections. However, on election day a turnout remains likely, as Rakhine political parties and the voting public recognise that a boycott will allow non-Rakhine parties to take a greater share of seats in parliament.

ASSUMPTIONS

- **Military solution prioritised**: Both the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Tatmadaw see security operations against the AA as a greater priority than holding elections. In the absence of a bilateral settlement, the Tatmadaw will be unable to provide security for polls. Regardless, both the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party and the NLD stand to win few seats in central or northern Rakhine State, where the Arakan National Party holds sway. There is a medium chance that the NLD will have to form a coalition government in Naypyidaw after losing their majority. As such, the non-election of the Arakan National Party will work in their advantage.

- **No trust between AA and Tatmadaw**: Negotiating positions between the Myanmar Tatmadaw and AA remain widely divergent. The AA seeks to establish a headquarters in Rakhine State and needs at least implicit Tatmadaw approval for this. The Tatmadaw, meanwhile, has demanded the AA return to where it was formed near Laiza, the Kachin Independence Organisation’s headquarters in northern Myanmar.[13] The low levels of trust between the AA and Tatmadaw mean that the Tatmadaw are unable to accept the AA’s stated interest in a ceasefire. The AA’s interest (or lack of) in elections is likely irrelevant, as the Tatmadaw is unable to accept the AA’s approaches regardless.

- **No effective Chinese intervention**: China does not, or cannot, pressure the AA or Tatmadaw into a settlement to hold elections or for a response to COVID-19. China does not have the ability to wield full influence over the AA (or its Northern Alliance allies).[14] Furthermore, China sees elections as more of a destabilizing force than a stabilizing one.

- **The AA seeks to settle in Paletwa**: The AA seeks to capture the strategic remote tri-border area of Paletwa Township, southern Chin State, as its base for operations. The border provides an essential sanctuary and a potential supply line for the AA. The Tatmadaw continues to see this as unacceptable and wages heavy strikes on the AA there. To date, Bangladeshi security forces have shown little interest in pushing the AA away from its remote, hilly, borderlands. Beyond November, the AA’s ability to establish a base in Paletwa will be a key factor in defining the future of the conflict. This development will be intertwined with Myanmar-Bangladesh relations and will have implications for the future of the Rohingya in both Bangladesh and Myanmar.

- **Corona impact limited**: The impact of the COVID-19 virus and containment efforts does not impact the AA or the Tatmadaw’s operations significantly.[15] International pressure for a ceasefire to contain the virus is seen by the Tatmadaw as opening a window for the AA to expand its influence, and is therefore deemed unacceptable.

INDICATORS

- **Little to no dialogue**: There are very few, if any, meetings between the AA, Tatmadaw and government negotiators. The Tatmadaw holds to its demand that the AA return to Laiza, and the AA similarly continues its combative rhetoric, showing reluctance to shift its own negotiating position.

- **Militarisation of urban areas**: The Tatmadaw sets up more camps in urban areas, including Sittwe.

- **Security incidents increase in southern Rakhine**: IED attacks on Tatmadaw vehicles, and armed clashes gain frequency in southern Rakhine Townships such as Kyaukphyu, Ramree and Taungup.

- **Signs of mobilisation in Chin State**: The mobilisation of a novel ethnic armed group in southern Chin State may be indicated by the discovery of training camps, reports of clashes between the AA and unknown groups, or the continuation of rumours from southern Chin State of recruitment and training.

- **Rumours of escalation in Sittwe**: Rumours of increased troop deployment into Sittwe Township will reflect expectations among communities of the imminent approach of security incidents.

- **Increased security in urban areas**: The deployment of troops in or around Sittwe or other urban areas will indicate Tatmadaw expectations of escalation.

- **No ineffectual Chinese Approach**: China does not approach either the Tatmadaw or AA to urge a cease in hostilities, or an approach is ineffective.

