

# MYANMAR'S NORTHERN BORDERLANDS

A History of Myanmar-China Relations  
and the Implications for Future Conflict

BY DAN SENG LAWN

KACHINLAND RESEARCH CENTRE

MARCH 2025



## About Kachinland Research Centre

Kachinland Research Centre, a non-profit research organisation headquartered in Myitkyina, Kachin State, was founded in 2012 mainly focusing on human rights issues, education and media. The aim of KRC is to promote social science research, engage in critical conversations about Kachin society, and build a comprehensive data bank of Kachinland. In order to materialise that goal, the Centre is doing rigorous field research, publishing research works in Kachin, Burmese and English languages, and lecturing in education institutions.

## Other contributors

Tabea Campbell Pauli  
Deddeaw Laosinchai

## Cover page

Bhamo Joss house. Photo credit: James Henry Green, 1922.

## Suggested citation:

Dan Seng Lawn (2025) 'A History of Myanmar-China Relations and the Implications for Future Conflict' in *Myanmar's Northern Borderlands paper series*. XCEPT: Online.

*Myanmar's Northern Borderlands* is a series of short papers which aim to help foreign actors understand the changing nature of conflict and peace in this region in 2025. Further papers in this series explore the evolution of Myanmar's bilateral relationship with China amid escalating conflict near their shared border, and the local experiences of the ongoing fighting on communities grappling with a growing humanitarian crisis.

---

This report is a product of the Cross-Border Conflict: Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) program, funded by UK aid from the UK government. XCEPT brings together leading experts to examine conflict-affected borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and the factors that shape violent and peaceful behaviour. This research is a part of XCEPT's Local Research Network, which engages experts on the ground to build data, evidence and analysis that reflects the local experiences of fragility and conflict. For more information on XCEPT and the Local Research Network visit [www.xcept-research.org](http://www.xcept-research.org)

The views expressed in the document do not necessarily reflect those of The Asia Foundation, XCEPT or the UK government.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The roots of China-Myanmar relations	5
The post-independence period	6
1990s and 2000s: Rapprochement	6
2010s: Myanmar's democratisation and ensuing tensions	6
2021: The military coup and further disengagement	7
Operation 1027 and its aftermath	7
Conclusion	8
Endnotes	10

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
UWSA	United Wa State Army

# INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, Myanmar's relationship with China has been marked by periods of intense conflict and diplomatic tension. The border between the two countries is rooted in 13<sup>th</sup> century Chinese expansion, when the Yunnan territory was formally incorporated into China's Yuan empire.<sup>1</sup> The imperial administration was tasked with conquering neighbouring tribes as well, resulting in Kachin, Wa and northern Shan communities becoming protectorates.<sup>2</sup> With Chinese political and economic influence projecting into Southeast Asia, tensions grew between the empire and the Burmese kingdom over the frontier tribal areas. Regular conflict occurred well into the British colonial period.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the border region was characterised by ethnic armed resistance and a communist uprising. Chinese support for the insurgent Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was a major source of tension between the governments of China and Myanmar, and cross-border alliances between armed and political groups in the frontier region rivalled the significance of diplomatic ties between Beijing and Yangon. The 1990s represented a major shift in dynamics, with the collapse of the CPB in Myanmar, and the Chinese government's opening up toward economic development and international trade. Myanmar's decade of democratisation strengthened its relations with the west, sidelining China's footprint in the country. Following the 2021 military coup, Myanmar's foreign policy collapsed, creating opportunities for a return of Chinese influence.

