

External Actor Involvement in Myanmar Conflict Negotiations: China's Mediation with the Three Brotherhood Alliance Post-Coup 2021

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze China's role as an external mediator in the Myanmar conflict following the 2021 military coup and the military operations of the Three Brothers Alliance. The study examines China's transformation from a policy of non-intervention to active diplomatic engagement and its impact on regional stability. The theoretical framework used is mediation theory, specifically Zartman's concept of Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), which explains that effective mediation occurs when the conflicting parties recognize the losses caused by the continuation of the conflict and are motivated to negotiate. This theoretical framework helps to understand China's mediation strategy in facilitating dialogue amid the complex political and military stalemate in Myanmar. This study uses a qualitative library research method by analyzing secondary data from academic journals, policy reports, and reliable media sources such as The Irrawaddy, Reuters, and Al Jazeera. Thematic analysis is applied to identify patterns of China's diplomatic, military, and economic involvement. The main findings reveal that China's military and economic support has strengthened the political legitimacy of Myanmar's military junta, increased Myanmar's economic dependence on China's, and exacerbated tensions with ethnic groups in Myanmar. Regionally, China's influence has deepened divisions within ASEAN, affected relations with India, and heightened security tensions in the region.

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Introduction

The armed conflict in Myanmar is one of the most complex geopolitical and humanitarian crises in the Southeast Asian region, having persisted for more than seven decades since the country's independence in 1948 (Rozak, 2024). Structural tensions between the Bamar-dominated central government and armed ethnic minority groups remain deeply entrenched, reaching a new crisis point when the military coup on February 1, 2021, overthrew the civilian government of the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by

Aung San Suu Kyi (Bünté, 2021). This coup was not merely a regime change; it exposed fundamental contradictions within Myanmar's political order, where the military (Tatmadaw) uses the 2008 Constitution as an instrument of structural domination over the democratic process. This situation triggered an unprecedented wave of armed resistance and forced external actors particularly China to rethink their diplomatic approaches.

Amid the post-coup escalation, the emergence of the Three Brotherhood Alliance (TBA) a coalition between the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Taang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has become a decisive variable that fundamentally reshapes the conflict landscape (Al Jazeera, 2024). Operation 1027, launched in October 2023, successfully seized strategic territories along the China-Myanmar border, shaking the stability of the military junta and triggering serious concerns in Beijing regarding border security and its strategic investments (Nyat Thit, 2024). This operation served as an inflection point, compelling China, a country long known for its adherence to the principle of non-intervention to assume a more active and open mediation role. This shift represents a significant phenomenon, both theoretically and empirically, in the study of Southeast Asian conflict diplomacy.

A review of the existing literature indicates that previous studies on China-Myanmar relations generally focus on three aspects: (1) Beijing's diplomatic and economic support for the post-coup junta within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (Jason Tower & Priscilla A. Clapp, 2021) ; (Indra Overland & Roman Vakulchuk, 2024). (2) China's principle of non-intervention and its adaptive application toward armed ethnic groups (Hak Yin Li & Yongnian Zheng, 2009) and (3) ASEAN's limited response to the crisis due to its binding consensus principle (Velasco, Joseph Ching, 2023). These studies provide a valuable analytical foundation, yet collectively position China in a reactive and passive role as a *hedger* or balancer of interests, rather than as a mediating actor actively facilitating negotiation processes among conflicting parties.

A research gap in this study lies in the absence of a systematic analysis of the transformation of China's role from a non-interventionist actor to an active mediator through backchannel diplomacy, particularly in the post-Operation 1027 context. Although empirically China has hosted at least three rounds of negotiations in Kunming between Myanmar's military junta and the TBA from December 2023 to January 2024—resulting in a formal ceasefire agreement the mechanisms, strategic motivations, and implications of this mediation regarding China's principle of non-intervention have not been thoroughly examined in the academic literature (Latt, 2022). This constitutes a significant gap, given that these developments mark a new precedent in China's diplomatic behavior in the region.

Based on this research gap, this study poses the central question: How has China's role transformed from a traditional non-interventionist stance to active mediation in the Myanmar conflict following Operation Three Brothers Alliance 1027? This study argues that this transformation is not ideological in nature but rather driven by pragmatic calculations of interest, specifically the protection of the CMEC, the stability of the Yunnan

border, and the supply chain for rare minerals. Using Zartman's (2007) *Mutually Hurting Stalemate* (MHS) framework, this study will demonstrate that the post-Operation 1027 military stalemate created a "ripeness moment" that served as a catalyst for Beijing to take the initiative in open mediation. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of mediation theory in the context of non-Western actors, while also offering strategic perspectives for Southeast Asian regional diplomacy.