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[13] In retaliation, AA supporters online refer to the Tatmadaw by the name of its predecessor, the ‘Burma Independence Army’, and suggest the Tatmadaw should return to Bangkok, where it was formed in the pre-independence period.


[15] In the 2019 rainy season, a severe seasonal flu was reportedly spread widely among AA troops, suggesting some precedent while recognising that COVID-19 is a much more serious illness. As the AA take more of an administrative role in rural areas, their attempts to contain or prevent the virus should be monitored.
- **No UEC access by August.** If the Union Election Commission is unable to access any areas to post voter lists by late August, it can be assumed that elections will be cancelled in those village tracts/wards. In this case, there is little incentive for either the Tatmadaw or AA to reduce the intensity of clashes before November.\(^\text{17}\)

### HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

- **Medium to large scale displacement:** Communities will continue to be displaced in conflict hotspots: Mrauk U, Minbya, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Rathedaung and Buthidaung. In the southern Rakhine Townships of Ramree, Kyaukphyu and Taungup, new displacement to sites near the main road or urban centres can be expected. An increase in displacement within Sittwe Township is likely, with most displaced persons gravitating towards the relative calm and resources of the urban centre. However, the presence of large IDP sites there will be viewed with suspicion by the government, who increase security in urban Sittwe and patrol IDP sites. Displaced and non-displaced families with financial means increasingly migrate to Yangon or other places in central Myanmar.

### Table 4: Forecasted Additional Displacement (Scenario 1)\(^\text{18}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Displaced From (Township)</th>
<th>No. Displaced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ponnagyun</td>
<td>5,000 to 7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyauktaw</td>
<td>5,000 to 7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrauk U</td>
<td>4,000 to 5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minbya</td>
<td>4,000 to 5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sittwe</td>
<td>1,000 to 1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myebon</td>
<td>2,000 to 3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>4,000 to 6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taungup</td>
<td>1,000 to 2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rathedaung</td>
<td>5,000 to 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buthidaung</td>
<td>3,000 to 4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maungdaw</td>
<td>500 to 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paletwa</td>
<td>3,000 to 5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>37,500 to 56,500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Displaced persons shelter in government-constructed sites:** The sheer number of people displaced means that some will shelter in government-constructed displacement sites: locations where displaced persons have for the most part refrained from sheltering to date. If humanitarian agencies are asked by authorities to support communities in the new sites, there are a number of considerations. In a context characterised by fears of the instrumentalisation of aid, armed conflict in Rakhine State revolves around actors’ ability to control or draw support from civilians. Humanitarian support in these sites may serve as a pull-factor. Agencies should take reasonable measures to ensure that their response is not used to support either side of the conflict. Housing, land and property considerations should also be taken into account. There is little clarity on land ownership for many of these sites, and some reports that one site in Kyauktaw is situated on land where Rohingya previously resided before displacement in 2012. While there are parallels with issues encountered by humanitarian agencies operating in the 2012-established camps in central Rakhine State, there are also important distinctions. The majority of those displaced by armed conflict are not Rohingya, and the nature of displacement and government policy is different from the 2012 response, particularly in terms of freedom of movement for displaced people.

- **Protection risks rise for all civilians:** The AA consolidates control of rural areas that the Tatmadaw is unable to access. Local AA commanders will begin to collect taxes and set up interests in the legal and illegal economy, generating corruption and duplicating the taxes paid by civilians. Following the precedent of other ethnic armed organisations in Myanmar, the AA will continue to engage in drug-control activities directed towards drug users/abusers and administer punishments for those deemed guilty of trafficking or taking illicit drugs.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{16}\) There are two mechanisms for the cancellation of polls. First, for polls to take place in a given administrative unit (down to the village tract/ward level) the Union Election Commission (UEC) must be able to access the area before the election to post voter lists, twice. There are approximately 5 million new voters in the 2020 election who must be accurately enrolled to vote. Residents of that village tract/ward must be able to access the area before the election. If the UEC cannot access an area for any reason, polls will not be held in that village tract/ward. The second mechanism is a military one. If the Tatmadaw deems polls cannot be held in any administrative area, they alert the UEC who cancels polls in those areas under Section 10F of the UEC law. In previous elections, notification has occurred just weeks before the election date. In 2015, the UEC announced cancellations up to 27 October. In total, polls were cancelled in seven townships of Shan State, and some 450 additional village tracts in Bago, Kachin, Karen, Mon and Shan states. By-elections were subsequently held in 2017 and 2018 for many of these unelected seats.


