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## Memo on Effective Control on the Ground in Myanmar

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Myanmar has one of the most complicated conflict landscapes of any country in the world. In all seven ethnic states (Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine and Shan) as well as three regions (Bago, Sagaing and Tanintharyi), long-running armed struggles have continued into the 21st century, with a diversity of ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) controlling military forces and administering territories of varying size. All are seeking greater autonomy for their peoples from the central state. While some forces were largely based in the country's borders, others — such as the Kachin Independence Organisation, Karen Nation Union, Karenni National Progressive Party and United Wa State Party — have established their own systems of governance, including schools, hospitals and legal departments.

During the past decade, 21 of the EAOs were generally considered to be engaged in a peace process initiated by the quasi-civilian government of President Thein Sein government in 2011. But this involved a changing diversity of forces including EAOs that had bilateral ceasefires with the government, not agreed ceasefires with the government or, on occasion, declared unilateral ceasefires. Only 10 EAOs signed a 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, but most of the strongest refused, accusing the Tatmadaw (national armed forces) of manipulating the peace process. As a result, conflict remained uninterrupted in several parts of the country, principally Kachin and Shan States (and later northern Karen State), with new fighting and refugee flight — both Rakhine and Rohingya — breaking out in Rakhine State and southern Chin State. This led to investigations of human rights violations and allegations of war crimes at the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice.

Conflict has reignited across all seven states and three regions, as well as spreading into new territories, since the coup by the State Administration Council (SAC) on 1 February. Conflict-lines are changing, and there has been a substantial formation of new People's Defence Forces (PDFs) opposed to the SAC as well as the mobilization by the Tatmadaw of militia groups to support the SAC. Alignments between the different forces have been changing, but several EAOs have increased their areas of operation or control, especially in Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Rakhine and Shan States. There are, in effect, two rival governments claiming jurisdiction in the country: the SAC and the National Unity Government, established by MPs-elect of the National League for Democracy which won the 2020 general election, together with representatives of other political parties, EAOs and civil society organisations. But, in between, there are other movements and EAOs — such as in Shan State — which are continuing to control their own territory, without declaring support for any side.

Statistical documentation of the conflict landscape is very difficult. In security terms, over half the land area of the country and a majority of the 54 million population are affected by the political breakdown and the contested claims of the different sides. In the meantime, the numbers of refugees (principally in Bangladesh, India and Thailand) and internally-displaced persons (principally in Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Rakhine and Shan States) are estimated to have passed the 1.6 million mark. With Covid-19 spreading, rival authorities claim to be delivering health care to the people, with both the SAC and NUG wanting responsibility and most EAOs, along with local ethnic health organisations, running their own systems.

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