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Myanmar: Vast arsenal and notorious troops deployed during nationwide ‘killing spree’ protest crackdown – new research

- *Analysis of more than 50 videos show systematic and premeditated killings amid extensive deployment of battlefield weaponry*
- *Soldiers implicated in atrocity crimes against ethnic minorities now operating in Myanmar’s cities*
- *Evidence of extrajudicial executions and killings on orders of commanders*

The Myanmar military is using increasingly lethal tactics and weapons normally seen on the battlefield against peaceful protesters and bystanders across the country, new research by Amnesty International has revealed.

By verifying more than 50 videos from the ongoing crackdown, Amnesty International’s Crisis Evidence Lab can confirm that security forces appear to be implementing planned, systematic strategies including the ramped-up use of lethal force. Many of the killings documented amount to extrajudicial executions.

Footage clearly shows that Myanmar military troops - also known as the Tatmadaw - are increasingly armed with weapons that are only appropriate for the battlefield, not for policing actions. Officers are frequently seen engaging in reckless behavior, including the indiscriminate spraying of live ammunition in urban areas.

“These Myanmar military tactics are far from new, but their killing sprees have never before been livestreamed for the world to see,” said Joanne Mariner, Director of Crisis Response at Amnesty International.

“These are not the actions of overwhelmed, individual officers making poor decisions. These are unrepentant commanders already implicated in crimes against humanity, deploying their troops and murderous methods in the open.

“For years, ethnic minorities - including the Chin, Kachin, Karen, Rakhine, Rohingya, Shan, Ta’ang and more - have borne the brunt of horrific violence meted out by the Tatmadaw. Along with other rights groups, we have called on the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court, and bring the Tatmadaw’s senior commanders, including Min Aung Hlaing, to justice. Instead the Security Council has done nothing, and today we see the same military units turn their fire on protesters.

“The military authorities must immediately cease their deadly onslaught, de-escalate the situation nationwide, and release all those arbitrarily detained.”

The 55 clips, filmed from 28 February to 8 March, were recorded by members of the public and local media in cities including Dawei, Mandalay, Mawlamyine, Monywa, Myeik, Myitkyina and Yangon.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, the [death toll](#) from the protests as of 4 March stands at 61. This official estimate excludes additional known casualties in recent days.

Planned, premeditated and sanctioned use of lethal force

Amnesty International has verified multiple clips showing lethal force is being used in a planned, premeditated and coordinated manner.

In one [video](#) taken in Sanchaung township in Yangon on 2 March, a commander can be seen standing over an officer operating a sniper rifle. The commander appears to be giving him orders to direct fire towards specific protesters.

In a disturbing [clip](#) from 3 March in North Okkalapa township, Yangon, officers are seen leading a man towards a larger group of security forces. The man appears to be in the group’s custody and offers no visible resistance, when an officer beside him suddenly shoots him. He immediately drops to the ground and is left on the road, apparently lifeless, for several seconds before officers then walk back and drag him away.

Two people were killed and several more injured in Myitkyina, Kachin State, on 8 March. In one verified [clip](#), a group of people can be seen running from a thick cloud of smoke as gunshots sound in the distance. Panicked voices can be heard saying, “It burns so much” and “One person has died,” amid screams of shock as a person with a serious head injury is being carried away. Several apparently injured people are then seen being dragged away, leaving significant amounts of blood on the ground.

In another [verified clip](#) dated 28 February, a member of the military in Dawei is seen apparently lending his rifle to a police officer deployed alongside him. The officer crouches, takes aim and shoots, before a group of officers standing with them celebrate.

“Not only does this incident show a reckless disregard for human life, making sport of shooting live rounds at protesters, it also reveals deliberate coordination among security forces,” said Joanne Mariner.

Extensive military arsenal deployed

On 5 March, state-run media [quoted](#) military authorities as denying any role in fatalities, claiming that “unscrupulous persons [might be] behind these cases”.

However, Amnesty International has identified security forces armed with a variety of military firearms, including Chinese RPD light machine guns, as well as local MA-S sniper rifles, MA-1 semi-automatic rifles, Uzi-replica BA-93 and BA-94 submachine guns, and other arms manufactured in Myanmar. These weapons are completely inappropriate for use in policing protests. According to international law and standards, security forces must not use firearms unless there is an imminent threat of death or serious injury, and there is a no less harmful alternative available.

“The weaponry deployed by the Tatmadaw reveals a deliberate and dangerous escalation in tactics,” said Joanne Mariner.

“Not content with indiscriminately using less-lethal weapons, each new day shows an apparent order to deploy semi-automatic rifles, sniper rifles, and light machine guns in increasing numbers. Make no mistake, we are in a deadly new phase of the crisis.”

This deployment follows the [excessive use](#) of tear gas, water cannons, South Korean Dae Kwang DK-44 flashbang grenades and other contentious ‘crowd control’ methods, as well as incidents of egregious beatings at the hands of the security forces, such as in this [verified clip](#) filmed in Mandalay on 7 March.

Photos and videos also show that police have access to traditional less-lethal arms, including “pepperball” launchers, and shotguns loaded with rubber bullets manufactured by the Turkish company Zsr Patlayici Sanayi A.S., using cartridges from Franco-Italian company Cheddite.

Reckless and indiscriminate use of lethal weapons

Amnesty International has also verified footage of security forces using lethal weapons in ways that are reckless, indiscriminate, and very likely to cause fatal injuries.

Verified [footage](#) from 1 March in Mawlamyine in Mon State shows security forces riding pick-up trucks while apparently indiscriminately firing live ammunition in multiple directions, including into people’s homes.

In a clip from Yangon’s Hledan township [published](#) on 28 February, the man recording the footage is peering over a balcony and describing the scene below, where armed forces personnel appear to be shooting teargas and ammunition directly at people in the street. Huddled with others on the balcony he continues to record the scene, when a group of officers at street level seem to spot him filming. A single shot can be heard before people on the balcony say “[someone has been] hit! Get inside [the apartment]!”. A woman on the balcony can then be seen lying with a head injury.

“As the death toll surges, the UN Security Council and the international community must move beyond words of concern and immediately act to halt violations and hold perpetrators accountable,” said Joanne Mariner.

Notorious military divisions deployed

Further analysis of photos and videos show that the military units involved in this lethal repression include the Yangon Command, Northwestern Command, and the 33rd, 77th and 101st Light Infantry Divisions (LID), often operating alongside – and sometimes lending their weapons to – police officers.

According to footage examined by Amnesty International, the 33rd LID is currently deployed in Mandalay, the 77th in Yangon, and the 101st in Monywa. All three cities have seen extreme instances of excessive force, including killings, by security forces in recent days.

Some of these military divisions are notorious for atrocities and serious human rights violations committed in Rakhine, Kachin, and northern Shan States. Amnesty International has [implicated soldiers](#) from the 33rd LID in war crimes in northern Shan State in 2016 and 2017, and in crimes against humanity against the Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2017.

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ecoi.net summary:

Video recordings show extensive deployment of military weaponry against peaceful protesters; several killings of protesters amount to extrajudicial executions

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