

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

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# Arakan Army Posed to “Liberate” Myanmar’s Rakhine State



The Arakan Army (AA), the ethnic armed organization for the Arakan (Rakhine) people, has now seized control of almost all of Myanmar’s Rakhine State, with the notable exceptions of the capital of Sittwe and the port city of Kyaukpyu. A press report from early December 2024 indicated that the AA controlled [13 of the 17](#) townships in Rakhine State (including all the townships along the border with Bangladesh), as well as Paletwa Township in neighboring Chin State. On December 20, 2024, the AA claimed it had [overrun](#) the Western Military Command headquarters in Rakhine’s Ann Township. In a statement released on January 20, 2024, the AA reported that [fighting with the military junta’s forces continued](#) in Ann Township, as well as in Ayeyarwady, Bago, and Magway regions.

Most recently, the AA conducted military operations in early February 2025, potentially signaling an impending assault on the city of Sittwe. The AA and the military junta have reportedly been [exchanging artillery fire](#) in the outskirts of the capital city, leading one military analyst to speculate that the AA was trying to ascertain the weaknesses in the junta’s defenses in preparation for an assault on Sittwe. Besides its military operations in Rakhine State, the AA has also [recently conducted attacks](#) on junta forces in the Magway Region.

The remaining junta forces in Rakhine State appear to be isolated, relying on airdrops to be resupplied with troops, weapons, and other supplies. As part of its military campaign, the AA has offered junta officers and soldiers immunity if they defect or surrender. A lieutenant colonel who surrendered to the AA [said](#) in a video, “The military will not only lose to the AA, but will continue to be defeated in all battles, everywhere.”

If recent trends continue for the rest of 2025, there is a good chance that the AA will eventually take complete control of Rakhine State, as well as Paletwa Township in Chin State. Such a turn of events has several serious implications for the future of Myanmar.

The AA is already establishing local governments in the Rakhine townships it controls. Little has been reported about the nature of these local governments, especially regarding their level of democratic representation and inclusivity of ethnic groups other than the Arakan.

It also remains to be seen if the AA will cease its military operations against the junta once it has won control of those areas of Myanmar that it considers part of the Arakan homeland. The seizure

of Paletwa in Chin State is allegedly based on the AA's claim that the township was historically part of Rakhine State. The AA's recent assaults in the Magway Region may reflect the AA's view that those areas should be part of a new Arakan state.

Alternatively, the AA's military operations in the Magway Region—as well as other assaults conducted alongside its Brotherhood Alliance allies, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army in Ayerawady and Sagaing regions—may demonstrate a willingness to continue to participate in Myanmar's revolution against the military junta even after the AA has secured control of the Arakan homeland.

The AA's attitude about joining a possible reconstituted democratic republic in Myanmar is another unresolved issue. The AA previously expressed a desire to be treated as a highly autonomous region in a manner similar to the junta's treatment of the United Wa State Army in Shan State under the 2018 constitution. Assuming the AA does take control of all of Rakhine State, such an arrangement may no longer be acceptable. Instead, the AA may seek to be recognized as a separate state in any new republic formed by ethnic armed organizations after the defeat of the military junta. In addition, the AA may seek recognition as an independent country.

AA control of Rakhine State also has major implications for the future of the Rohingya. There are [credible allegations](#) that AA soldiers have committed serious human rights violations against Rohingya civilians living in Rakhine State. The AA has said that it would welcome back the Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh and other countries but has provided no concrete plans for how such repatriation would occur or what conditions the returning Rohingya would face under AA rule. Given the current situation, it seems unlikely that many Rohingya would voluntarily return to Rakhine State to live under an AA-run government.

The future of Rakhine State is further complicated by the actions of the new Trump administration. The suspension of humanitarian assistance provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development has severely compromised the provision of basic food and medical care for hundreds of thousands of Burmese refugees in Bangladesh, India, and Thailand, raising the risk of malnutrition and death. The administration has also cut off support for the establishment of democratic provisional local governments in areas controlled by Myanmar's resistance movement. Similarly, the suspension of scholarships for Burmese students and the uncertain immigration status of Burmese refugees in the United States are placing hundreds of people in danger.

The renewal of the international emergency in Burma under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) does little to ameliorate the uncertainty about the Trump administration's policy on Myanmar. The renewal can be used to either apply more sanctions or remove existing sanctions on the military junta and its supporters—notably, President Obama utilized the IEEPA renewal process in 2016 to remove most of the existing sanctions on the previous military junta in Myanmar.

Overall, 2025 may prove to be a critical year for the people living in Rakhine State and the estimated one million Rohingya living in exile. For some, it could be a year of celebration and liberation; for others, it may close the door on their safe and voluntary return to their home villages and towns. Or it may be another year of war, violence, and death without any clear prospect for peace.

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