This paper seeks to ground an analysis of current China-Myanmar relations in a historical background which highlights key trends that have long defined Myanmar's

ties to its largest neighbour. Throughout history, Myanmar's rulers have had to balance Chinese influence, recognising China as a major political force and economic partner, and contending with strategic actions that have, at times, taken coercive and aggressive forms. This historically grounded analysis helps to understand the broader trends within which current conflict and political developments occur. Northern armed groups hold major power in Myanmar's overall conflict landscape, and their actions and decision-making are closely tied to Chinese positions and priorities in the border region. This paper, researched and written by a political analyst from this northern region, emphasises key points that risk being overlooked in ahistoric accounts of current conflict trends. These include:

- Chinese engagement in northern Myanmar is part of a long pattern. Whether through cross-border incursions or local alliances between actors in Yunnan and the Myanmar border region, this link has existed for at least one thousand years.
- China's presence is more dominant when the centre of Myanmar is weak, opening space for greater influence. In the wake of the 2021 coup, the military regime is struggling to hold on to its historical centre of power. Reducing Chinese influence would require improved stability and legitimate governance within Myanmar.
- China has been a significant player in recent changes on the ground. Its interests are complex, from securitising economic investments and trade, to managing violent conflict and illicit activity along the border. Consequently, this has required some balance between supporting ethnic armed groups and supporting the Myanmar military.



Loi Je: half of this village is in China, the other half in Myanmar.  
Photo credit: Major C. M. Enriquez, 1923.

# THE ROOTS OF CHINA-MYANMAR RELATIONS

The study of history offers us no manual of instructions that can be applied automatically. History teaches by analogy, shedding light on the likely consequences of comparable situations. But each generation must determine for itself which circumstances are in fact comparable.

—Henry A Kissinger<sup>3</sup>

Historically, China conceived of itself as encompassing three spheres of territory:

- A **Sinic zone** including Korea, Vietnam, the Liu Chiu Islands, and at times Japan
- An **inner Asian zone** of non-Han Chinese populations like Manchus, Mongols, Uighurs, Turks, and Tibetans, who had to be controlled for security reasons
- An **outer zone** of ‘barbarians’ who were nonetheless ‘expected to pay tribute and acknowledge China’s superiority.’

Traditionally, Chinese security was synonymous with maintaining dominance, which referred not only to physical territory but intangible and cultural spaces too.

The extension of Chinese imperial administration to Yunnan province in the 13<sup>th</sup> century nominally included the territories of modern-day Kachin State and Shan State until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Successive pacification efforts reached the Irrawaddy and Taunggyi in the south, control over which were regularly contested by Chinese and Burmese forces between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Place names in the border region reference this history, such as Ping-Mian (‘pacifying Myanmar’) and Mian-Ning (‘Myanmar tranquility’). Chinese imperial claim to these areas was weak and control over them in real terms remained with the local chiefs, as their communities showed no allegiance to China or to Myanmar.<sup>4</sup>

## Cross-border relations throughout China’s dynastic periods

**Yuan dynasty:** Shortly after claiming control of Yunnan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, envoys were sent to the Bagan kingdom, which ruled central Myanmar at the time, though they were unsuccessful in extracting tributes and Bagan responded by invading borderland areas which had submitted to Chinese rule, such as the Wa-Palaung. Conflict ended with the Burmese King submitting to the Chinese following the capture of Tagaung and the temporary incorporation of northern Myanmar into a new province called Cheng-mien.<sup>5</sup> The Burmese monarchy suffered internal fighting for many years, opening opportunities for Chinese advance, and Myanmar ultimately became a tributary state of the Chinese empire.<sup>6</sup>

**Ming dynasty:** Myanmar’s 15<sup>th</sup> century Taungoo dynasty aggressively expanded with regular incursions into Yunnan, eventually leading the Chinese to demarcate the border through a series of mountain passes.<sup>7</sup> By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the last emperor of the Southern Ming dynasty retreated to Yunnan when his capital was overrun by the Qing; he took over Hsenwi and Maingmaw and eventually took refuge, along with his remaining army, in the Burmese kingdom in Sagaing. For some years, Ming loyalists regularly crossed into Myanmar to support the exiled emperor, occupying the Shan principalities of Mone and Yawnghwe, raiding Bagan and advancing as far as present-day Meiktila, until the emperor was handed to the Qing army and executed.<sup>8</sup>

**Qing dynasty:** A century of peace followed, and the borderland tribes were left alone, with the frontier between the Chinese empire and the Burmese kingdom largely un-demarcated. Over time, Yunnan became a frontier hub run by local power brokers like the owners of highly lucrative mines, who exerted significant influence on the cross-border relationship. A new dynasty in Myanmar set out to consolidate its rule in border regions, sparking tensions with the Qing which escalated into open warfare in 1765.<sup>9</sup> Cross-border trade was banned for decades and the border heavily securitised, including the construction of fences in certain areas.

