

**AUGUST
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SCENARIO PLAN

Nationwide Elections

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CONTENTS

2	CONTENTS
3	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
3	BACKGROUND
5	POLITICAL DYNAMICS

SCENARIOS

7	SCENARIO 1 – ELECTION PREPARATION UNDER FIRE
9	SCENARIO 2 – MAJOR MAF OFFENSIVE
11	SCENARIO 3 – MAJOR RESISTANCE OFFENSIVE

This Scenario Plan presents election-related context projections for the purposes of response planning and strategy. However, the focus of this scenario plan is not on the outcomes of the elections themselves; it is instead on the impact of the elections process on humanitarian needs, and aid implementation. At present, it appears that the most likely scenario over the next six months is one in which the State Security and Peace Commission (formerly the State Administration Council) carries out elections in many parts of Myanmar despite attacks on the process by resistance actors. Other possible scenarios include a large-scale offensive by the Myanmar Armed Forces or other actors, but these are of low or moderate likelihood.

While this Scenario Plan provides general guidance, responders may make adaptations to suit the needs, priorities, and strategies of their respective organisations.

BACKGROUND

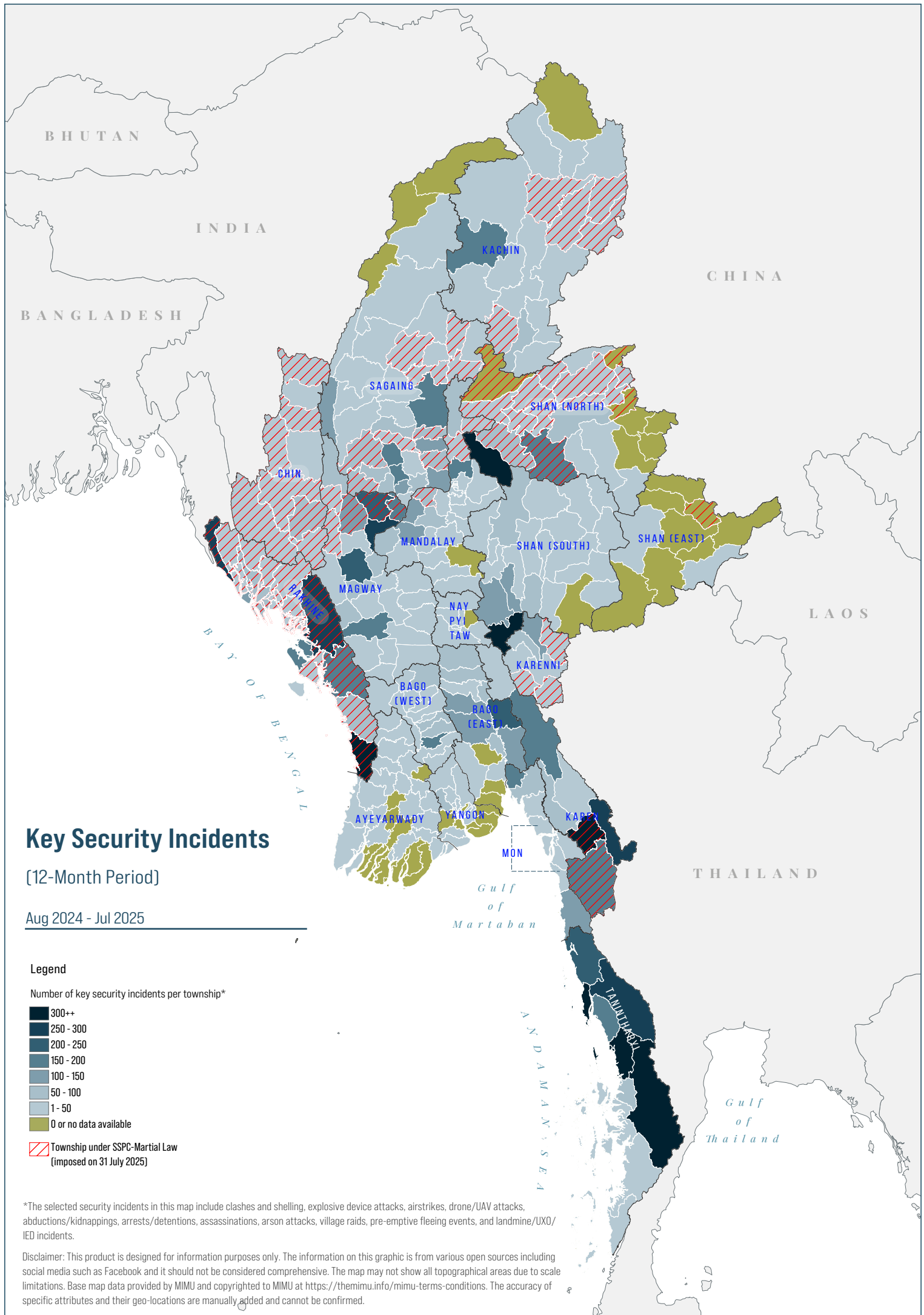
Leaders of the Myanmar military claimed that the 2020 election was marked by large-scale voter fraud and used this claim as a pretext to launch a coup in February 2021. After seizing power, and detaining leaders and members of the victorious National League for Democracy (NLD) party, the military established the State Administration Council (SAC). Meanwhile, many of the parliamentarians ousted in the coup convened as a shadow parliament, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) — the majority of whose members hailed from the NLD party — and established a shadow government, the National Unity Government (NUG). As of early 2025, all indications suggest that there is still widespread popular opposition to military rule and support for some sort of alternative ‘resistance’ governance, although support for the NUG itself appeared to have ebbed. The SAC nonetheless retained control of key state apparatuses (including Myanmar’s Union Election Commission) and Myanmar’s biggest population centres, despite losing significant swathes of territory to the resistance since 2023.