\(^{18}\) Figures are indicative. Figures are calculated from General Administration Department population data, historical and current displacement trends and conflict trajectory scenarios; and are subject to constraints on accessing historical and current ‘displacement from’ data and up-to-date population numbers.

\(^{19}\) The AA has posted notices in urban areas warning Rakhine youth against using and dealing drugs, and also detained drug users and dealers for breaching the notice. This fits into a pattern of ethnic armed groups across the country, who for decades have sought to reduce the harm of drugs in their communities through rehabilitation. Conversely, the government has repeatedly accused the Arakan Army of being involved in the drug trade. In 2016, the government made such allegations in state media after police arrested an Arakan Army officer in Yangon who was found with large amounts of drugs and weapons. Similarly, the AA, or actors connected to it, are thought to be related to a campaign to make Rakhine villages alcohol-free.
Rohingya villagers face a high level of uncertainty: Abuses against Rohingya civilians – indeed all civilians – are likely to increase as the AA takes more control of rural areas and commanders become entrenched in local social, political and economic infrastructure. The specific vulnerabilities of the Rohingya mean they suffer a greater impact. Incidence of people smuggling or human trafficking to Yangon and other domestic and international destinations can be expected to increase.

Untraceable COVID-19 spread: The virus spreads among populations in both urban and rural locations, including displacement sites, where communities are particularly vulnerable. The annual hot-season water shortage presents further barriers to prevention. As elsewhere in the world, the elderly and those with existing health issues are disproportionately affected. While many of the cases – and deaths – have little interaction with the government’s health system, those cases which do make it to hospital are likely to completely overburden healthcare facilities in Rakhine and southern Chin State. Humanitarian organisations are best placed to respond through local actors.

Decades-long food insecurity: A decades long impact to agriculture and therefore food security can be expected. Farmers are unable to plant or harvest, fields are inaccessible due to landmines and unexploded ordnance. The economic effects flow on from this: a dramatic reduction in disposable income affects business in all urban and rural areas. Transportation is repeatedly blocked or disrupted on the Yangon-Sittwe mainroad. Prices for all goods in central and northern Rakhine State continue to rise. The unavailability of other goods and the inaccessibility of certain rural areas results in food insecurity and displacement to locations near the main road or urban centres.

Government restricts travel authorisations: Authorities would heavily restrict the abilities of national and international response access affected populations under this scenario, although national actors, and informal actors in particular, would continue to have more pathways to access communities.
Elections are likely in urban areas, and somewhat likely in rural areas.

Legend:
- **Dark Green**: Elections are likely in urban areas, but not rural areas.
- **Light Blue**: Elections are likely in urban areas, and somewhat likely in rural areas.
- **Light Green**: Elections are likely in urban areas, and in rural areas.

**Town**:

- Town

**Township boundary**

Disclaimer: This CASS product is designed for information purposes only. This map may not show all islands of the coastal areas due to scale limitations. Basemap data provided by MIMU and copyrighted to MIMU at http://themimu.info/mimu-terms-and-conditions. CASS cannot guarantee the complete accuracy of the information presented. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official acceptance or endorsement by CASS. For more information, please visit cass-mm.org.
Scenario 2: Negotiated Agreement and Ceasefire

Likelihood: 2/5 Impact: 2/5

In this scenario, the AA, Tatmadaw and civilian government open a dialogue and agree to cease fighting. This may be motivated by a desire to allow polls to take place, or to stop the spread of COVID-19.

