SPECIAL REPORT

NO. 486 | NOVEMBER 2020 UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE www.usip.org

The Arakan Army in Myanmar: Deadly Conflict Rises in Rakhine State

By David Scott Mathieson

Kyaw Han, general secretary of United League of Arakan/Arakan Army, attends a March 2019 meeting with government, military, and ethnic armed organizations. (Photo by Aung Shine Oo/AP)

Contents

Summary

- Myanmar's most serious conflict in many decades has emerged in Rakhine State between the Myanmar armed forces (Tatmadaw) and the Arakan Army (AA), demanding self-determination for the Buddhist Rakhine ethnic minority. It leaves Rohingya refugees with little chance of a safe return.
- The AA's guerrilla tactics have caused many military and civilian casualties, evoking a typically fierce armed response from the Tatmadaw and compounding the human and physical damage.
- The AA's sophisticated communications strategies use social media to swell its recruitment base, build civilian support, trade insults with the Tatmadaw, and reach an international audience.
- Government efforts to marginalize and demonize the AA are counterproductive with the Rakhine population, hardening attitudes and narrowing possibilities for political solutions. This conflict will continue to escalate absent the AA's inclusion in the peace process, sending Rakhine State into a downward spiral that could seriously damage the rest of the country.
- With strategic investments to protect in Rakhine's Kyaukphyu port, influence on other armed groups, and an interest in the peace process, China is the only external player that can influence the AA.

United States Institute of Peace
Making Peace Possible

SPECIAL REPORT

NO. 486 | NOVEMBER 2020

CONFLICT ANALYSIS & PREVENTION

ABOUT THE REPORT

In the most serious conflict currently active in Myanmar, the Arakan Army, a Buddhist Rakhine ethnic minority insurgent group, is fighting the Myanmar security forces. This report, commissioned by USIP's Burma program, explains why any hope for reconciliation and for the safe return of Rohingya refugees will require political negotiation and inclusion of the Arakan Army in the nationwide peace process.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Scott Mathieson is a Myanmar-based independent analyst working on conflict, peace, humanitarian and human rights issues, and the drug trade. From 2006 to 2016 he was the senior researcher on Myanmar for Human Rights Watch based in Thailand and Myanmar. He has contributed articles to the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Irrawaddy*, *Foreign Policy*, and is a regular contributor to *Asia Times*.

United States Institute of Peace
2301 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Phone: 202.457.1700
Fax: 202.429.6063
E-mail: usip_requests@usip.org
Web: www.usip.org

Special Report No. 486. First published 2020.

ISBN: 978-1-60127-834-0

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
Making Peace Possible

People who fled Rathedaung Township due to ongoing conflict between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army collect rainwater at the She Pye Thar Monastery's temporary camp in Sittwe, Rakhine State, on August 16 2020. (Photo by Nyunt Win/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock)

Introduction: A Deadly Conflict Rises in Rakhine State

Armed conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State between the Arakan Army (AA) and the national army, known as the Tatmadaw, has escalated sharply in the past two years, gradually expanding to engulf large parts of the state.[1] This development has been largely eclipsed, however, by the continuing international focus on the human rights crisis of the Rohingya Muslim minority, seven hundred thousand of whom remain in refugee camps in Bangladesh after being violently expelled from Rakhine in 2017. Yet the reality is that as this new conflict expands in territory and ferocity, the hope of repatriating Rohingya refugees to Rakhine recedes into the future. This dilemma deserves greater understanding and urgent attention from the international community.

Driven by a profound reservoir of historical grievances and modern frustrations over perceived developmental neglect and the plundering of natural resources by the central state, the AA's fundamental demand is for self-determination for Myanmar's Rakhine (Arakan) ethnic minority and promotion of the cultural and "national identity" of Arakan people.[2] To this end, it has declared that a primary goal is a poorly defined "confederate status" that would give Rakhine State greater autonomy than the national government—especially the army—is willing to consider. Yet the AA's increasing military capability and support among civilian populations mean that its demands need to be taken seriously.

After gaining valuable battle experience in its early years fighting alongside other ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) in Kachin and northern Shan State near the Chinese border and being denied an opportunity to join negotiations for a nationwide ceasefire between the Tatmadaw and EAOs, the AA began moving steadily into Rakhine State around 2014 to establish a presence that would challenge Tatmadaw control of the state. Having executed a number of minor skirmishes with government security forces, the AA rose to prominence with its coordinated attack on four Rakhine police stations on January 4, 2019, Myanmar's Independence Day. Rapidly building wide support among the local Rakhine population, the AA has since grown into a formidable fighting force that is employing modern guerrilla tactics to inflict serious damage on the Tatmadaw.

Complementing its battle skills with strategic use of social media and modern communications to reach both national and international audiences, the AA has also engaged the Tatmadaw in an unprecedented war of words, with both sides trading insults, claiming uncertain victories, and attempting to pin blame on the other side for the mounting damage the conflict is causing the civilian population and, more recently, the failure to address the COVID-19 crisis in Rakhine. As each side hardens its position rhetorically and militarily, a solution seems increasingly out of reach.

The government's decision in March 2020 to designate the AA a terrorist organization under the country's 2014 counterterrorism law added fuel to the insurgency and rendered a peaceful political solution to the crisis more difficult to achieve. Until the AA can be brought into the national peace process, the conflict in Rakhine will continue to expand, ultimately damaging the entire country.

The only external player with influence on both the AA and the national government is China, whose strategic interest in building a deepwater port in Rakhine State is a centerpiece of its Belt and Road Initiative in Myanmar, but so far it has shown little interest or ability in playing a mediating role. Therefore, in the current situation of severe mutual distrust, it is incumbent on the government to devise a way to engage with the AA politically rather than militarily and to demonstrate that the AA's aspirations can be better achieved through negotiation and participation in electoral democracy, including full participation in the national elections scheduled for November.[3]

Background and Rise of the Arakan Army

The Arakan Army was founded in Laiza, a town in remote Kachin State, in 2009 by Rakhine youth who had been associated with the ethnic armed groups operating in Myanmar's northern states. During this early period, the group trained and fought alongside the Kachin Independence Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army in battles against the Tatmadaw that broke out in 2011 after the military abrogated a seventeen-year-old ceasefire with these and other EAOs.

When, in 2011, the newly elected government of Thein Sein initiated a multiparty peace process and negotiations for a nationwide ceasefire, the AA was denied the opportunity to participate. Government negotiators argued that because the AA was not based in the territory of its ethnic identity, Rakhine State, it could not meet provisions relating to territorial rights and monitoring arrangements contained in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). In retrospect, this

Box 1

Arakan Army Leadership

The AA's youthful and articulate leader Major General Twan Mratt Naing spent time studying in Rangoon in the late 1990s, where he was head of the Rakhine Students' Union, reportedly worked as a tour guide, and was a leader of the All Arakan Students and Youth Congress and the Shwe Gas Movement, an environmental collective opposed to the construction of pipelines to China from a massive natural gas deposit off the coast of Rakhine State. Disappointed by the divisions within the Rakhine movement, especially the Arakan National Congress, and seeking support from an established EAO, he went underground in 2009. With a small group of twenty-nine fellow activists, he formed the AA in Laiza.[a] The AA's deputy leader, Nyo Twan Awng, is a medical doctor, and its spokesman, U Khine Thu Kha, is an experienced operator who was formerly a senior member of the Arakan Liberation Party.

a. Nyi Nyi Lwin, "Essense of Arakan Army Formation, Rationale of Armed Struggle, and What Next," Arakan News, November 6, 2019.

can be seen as a strategic mistake, because the AA—which in 2011 was generally regarded as militarily insignificant and politically irrelevant—subsequently became the most ruthless, militarily effective, and defiant armed group in the country, challenging the viability of the peace process to bring an end to seventy years of armed conflict in Myanmar. How did this strength and prowess come about in just a few years?