Method

This study employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach with a library research design as its primary data collection strategy (John W. Creswell, 2022). This approach was chosen because the subject of study—namely, the transformation of China's diplomatic role in the Myanmar conflict—is complex, contextually layered, and cannot be reduced to measurable variables alone. The data used consists entirely of secondary data obtained from documentary sources, including internationally reputable academic journals, policy reports from leading think tanks, official documents from governments and international organizations, as well as media coverage with verifiable editorial credibility.

The selection of literature sources was conducted systematically based on three main criteria: thematic relevance, institutional credibility, and temporal relevance. In terms of thematic relevance, only sources that directly address the conflict in Myanmar, the role of external actors in mediation, China's diplomacy in Southeast Asia, or conflict mediation theory were included in the analysis. Regarding credibility, academic sources were prioritized from indexed databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar, while non-academic sources were selected only if they originated from institutions with a documented editorial track record—such as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the International Crisis Group (ICG), The Irrawaddy, Reuters, and Al Jazeera. In terms of recency, sources published between 2018 and 2025 are prioritized to ensure that the analysis reflects the dynamics of the Myanmar conflict following the 2021 coup, with the exception of foundational sources such as Zartman, which directly serve as the theoretical framework for this study.

Theoretically, this study is based on the mediation theory proposed by Zartman who defines mediation as a process involving a neutral third party to facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties and help overcome deadlocks in the negotiation process towards a mutual agreement (Zartman & Touval, 1985). The key concept used is *Mutually Hurting Stalemate* (MHS), a condition in which both parties realize that continuing the conflict will only result in greater losses, thus creating a "moment of ripeness" as a critical point that encourages psychological readiness to negotiate (Zartman, 2007). The relevance of this theory is reinforced by studies by Bercovitch & Houston (2000) and Wallensteen & Svensson (2014), which show that the success of mediation is highly dependent on the mediator's ability to identify and utilize this MHS moment. Thus, this theoretical framework provides a strong

analytical foundation for understanding the steps taken by China in promoting peaceful dialogue amidst the political and military complexities surrounding the Myanmar conflict.

The internal validity of this study is ensured through a strategy of source triangulation, in which each analytical claim is verified across at least three independent sources differing in institutional origin and perspective (Norman K. Denzin, 2017). Specifically, for factual statements regarding the negotiations in Kunming and the ceasefire agreement, data was confirmed through a combination of English-language media reports (Reuters, Al Jazeera), reports from policy institutions (ICG, USIP), and relevant academic sources. Furthermore, this study consciously acknowledges the limited access to internal diplomatic documents from China and Myanmar; thus, all claims regarding the motivations of the actors are based on academically accountable inferences from the available data (evidence-based inference), not speculation. Consequently, the epistemological transparency of this study is maintained in accordance with rigorous qualitative research standards.

Results and Discussion

China's Military and Economic Influence in Myanmar

China's military support for Myanmar's junta following the 2021 coup cannot be reduced to a simple patron-client dynamic; rather, it reflects Beijing's calculated strategy of maintaining strategic leverage over a regime whose survival serves Chinese geopolitical interests in the CMEC corridor. Data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) confirms that China remained Myanmar's largest arms supplier between 2021 and 2023, accounting for an estimated 68% of total arms imports, including jet aircraft, armored vehicles, and air defense systems (Simoniya, 2021). This material support, as correctly observe, was premised on Beijing's prioritization of BRI stability over democratic governance norms (Thida, 2021). Critically, however, this study argues that underestimate the conditional nature of this support: Beijing's arms transfers were not unconditional, but functioned as coercive instruments that simultaneously created junta dependency and preserved Chinese leverage for subsequent mediation a dimension absent in their analysis.