## The post-independence period

Since its independence, Myanmar has tried to maintain its *paukphaw* (kinship) relationship with China, careful not to threaten Chinese security interests.<sup>10</sup> Bilateral relations strained in the 1950s as the Chinese civil war between the Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) spilled over the border, with the People's Liberation Army crossing into Myanmar to chase after guerrillas. Tensions around the CCP's support for the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and wider anti-Chinese action in Myanmar in the wake of China's Cultural Revolution, caused further challenges.<sup>11</sup> Myanmar's successive regimes have needed to maintain neutrality and avoid confrontation with neighbours China and Thailand, even as these have to varying degrees lent support to ethnic armed resistance in Myanmar's border regions. Prioritising territorial integrity and national unity, the Myanmar military has engaged in decades of fighting along the Chinese border, walking a delicate line between imposing its will and placating China.<sup>12</sup>

## 1990s and 2000s: Rapprochement

The two governments were brought closer together by the events and responses to the 1988 uprising in Myanmar and the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in China. Both events were shaped by global geopolitical trends which continue to underpin the bilateral relationship today. The collapse of the Berlin Wall symbolised the end of the Cold War and the ideological battle between the communist and the western (capitalist) blocs, with the latter seeking to roll out democratisation efforts across the world. At the same time, Deng Xiaoping's reformist ascendance in 1980s China focused on economic development rather than exporting communist ideology abroad.<sup>13</sup> In Myanmar, the collapse of the CPB gave rise to a number of new armed groups in Kachin and northern Shan States, and the military junta sought to manage conflict risks by quickly establishing ceasefires with those groups.<sup>14</sup> Coinciding with major sanctions applied by western governments against Myanmar's junta, a boom in cross-border trade with China ensued, with Muse, Kan Pai Ti and Loi Je developing as major hubs and creating important revenue opportunities for Myanmar's sanctioned regime.<sup>15</sup>

The shift in Chinese policy toward Myanmar during this period was part of a larger strategic move based on a careful assessment of China's interests and economic needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Myanmar's significance in China's economic growth plans was outlined first in the 1980s, using the old Burma Road to link up China's poorer inland provinces, such as Yunnan, with the fast-growing economies of Southeast and South Asia.<sup>17</sup>

More and more high-level visits between the capitals took place. Between 1990–1998, China reportedly supplied nearly USD 1.8 billion worth of arms to Myanmar, enabling its military to modernise. What was a poorly equipped force of 185,000 troops in 1988, limited to counter-insurgency operations, became the second largest military in South-east Asia, with approximately 500,000 troops, capable of waging both conventional and unconventional warfare.<sup>18</sup>

## 2010s: Myanmar's democratisation and ensuing tensions

The Myanmar military invested heavily in weakening and limiting the actions of ethnic resistance movements throughout the 1990s, bringing the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) to a ceasefire in 1994, and taking advantage of internal fighting in the Karen National Union to take over its Manerplaw headquarters in 1995.<sup>19</sup> In 2009, the Myanmar military captured Laukkai in Kokang, Shan State, the headquarters of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). The move was condemned by China which had supported the group as historical ethnic Han rulers of the region.

With the rise to power of Thein Sein in 2010, the first quasi-civilian president of Myanmar since the 1950s, the country signalled its move toward democratisation, trying to mend relationships with the west and sparking tensions with China over the suspension of the controversial Myitsone dam project in Kachin State.

