



Weekly Security Review

Safety and security highlights for clients operating in Myanmar

Released: 06 February 2020

Dates covered: 29 January - 04 February 2020

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Armed Conflict

Two (2) incidents have been reported in the last report period (29 January - 04 February 2020):

1. IED: 2nd Feb 2020 - Time: Unknown - Kayin State's Hpapun Township

On 27 January, Tatmadaw Battalion Commander of Light Infantry Battalion No. 708 was killed in a targeted mine attack in Kayin State's Hpapun Township.

According to a Tatmadaw spokesperson; the mine was planted by the Karen National Union's armed wing Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).



Photo via RFA Facebook

2. IED: 3rd Feb 2020 - 07:00Hrs - Myawaddy Township, Kayin State

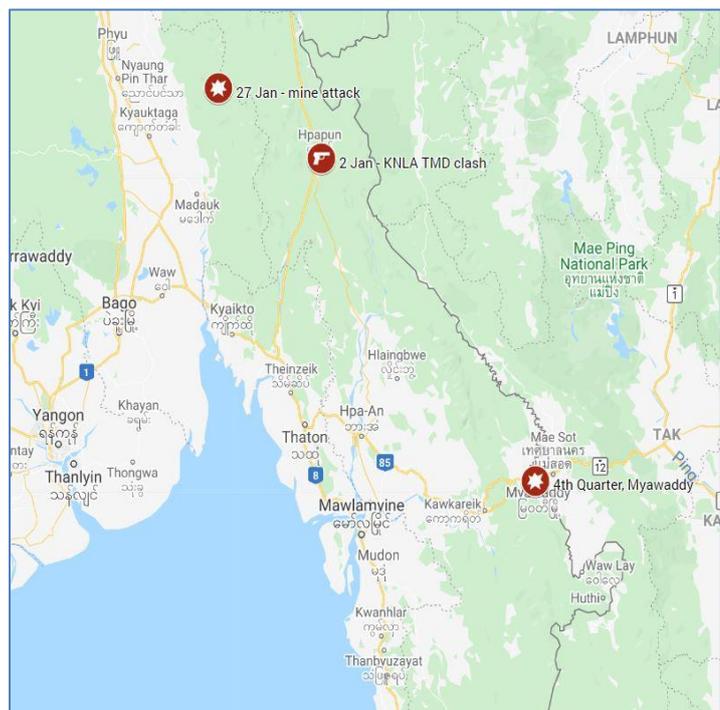
Statements released by the Kayin State Border Guard Force; at approximately 07:00Hrs on Monday 3 Feb, 2x explosive devices detonated beside a residence in the 4th Quarter, near Asia Highway (AH-1) in Myawaddy Township, Kayin State.

- Type of devices: Unconfirmed
- Injuries: 2x Casualties (taken to Myawaddy Hospital)
- Fatalities: Nil Reported
- No group claimed responsibility for the attack
- Authorities are conducting further investigations

Assessment

In 2014, intense skirmishes between the Tatmadaw and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) broke out on the outskirts of Myawaddy and a number of residents were displaced.

On 2 January, KNLA's Brigade No.5 and Tatmadaw troops clashed in Hpapun Township and two civilians were wounded.



While Kayin State remains largely peaceful, a delicate balance between the KNU, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and security forces is driven by resource income and associated corporate social responsibility projects. Deep tensions remain between these groups, and there is the potential for minor incidents to quickly escalate. Unpredictable splinter groups operating in border regions, such as the rogue DKBA brigade 5 (also known as the Klo Htoo Baw column or battalion), may inflame conflict beyond the direct control of larger ethnic armed organizations. Sudden changes to the economy, such as shutting down major sources of employment or corporate social responsibility projects, could jeopardize the balance of power between groups and provoke conflict over territory, resources, and roads.

Though a signatory to the NCA, the KNLA and Tatmadaw resumed fighting after the Tatmadaw began repairing the road from Baw Hsee Kee to Ler Mu Plaw, in Hpapun Township.

Tensions stemming from the road construction were never resolved, and have since eroded trust between the two armed groups. In October 2018, the KNU pulled out of formal peace negotiations privately citing a lack of trust in the process. With both the KNU and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) abstaining from formal peace talks, the likelihood of the process moving forward is limited. In the short term, clashes are expected to continue intermittently in and around Hpapun.

No change to security posture. Implement journey management plans for teams travelling outside of urban areas in Kayin and Tanintharyi regions.

Government reimposes internet ban in Rakhine and Chin states

The Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC) has imposed an internet shutdown in Rakhine's Maungdaw, Rathedaung, Buthidaung, Myebon and Paletwa Township in Chin State. The shutdown went into effect at 10.00pm local time on 3 February and will last three months.

The MoTC ordered telecom companies to shut down internet services as of 21 June 2019 in Rakhine State's Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rathedaung, Minbya, Mrauk-U, Ponnagyun Kyauktaw and Chin State's Paletwa Township amid escalating clashes in the regions between the Tatmadaw and AA forces. On 31 August 2019 midnight, the MoTC partially lifted the internet in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Myebon and Paletwa townships. Restoration of peace and stability in the townships was given as a reason by the MoTC.

Assessment

The shutdown of internet ordered by the Tatmadaw probably aims to reduce Arakan Army's capacity to communicate through messaging applications like Wechat and Viber across operation areas and collect intelligence from the local population about Tatmadaw troops movements. While this will surely reduce AA capacities momentarily, it is likely that redundant communication system based on phone calls or handheld radios will be set up quickly by the insurgent group.

However, Rakhine MPs and Human Rights activists believe the Internet shut down limits information leaks as Tatmadaw continues to conduct large-scale counter-insurgency operations.

Armed engagements between the AA and Tatmadaw troops are the most intense in Ponnagyun, Kyuaktaw, Minbya and Mrauk-U, where the internet remains blocked. Positive results from the next peace talks between the four Northern Alliances and government's NRPC and implementing to find a way to enforce NCA may bring an end to the internet ban.

In advance of any travel in Myanmar, Clients are recommended to establish primary, secondary, backup and emergency forms of communication in the event of the failure of one or multiple modes. Satellite phones are the most effective means of emergency communication independent of government-controlled systems, but licenses and usage are heavily restricted, and effectiveness is limited during rainy season. Establishing regular check-ins with colleagues, informing others of routes and waypoints, and establishing procedures for missed check-ins are effective ways of monitoring travelling teams.

List of Acronyms

AA: Arakan Army. The militant outfit of the ULA (United League of Arakan). Created in 2009 by Major General Tunn Myat Naing, the AA has grown into a force of about 7,000 soldiers benefiting from a solid support by the Arakanese Population.

NRPC: National Reconciliation and Peace Center. The governmental department in charge of negotiating with various Ethnic Armed Groups on the implementation of a peace agreement chaired by Aung San Su Kyi.

KNU: Karen National Union. A political organization with its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The KNU is one of the ten Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement signatories.

RCSS: Restoration Council of Shan State. A 10,000 strong armed group based on the Thai border. Founded in 1996, RCSS joined the national cease-fire with central government in 2015 and subsequently started to move northward to the Chinese border where it has clashed regularly with other armed groups operating in the region.

Source Information

This product represents highlights from a comprehensive review of Myanmar and English language print, electronic, and social media as well as information obtained from sources in law enforcement, government, diplomatic missions, the United Nations, international NGOs and other Exera partners active in the region. Supplementary research is conducted by Exera investigators and analysts.

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