

Move by the National Union Government towards a Federal Union Army will see a more formal conflict develop.

OVERVIEW

Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG), established by opponents of army rule, declared on 05 May that it would establish a "People's Defence Force" as protection against government violent attacks towards its members.

The statement noted that this was a prelude to establishing a Federal Union Army "in order to terminate the 70-year-long civil war."

The Tatmadaw also responded with heavy weapons after reports that the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) shot down a military helicopter in the vicinity of Konelaw village, Moemauk Township, Kachin State on 4 May.

The risk of deterioration within Myanmar was highlighted by Zhang Jun, the Chinese Ambassador to the UN, in one of China's strongest statements yet, when he warned that further violence in Myanmar could lead to "civil war".



ANALYSIS

We predicted in our previous alert ([27 Apr: Myanmar Border Area Clashes](#)) that any further violence either along the Thai border area or between the Tatmadaw and the militia units (in this instance the Karen National Union - KNU) would likely escalate.

Violent episodes are intensifying: on 4 May bomb blasts were reported in Myaing Township on 4 May, as were further clashes in Chin state, near the border with India, between the Chinland Defence Force (CDF) and Myanmar troops.

The move by the NUG towards a Federal Union Army is highly likely in response to these clashes and would build a coordinated force against the Tatmadaw.

Indeed, local sources have reported that units have been training "in the jungle" for several months and that militias have been using illegal arms traders to build up supplies of weapons.

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PREDICTION

- The move by the NGU to establish a Federal Union Army, along with the intensifying number of incidents, and the UN Chinese Ambassador's comments points to the high probability that a more formal civil war phase is imminent.
- Cross border illicit arms trading will see a major increase, whilst the Tatmadaw will likely receive more military support from China, and possibly India; both have geopolitical interests in supporting the Myanmar government.
- Both militia units and the "People's Defence Force/ Federal Union Army" are likely to receive illicit aid from countries opposed to either India or China.
- The numbers of IDPs within the country, and refugees seeking shelter on the Thai/ Indian border is likely to increase, leading to the possibility of further spread of Covid 19 within the country and region – as Myanmar appears to heading into a third wave of the virus, with no effective vaccine deployment in place.

MITIGATION

- Organisations should carefully consider whether to deploy staff within 10 miles of the border areas – especially the China/ Myanmar border region.
- Vary routes into and out of projects as often as possible.
- All staff should remove themselves from social media (if internet still available), remove satellite dishes from homes (if outside of main cities), and where possible, organisations should ensure that staff have a removable hard drive, and emphasize strict IT safeguarding protocols.
- Reinforce use of PPE and checking in protocols.

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