As the Myanmar regime tried to reduce Chinese influence, China adopted a more pragmatic policy position to secure its investments in the country, including the ambitious infrastructure and transport project, the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>20</sup> When the KIA's ceasefire broke down in 2011, China adopted a mediating role between the Myanmar government and the ethnic armed organisation.<sup>21</sup> As Kachin State and northern Shan State lie on China's proposed route linking Yunnan with the Indian Ocean, it is in the Chinese government's interest to maintain leverage over all armed actors controlling territory along the border.<sup>22</sup> Through its involvement in the Myanmar peace process that led to a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement between some of the ethnic armed organisations and the government, the Chinese government sought to restrict outside involvement in its sphere of influence.<sup>23</sup> During this period, limited state visits between the two governments maintained a minimum level of contact.<sup>24</sup>

## Wa State: A key piece of the border puzzle

Wa State, and its leadership under the United Wa State Army (UWSA), Myanmar's largest ethnic armed group, is a major consideration for Myanmar and China as their relations continue to unfold. Over decades, the armed group has developed a *de facto* state, most of it situated along the border with China, with little to no ties to Myanmar's central administration and economy. In the 1990s and 2000s, the UWSA became increasingly assertive through forceful expansion into new territories in southern Shan State. With the KIA's sidelining from ethnic politics and peace negotiations through the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of 2015, the UWSA became a strong voice in the Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee, a grouping of ethnic armed organisations who opted out of the peace process. It forged alliances with other powerful armed groups like the Three Brotherhood Alliance which have helped the UWSA to promote its political goal of formal recognition of Wa State.

For Myanmar's military regime, the UWSA's political vision of autonomy is a direct challenge to sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also encourages other ethnic groups to pursue some measure of self-determination, for example in federal models of governance. This will create huge challenges for the maintenance of a political equilibrium that satisfies the regime, but denying the Wa this official status is likely to entrench its contested *de facto* authority and give more cause for a strong relationship with China. For China, the UWSA's political project is a major determinant of future investment in the border region.

Recent support from China to extend its territorial claims into the western Salween region has helped the UWSA to become the dominant ethnic force in the geo-strategically important border region. Further extension to the west would serve China's interests in a strong China-Myanmar Economic Corridor but represents a huge loss of territory in Shan State and would bring the Chinese zone of influence much closer to Myanmar's capital.<sup>25</sup>

### 2021: The military coup and further disengagement

In February 2021, the Myanmar military toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government to vehement civilian protests, installing its own State Administrative Council to govern the country. Brutal crackdowns on dissent followed, with ethnic armed organisations mostly supporting the anti-coup movement, allied with the ousted elected lawmakers. The Kachin Independence Organisation, the KIA's political counterpart, officially gave its support to demonstrators in Kachin State as well as the new government in exile, the National Unity Government. These moves rapidly escalated fighting between the KIA and Myanmar military.<sup>26</sup> Unlike during the 1988 popular protest movement, the Chinese government remained silent on the coup, neither endorsing nor denouncing any emerging political factions. It also distanced itself from the broader regional fallout over the coup, as Myanmar's regime is excluded from regional diplomatic circles.<sup>27</sup> China maintained this position until October 2023 when an alliance of resistance groups and ethnic armed organisations launched a joint offensive against the Myanmar military, Operation 1027.

### Operation 1027 and its aftermath

This major offensive operation by an alliance of anti-coup armed groups can be understood through a historical and geopolitical perspective in the broader context of China-Myanmar relations. Similar events, including clashes over border territory, Chinese annexation of tribal areas, and mobilisation of Chinese fighters through proxy armed groups in Myanmar, may offer insights into the significance and implications of this major conflict event.<sup>28</sup>

On 27 October 2023, the Three Brotherhood Alliance comprising the MNDAA, Arakan Army, and Ta'ang National Liberation Army, launched coordinated action against the Myanmar military in Mong Ko and Chinshwehaw. The first phase of the offensive resulted in the MNDAA regaining control of Laukkai in Kokang, which they had lost to the Myanmar military in 2009. By August 2024, the second phase culminated with the capture of Lashio, the largest city in northern Shan State and home of the Myanmar military's northeastern regional command centre. Other strategic locations in northern Shan State were captured, including Kutkai, Hsenwi, Namhkam, Namhpakka and Nawngkhio.

