

***Operation 1027: A Turning Point in Myanmar's Conflict Landscape.*
By Myo Naing and Yizheng Zou. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan,
2025. Hardcover: 255pp.**

In March 2026, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) attacked positions held by its former ally, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), in Kutkai, a township in Myanmar's Shan State. The TNLA had held the territory since the later phases of Operation 1027, a major offensive launched in late 2023 against military junta forces by the MNDAA, TNLA and the Arakan Army (AA), the so-called Three Brotherhood Alliance. What had once been celebrated as a successful axis of anti-junta forces had frayed into open conflict between former allies over one of northern Shan State's most strategic trade corridors, where disputes over taxation, local authority and cross-border commerce had been intensifying for some time.

The seeming breakup of the Three Brotherhood Alliance makes Myo Naing and Yizheng Zou's book about Operation 1027 even more timely. Naing and Zou explore Operation 1027 not simply as a military offensive but also as a transformation in border governance, political economy and non-state authority in Myanmar. The book's central argument is that the offensive reflected the collapse of "ceasefire capitalism"—a model where the military swapped resource concessions for political acquiescence from minority ethnic groups—and the emergence of what the authors call "competitive local governance" (p. 4). The latter refers to how the country's various Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) sought not only to fight the military junta but also to govern their own territories, regulate trade and construct alternative forms of legitimacy. In doing so, Naing and Zou present the actions of the EAOs as *de facto* state-building.

The book's main contribution to the existing literature lies in its refusal to reduce Operation 1027 to a battlefield narrative. Its conceptual framework, centred on "digitalised ceasefire capitalism" (p. 3) and "competitive local governance", provides a lens for understanding Myanmar's evolving conflict. The book is particularly insightful in identifying how illicit digital sectors such as cyberscamming have accelerated the transformation of ceasefire arrangements and intensified competition over local governance.

The book comprises six well-structured chapters, moving from conceptual framing and historical reconstruction to alliance dynamics and interethnic tensions. A dedicated chapter on the cyberscam

industry demonstrates how these digital operations were central to political events in Kokang, in the northernmost part of Shan State, thereby addressing a significant gap in Myanmar scholarship.

Chapter Five is particularly noteworthy. It challenges mainstream perceptions of governance and federalism in Myanmar. Much of the existing literature relies on state-centric frameworks that present federalism as a bottom-up process of negotiated power-sharing, democratic institution-building and inclusive political settlement. These approaches typically treat EAOs as actors to be incorporated into a reformed central state structure. This chapter challenges this assumption by showing that the Three Brotherhood Alliance did not wait for permission to govern, nor did they seek to solely become administrative units within a federal Myanmar. Indeed, mainstream perceptions assume that EAOs will accept designs and models centred on a grand federal blueprint, such as the one proposed by the anti-junta National Unity Government. But this assumption does not hold in practice. There is no shared position among EAOs on post-conflict governance arrangements. In particular, those in the north of the country, such as the EAOs that launched Operation 1027, pursue distinct political visions, governance practices and value systems that diverge from those promoted in much of the academic literature.

What makes Naing and Zou's analysis compelling is its attention to what these groups are actually doing. They show that the Three Brotherhood Alliance partners have built parallel administrative systems, taxation regimes, judicial structures and trade regulations that operate independent of central state authority. This is not proto-federalism in the sense that policy literature imagines it; it is competitive state-building. The governance these actors provide is not simply "local" or "community-based" in the romanticized sense often found in bottom-up governance literature; it is territorialized, extractive and sovereign in aspiration. Chapter Five shows/demonstrates that EAO administration functions through armed enforcement, strategic economic control and political consolidation, rather than through the participatory, rights-based and accountability mechanisms that dominate normative discussions of federal governance. This matters because it forces a reckoning with how Myanmar's political order is actually being remade. Naing and Zou demonstrate that fervent ethno-nationalism serves as both a source of legitimacy and a mechanism of exclusion. Territorial disputes are not anomalies to be resolved through dialogue, but structural features of competing sovereignty projects. The tensions between the Ta'ang and Shan ethnic groups

or between the TNLA, the Kachin Independence Army, the MNDAA and various Shan actors reflect fundamentally different visions of who has the right to govern, tax and control specific territories. Thus, the authors challenge the assumption, prevalent in policy circles and academic work, that shared opposition to military rule translates into shared commitment to democratic federalism.

By foregrounding competitive governance rather than cooperative federalism, the book shifts the analytical frame in productive ways. It suggests that Myanmar's borderland future may be shaped by contests between rival armed authorities, each pursuing their own state-building projects, each claiming legitimacy through the provision of governance and each enforcing order within the territories they control. This is not the federalism imagined in policy roadmaps; it is fragmented sovereignty. The developments following the 2023–25 phases of Operation 1027, including the Kutkai confrontation, underscore this analytical position. Rather than treating wartime coordination as settled political convergence, Naing and Zou provide conceptual resources for understanding both the emergence of new governing formations and the persistence of competing political projects. Tactical coalition warfare can dismantle an old order without producing a shared new one.

This book is an empirically rich and conceptually ambitious study that moves beyond event-focused analysis to examine the deeper structures shaping Myanmar's conflict landscape. It demonstrates convincingly that borderland authority can no longer be understood through frameworks of ceasefire stability, peripheral insurgency and military containment. For scholars and policy analysts working on Myanmar, it offers essential insights by rejecting simplified categories of EAO governance and identifying the key arenas of contestation: taxation, trade, crime, legitimacy and authority. This is a valuable and timely intervention that will shape how we understand Operation 1027 and its aftermath for years to come.

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