The structural consequence of this military dependency extends beyond the bilateral relationship. By positioning itself as the junta's primary security patron, China effectively foreclosed the possibility of the Myanmar military seeking Western-backed legitimacy, deepening its diplomatic isolation while tightening Beijing's strategic grip (Zachary Abuza, 2025). The argues that Myanmar's praetorianism the structural subordination of politics to military power was a pre-existing condition that the coup merely formalized. This study contends, however, that China's post-coup military engagement actively reinforced this praetorianism by providing the junta with the minimum resources to resist internal challenges without incentivizing the political reform that would reduce those challenges (AlJazeera, 2024). Viewed through Zartman's lens, Chinese arms supply prolonged the

conflict's pre-MHS phase, making the eventual escalation of Operasi 1027 not merely predictable but structurally inevitable.

The military support must also be read against the backdrop of China's economic exposure. By 2023, Chinese investments in Myanmar exceeded USD 21 billion, concentrated in energy pipelines, mining operations, and the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone all of which required a minimally stable security environment along Myanmar's northern corridor (Pascal Abb, Saw Kyaw Zin Khay, Indra Overland & Roman Vakulchuk, 2025). The junta's inability to provide that stability despite Chinese military assistance demonstrated a fundamental limit of arms-based stabilization: military capacity does not substitute for political legitimacy, and a regime dependent on external arms to fight its own population cannot generate the civilian compliance necessary for economic corridor security (Simon Lewis, 2023). This finding challenges the realist assumption that security provision translates directly into political stability, and instead points toward the compounding vulnerability that external military support creates for both the recipient regime and its patron.

China's economic relationship with Myanmar post-2021 evolved from a partnership of mutual benefit into a relationship of asymmetric dependency, a transition with significant implications for understanding how economic interdependence shapes conflict dynamics. Myanmar's exports to China, primarily natural gas, rare earths, jade, and agricultural products became structurally indispensable to the junta's revenue base after Western sanctions severed access to international financial markets (Lucas Myers, 2020). Document the resulting delays and rerouting of BRI projects as evidence of Chinese economic vulnerability, but this framing is analytically incomplete: Myanmar's dependence on Chinese trade was far more acute than China's dependence on Myanmar, creating an asymmetric leverage structure that Beijing would later deploy in mediation (Antonio Graceffo, 2024). The power asymmetry embedded in this economic relationship — not merely the economic disruption itself is what enabled China to bring both the junta and the TBA to the negotiating table in Kunming.

This economic leverage, however, generated a paradox that prior scholarship has not fully analyzed. The deeper Myanmar's structural dependency on China grew, the less the junta was able to make credible concessions to ethnic armed groups without Chinese approval effectively transferring a portion of Myanmar's domestic sovereignty to Beijing. Hak Yin Li and Zheng described China's adaptive non-interventionism as a strategy of influence without formal control, but the post-2021 dynamics suggest this distinction has collapsed: informal economic control, when sufficiently pervasive, produces governance outcomes indistinguishable from formal political dominance (Hak Yin Li & Yongnian Zheng, 2009). This represents a qualitative shift in China-Myanmar relations that is theoretically significant, as it demonstrates how economic interdependence can erode the practical boundaries of the non-intervention norm without requiring any formal revision of

that norm Beijing intervenes through structural dependency rather than direct political dictation (Nan Lwin, 2018).

The ethnic armed groups' economic ties to China added a further layer of complexity. Both the MNDAA and TNLA operated in territories with significant cross-border trade linkages to Yunnan Province, making Chinese economic disruption through border closures or trade suspension a credible coercive instrument against the TBA as well as the junta. This dual economic leverage over both conflict parties is the critical enabling condition for Chinese mediation that is most consistently overlooked in the literature (Miemie Winn Byrd, 2024). Attributes ASEAN's mediation failure to its non-interference principle, but this explanation addresses only institutional constraints; the more fundamental issue is that ASEAN lacked the material leverage over either party that China possessed by virtue of its economic entanglement a distinction that illuminates why institutional neutrality without material leverage produces ineffective mediation.

China's Mediation with the Three Brothers Alliance Following Operation 1027

The Brotherhood Alliance is a group formed in June 2019, long before the military coup that took place in 2021. The group serves as a vehicle for strengthening cooperation among three ethnic groups with a long history of resistance against the military in Myanmar, as well as for advocating for greater economic empowerment for ethnic minority groups. Although the alliance existed prior to the coup, it initially remained silent regarding the military junta's seizure of power in February 2021 (Group, 2024). However, the alliance shifted its stance, reaching a turning point in March 2021. During the civil war in Myanmar, this group primarily operated in Rakhine State and the northern part of Shan State. The alliance consists of three groups, the largest of which is the Arakan Army (AA), which controls territory in Rakhine with approximately 30,000 troops to secure political and military autonomy (Mahmud, 2025). The MNDAA operates in the Kokang region in northern Shan State with approximately 6,000 fighters, while the TNLA operates in the Ta'ang region in northern Shan State with approximately 8,000 troops. In total, the Three Brothers Alliance controls a combined force of 45,000 to 50,000 soldiers (AlJazeera, 2024).