Since the 2021 coup, there has been sustained or intermittent fighting in most parts of the country. Civilians opposing the SAC have taken up arms, forming localised groups (People’s Defense Forces [PDFs]) that have since either remained independent or nominally come to fall under the NUG’s Ministry of Defense. PDFs are most active in areas of central Myanmar where there had been minimal or no fighting before the coup; in the borderland areas of Myanmar with a historical presence of ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), the landscape has more prominently involved these EAOs asserting their own interests, though many have trained PDFs or deployed them in operations.

One key consequence, for the purposes of the upcoming elections, is that the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC) — a new incarnation of the SAC — lacks access or control in much of Myanmar. EAOs have ousted the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) from entire townships and critical border crossings, notably in Rakhine, Northern Shan, Kachin, Chin, and Karen states. In central Myanmar, PDFs generally

control rural areas while the SAC’s presence and access is limited to towns and the major roadways connecting them, amidst near continuous violence.

Humanitarian needs have skyrocketed. According to [UNHCR](#), as of 4 August 2025 there were over 3.3 million IDPs in Myanmar and over 170,000 more people had crossed into neighbouring countries. While international and local response actors have been able to provide support, their ability to do so has been limited by a withering Myanmar economy, massive cuts to international funding, and significant formalised and practical obstacles to reaching communities — primarily, though not exclusively, by the SAC. As of January 2025, UNDP [estimated](#) 49.7 per cent of Myanmar’s population to be below the poverty line, and another 25 per cent to be just barely above it. Myanmar’s 2025 Original Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, calling for 1.14 billion USD, has only been 11.9 per cent [funded](#).



Since 2021, the military administration has repeatedly called for — but not conducted — elections. However, all indications are that the SSPC now genuinely plans to facilitate them in [December 2025](#) and early 2026. In July and August of 2025, there was a flurry of election-related activity and announcements from Nay Pyi Taw, which included the following:

- On 29 July, the SAC [promulgated](#) the “Law on the Prevention of Disruption and Interference with Elections”, which makes speaking against an election a crime, and which threatens up to lifetime imprisonment for interfering with campaigns or destroying materials connected to elections (closely mirroring a [1996 law](#)).
- On 31 July, the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC): [revoked](#) Presidential Order 1/2021 (thus ending the national state of emergency invoked on 1 February 2021 and dissolving the SAC); formed a new union government (with General Nyo Saw as Prime Minister); and formed the new SSPC (with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing as chairman) to serve as the “interim government” until elections. According to the 2008 [constitution](#) (§ 429), elections must take place within six months of this action.
- As well, on 31 July, the NDSC [declared](#) a state of emergency and martial law in 63 townships (a slight change from the 61 [previously](#) under martial law).
- On 15 August, the Union Election Commission (UEC) [issued](#) a series of notifications specifying a novel mix of first-past-the-post, proportional representation, and mixed-member pro-

portional systems for constituencies across Myanmar.