### The objective of Operation 1027 was

“To safeguard the lives of civilians, assert our right to self-defence, maintain control over our territory, and respond resolutely to ongoing artillery attacks and airstrikes perpetrated by the [Myanmar military].

Furthermore, we are dedicated to eradicating the oppressive military dictatorship, a shared aspiration of the entire Myanmar populace. Our commitment extends to combating the widespread online gambling fraud that has plagued Myanmar, particularly along the China-Myanmar border.

Additionally, we aim to crack down on online gambling companies and the [Myanmar military], along with its associated militia groups, that have been involved in these operations.”

(Statement by the Three Brotherhood Alliance issued on 27 October 2023)

These actions were closely aligned with Chinese interests in the border region. A statement issued by the Three Brotherhood Alliance affirms that ‘combating the widespread online gambling fraud’ in this border region was a key objective of the operation. Together with the

more recent development of online scamming, gambling has long been a source of consternation for the Chinese government, which has accused Myanmar authorities of inadequate responses to these criminal activities.<sup>29</sup> The return to power of ethnic Kokang groups in Laukkai was another priority.<sup>30</sup> The scale of the operation suggests that it would not have been possible without Chinese support, as the MNDAA has historically sourced weapons from across the border, facilitated through the UWSA.<sup>31</sup> The Myanmar military Commander-in-Chief stated several times in the aftermath of the offensive that ‘foreign experts’ assisted ethnic armed groups with weapons technology like drones, as well as provision of funds, food, pharmaceuticals and other aid.<sup>32</sup>

Operation 1027 extended the Chinese sphere of influence in Myanmar through the Three Brotherhood Alliance’s territorial gains. The armed groups demonstrated their capacity to capture significant territory from the Myanmar military. At the same time, Beijing appears to oppose a complete dismantling of the Myanmar military regime, and the Chinese government has returned to direct engagement in a mediation role for a political settlement between the regime and the armed groups.<sup>33</sup> Though it has the convening power to bring them to the negotiation table, China may not be able to determine the outcome of talks. The Myanmar military is forced to accept mediation but rejects the new map of territorial control in northern Shan State. The MNDAA and its allies will likely be unwilling to relinquish the new areas they have captured. The temporary ceasefire appears unlikely to transform into a larger political and territorial settlement, laying the foundations for protracted instability and complicating future Chinese interests around trade and investment in the region.

## CONCLUSION

In facing up to its much larger and more powerful neighbour, Myanmar is left with few palatable options. The military regime can

- Continue to aim for a balance between internal and foreign interests in the country
- Ignore or attempt to transcend the relationship with China by finding a way to stabilise Myanmar’s internal crisis, increase the government’s legitimate authority, and improve relations with other foreign powers, or
- Acquiesce to China’s interests.<sup>34</sup>

Myanmar’s neutral stance in the region during the first democratic government period of the 1950s and

subsequent isolationist policies allowed it to ignore or ‘hide’ from Chinese influence.<sup>35</sup> Since 2010, greater emphasis was placed on balancing interests, while building closer ties to other neighbours including India and Vietnam, as well as the US, as evidenced by democratisation efforts and the military’s decision to resume fighting against the KIA close to China’s border.

Policy options for managing bilateral relations drastically reduced after the 2021 military coup, and they were further undermined by Operation 1027 and Myanmar military losses in several areas. The ability for Beijing to influence the course of events in Myanmar’s ongoing conflicts was reaffirmed, underscoring Myanmar’s inability to adopt a strong position in the absence of a stable social and



political order inside the country. Until such stability is restored, the relationship between the two governments will remain entirely asymmetrical, and the threat of Chinese expanding influence across the border endures.