The AA initially recruited among the many young, impoverished Rakhine migrant workers who had fled Rakhine State to find work in the jade mines of Hpakant or in Thailand and Malaysia. As it developed military competence through battle experience and professional training, the AA began to expand its area of operations, moving gradually from Kachin State and northern Shan State in Myanmar's north through Chin State in the west, following a spate of serious ethno-religious communal violence in Rakhine State in 2012.[4]

Since then, the AA has quietly deployed growing numbers of troops in the hinterlands of northern Rakhine State and in Paletwa Township in neighboring Chin State, launching ambushes against government security forces with greater frequency and working its way down through the middle of Rakhine State along major roadways and rivers.

In decades past, the national infrastructure was rudimentary, travel was difficult, and large groups of fighters moving through the western hills could be easily interdicted by the Myanmar army. In recent years, however, it has become far easier to move cadres and materials through the country. Taking advantage of this, the AA provides advanced training for its recruits at camps hidden in the hills of northern Rakhine, as well as in camps in Kachin State, then deploys them by civilian transport through central Myanmar to staging areas in Rakhine State. When the AA fighters arrive in Rakhine State, one of the country's most ethnically homogenous areas, they blend in seamlessly with the local community, disguised as civilians.

Since 2014, the AA has been firmly established in Rakhine State, allowing it to recruit broadly from among Rakhine youth and growing from a force of a few hundred fighters to a strength estimated today at between seven thousand and ten thousand.

POWERED BY ETHNIC PRIDE AND GRIEVANCES

The AA is guided by its strategy of "The Way of Rakhita," a call for a nationwide uprising by ethnic Rakhine against ethnic Bamar (which dominate Myanmar's government and military) to retake the state, ensure political self-determination for Rakhine people, and restore the greatness of the Arakan State that was destroyed following the Burmese Konbaung Dynasty invasion of 1784. The urgency of the AA's ambitions for autonomy is further reflected in its rallying cry "Arakan Dream 2020." Such "rebel branding" slogans have spread throughout Rakhine State for several years. Many of the AA's grievances are shared by Rakhine political and community groups, fueling widespread support for the AA.

Unfortunately, the direction of electoral politics over the past ten years has fed broader Rakhine resentment of Bamar majority rule, which Rakhine see in both the Bamar-led National League for Democracy (NLD) government and the Tatmadaw, whose commissioned officers are almost exclusively Bamar. When the Arakan National Party (ANP) won a large number of both national- and state-level seats in the 2015 elections, the NLD government denied the party the post of Rakhine chief minister in the state parliament, where they held a majority. Although the NLD decision followed the requirements of the (military) constitution, the decision generated a sense of betrayal among Rakhine and distrust of electoral politics as a vehicle for change. Subsequently, the NLD has largely ignored the ANP, complicating its ability to show any positive results from its representation in the national parliament, even though it holds the seat of deputy speaker of the Upper House.

Upon arriving in Rakhine State, the AA thus found fertile soil in the existing disaffection with the central government and electoral politics, which could easily intensify in November if elections are not permitted in large parts of the Rakhine State because of ongoing conflict with the AA. This would be a serious blow to Rakhine political representation at both the national and state level, constricting or even eliminating a critical channel of political dialogue with the government.

The AA's ostensibly political wing, the United League of Arakan (ULA), was formed in 2016 to represent the interests of the AA in discussions with the government, especially during infrequent peace negotiations. (This distinguishes the AA from many other well-established EAOs, which commonly maintain a distinction between their armed and political wings.) The head of the AA, Twan Mratt Naing, and the deputy head, Nyo Twan Awng, are respectively the ULA president and head of the Secretariat. At this point, the ULA is a politically insignificant appendage of the AA. But diminishing support for other Rakhine rebel parties—the Arakan Liberation Party/Arakan Liberation Army (ALP/ALA), which signed the 2015 NCA, and the Arakan National Congress, based on the Thailand-Burma border, both of which are militarily insignificant—has focused Rakhine hopes and support on the AA and could, by extension, elevate and empower the ULA.[5]

The Nature of Arakan Army Warfare and Strategy

The AA does not easily fit the standard classification of insurgent mobilization in Burma. It is not a profit-driven rebellion that seeks rents from natural resources, except perhaps for its dependence on the income from drugs, nor is it a small faction seeking greater political recognition and inclusion in the political system. The AA's tactics are decidedly more extreme than those of many other armed groups in Myanmar, and its cadres exhibit a ruthlessness of purpose, but they are not extremists in the usual sense—or not yet. And the AA's size and military prowess render many of the EAO signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement almost insignificant.

Three features of this deadly conflict are relatively modern and differ from the approaches of multiple insurgencies over the last seventy years of civil war in Myanmar: the wide geographic operating space, the fusion of classical insurgent tactics with an aggressive operational stance rarely seen elsewhere, and the multimedia "war of words" of the AA's public narratives and the counter-messaging by Myanmar's security services and civilian government. The AA's rise not only coincided with Myanmar's transition to a "discipline-flourishing democracy" in 2011 but also with the multiple crises in Rakhine State, from the intercommunal violence of 2012 to the ethnic cleansing and forced expulsion of the Rohingya in 2017. Rapid social change and freedoms following the isolation and repression of six decades of military rule, including one of the swiftest rollouts of digital telecommunications networks in the world and a surge in social media use, have also influenced the nature of the AA efforts.

EXPANDING TERRITORY

Many of the long-standing insurgencies in Myanmar have established large base areas near the country's borders with Thailand or China, and armed conflict predominantly takes place in rugged, mountainous terrain, often predicated on defending these areas and the commerce that sustains them. The objectives of the larger ethnic groups, such as the Karen and Kachin, is to maintain territory and base areas and provide health, education, and legal services to their constituents; yet they rarely use more aggressive projections of force to reclaim ground and take the fight to the enemy, engaging in combat with the Tatmadaw. Fighting close to and within urban centers has taken place only occasionally in recent years and not with the intensity of the combat in Rakhine State.

The AA is fighting close to major towns in central Rakhine State; staging attacks on the Union Highway, the main road connecting the state's capital, Sittwe, with the rest of Myanmar; and along the rivers and waterways that provide the main shipping and transport connections around the state and into Paletwa Township of neighboring Chin State. Its strategy appears to be centered on gaining control of Paletwa Township to use as a staging area for sustained operations in the several townships of north and central Rakhine, and then expanding into the southernmost Rakhine townships west of the Arakan Yoma mountain range that divides Rakhine State from the Magwe, Bago, and Irrawaddy regions and provides a natural barrier to the Bamar heartland.

Box 2

Abuductions as a Means of Warfare

The AA has made liberal use of abductions as a means of intimidation, to taunt the enemy, and to increase its control over the local population and government. In 2017, AA units detained an estimated fifty Chin civilians in Paletwa. The AA has increased use of this tactic since then, detaining scores of people including police officers, soldiers, firefighters, an executive of the military-owned telecommunications company, many government administrators, and other local officials.[a]

In October 2019, the AA abducted a number of Indian engineers working on the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport project linking the port of Sittwe with Paletwa and the Indian border, a major Indian-financed infrastructure project.[b] One of the Indian nationals died of natural causes during the ordeal, the others were released soon afterward.

In early November 2019, U Hawi Tin, an ethnic Chin member of the Upper House of Burma's parliament was abducted and kept in AA custody for ten weeks, but eventually released unharmed in late January 2020. U Ye Naing, the head of the ruling National League for Democracy branch in Buthidaung was abducted on December 11, 2019, and was allegedly killed on Christmas Day by Tatmadaw artillery strikes on the AA base where he was being detained.