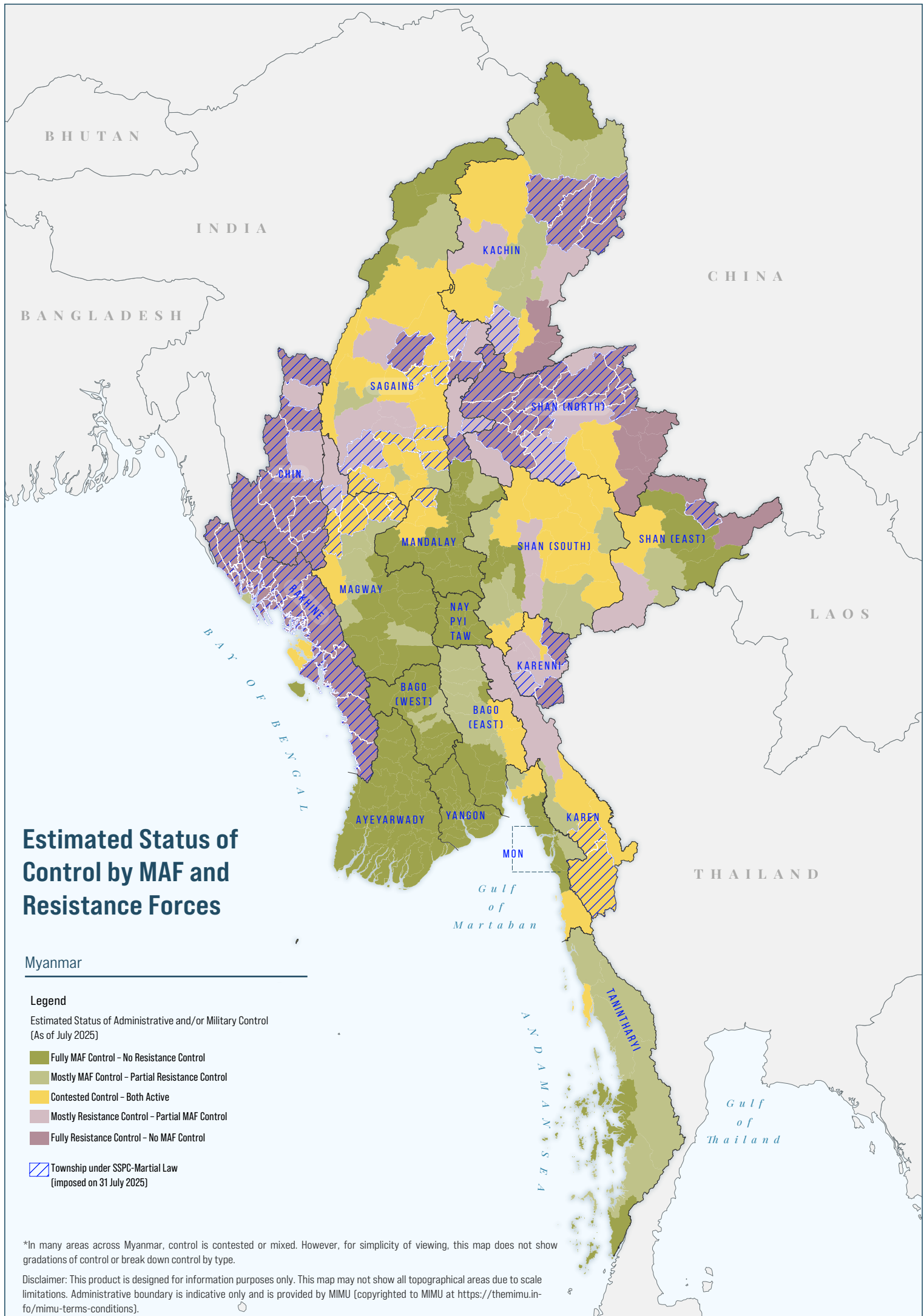
- On 18 August, the UEC [announced](#) that elections would begin on 28 December, with further polling dates to be announced.