If the ceasefire if motivated by elections, any agreement between the belligerents to allow access for the UEC into rural Rakhine State would have to be in place by August at the latest. Fighting stops gradually as discussions take place, and stops to a large extent after an agreement is formed. The AA’s effective control of some rural areas means that elections are only permitted to occur in an approximate 80% of village tracts, as well as all urban areas.

However, there will remain large numbers of AA and Tatmadaw on the ground, together with an increased quantity of landmine and unexploded ordnance. There will remain a risk of small skirmishes leading to larger clashes, which would threaten any agreement.

Assumptions

- Sufficient trust between AA and Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw is willing to enter into a dialogue with the AA, and the two parties can build trust before November. This may be built on a recognised need to combat the spread of COVID-19. However, up to the time of writing there is little indication that a settlement is likely. The Tatmadaw’s rhetoric on ‘terrorism’ and the designation of the AA as a terrorist organisation on 23 March all suggest that even a temporary ceasefire is unlikely.

- AA and Tatmadaw want to see polls. The AA wishes to see ethnic Rakhine parties returned to parliament in 2020. While there is a general disillusionment with electoral politics among Rakhine communities, there is also a recognition that elected representatives have been able to take some issues of concern to media and to the state and national parliaments. The Tatmadaw wishes to see ethnic Rakhine members being returned to the parliament in order to destabilize the NLD government. Yet despite the Tatmadaw’s incentive to allow polls, indications to date suggest that a military solution remains the priority.

- Northern Alliance Inclusion. The Tatmadaw is willing to sign other bilateral agreements with other armed ethnic organisations non-signatory to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The seven-member Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) has said its members will only sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement once the four-members of the Northern Alliance have signed bilateral ceasefires with the government.

While the Tatmadaw will likely attempt to sign ceasefires with individual Northern Alliance members, any bilateral settlement in Rakhine State (for the purpose of facilitating elections, responding to COVID-19 or otherwise) will likely depend on negotiations between authorities and the Northern Alliance or Brotherhood Alliance, not just the AA.

Indicators

- Trust building dialogues. The Tatmadaw and AA/Brotherhood Alliance begin to meet frequently. This remains unlikely, however, given the standstill in other negotiations between government and armed actors due to the COVID-19 crisis.

- China reaches out. China reaches out to meet with the AA/Brotherhood Alliance before August. As clashes momentarily ceased after a high-level meeting with Beijing’s delegate before Xi Jinping’s January visit, China may wish to push for dialogue between the Tatmadaw and Brotherhood Alliance, especially if security incidents threaten Chinese investments.

[20] Armed conflict in Rakhine State threatens the legitimacy of Myanmar’s ongoing Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and broader peace process – launched by the former government in 2011. Despite constituting the greatest present military challenge to the Tatmadaw, the AA remain outside the official peace process, and consume limited time and energy from the process at a time when many ethnic armed organisations are increasingly skeptical of the government’s intentions.


[22] China also desires a greater role in the returns of Rohingya refugees, and has also recently been positioning itself as the only regional hegemon able to contain COVID-19. These factors may encourage a greater intervention in the AA-Tatmadaw conflict.
IMPACT

- **Little new displacement:** New displacement would likely continue up until a negotiated settlement, but would unlikely exceed 10,000 persons. Return of displaced persons to their place of origin could not be expected on a large scale, given the little capital communities have for rebuilding homes or planting fields, and the contamination of rural areas with landmines and unexploded ordnance.

- **Long-term food security concerns:** The ability for farmers to access their fields in rural areas remains low due to landmine contamination. Little relief for communities in terms of livelihoods can be expected. Food insecurity can be expected to continue. Early recovery activities would have to be implemented to recover livelihoods.

- **Some capacity to tackle COVID-19:** A cessation in hostilities allows for the tracing of suspected COVID-19 cases, and greater preventative measures. However, the impact will far exceed the capacity of healthcare facilities in Rakhine and southern Chin states. Authorities will allow greater access for humanitarian responders to access communities vulnerable to the disease. Clean water will be in high demand.