As a result of this high-risk strategy, many AA hostages have been killed in botched rescue attempts by the Tatmadaw, and many have allegedly been executed by the AA, such as the large numbers of soldiers killed following their capture on the Shwe Nadi ferry in Buthidaung in late October 2019.[c]

AA abductions intersect with police and Tatmadaw arrests in the mass resignations of Rakhine and Chin local officials. Fear prompted a series of departures from the General Administration Department, whose personnel handed in their official stamps rather than risk AA abductions. In Myebon in June, fifty-nine out of sixty-five township administrators resigned after three of their colleagues were arrested under suspicion of aiding the AA. Similar resignations have occurred in Paletwa, and Chin bureaucrats cite fears of being targeted by the AA.

a. "AA Terrorists Abduct Five People Including Heads of 100-Household Group without Rhyme or Reason," *Myawady*, May 20, 2020, 19.
b. ULA/AA, "Statement on NLD Parliamentarian U Hwe Tinn and 5 Indian Nationals," Arakan Army, November 4, 2019.
c. Min Aung Khine, "Myanmar Security Forces, Civilians Rescued; Ferry Owner, Crew Interrogated," *The Irrawaddy*, October 31, 2019.

Until late 2018, the AA had yet to extend operations to the plains and central townships of the state, where the group appears to have growing support among ethnic Rakhine. Many of the engagements with government forces had been relatively small-scale skirmishes confined to Paletwa and Buthidaung townships, but they were growing in size and intensity. Between September and December of 2018, there were twenty-five clashes between the AA and security forces, and the AA allegedly carried out an IED attack on the convoy of the chief minister of Rakhine State, near Mrauk U, on January 1, 2019. On January 4, Myanmar's Independence Day, more than one hundred

AA soldiers were involved in three of the AA's four coordinated assaults on Border Guard Police (BGP) stations in Buthidaung Township, and around fifty were involved in the fourth assault.[6] These are significant numbers for insurgent attacks in Myanmar and suggest that the strength of the AA in the western borderlands had already approached several thousand. Thirteen BGP troopers were killed in the assaults, nine were injured, and a dozen police and several civilians (possibly families of the troopers) were held captive for hours before being released.

From this point, the AA gradually extended the range of its ambushes, IED attacks, shooting at military helicopters carrying ministers, assaults on police stations, incursions into main towns and peri-urban areas, and attacks on road transport and river transport in northern Rakhine State, in Mrauk U, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Myebon, Rathedaung, and Ponnagyun—in other words, the Rakhine heartland, where the majority of ethnic Rakhine live. This sustained expansion of hostilities could only have been achieved with painstaking logistical planning by AA fighters who likely hail from these areas, know the terrain, and have extensive local connections, eliciting either active participation or forced compliance of the local civilian population.

The AA's attacks against the four police stations on January 4, 2019, transformed it from a growing nuisance the Tatmadaw could largely contain into a serious security threat. Since then, the AA has staged hundreds of operations in more than nine townships in northern Rakhine and is steadily expanding into townships in southern Rakhine. The group released data in early 2020 that claimed it had engaged in 681 engagements lasting longer than thirty minutes in 2019 and had inflicted a total of 3,562 casualties on government security forces. The AA itself is believed to have sustained numerous casualties, but this cannot be independently verified. Combat casualty numbers in Myanmar's civil war are notoriously unreliable, but in Rakhine they do indicate a major war is underway.[7] In fact, Myanmar has not experienced this intensity of fighting in decades.

FUSION OF TACTICS

Traditional insurgent organizations seek three dominant strategies: guerrilla warfare, conventional warfare, and punishment of civilians or agents of the state.[8] The AA uses these tactics, adapting them to fit the spatial realities of Rakhine State, and adding new features such as an intense tempo of fighting and aggression, innovations in tactics of ambush, and use of IEDs and 107 mm unguided rockets to target Myanmar Navy vessels, making Rakhine State the site of an evolution of insurgent violence in Myanmar.

Guerrilla warfare requires insurgent groups to mobilize the local population for information, food, recruitment, and support. Guerrillas must organize themselves into small, mobile units that strike government forces using assassination, sabotage, and hit-and-run tactics. This was evidently the aim of the AA as it mobilized first in Paletwa and then in Buthidaung Township between 2015 and 2018.

The bold attacks in urban areas throughout Rakhine State were a major departure from the approaches of other conflict actors in Myanmar. The change reflected thinking by Rakhine insurgent leaders from the 1970s that the key operating space for success is the plains and waterways of central Rakhine State, and not the isolated jungles and mountains of the Myanmar-Bangladesh borderlands, where insurgent actions can be more easily contained by Tatmadaw counterinsurgency efforts. The AA has sought to regulate traffic along the Kaladan and Lemru Rivers,

which run through central Rakhine State and are crucial to maintaining the transport of goods and people, especially during the monsoon months. The AA's tactics on the waterways have included stopping vessels, extracting money and supplies, taking hostages, and interdicting shipments meant for government security forces. The group claims that ships are being used to transport supplies and reinforcements for the Tatmadaw, and that companies should inform the AA of their timetables and cargo, including companies working on the Indian-financed Kaladan River infrastructure project.[9] The implication is that companies not supplying the Tatmadaw could share information with the AA and thus avoid these attacks.

Conventional warfare, the direct engagement of insurgent forces against the military of the state, is not a viable strategy for the AA against the much larger and better-equipped Tatmadaw. But its attacks on large military bases—in some cases massing several hundred to a few thousand fighters—indicate a capacity to engage in strength. In February and March 2020, several hundred AA fighters (some estimates claim as many as three thousand) besieged the Tatmadaw's Tactical Operations Command base at Mee Wa in Paletwa Township, where fierce fighting for forty days provoked a full-throttle Tatmadaw response, with naval gunfire support, close air support, air resupplies, and troops reportedly airlifted into the area.[10] Despite the intensity of the fighting, the AA failed to overrun the installation, a potential setback to its long-term aspiration to establish a more secure rear base area in Paletwa. In late May, the Tatmadaw claimed to have taken three significant AA bases close to Paletwa.[11]

In response to the broadening of the conflict, the Tatmadaw has responded with a mixture of brutal counterinsurgency tactics it has deployed elsewhere in Myanmar, relying in particular on "area clearance operations" by the military. It is noteworthy that while the AA has exhibited a style of retro-innovation in its approach to insurgency, the Tatmadaw has not markedly adapted its response, relying on its timeworn heavy-handed and punitive measures, including scorched-earth tactics and torture of civilians.[12]

The Tatmadaw has also increased its use of heavy firepower, including 122 mm howitzers, 240 mm multiple launch rocket systems, Russian-supplied Mi-35 helicopter gunships, ground attack aircraft, and MiG-29 fighter aircraft, which the AA alleges have dropped thermobaric weapons. Reports also indicate the Tatmadaw have deployed weaponized drones (believed to be Chinese-supplied CH3 unmanned aerial vehicles.[13] The Tatmadaw's indiscriminate firepower has had a devastating effect on the civilian population, especially in urban fighting in towns such as Mrauk U, the former capital of the Arakan kings and a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site.[14]

Punishment of civilians serves a range of purposes, including attempting to ensure control of the local population, to intimidate people in areas the insurgents do not control, to induce government forces to overreact and thus harm civilians themselves, to unnerve government officials, and to prove to civilians that the state cannot protect them. Local officials have received letters containing bullets, warning them to obey AA directives. A number of local officials, including a former military intelligence officer, a local official of the Arakan League for Democracy, and several others have been killed in circumstances that suggest AA involvement, although the group has never publicly acknowledged any targeted assassination. These killings could be the result of a general breakdown in law and order, score settling under the cover of armed conflict, or underground cells of AA operatives exacting retribution.