The announcements coincided with a general tightening of restrictions on an already repressive civic space. On 28 July, the SAC [issued](#) the “Military Secrets Preservation and Protection Law”, which allows life imprisonment or the death penalty for the use of military secrets in the service of other organisations, including foreign and non-state armed actors. On 30 July, the SAC’s “[Cybersecurity Law](#)” [came into effect](#). Among other things, this prescribes penalties for VPN use and producing or conveying certain types of information, and it appears to allow for greater oversight of digital communications. While the precise implications of each of these remain to be seen, they can all be understood as efforts to increase control over election outcomes, performative measures aimed at demonstrating a level of control or legitimacy, or a combination thereof.

Multiple factors mean that the military can essentially dictate the outcome of the election. It continues to detain NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of her party, and requirements under the SAC’s 2023 “[Political Parties Registration Law](#)” further constrain the field of candidates and parties that can compete. Voter registration processes, large-scale displacement, and contextual factors will keep many people away from voting booths and likely skew votes significantly. The SSPC and UEC also have the power to cancel voting in, and/or to nullify results from, specific (or all) locations, and election personnel — or MAF troops near polling places — could engage in unethical practices that skew voting. Given the illegitimacy of the

elections, it is unlikely that credible international election monitors will observe the elections in-country, and even less likely that the SSPC would provide them with visas. Myanmar’s 2010 elections, also held under military rule, were characterised by manipulation and fraud. The then US President Barack Obama claimed the military had ‘stolen’ the election, although China and Russia endorsed its outcome: a victory for the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). U Thein Soe, a former major general led the UEC which organised the 2010 elections, was [reappointed](#) following the 2021 coup and is tasked with organising the 2025 polls, suggesting a very low likelihood that the elections will be free and fair.

It remains to be seen what comes after the election. There will likely be power shifts within the military apparatus: Min Aung Hlaing, who currently leads both the SSPC and the military, will likely have to give up his role as either commander-in-chief or head of state; the constitution (§ 67) specifies that the president may not “hold any other office or position of emolument”. Alternatively, maneuvering within the upper echelons of the military (and its linked political apparatus, the USDP) could push him out entirely. Leadership and personnel shifts could result in changes to military strategy, diplomatic strategy, and domestic political strategy (including negotiations with EAOs). Or, there could be deviation from the constitution or an ad hoc arrangement in which Min Aung Hlaing retains all the levers of power in Myanmar. However, as noted, the focus of this scenario plan is not on the outcomes of the elections themselves; it is instead on the impact of the elections process on humanitarian needs, and aid implementation.



Election Preparation Under Fire

LIKELIHOOD: 

In this scenario, the SSPC prepares for an election to take place in December, while the NUG and excluded and non-participating parties decry it as fraudulent and undemocratic. The MAF increases its securitisation of urban areas, particularly those in parts of the country where it has little presence or control outside of the town, such as Lashio, Myitkyina, Sittwe, Loikaw, and Hakha. PDFs increase their attacks in urban areas. They target election locations and infrastructure, offices of parties planning to compete, and MAF troops and positions. However, by nature of the urban setting and often indiscriminate nature of PDF attacks (e.g. with explosives), and the fact that poll workers (often schoolteachers) and many involved in election preparations are not MAF troops, there are frequent civilian casualties — both intended and unintended. The degree of vio-

lence differs between locations, and particularly between PDFs. Targeted killings of those perceived to endorse polls may increase, alongside accusations of informing both for and against the resistance. As the nearing election polarises civilians, it could drive greater civil disobedience movement (CDM) involvement.

Where the MAF securitises urban areas, it deploys troops (including newer conscripts), increases checkpoints and security around potential polling places, enacts curfews, conducts raids, and questions and detains civilians it suspects of association with antagonistic actors — or simply of opposing the election. Civil servants are ordered to focus their efforts on election preparation. Increased crackdowns on VPN usage, financial activity, and visa holders (and applications) affect a range of organisations, including those conducting humanitarian activities.