- **Travel permissions open, but remain limited:** The reduced intensity of conflict inspires the government to allow a greater level of access for humanitarian responders. As tensions remain high and armed forces continue to have a heavy presence, national actors are more likely to get permissions for travel than their international counterparts.

- **Relations with non-state actors:** Should the Tatmadaw enter into a negotiated agreement with the AA, the agreement will be interpreted as the Tatmadaw’s recognition that the AA controls areas of territory within Rakhine State or southern Chin State. Simultaneously, any agreement would allow AA troops to have a greater visibility in rural areas under their control, consolidating AA encroachment into administration. National and international humanitarian responders would likely have to enter into discussion with both state and non-state actors to negotiate access.
Scenario 3: Status Quo: Armed Conflict Continues at Current Scale

Likelihood: 3/5  Impact: 2/5

Under this scenario, the intensity and geographic spread of armed conflict remains at approximate current levels through Rakhine State and Paletwa, southern Chin State. This scenario may occur regardless of attempts by either the AA or civilian or military authorities to encourage a cessation in hostilities.

The AA continues to strike Tatmadaw and other Myanmar security forces. Tatmadaw ground forces, aware of their vulnerabilities, remain largely stationary. Following trends of early 2019, the Tatmadaw will continue to use attack helicopters and navy vessels to shell areas near villages, cutting the AA’s access to food and other supplies by forcing villagers to displace.

The AA continues occasional strikes against moving Tatmadaw targets in southern Rakhine State – Kyaukphyu, Ramree and Taungup – but does not attempt to open a new front of conflict there. Instead, the AA attempts to hold influence over its existing areas of semi-control in order to illustrate that the Tatmadaw can do little to force a retreat.

Elections are held in urban areas in most townships, but are cancelled in rural areas of most conflict-affected townships: Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Minbya, Myebon, Ann, Rathedaung and Buthidaung.

Assumptions

- **Corona impact on armed actors limited**: The impact of the COVID-19 virus and containment efforts does not impact the AA or the Tatmadaw’s operations significantly. International pressure for a ceasefire to contain the virus seen by the Tatmadaw as opening a window for the AA to expand its influence, and therefore unacceptable.

- **Little to no dialogue**: There are very few, if any, meetings between the AA, Tatmadaw and government negotiators, and all sides refuse to shift their negotiating position. Authorities continue to label the AA as ‘terrorists’ while the AA highlights abuses and continues to seek a base in Rakhine or southern Chin states.

- **No UEC access by August**: If the UEC are unable to access any areas to post voter lists by late August, it can be assumed that elections will be cancelled in those village tracts/wards. In this case, there is little incentive for either the Tatmadaw or AA to reduce the intensity of clashes before November.

- **No/ineffective Chinese Approach**: China does not approach either the Tatmadaw or AA to urge a cease in hostilities, or an approach is ineffective.

Impact

- **Displacement will continue to rise**: The Tatmadaw continues its ‘four cuts’ strategy against the AA, inciting displacement from rural areas into urban areas or other displacement sites where authorities can control the flow of assistance, information and other resources. In particular, displacement can be expected from northern Kyauktaw township, the borders of Rathedaung and Buthidaung, and inside Paletwa. Those with financial means will continue to leave Rakhine State.
Some displaced people shelter in government-constructed sites: This will occur as detailed above, but to a lesser extent, corresponding to the numbers tabled above. The same Do No Harm considerations for engagement apply.

Rohingya villagers continue to face specific vulnerabilities. Abuses against civilians are likely to increase as the AA takes more control of rural areas. The specific vulnerabilities of the Rohingya mean they suffer a greater impact. Incidence of people smuggling or human trafficking to Yangon and other domestic and international destinations can be expected to continue.