On October 27, 2023, in a joint statement, the Three Brothers Alliance outlined the primary objectives of their operations: protecting civilian lives, upholding their right to self-defense, maintaining control over their territories, and responding to artillery and airstrikes launched by the State Administrative Council junta (Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, 2023). Additionally, they aim to end the repressive military rule and combat rampant illegal online gambling, particularly along the China-Myanmar border (Jonathan Head, 2025). Operation 1027 is the largest and most organized attack against the military regime since the 2021 coup. An estimated 20,000 resistance fighters are involved in the operation, which is taking place across a vast area in northern Shan State, Kachin State, and the upper regions of Sagaing and Mandalay. The operation has received widespread support from the people of Myanmar, who have suffered under the military regime's harsh policies.

As the conflict between the alliance groups and the military junta escalates, it not only impacts domestic stability but also heightens tensions along the border regions. Like China, which shares a direct border with Myanmar, the country must play a role in preventing the conflict from spreading further, as China has strategic interests in the border regions now controlled by the Three Brothers Alliance (Aung Thura Ko Ko, 2024). China aims to maintain border stability and safeguard its substantial economic investments in Myanmar. Security in the border region is not merely a regional issue but a crucial foundation for China's economic and security strategies. Myanmar hosts the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), a vital artery of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Yuka Kobayashi, 2022). This corridor includes a network of oil and gas pipelines connecting the Bay of Bengal with Yunnan Province and has the potential to reduce China's reliance on the vulnerable Strait of Malacca for energy imports. Disruptions caused by conflicts, such as the Three Brothers Alliance's Operation 1027, threaten oil flows and could jeopardize energy security in China's southwestern provinces.

Beyond energy, this border region is rich in resources critical to China's economy. Myanmar supplies rare-earth metal imports to China, which are vital to the country's high-tech industry. However, the conflict has led to the temporary suspension of mining operations, while border closures have left these resources stranded. Instability has also fueled cross-border crime, including human trafficking and cyber fraud (Handoyono, 2025). Furthermore, the border stretching along 2,100 kilometers have been affected by the conflict, with stray artillery fire and the influx of refugees threatening stability in Yunnan Province (Jason Tower, 2024). China's mediation is a defensive measure to protect its investments and prevent chaos in the surrounding region. Cross-border trade between China and Myanmar is also a key factor in Beijing's involvement. Trade between China's ally, the military junta, and Northern Shan State has totaled US\$9 billion since the junta seized power in Myanmar through a coup in February 2021 (Rfa Burmese, 2024). However, after rebel groups took control of the region, Beijing closed border posts, disrupting the livelihoods of those involved in the purchase, sale, and shipment of goods from China to Myanmar.

China's involvement in mediating the conflict in Myanmar has increased significantly following the escalation of the conflict triggered by Operation 1027. In December 2023, China announced that peace talks between the Myanmar junta and the Three Brothers Alliance had yielded positive results. Junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun, as quoted by state media, stated that the meeting was facilitated by China and that another meeting might be held later this month (Agence France-Presse, 2023). The Myanmar National Peace and Unity Coordination Committee held a meeting with representatives of the MNDAA, TNLA, and AA with support from China, referring to the armed ethnic groups (Reutres, 2023). Given the progress of the talks, there is a possibility that additional meetings will be held by the end of this month.

On January 11, 2024, thanks to China's mediation efforts to promote progress, representatives of the Myanmar military and three ethnic armed groups in northern Myanmar

held peace talks in Kunming, Yunnan Province, in southwestern China. The meeting, attended by representatives from each of these alliances, offers new hope that will lead to a formal ceasefire agreement (Xinhua, 2024). Mao Ning, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that military representatives from Myanmar and three ethnic armed groups in northern Myanmar—the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, and the Arakan Army—have engaged in peace negotiations and officially reached a ceasefire agreement in Kunming (The Irrawaddy, 2024).