The SSPC appears to be wholly committed to facilitating elections in December, and has gone beyond the preparations seen on other occasions since the coup in 2021. Most importantly, the dissolution of the SAC and [announcement](#) of a specific date are concrete procedural actions that have not been seen before. Entreaties and support from external stakeholders (most notably [China](#)) for the planned elections suggest that the SSPC is under both domestic and international pressure to make this happen. As for the conditions under which elections take place, the MAF is likely to engage in heavy militarisation of polling places and restrictions against civilians that could disrupt the process. PDFs and the NUG have consistently objected to any election held by the military administration and will likely disrupt it in ways similar to their attempts to disrupt SAC income generation, household data collection and conscription.

It is worth noting that a different scenario could play out if either the MAF or other actors decide to launch a large-scale offensive (scenarios 2 and 3), which could disrupt elections in specific areas of the country and — if massive enough — could force the SSPC to push back the elections entirely (again). It is also possible, though unlikely, that PDFs refrain from launching small-scale attacks on areas with voting, as contemplated in this scenario — for example because the MAF's defensive preparations effectively prevent them from doing so.

IMPACT: MEDIUM AND NEGATIVE

KEY TAKEAWAY: THE CHANGES IN THIS SCENARIO WOULD LIKELY HAVE A LOW IMPACT ON HUMANITARIAN NEEDS BUT MEDIUM IMPACT ON HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS AND STAFF SAFETY IN PARTICULAR.

MAF securitisation measures would likely raise protection concerns for urban populations (including IDPs in urban areas), by increasing the possibility of people being detained, abused, or even killed. Some of the newer ‘laws’ may be used as a basis for detaining and sentencing people. MAF measures could also prevent people — including IDPs from elsewhere — from moving into urban areas. However, it is unlikely that other humanitarian needs would be significantly affected. This would also likely have a very limited impact on market functionality.

There is a larger potential impact on humanitarian operations. First, generalised securitisation measures could affect responders’ ability to procure goods, undertake normal operations, and reach populations in need by raising security and financial costs (e.g. at checkpoints). This may impact access for organisations either working from, or trying to reach, urban areas. Second, increased scrutiny from MAF and SSPC actors could result in raids on offices, warehouses, and service delivery points, both directly affecting specific organisations and having a chilling effect on response operations more generally. Third, a more general crackdown on civil space (e.g. through crackdowns on people using VPNs and on financial transactions) is likely to stoke fears and have uncertain consequences. Particularly with the rollout of the Cybersecurity Law and possible increased in-person and digital checks in place, there is likely to be fear, confusion, and uncertainty about the visibility of humanitarian activity — and therefore about administrative risk. However, it is worth noting that this is more likely to affect organisations that are operating on the MAF’s radar to some degree — less so for those with zero visibility.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS IN URBAN AREAS SHOULD:

- Identify which townships in which activities they support are likely to be impacted by electoral violence (i.e. which townships polls are announced for), and adjust operations to ensure staff safety (e.g. by moving office premises away from polling sites, ensuring teams avoid polling areas, and exercising particular caution on polling day);
- Advise staff (including of implementing partners) — especially staff from Myanmar — to exercise heightened vigilance around checkpoints;
- Advise staff (including of implementing partners) — especially staff from Myanmar — to exercise heightened vigilance while carrying out humanitarian activities that could be perceived as supporting resistance actors;
- Anticipate delays or changes due to implementation challenges and concerns;
- Allow for the utmost flexibility in reporting, documentation, and accounting, given heightened MAF securitisation measures and the risks these pose to carrying such documentation;
- Ensure that all partners are trained in digital security practices;
- Avoid, and advise staff (including of implementing partners) to avoid, locations with MAF troops where possible, as these may be targets for resistance actors; and
- Ensure that organisations have no visible connection to voting or the election.