A COVID-19 spread: As in previous scenarios, the spread of COVID-19 appears inevitable. Cases and deaths have limited interaction with the government’s healthcare system, and the displaced and elderly are particularly vulnerable. Humanitarian organisations are best placed to respond through local actors.

Little relief for livelihoods. There will be little return of IDPs to village areas and fields will remain inaccessible. The government and Tatmadaw will continue to pose barriers to the clearance of landmine and other contamination, making return to place of origin impossible for many communities.

### Table 5: Forecasted Additional Displacement (Scenario 3)²³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Displaced From (Township)</th>
<th>No. Displaced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ponnagyun</td>
<td>3,000 to 4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyauktaw</td>
<td>3,000 to 4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maung U</td>
<td>2,500 to 4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minbya</td>
<td>2,000 to 3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sittwe</td>
<td>0 to 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myebon</td>
<td>1,500 to 2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>2,000 to 3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rathedaung</td>
<td>2,000 to 4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buthidaung</td>
<td>2,000 to 4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maungdaw</td>
<td>0 to 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paletwa</td>
<td>1,500 to 3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19,500 to 33,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²³ Figures are indicative. Figures are calculated from General Administration Department population data, historical and current displacement trends and conflict trajectory scenarios; and are subject to constraints on accessing historical and current ‘displacement from’ data and up-to-date population numbers.

### Likelihood Table

Different aspects of the above scenarios may occur. The following table outlines possible mutually non-exclusive developments in Rakhine State, and rates the likelihood and humanitarian impact of each.

### Table 6: Likelihood Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Likelihood (1-5)</th>
<th>Humanitarian Impact (1-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armed Clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw occur in Sittwe Township, in or near the urban area</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective ARSA attack and Tatmadaw reprisal on Rohingya villages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Clashes between the AA and Tatmadaw occur further south, particularly Taungup Township</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return of 200,000 to 400,000 Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 1:
Extraordinary Circumstances: COVID-19 Specific Considerations for Responders

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a ‘pandemic’. On 23 March, the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Myanmar. On 23 March, United Nations’ Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for a ‘global ceasefire’ to protect civilians amid the threat of COVID-19. The same day, the AA was designated as a ‘Terrorist Organisation’ under the 2014 Counter-Terror law, suggesting that negotiation is off the table at least until after elections in November. While the impact of the virus for Myanmar – and for humanitarian response in Myanmar – remains unclear, there are a number of considerations for humanitarian responders.

- **Impact on vulnerable populations:** Communities living in camps and displacement sites are most vulnerable to a) the virus itself and b) the impact of measures put in place to slow the spread of the virus. Communities living in cramped conditions with little access to healthcare would face the most severe impact. Already vulnerable populations may also face further stigmatization or marginalisation, further limiting their access to lifesaving assistance.

- **Supply chain blockages:** The slowing global economy, diminishing travel, trade and connectedness may have an impact on procurement for humanitarian agencies.

- **Travel authorisations and activity restrictions:** In the event of increased detection of the COVID-19 virus, restrictions on movement can be expected. This may affect the issuance of travel authorisations by the Coordination Committee in Sittwe, and the permissions given for particular activities, such as those involving gatherings of crowds.

- **Engagement with Government:** Understanding of the measures that government puts in place to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 will be required. Similarly, humanitarians should advocate that the government continues to allow humanitarian access to vulnerable populations, while also continuing to welcome feedback from the government in regards to how humanitarian actors might best respond to the crisis.

- **Advocacy for ceasefire:** The call by United Nations’ Secretary General Antonio Guterres for a ‘global ceasefire’ to protect civilians should continue to be raised with civilian government and military leaders. As noted several times in this document, in the absence of a major contextual shift current levels of trust between the AA and Tatmadaw indicate that even a temporary ceasefire is unlikely.

- **Disruption to funding streams:** As donor countries allocate funds to alleviate the impact of the virus domestically, there is a risk that funding for overseas humanitarian assistance will be redirected.

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