The AA's extensive use of hostage taking to influence and threaten is a serious departure from the norms of insurgent behavior in Myanmar.

It is not well-known to what degree the AA is organizing and mobilizing underground at the local level. Not all trained AA troops are necessarily fighting in the countryside, and there are indications that AA cadres dressed in civilian clothes assemble in towns and villages before staging attacks on security forces. The necessity of moving arms and materials and extracting supplies and taxation also suggests that the AA has a number of personnel acting as couriers, spotters, and weapons teams, and performing other activities within the civilian population.

The AA has increasingly abducted civilians, public servants, and security personnel, often parading them as public relations exhibits. This tactic started around 2017, prompting scores of local government officials to resign in both fear and protest. The group has been public about its detention policies and routinely publishes names, ages, and business, government, or military affiliations of those being held and when they will be released. For example, following the battle of Mee Wa base in February and March 2020, the AA posted lists of prisoners of war including names, serial numbers, and units.[15] They have also publicly released "aged soldiers" of the Tatmadaw on humanitarian grounds.

The AA's extensive use of hostage taking to influence and threaten is a serious departure from the norms of insurgent behavior in Myanmar. Why has the AA adopted such extreme tactics, knowing they would increase mistrust from civilians, spark condemnations from neighboring countries, and potentially confirm the "terrorist" label? The AA's approach is partly predicated on the need of insurgent groups to control their environments, which involves weakening the local civilian power structures and filling the void with the group's own parallel system of administration, or at the very least obtaining enforced loyalty from the local population through fear. Although using hostages, including potential use as human shields, is a grave crime under international humanitarian law, the AA appears confident that these tactics will not diminish civilian support.

THE AA'S COMMUNICATIONS WAR

Another feature that sets the Rakhine war apart from battles between government forces and other ethnic armed groups is the competition between the AA and the Tatmadaw in employment of modern communications strategies. The AA places high value on its innovative use of media. AA leader Twan Mratt Naing said in his speech on the eleventh anniversary of the group's formation, "We are not only engaged in the ground battles but contesting each battlefront such as [the] informational intelligence field, the frontline of psychological warfare, organizing operations, legitimacy and international law, and the diplomatic field from which our struggle can receive international support."[16]

In a series of interviews, he has outlined the organization's objectives and aspirations, which contain a mixture of defiance and the possibility of negotiation with the Myanmar authorities: "We must be able to determine our own future and have self-determination. We just can't let someone else decide our future. . . . I want to tell the government that it should not treat us as an enemy at this time, in this era. Our fundamental principle is defence, while the government wants to annihilate us."[17]

A slick 2017 video called *Dream in Our Heart* profiles the aims and aspirations of the AA leadership and rank and file, calling for freedom and independence for Rakhine State and an end to the "slavery" of Rakhine people. Mostly in English, the AA's productions are clearly designed for a broad audience.[18] Videos of training activities illustrate widespread recruitment of young women as fighters and members of sniper teams, promoting a dynamic and defiant image. In *The Way of Rakhita* video, a senior AA leader claims the group has over 750 female recruits. Many video interviews are available on the AA website, aimed at international viewers. As additional outreach to the English-speaking world, the group also communicates on Twitter, which is not widely used in Myanmar.

Locally, the main means of disseminating conflict-related information for the AA's Rakhine community support base is through social media, which has a wide reach in Myanmar's digitally connected culture. The AA's violent activities and media profile have garnered public attention in Rakhine, where there is a lack of interest in the national civil war and EAOs elsewhere in the country. The AA has its own YouTube channel, where it presents interviews with senior leaders, some combat footage of AA anti-aircraft guns firing at Tatmadaw fighter jets, extended interviews with POWs, and post-action displays of captured weapons and equipment.

The group regularly releases formal statements in Burmese and English, with Chinese-language translations of key statements, which include direct messages to senior Tatmadaw leadership in response to their public denunciations of the AA, information on detainees and POWs, and battle news with maps, diagrams, and satellite imagery. The AA also issues public warnings to civilians, local business leaders and officials, and the Myanmar Police Force against engaging in any activities that threaten the organization or the Way of Rakhita, cautioning, "We will take all [those who do so] as our opponents and will fight our decisive wars against them."[19] Largely absent, however, is a clear articulation of the AA's political, military, social, and economic strategies beyond general statements about seeking independence. Observers are left uncertain as to what the AA means by wanting "confederation" and its long-term goals for Rakhine.

Before the AA was designated a terrorist organization in March 2020, making association with the group illegal, its leadership was being routinely interviewed by the Myanmar independent media, and its activities were covered almost daily by a range of news outlets in Burmese and English. In fact, after the January 2019 attacks, the AA received more detailed domestic media coverage than any other armed group in the country and used the opportunity to skillfully reinforce a defiant public image. Yet despite the AA's media strategy, its escalating conflict and the suffering of Rakhine civilians have received little attention in the international press, although coverage of the plight of the Rohingya Muslims remains extensive.

The AA has been adept at constructing a modern public presence through social media and official statements, using these tools more often and with more sophisticated messages than many other ethnic armed groups. This communications strategy is also likely to have incited more anti-Rakhine sentiment among ethnic Burmans due to its celebration of violence and self-promotion at the national level.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

The Myanmar military has responded to the AA with a punishing communications strategy of its own, far exceeding the intensity and vitriol it directs at other EAOs. The Tatmadaw True

Myanmar's government spokesman Zaw Htay speaks with the media during a press briefing at the Presidential Palace in Naypyitaw on January 7, 2019. (Photo by Aung Shine Oo/AP)

News Information Team, part of the Directorate of Psychological Warfare and Public Relations of the Ministry of Defense, has launched its own public relations offensive with the AA as its primary target. Although Tatmadaw press briefings and statements were rare and largely insubstantial in the past, the True News Information Team has held more regular press conferences in recent years, featuring allegations of AA abuses and downplaying or refuting allegations of Tatmadaw abuses and losses. Regular updates on these clashes are also featured in the state and Tatmadaw media.

The Tatmadaw and AA have traded counteraccusations over recent cases of large-scale arson, including the burning of several hundred houses in Kyauktaw in March and hundreds in Mrauk U and Paletwa in late May 2020.[20] These tactics are reminiscent of the mass arson against the Rohingya in October 2016 and from August to December 2017. Mimicking international rights groups, the AA information products make use of satellite imagery to clarify the AA's version of events and play to a Western audience.

In June 2019 the government instructed Myanmar's four telecommunications operators to suspend data services in nine townships where the AA had been fighting (the block on one was lifted in May 2020). The ostensible reason for the shutdown was to deny the AA use of messaging apps to coordinate attacks, but it also had a deleterious impact on the economy of Rakhine State, on coordination of humanitarian assistance, and on human rights reporting.

The authorities have also charged journalists who report on the AA. Editors of *The Irrawaddy* magazine and Reuters news agency were sued under the Telecommunications Law in April 2019 for their coverage of the AA conflict, with the case dragging on until charges were dropped in March 2020.[21] In May 2019 a suit was brought under the Unlawful Associations Act against Media Development Group editor Aung Marm Oo, who has been in hiding ever since, and in March 2020 a case against Narinjara News editor Khaing Mrat Kyaw was brought under the counterterrorism law.[22] Both of these outlets have had their websites blocked domestically under the counterterrrorism restrictions.