Major MAF Offensive

In this scenario, the MAF launches one or more large-scale offensives to regain specific areas of Myanmar — particularly in towns where it has lost control — in the lead-up to its planned elections. It shifts troops and materiel into areas identified as important for holding elections, and then uses main roads to re-establish its presence in more territory. It aids its re-expansion efforts through the frequent use of airstrikes (and drone attacks), particularly in villages near roadways and towns, and in locations where it perceives resistance actors to be located. EAO and resistance-led attacks rely more heavily on drone strikes, hit-and-run tactics, and the ambushing of convoys, resulting in MAF troop losses but with limited effectiveness in stopping MAF movement. As MAF troops move along major roadways, urban areas and transport corridors are the first places to become increasingly securitised, meaning that some economic activity can take place but civilians in these places are highly restricted — and at risk of detention or other punishment. More civilians flee from urban to rural areas, but they may be displaced multiple times as the MAF tries to expand a buffer zone around the areas in which it has — or retakes — control.

LIKELIHOOD: 

As the SSPC tries to ensure that its election goes through and is treated — at least by specific international actors — as legitimate, it may see exertion of military efforts as valuable. The causality could go in either direction: perceived external support and buy-in for elections may give it increased confidence to wage offensives (as it did recently in northern Mandalay Region and Northern Shan State); or it may seek greater control in order to gain greater assurance that it can conduct elections. The likelihood of this scenario was bolstered by recent [reporting](#) that the UWSA would refrain from selling weapons to the other large EAOs (which could also affect smaller groups that benefit from downstream sales); the UWSA is understood to be a major supplier of arms to these groups. Decreased armament of groups opposing the MAF, and MAF visibility on this,

could be a motivating factor for it to increase its offensives against them.

However, there is little evidence that it needs to make gains in specific areas, and it has struggled to make such gains in the past. For the purposes of making a political transition to a more democratic-looking regime, there are only marginal benefits of facilitating voting in a few more locations. Equally important here is the MAF's seeming inability to make major gains when it wants to; it has often spent months trying to retake lost ground (e.g. in Nawng-hkio Township), and in many places has simply been unable to make headway (e.g. on the Asia Highway in Karen State). However, as noted in the preceding paragraph, changes in the supply chains of EAOs and smaller resistance actors could change its calculus and the effectiveness of its efforts.

IMPACT: HIGH AND NEGATIVE

KEY TAKEAWAY: IN THIS SCENARIO, HUMANITARIAN NEEDS CAN BE EXPECTED TO RISE ACROSS THE BOARD, BUT HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT CAPACITY (AND MARKET FUNCTIONALITY) ARE UNLIKELY TO CHANGE SUBSTANTIALLY.

MAF efforts to re-establish control along roadways is likely to displace, and otherwise affect, people living on and in villages near these corridors. The increase in MAF troops, and the violence engendered by their presence, would likely increase protection concerns; and these same factors, as well as fears of MAF abuses, would likely impact livelihoods and healthcare access in the same areas.

As ever, changes in control may disrupt established patterns of response activity and require travel along different routes, but local responders will likely still be able to reach populations in need, and increased MAF presence may even increase the reach of international responders. For similar reasons, market functionality would likely not be significantly affected.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS SHOULD LOOK TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN SCENARIO 1 AND ALSO:

- Preposition aid, to the greatest extent possible, in anticipation of waves of displacement on the routes taken by MAF troops;
- Reduce administrative burdens (e.g. reporting requirements) and increase flexibility, allowing local partners to quickly adapt programs to respond to needs as they arise;
- Shift to remote, zero-visibility modalities where not already existing; and
- Engage with local authorities in border-adjacent areas, where possible, to facilitate the flow of assistance from the border inward.

Major Resistance Offensive

LIKELIHOOD: 

Resistance actors may see this as a critical window during which to launch an operation against the MAF. As the NUG struggles to assert its legitimacy as an alternative government, resistance actors may seek to undermine whatever legitimacy an election and transition could bestow upon the SSPC. Some EAOs may also want to disrupt an election that could strengthen the MAF's international standing and position in formal peace talks with EAOs. It is possible that resistance actors and/or aligned EAOs have laid plans to launch such an offensive but not made this public, as with Operation 1027.