Post-Operation 1027, the Myanmar military's ability to hold together a united and democratic nation looks increasingly weak. In this context, China's position is under scrutiny as it wields enormous influence over

Myanmar's non-state armed actors and their fight against the Myanmar military. For China, in the long run, balancing support between these groups and the central regime in order to safeguard its geopolitical and trade interests will become increasingly challenging. Though historical evidence reveals certain recurring patterns in China's management of its borders and relations with Myanmar, this era is moving into uncharted territory, increasingly fluid and unpredictable.



China town in Bhamo.  
Photo Credit: Major C. M. Enriquez, Meiktila, 1920.

## Endnotes

1. Dan Seng lawn (2015) 'Burma/Myanmar: A Fulcrum of Great Power Politics' in *World Affairs*, 19 (4): pp.108–129.
2. EH Parker (1893) *Burma with special reference to her relations with China*, Rangoon: Rangoon Gazette, p. 44; GE Harvey (1925) *History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824, the beginning of the English Conquest*, London: Frank Cass, reprinted 1967, p.27.
3. Henry Kissinger (1994) *Diplomacy*, New York: Simon and Schuster, p.27.
4. XiaolinGuo (2007) 'Towards Resolution: China in Myanmar Issues' in *Silk Road Paper*, p. 31.
5. Than Tun (1961) 'History of Burma: A.D. 1000–1300' in *Open Mind (A Journal of Selective International Writings)*, 2 (13), pp. 97–111.
6. Yingcong Dai (2004) 'A Disguised Defeat: The Myanmar Campaign of the Qing Dynasty' in *Modern Asian Studies*, 38 (1), p. 150.
7. Ibid. Scholar G.H. Luce thought that the positions of these eight passes were moveable within twenty or twenty-five miles.
8. EH Parker (1893).
9. Yingcong Dai (2004) pp. 153–155.
10. Thin Maung Maung Than (1999) 'Myanmar: Myanmar-ness and realism in historical perspective' in K Booth and R Trood (eds.) *Strategic Cultures in the Asia Pacific Region*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p.166.
11. DM Seekins (1983) 'Historical Background' in EM Bunge (ed.) *Burma: A Country Study*, Washington: The American University, p. 66.
12. Thin Maung Maung Than (1999).
13. Lee Kuan Yew (2000) *From Third World to First: Singapore and Asian Economic Boom*, New York: HarperCollins p. 599.
14. Zakhung Ting Ying and Layauk Ze Lum, based in Kan Pai Ti, formed the National Democratic Army—Kachin, establishing an 'everlasting peace agreement' with the Tatmadaw. In 1994, the KIA also entered into a ceasefire agreement with the military government. For more detail, see Dan Seng Lawn (2022) *Conflict and Development in the Myanmar-China Border Region*. XCEPT: Online.
15. Dan Seng Lawn (2022).
16. Malik, Mohan (2012) *China and India: Great Power Rivals*, New Delhi: Viva Books, p.204.
17. P Stobdan (1993) 'China' forays into Burma: Implications for India' in *Strategic Analysis*, 16 (1), p. 34. See former vice-minister of communications, Pan Qi (1985) 'Opening to the Southwest: An Expert Opinion' in *Beijing Review*, 2 September.
18. Weapons technology included fighter aircraft, radar equipment, naval patrol boats, heavy artillery, main battle tanks, anti-aircraft missiles, guns, and ammunition. The indicated troop size was an overestimation in hindsight. W Ashton (1995) 'Chinese bases in Burma—fact or fiction' *JIR*, 7 (2), p.26.
19. Dan Seng Lawn (2023) 'Development Policy and Processes in Kachin State: Development from Above During the Ceasefire Period (1994–2010)' in Makiko Takeda and Chosein Yamahata (eds.) *Myanmar's Changing Political Landscape: Old and New Struggles*, Singapore: Springer, p. 94.
20. Pongphisoot Busbarat, Alvin Camba, Fadhila Inas Pratiwi, Sovinda Po, Hoàng Đỗ, Bouadam Sengkhamkhoutlavong, Tham Siew Yean, and Moe Thuzar 'How Has China's Belt and Road Initiative Impacted Southeast Asian Countries?' in *Carnegie China*, 5 December 2023.
21. Thomas Fuller 'Peace Talks Start Between Myanmar and Rebels' in *New York Times*, 4 February 2013.
22. Bertil Litner (2012) *Great Game East: India, China and the Struggle for Asia's most volatile frontier*, New Delhi: Harper Collins, p. 223.
23. Yun Sun (2017) *China and Myanmar's Peace Process*, United institute of Peace, Special Report.
24. 'Xi Jinping Meets with President U Thein Sein of Myanmar' in *China News*, 8 November 2014; 'Xi Jinping hold talks with State Counsellor Aung San Su Kyi of Myanmar' in *China News*, 18 January 2020.
25. For more background on Wa State, see Bertil Litner (2019) *The United Wa State Army and Burma's Peace Process*. United States Institute of Peace.
26. Dan Seng Lawn (2025) 'Changing Power Dynamics Since the 2021 Military Coup' in *Myanmar's Northern Borderlands paper series*. XCEPT: Online.
27. Jonathan Head 'China welcomes Myanmar's embattled leader on first visit since coup' in *BBC*, 6 November 2024
28. Bertil Litner (2012). The Chinese Yuan dynasty and Myanmar kingdom clashed over control of the Wa and Palaung in 1272. The latter's military loss and refusal to pay tribute resulted in the Chinese annexing northern Myanmar as a new province of its empire, extending its influence southward and destabilising Myanmar's power centre. In the 20th century, China's communist regime retaliated against Myanmar following anti-Chinese riots in 1967 and attacks on the Chinese embassy in Yangon. Under the banner of the proxy CPB, strengthened by thousands of Chinese 'volunteer' fighters, Chinese forces supported a cross-border incursion at Mong Ko in north-eastern Shan State, overrunning the Myanmar garrison. Within a few years the CPB controlled nearly all of Shan State's border areas.
29. National Institute for Defense Studies 'China and Myanmar Civil War: Operation 1027 and China's Position' No.353, 11 October 2024; 'Insight: Rebel Fire and China's Ire: Inside Myanmar's Anti-Junta Offensive' in *Reuters*, 20 December 2023.