As the charges against journalists began to be filed in 2019, a combination of formal legal proceedings and PR rhetoric were also brought to bear against the AA. The group was increasingly accused of terrorist activities by the government and the Tatmadaw as they sought to intimidate

The sweeping use of the counterterrorism law will likely drive further community support for the AA in Rakhine if arrests and legal charges continue.

Rakhine civilians supporting the AA and cast the force as illegitimate and engaged in extremist and unlawful acts. By late 2019 the Tatmadaw was regularly referring to "AA terrorists."[23] The AA retorted with colorful formulations of its own, such as "Burmese ultranationalist war criminal Myanmar Army."[24]

A day after the January 4, 2019 attacks on the four BGP bases, terrorism charges were filed against the AA, with possible sentences ranging from ten years' to life imprisonment.[25] Then on July 4, 2019, the four senior AA commanders were charged in absentia by a Rakhine court for violating the 2014 counterterrorism law, which could lead to three- to seven-year prison terms.[26]

In the last few years, many civilians with suspected ties to the AA have been charged under the counterterrorism law and the 1908 Unlawful Associations Act. The Thazin Legal Aid Network in Sittwe estimated that forty-eight charges were laid against 503 people in 2019. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners–Burma (AAPPB) documented ninety-one people facing terrorism charges, eighty of whom are imprisoned. Among those prosecuted were the youngest brother of the AA commander and nine others who were deported from Singapore in July 2019 for alleged AA fundraising through the Arakan Association–Singapore. Following their return to Myanmar, they were arrested and went on trial under the counterterrorism law. The AAPPB reported that the sister and brother-in-law of the AA commander were among twenty-six civilians arrested in October 2019. The commander's wife and two children were arrested while living in Thailand and faced deportation to Myanmar until back-channel diplomatic interventions secured them asylum in Switzerland. This incident likely severed all international efforts to enable dialogue with the AA, leaving China as the sole possibility for external influence, as discussed in this report.

Pressure from the Tatmadaw and pro-military lawmakers built in late 2019 for the AA and its allies to be designated terrorists under the 2014 counterterrorism law, and the government finally moved on March 23, 2020, to formally designate the AA a terrorist organization. The government claimed: "The United League of Arakan (ULA)/Arakan Army (AA), by organizing as well as using fear and threats to local people in northern Rakhine State, attacked military columns, members of Myanmar Police Force and security outposts using the local people as cover. They also arrested, killed and tortured village administrators, civil service staff and innocent civilians, in addition to shootings and landmine attacks in the village."[27] Before this, only the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) had been publicly designated a terrorist organization under the law, which happened on August 25, 2017, following its attacks on BGP outposts in Maungdaw and Buthidaung.

The sweeping use of the counterterrorism law will likely drive further community support for the AA in Rakhine if arrests and legal charges continue. Meanwhile, the Tatmadaw seems oblivious to the possibility that this approach could backfire and also is unlikely to convince the international community that the AA is a terrorist organization. The AA's formal designation as a terrorist organization also seriously complicates the potential for its inclusion in the peace process, reducing the chances for significant change.

MARSHALING RESOURCES

The AA has long been suspected of funding its rebellion through the transport and sale of methamphetamines, called *yaba* in Myanmar (from the Thai phrase for "crazy medicine"). Although the drug has been mass-produced around the country for more than twenty years, the growth of exports to Bangladesh has coincided with the rise of the AA, and a number of interdiction raids on AA supply shipments have uncovered small consignments of weapons, ammunition, and methamphetamines from northern Myanmar that seem destined to be cached throughout Rakhine.[28] This indicates significant logistical planning and strategic patience by the AA.

In early 2020 Myanmar security forces staged a major operation against the Kaung Kha militia, making an almost unprecedented raid on major drug production facilities in northern Shan State, including a number of crystal methamphetamine labs and chemical storage facilities. They seized a massive haul of narcotics, including fentanyl, previously never seen in Myanmar.[29] Some analysts speculated that this move against the long-standing security provider for transnational criminal networks producing the drugs in the region, was partly to cut *yaba* supply lines for the AA and to obstruct their revenue streams.[30] The AA strongly denied this report.[31]

The AA likely has diverse revenue sources apart from narcotics, including taxation of Rakhine-based businesses and trucking companies—a practice that provides a pool of revolutionary financing to many EAOs in Myanmar—and some level of diaspora financing from Rakhine migrant workers in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, where fundraising activities have been reported. Yet, as in many conflict zones, rebel financing in Myanmar is opaque and subject to speculation. In late 2019 the AA announced the formation of the Arakan Authority or the Rakhine People's Authority. Precise details and aspirations of this "authority" have not been publicized by the AA, but spokesman Khine Thukar told Myanmar reporters the move was designed to create a "new form of government." This move was likely also taken as a means of beginning to set up functions to collect tax revenue since the AA announced the intention to begin collecting taxes from companies in Rakhine State in December of 2019.

Attitudes toward Rohingya and Muslim Minorities

The AA leadership has largely refrained from mentioning Rohingya or Muslims in its public statements, regularly asserting that its fight is with the Tatmadaw and against Burmese rule over Rakhine State. Its public statements, however, also reflect an evolution in its attitude toward the Rakhine minority population over the past four years. In the wake of the October 2016 attack by Rohingya militants in Maungdaw, the AA released a statement referring to "savage Bengali Muslim terrorists" and vowing to defend Rakhine State, asserting that the Tatmadaw was incapable of deterring further attacks.[32]

In a December 2017 interview, Twan Mratt Naing stated that the people of Rakhine shouldn't be distracted by the post–August 25 Rohingya crisis: "The problem of the *Kalar* is a political trap for us.

Rohingya fleeing Myanmar paddle a raft across the Naf River separating Bangladesh from Myanmar on November 29, 2017. (Photo by Adam Dean/New York Times)

It has divided our people. . . . Whenever there has been a conflict with the Kalar, they [the Myanmar Army] have wanted to create a split between the AA and the world."[33] (*Kalar* is a slur against Muslims.)

The Tatmadaw has claimed the AA is cooperating with the ARSA, although without providing any evidence. On January 7, 2019, presidential spokesman Zaw Htay told the media that the AA was a "terrorist organization" and had contacts with ARSA, and that the government had vowed to "crush the terrorists."[34] The AA, however, vehemently denied allegations that it had any contact with ARSA. The Arakan National Party denounced Zaw Htay's comments as "threatening with use of force and accusations to Rakhine and all its ethnic groups."[35] Realistically, active armed cooperation between the two groups is highly unlikely.

On July 10, 2020, the AA released a statement on its Facebook page showing a shift from its earlier rhetoric. In this case, the group described itself as "a revolutionary organization comprising all inhabitants in Arakan irrespective of religion, race, ethnicity, minority, or majority," and saying that "it is not an organization which was solely based on Buddhism; it respects freedom of religion and human values." Leaving no doubt about the audience the AA wished to reach with this message, it concluded, "We would like to apprise the global media not to characterize our organization as a fundamentalist or racial organization in the future."