At the same time, little can be inferred from the lack of visible planning here; while this may indeed be a critical window, it cannot be assumed that the required coordination — not yet seen since the coup — will appear now. Furthermore, it is not clear that resistance forces could launch an offensive that would be effective in stopping elections: unlike the advantages held by the Three Brotherhood Alliance in Northern Shan State's hilly terrain, most resistance actors operate with fewer resources on flat plains where the MAF has most of the advantages. Many EAOs, even if they were inclined to support such an offensive in territory beyond that in which they primarily operate, are tied up in their own fighting against the MAF.

In this scenario, resistance actors — potentially in tandem with larger EAOs — launch a large-scale, planned offensive that involves attacks on towns, potentially targeting areas where the SSPC plans to hold the election. This could take place in multiple locations at once, but would be most likely to occur in parts of Sagaing, Mandalay, and Magway regions, where resistance actors control rural areas surrounding towns and have the support of EAOs in neighbouring states (Shan, Kachin, Rakhine). As in Operation 1027, this could involve the blocking or damaging of major roadways, preventing MAF troops from sending reinforcements, and the simultaneous siege of towns beyond those choke points.

The MAF responds to such attacks with extreme force, massively increasing its use of airstrikes and drone strikes in towns and the areas around them, and affecting tens of thousands of civilians in the process. It barricades its positions in towns under attack and tries to prevent the movement of anybody into or out of them. This, and the blocking of roads by resistance actors also prevents goods from easily reaching areas where fighting is taking place. By virtue of the imbalance of arms between the MAF and resistance forces, such fighting drags on for many months, likely past the planned timeline for the elections in affected areas. Polls may go ahead in other areas, such as Yangon and Ayeyarwaddy Region.

IMPACT: HIGH AND NEGATIVE

KEY TAKEAWAY: THE CHANGES IN THIS SCENARIO WOULD HAVE A HIGH IMPACT, RESULTING IN A MAJOR INCREASE IN DISPLACEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN NEEDS. IT WOULD ALSO SEVERELY IMPACT HUMANITARIAN ACCESS, MARKET FUNCTIONALITY, AND ADMINISTRATIVE RISK IN AFFECTED AREAS.

In this scenario, increased violence in more densely-packed urban areas would likely affect many people, including long-time residents of these places and IDPs who have fled there from nearby rural areas during fighting since 2021. Displacement would likely rise significantly, though transport blockages could also simultaneously affect people's ability to reach safer areas. Accordingly, the full gamut of humanitarian needs would be expected to rise for a large number of people in this scenario, who would be affected by security threats, struggle to generate income or acquire sufficient food, and lack access to healthcare and other services.

At the same time, humanitarian responders (even local responders) would likely find it extremely challenging to access the areas where fighting takes place, both logistically and in terms of security and administrative risk. For the same logistical reasons, and because of the destruction and insecurity likely engendered by fighting in urban areas, market functionality would likely suffer.

IN THIS SCENARIO, INTERNATIONAL RESPONDERS SHOULD:

- Be prepared to respond to displacement from urban areas, resulting in dispersal to multiple informal displacement sites and relocation to other nearby towns;
- Scale up funding in order to maximise the impact of existing access, and increase cash-based assistance to offset the rising costs of goods and loss of livelihoods;
- Support local partners in conducting localised needs assessments with IDP populations and other communities, in order to gauge the scope of needs and respond accordingly;
- Support the construction and operation of healthcare centres to address the needs of large numbers of people injured by previous fighting, among other health concerns;
- Develop programmatic streams dedicated to supporting returnees, with the explicit understanding that these are not durable solutions and repeated displacement is likely;
- Anticipate the need to increase engagement with NUG-linked actors and develop strategies to navigate tensions that may arise as multiple actors compete for control; and
- Provide technical and financial support for emergent actors' efforts to comply with IHL and IHRL norms, including by protecting civilians and ensuring protection and humane treatment for those who surrender or defect.

Scenario Plan

NATIONWIDE ELECTIONS

Contributing information sources to this document include public and non-public humanitarian information. The content compiled is by no means exhaustive and does not necessarily reflect the position of its authors or funders. The provided information, assessment, and analysis are designated for humanitarian purposes only and as such should not be cited.

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