30. Previous efforts to restore the MNDA in Kokang in 2015 were repelled by the Myanmar military and prompted then-president Thein Sein to accuse Chinese officials of supporting the ethnic armed organisations involved. Win Min, '[Fighting Intensifies in Myanmar's Kokang Region](#)' in *Voice of America*, 15 March 2015.
31. National Institute for Defense Studies (2024).
32. '[Myanmar Junta Chief says "foreign experts" helping in offensive against military](#)' in *The Straits Times*, 11 November 2023; '[China closes border to pressure Myanmar Ethnic armies into peace talk](#)' in *The Irrawaddy*, 28 August 2024.
33. Wang Yi's visit to Naypyitaw in August 2024 set the tone for bilateral relations in the aftermath of Operation 1027.
34. Paul Schroeder (1994) 'Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory,' in *International Security*, 19 (1): 108–148; Stephen M Walt (2009) 'Alliance in a Unipolar World' in *World Politics*, 61 (1): 86–120; Thomas J Christensen & Jack Snyder (1990) 'Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity' in *International Organisation*, 44 (2): 137–168.
35. U Nu (1975) *Saturday's Son: Memoirs of the Former Prime Minister of Burma*, Translated by U Law Yone, New Haven: Yale University Press; David Steinberg (2012) *Modern China-Myanmar Relations: Dilemmas of Mutual Dependence*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press.