Fears that the AA may eventually exhibit more overt anti-Muslim sentiments and potentially target Muslims in Rakhine cannot be discounted. The AA, attuned to international horror over the brutal repression of the Rohingya, is cognizant that any violence against Rakhine Muslims now would render the AA a pariah in the eyes of the world. This should not generate complacency, though: grievances against the Rohingya among most Rakhine are almost irreconcilable. At times the AA, partly to taunt the Tatmadaw and partly to appeal to a Western audience, has released videos and statements in which it has profiled Tatmadaw POWs admitting on camera to being involved in killing Rohingya Muslims and digging shallow graves to cover up the 2017 massacres. It also has claimed to have "some additional evidence and proofs of mass graves of Muslim villagers in other GPS locations where they were massacred and buried by the Myanmar armed forces during their military assaults under the banner of 'Clearance Operations' in August 2017."[36]

There is, nonetheless, a strong international misconception that the AA, and the Rakhine people, primarily resent and target Rohingya rather than the government and the Tatmadaw. This should be balanced by a better understanding of the nature of Rakhine resistance and community attitudes toward the Bamar ethnic majority.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The war between the AA and Tatmadaw has been disastrous for the civilian population of Rakhine and Chin States. More than three hundred civilians, including many schoolchildren, have been killed or wounded by artillery, air strikes, cross fire, and land mines, which are used extensively. The Tatmadaw has employed the same abusive tactics it demonstrates in counterinsurgency operations throughout the country, and both sides are reported to have carried out numerous human rights violations, including torture and abusive treatment of civilians; arrests and mock trials of civilian administrators; arrests of security forces, foreign workers, and political party officials; looting; and forced labor.[37]

The civilian Rakhine Ethnic Congress estimated in June 2020 that 156,000 civilians, mostly ethnic Rakhine, had been displaced by fighting since March 2019. UN estimates are lower but still reflect a serious humanitarian crisis.[38] Rakhine's internally displaced persons (IDPs) join 128,000 Rohingya Muslims displaced by intercommunal conflict in 2012. The Rakhine State government and especially the military have imposed sharp restrictions on aiding all IDPs and conflict-affected communities. These restrictions are hindering efforts by the government, civil society, and international aid agencies to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in Rakhine State. The AA's abusive treatment of ethnic Chin civilians has increased the enmity between Buddhist Rakhine and predominantly Christian Chin communities.[39]

The civilian government is unlikely, if not unable, to seek pathways to a political settlement and an end to the fighting. In her address to the International Court of Justice in December 2019, defending the government against the case brought by Gambia for the alleged genocide of Rohingya Muslims, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi made a number of references to the growing AA insurgency: "Right now, in Northern Rakhine an army base near Paletwa is under attack by a group of more than 400 Arakan Army fighters, and some 200 insurgents have surrounded a military column near Ann City in [southern] Rakhine."[40] In April 2020, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi released

a statement, saying in part: "State Counsellor acknowledges Tatmadaw soldiers risking their lives to protect the lives of people at Rakhine State and Chin State from ULA/AA terrorist attacks while government, citizens and volunteers from the whole country are working together to protect, control and recover from Coronavirus Disease 2019."[41] This was read as praise for the military over the local population and angered many ethnic people, not just those in Rakhine State.

INCLUDE THE AA IN THE NATIONAL PEACE PROCESS

The Rakhine State conflict will continue to escalate until the AA can be included in the nationwide peace process. In retrospect, the exclusion of the group from the NCA was a strategic mistake, fueling and giving justification for the AA's insurrection. Government and military leadership of the peace process insist that non-signatories accede to the NCA as a precondition for meaningful peace talks.

The rhetoric and recrimination of both the AA and the Tatmadaw demonstrate how diametrically opposed their positions are. The Tatmadaw and NLD government insist that the AA must withdraw all its troops from western Myanmar and return to Kachin territory. This is anathema to the AA, which has demanded a presence in Rakhine State since at least 2014 and has fought hard to create one. The rhetoric becomes more extreme when the AA's demand for "confederation," for having some type of equal or greater political status, is raised. Major-General Soe Naing Oo, head of the Tatmadaw True News Information Team, has dismissed this issue as "the thoughts of a child daydreaming . . . asking for what is impossible."[42] In rejecting withdrawal to Kachin bases as a precondition for talks, the AA has responded with demands for the total withdrawal of all Myanmar security forces from Rakhine State.[43]

The inclusion of the small and militarily moribund ALP/ALA in the NCA process makes the AA's continued exclusion even more glaring. The ALP and the Thailand-Burma border–based Arakan National Congress are marginal actors compared to the AA. The ANP, Rakhine State's major political party, is largely in step with AA grievances, further underscoring the AA's political relevance. Although there are no formal ties between the ANP and the AA, which could spark counterterrorism or unlawful association charges against party members, there are social ties: the speaker of the Rakhine State parliament, U San Kya Hla, is the father-in-law of the AA leader.

It is also important to consider what effects the AA conflict will have on other armed groups, especially those such as the Ta'ang and Kokang forces in northern Shan State that are equally defiant, but less aggressive than the AA. It behooves the civilian government, military, and major Western supporters of the peace process to ensure more inclusion. The AA could embolden other armed groups—including those under ceasefire agreements and feeling deep frustration with a lack of progress, continual Burman chauvinism, and military truculence—to pursue more aggressive armed options.

ENCOURAGE CHINESE MEDIATION

The one international player that has potential influence over the AA is China, which has strategically vital economic interests to protect in Rakhine State. China's key Belt and Road Initiative project in Myanmar is the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone and proposed deepwater port on Rakhine's Bay of Bengal coast. Although Rakhine environmental groups (the source of AA economic justice ideals) have long campaigned against Chinese infrastructure projects in Rakhine

The COVID-19 crisis has opened a new battlefront in Rakhine State. The state's continued exclusion from the peace process has affected both military and civilian government responses.

State, as well as China's purchase of natural gas off the coast, the AA has studiously avoided threatening Chinese economic interests in the state. In some cases the AA has even publicly welcomed Chinese investment, while targeting Indian infrastructure projects. In July 2019, the group went so far as to issue a press release stating, "The ULA welcomes the governments and institutions who want to step up legitimate, transparent and mutually beneficial projects, national and international: including the OBOR-related China's deep-sea port, Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone, and considers them in a constructive way."[44]

It has been speculated that the AA leaders are now headquartered in Panghsang, the capital of the semi-autonomous Wa Self-Administered Division on the China-Myanmar border and home of the United Wa State Army (UWSA).[45] China's influence on large EAOs, particularly the UWSA, the largest and best-equipped of these groups, gives it access to pressure the AA.

China seeks a key role in the peace process, and due to these economic and security factors, it is perceived as the only external power capable of mediating between the Myanmar government and the AA, as well as other non-signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.[46]

COME TOGETHER ON COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has opened a new battlefront in Rakhine State. The state's continued exclusion from the peace process has affected both military and civilian government responses to COVID-19 in Rakhine. In other ethnic minority areas, EAOs have coordinated with civilian and military officials and are pursuing local awareness and public health programs. The AA was initially invited to join the government-EAO COVID-19 coordinating body but declined to respond. While it has called for a ceasefire to prioritize the pandemic response, the AA has continued fighting in the absence of a positive reply from the Tatmadaw.[47]

In April, a local driver for the World Health Organization was killed by cross fire in Minbya Township, with the AA and the Tatmadaw blaming each other for the incident, and another driver was killed in a similar incident the next day. The AA has allegedly been firing on World Food Program supplies bound for trapped civilians in Paletwa Township, incidents the AA again blames on the Tatmadaw.

In May, the Tatmadaw did announce a unilateral ceasefire to prioritize COVID-19 responses, "except [in] areas where terrorist organizations declared by the government take positions."[48] In doing so, the Tatmadaw has clearly indicated its intent to cordon off the AA insurgency from any peace process. In a countermove, the AA and two of its allied militia groups, which make up the Three Brotherhood Alliance, announced a sixth extension of their unilateral ceasefire, until November 9, 2020.[49]

Maintaining the tempo of operations in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis in Rakhine when there is positive, if wary, cooperation elsewhere misses an opportunity for a break in hostilities and some minimal avenues for dialogue. International donors, including China, should be urged further to call publicly and in private for a pause in fighting to prioritize virus mitigation programs, especially with the spike in COVID infections in Sittwe, which have been increasing since late August.

UNDERSTAND THE INTERSECTIONS OF AA AND ROHINGYA CRISES

The AA conflict must be factored into ongoing efforts to protect the rights of Rohingya Muslims. The appalling violence against the Rohingya Muslim population has captured international attention for several years.[50] However, there is no longer a viable approach to ensuring the rights and welfare of the remaining Rohingya or a way to facilitate the safe repatriation of more than seven hundred thousand from camps in Bangladesh unless there is a resolution of the AA conflict. There is little likelihood of any return in safety and dignity to areas experiencing active armed conflict, and there have been reports of Rohingya casualties in cross-fire encounters.[51]

But addressing the Rohingya crisis cannot be achieved in isolation. Dissociating Rakhine grievances from Rohingya repression obscured the growing AA insurgency. These grievances, fueled by systematic abuses of civilian rights akin to the military repression in Myanmar's other conflict zones, must be better understood. This is another urgent reason to seek a functioning peace process that reduces conflict and opens approaches to future coexistence. Western and Chinese efforts to ensure the rights of the Rohingya must prioritize the inclusion of the AA in future peace talks, as well as address broader Rakhine political, social, and economic aspirations, in line with the recommendations of the report released in August 2017 by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.[52]

• • •

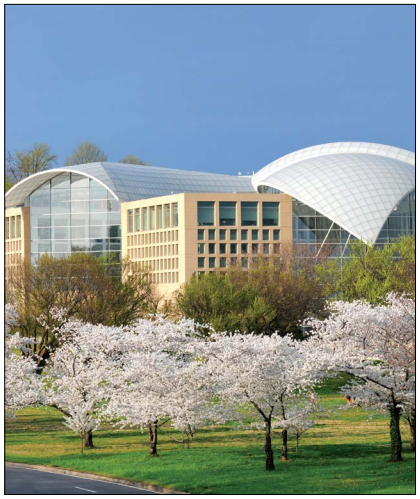
A key test for possible changes around the AA and Rakhine State will be the nationwide general elections scheduled for November 8, 2020. In mid-October, the AA abducted three candidates for the National League for Democracy in Taungup Township as they were campaigning.[53] Given the spread of the armed conflict to many of the townships in Rakhine State, including the southern region, the prospects for widespread electoral cancellations in the state were very real. On October 16, the Union Electoral Commission, likely based on Tatatmadaw recommendations, canceled voting altogether in nine townships of Rakhine and made partial cancellations in four others. This effectively disenfranchised an estimated 1.2 million voters, predominantly ethnic Rakhine, mirroring the disenfranchisement of Rohingya Muslims in the 2015 elections. Although the reasons may be different, the effect will be the same: the denial of full participation in electoral politics. This, in turn, will almost certainly condemn Rakhine State to a downward spiral of armed conflict, repression, thwarted development projects, and sharp restrictions on humanitarian aid support, ultimately causing serious damage to the rest of the country.

Notes

1. The Arakan Army (AA) employs the traditional term *Arakan* to describe the people and state of Arakan in preference to the Burmanized *Rakhine*.
2. For the Arakan Army's own description of its objectives, see its official website at www.arakanarmy.net.
3. International Crisis Group, "An Avoidable War: Politics and Armed Conflict in Myanmar's Rhakine State," Report no. 307 / Asia, June 9, 2020, www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/307-avoidable-war-politics-and-armed-conflict-myanmars-rakhine-state.
4. David Scott Mathieson, "Burma's Northern Shan State and Prospects for Peace," Peace Brief no. 234, United States Institute of Peace, September 29, 2017, www.usip.org/publications/2017/09/burmas-northern-shan-state-and-prospects-peace.
5. To add to the confusion, the Arakan National Congress has a small armed wing called the Arakan Army, based with Karen National Liberation Army, with similar insignia to mainstream AA.
6. Myanmar News Agency, "AA Insurgents Launched Synchronized Attacks against Four Police Outposts in Buthidaung Township; Thirteen Police Members Fell, Nine Injured" [in Burmese], *Myawady*, January 5, 2019.
7. See 2019 Combat Statistics on www.arakanarmy.net, January 4, 2020. There have also been numerous reports of wounded Tatmadaw personnel traveling on commercial airlines from Sittwe to Yangon in 2019 and 2020.
8. Seth Jones, *Waging Insurgent Warfare: Lessons from the Vietcong to the Islamic State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
9. Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint, "AA Says Construction Company Employees It Abducted Were Military Spies," *The Irrawaddy*, April 4, 2019; and Khaing Roe La, "Transportation of Weapons Is Unlawful According to AA," *Development Media Group*, November 23, 2019, www.dmediag.com/news/904-tran.
10. Aung Zaw, "A Fierce Battle in Western Myanmar Has Killed Hundreds as the Country Braces for COVID," *The Irrawaddy*, March 25, 2020.
11. *Myawady*, "Three Firm Stronghold Bases, Outer Posts of AA Terrorists Threatening Regional Security and Transport Security Near Paletwa Occupied" [in Burmese], June 1, 2020.
12. Anthony Davis, "Understanding the Myanmar Military's Genocidal Mind," *Asia Times*, December 17, 2019.
13. Aung Nyein Chan, "AA Accuses Tatmadaw of Using Combat Drones," *Myanmar Now*, January 7, 2020.
14. Khaing Roe La, "Fighting between Tatmadaw and AA Intensified in Mrauk U, Injuring Two Civilians," *Development Media Group*, August 28, 2019; and Amnesty International, "Myanmar: Indiscriminate Airstrikes Kill Civilians as Rakhine Conflict Worsens," July 8, 2020.
15. United League of Arakan (ULA)/AA, "Latest News Concerning Prisoners of War from LIB No. 7 under the Command of the 77th LID," March 14, 2020.
16. ULA/AA, "Speech by Commander-In-Chief at 11th Anniversary Day of the Arakan Army," April 10, 2020.
17. Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint, "I Want to Stress that We Are Not the Enemy," *The Irrawaddy*, June 12, 2015; Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint, "Arakan Army Chief: The Burma Army's Real Intentions Are to Continue Fighting," *The Irrawaddy*, February 7, 2017; Lawi Weng, "AA Chief Urges Arakanese Not to Fall into Army Trap in Rakhine," *The Irrawaddy*, December 11, 2017.
18. David Scott Mathieson, "Shadowy Rebels Extend Myanmar's Wars," *Asia Times*, June 11, 2017.
19. Arakan Army, "Warning Message (2/2019)," February 8, 2019; and Arakan Army, "Warning Message to Some Myanmar Police Force (3/2019)," February 8, 2019.
20. Sai Wunna, "Over 700 Houses Burned in New Rakhine Fighting," *Myanmar Times*, March 23, 2020, 1; and Aung Nyein Chan, "More Than 190 Homes Set Ablaze in Rakhine Village," *Myanmar Now*, May 18, 2020.
21. Zaw Zaw Htwe, "Myanmar's Military Ditches Irrawaddy and Reuters Lawsuits," *The Irrawaddy*, March 18, 2020.
22. Aung Htein, "Challenges Mount for Journalists Reporting on Arakan State," *Media Development Group*, May 23, 2020.
23. *Myawady*, "AA Terrorists Ambush Vessels with Loads of Iron Frames, Construction Materials for Paletwa Bridge Project" [in Burmese], December 1, 2019.
24. ULA/AA, "Statement on the Heavy Artillery Shelling on the Residential Quarters and Villages," December 3, 2019.
25. The government apparently maintains a secret list of terrorists and terrorist groups and a long-standing unlawful associations list. Signatories to the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement discovered they were on such lists just before signing the agreement when they were publically removed.
26. Wai Mar Tun and Min Thein Aung, "Myanmar Charges Arakan Army Leadership under Counter-Terrorism Law," Radio Free Asia, July 8, 2019.
27. Republic of the Union of Myanmar, "Declaration of Terrorist Group," Anti-Terrorism Central Committee Order no. 1/2020, March 23, 2020.
28. International Crisis Group, "Fire and Ice: Conflict and Drugs in Myanmar's Shan State," Asia Report No. 299, January 8, 2019, 5, www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/299-fire-and-ice-conflict-and-drugs-myanmars-shan-state.

29. "Myanmar Operation Results in the Largest Synthetic Drug Seizures in the History of East and Southeast Asia," Mizzima, May 18, 2020, http://mizzima.com/article/myanmar-operation-results-largest-synthetic-drug-seizures-history-east-and-southeast-asia; and Zaw Min Tun and Min Thi Ha, "The Drug Menace and the Tatmadaw's Mission" [in Burmese], *Myawady*, May 24, 2020.
30. Anthony Davis, "New Strategy to Address Escalating Insurgency in Western Myanmar Leaves Military Locked into Conflict," *Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Monitor*, April 21, 2020.
31. ULA/AA, "Response to Allegations of Links to Khaunghka Militia," April 29, 2020.
32. ULA/AA, press release, October 20, 2016.
33. Lawi Weng, "AA Chief Urges Arakanese Not to Fall into Army Trap in Rakhine," *The Irrawaddy*, December 11, 2017.
34. Myanmar News Agency, "Coord Meeting on International Relations, National Security Held at Presidential Palace," *Global New Light of Myanmar*, January 8, 2019, 1.
35. Arakan National Party, "Condemning Presidential Spokesman Statements" [in Burmese], Statement no. 1, 2019; and ULA/AA, "Statement for Denouncing the Baseless Accusations of ULA/AA Made by President's Office Spokesperson U Zaw Htay at the Press Conference on January 7, 2019" [in Burmese], January 8, 2019.
36. ULA/AA, "Rejection Statement on the Accusations against the Arakan Army at the Press Conference of Myanmar Army," February 3, 2020.
37. Amnesty International, "Myanmar: 'No-One Can Protect Us': War Crimes and Abuses in Myanmar's Rakhine State," May 29, 2019.
38. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UN High Commissioner for Refugees, "Myanmar: Conflict between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar Military: Update on Humanitarian Needs and Response in Rakhine and Chin States," November 2019.
39. Chin Human Rights Organization, *Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Chin State and Western Myanmar 2019*, December 10, 2019.
40. Office of the State Counsellor, "Statement by H.E. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the International Court of Justice," December 11, 2019, para. 34, www.burmalibrary.org/en/statement-by-he-daw-aung-san-suu-kyi-state-counsellor-and-union-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-the.
41. Office of the State Counsellor, "Statement from State Counsellor's Office" [in Burmese], April 21, 2020, www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/node/4228.
42. Su Myat Mon, "Tatmadaw likens Arakan Army demands to 'a Child Daydreaming,'" *Frontier*, March 26, 2020.
43. ULA/AA, press release, May 29, 2020.
44. ULA/AA, press release, July 19, 2019.
45. Bertil Lintner, "The United Wa State Army and Burma's Peace Process," Peaceworks no. 147, United States Institute of Peace, April 2019, www.usip.org/publications/2019/04/united-wa-state-army-and-burmas-peace-process.
46. Yun Sun, "China, the Arakan Army, and a Myanmar Solution," *Frontier*, March 23, 2020, www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/china-the-arakan-army-and-a-myanmar-solution.
47. ULA/AA, "Announcement on COVID-19 Exigency," April 26, 2020.
48. Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services, "Statement on Ceasefire and Eternal Peace," May 9, 2020.
49. Development Media Group, "Three Brotherhood Alliance Trio Extends Unilateral Ceasefire by 70 Days," September 1, 2020, www.dmediag.com/news/1924-b70.
50. UN Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth Session, Agenda Item 4, Report of the Detailed Findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, A/HRC/39/CRP.2 (September 17, 2018), www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_CRP.2.pdf; and Carlos Sardiña Galache, *The Burmese Labyrinth: A History of the Rohingya Tragedy* (London: Verso, 2020).
51. David Scott Mathieson, "The Rohingya's Right of No Return," *New York Times*, September 24, 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/09/24/opinion/rohingya-refugees-myanmar-return-bangladesh.html.
52. Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, "Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine: Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State," August 2017, 15, 19, 45, 53–55, www.rakhinecommission.org/app/uploads/2017/08/FinalReport_Eng.pdf.
53. ULA/AA, press release, October 19, 2020.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE



The United States Institute of Peace is a national, nonpartisan, independent institute, founded by Congress and dedicated to the proposition that a world without violent conflict is possible, practical, and essential for US and global security. In conflict zones abroad, the Institute works with local partners to prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict. To reduce future crises and the need for costly interventions, USIP works with governments and civil societies to help their countries solve their own problems peacefully. The Institute provides expertise, training, analysis, and support to those who are working to build a more peaceful, inclusive world.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Stephen J. Hadley (Chair), Principal, Rice, Hadley, Gates & Manuel LLC, Washington, DC • George E. Moose (Vice Chair), Adjunct Professor of Practice, The George Washington University, Washington, DC • Judy Ansley, Former Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor under George W. Bush, Washington, DC • Eric Edelman, Roger Hertog Practitioner in Residence, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC • Joseph Eldridge, Distinguished Practitioner, School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC • Kerry Kennedy, President, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, Washington, DC • Ikram U. Khan, President, Quality Care Consultants, LLC, Las Vegas, NV • Stephen D. Krasner, Graham H. Stuart Professor of International Relations, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA • John A. Lancaster, Former Executive Director, National Council on Independent Living, Potsdam, NY • Jeremy A. Rabkin, Professor of Law, Antonin Scalia Law School, George Mason University, Arlington, VA • J. Robinson West, Former Chairman, PFC Energy, Washington, DC • Nancy Zirkin, Executive Vice President, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Washington, DC

Members Ex Officio

Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State • Mark T. Esper, Secretary of Defense • Frederick J. Roegge, Vice Admiral, US Navy; President, National Defense University • Joe Lataille, Acting President; Chief Financial Officer, United States Institute of Peace (nonvoting)

THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS

Since its inception in 1991, the United States Institute of Peace Press has published hundreds of influential books, reports, and briefs on the prevention, management, and peaceful resolution of international conflicts. All our books and reports arise from research and fieldwork sponsored by the Institute's many programs, and the Press is committed to expanding the reach of the Institute's work by continuing to publish significant and sustainable publications for practitioners, scholars, diplomats, and students. Each work undergoes thorough peer review by external subject experts to ensure that the research and conclusions are balanced, relevant, and sound.

OTHER USIP PUBLICATIONS

- *What Works in Youth Projects? Lessons for the Youth, Peace, and Security Field* by Rebecca Ebenezer-Abiola and Jeremy Moore (Special Report, October 2020)
- *Why Burma's Peace Efforts Have Failed to End Its Internal Wars* by Bertil Lintner (Peaceworks, October 2020)
- *China-Venezuela Relations in the Twenty-First Century: From Overconfidence to Uncertainty* by Matt Ferchen (Special Report, September 2020)
- *Digital Inclusion in Mediated Peace Processes: How Technology Can Enhance Participation* by Andreas T. Hirblinger (Peaceworks, September 2020)
- *After the Agreement: Why the Oversight of Peace Deals Succeeds or Fails* by Aly Verjee (Peaceworks, September 2020)

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
Making Peace Possible

2301 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 457-1700
www.USIP.org