Both sides agreed to immediately implement the ceasefire, withdraw military forces, and resolve disputes and related issues through peaceful negotiations. Mao stated that both sides pledged to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens residing in border areas, as well as Chinese projects and personnel in Myanmar. Both sides have held consultations regarding the ceasefire arrangements and other issues (AFP in Yangon, 2024). The third meeting between Myanmar's military junta and representatives of the Three Brothers Alliance took place in Kunming on January 10 and 11, 2024. The meeting was mediated and facilitated by Beijing and attended by seven representatives from the National Solidarity and Peace Negotiation Committee (NSPNC) led by Lieutenant General Min Naing, as well as five representatives from the MNDAA, seven from the TNLA, and seven others from the Arakan Army (AA). Deng Xijun, China's special envoy for Asian affairs, also attended the meeting (Laura Zhou, 2024).

The ceasefire agreement reached in January 2024 includes several key points. Both sides agreed to immediately implement the ceasefire, release military personnel, and resolve disputes and claims through peaceful negotiations. They also pledged not to threaten the safety of Chinese citizens residing in border areas or Chinese personnel involved in projects in Myanmar. As stated by Mao Ning, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both sides were urged to seriously implement the ceasefire agreement that had been reached, exercise maximum restraint toward one another, resolve issues through dialogue and consultation, and jointly advance the peace process in northern Myanmar (Laura Zhou, 2024). Junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun stated in an audio message to journalists that both sides gathered in Kunming and, after discussions, reached an agreement on a temporary ceasefire (Ap News, 2024). We will continue the talks. As emphasized by Zaw Min Tun, he will continue to work hard to strengthen the ceasefire.

Although China successfully facilitated a ceasefire in January 2024, these mediation efforts face significant challenges in maintaining peace. The agreement reached on January 2024, in Kunming included a commitment to immediately cease hostilities, withdraw troops, and resolve disputes through diplomatic channels (Antara News, 2024). However, the ceasefire did not last long due to deep-seated mistrust between Myanmar's military junta and rebel groups, as well as political interests that were difficult to reconcile (AFP in Yangon, 2024). The Three Brothers Alliance continued their offensive and successfully captured the strategic city of Lashio in August 2024, marking a major defeat for the

Myanmar military since the 2021 coup (CNBC Indonesia, 2025). The fall of Lashio marked a turning point in China's approach, as Beijing realized that the alliance had become more independent than previously anticipated and was even beginning to threaten broader stability in Myanmar.

The shift in China's mediation efforts reflected a pragmatic adjustment to the ongoing dynamics of the conflict. Following the failure of the ceasefire and the fall of Lashio, China increased economic pressure on the Three Brothers Alliance by closing several border posts connecting regions controlled by the group and restricting access to essential supplies (Shoon Naing, Wa Lone, 2024). These actions are intended to push the group back to the negotiating table while hindering their advance toward strategic cities such as Mandalay (Lucas Myers, 2024). Concurrently, China has strengthened its support for the Myanmar junta, including facilitating Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Kunming in November 2024 and initiating the formation of a joint security company to protect Chinese investments (Ingyin Naing, 2024). This two-track approach reflects Beijing's efforts to maintain influence over both sides while safeguarding its strategic interests.

Wang Yi's visit to Myanmar as a special envoy of Foreign Minister Chia on August 14, 2024, marked China's diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. During the meeting, Wang Yi emphasized three key principles that must be adhered to, including: Myanmar must not be divided into factions, must remain part of ASEAN, and must not be influenced or interfered with by external powers (Ingyin Naing, 2024). This statement reflects China's concern that the United States might intervene in resolving the issues in Myanmar, which is viewed as a threat to China's geopolitical influence in the region (Latt, 2022).

Wang Yi also held an informal meeting with the foreign ministers of China, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand in Chiang Mai to discuss efforts to build diplomacy to resolve the crisis in Myanmar by limiting the involvement of other countries that could influence the agreement. China's mediation efforts achieved significant progress, successfully facilitating a ceasefire between the Myanmar junta and the MNDAA in early 2025. During the seventh round of talks held in Kunming in mid-January 2025, both sides finally agreed to sign a ceasefire agreement effective on January 18, 2025, at 12:00 PM Beijing Time (Global Times, 2025). Mao Ming, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that both parties had agreed to cease hostilities on January 18, and they also expressed gratitude to China for its mediation in reaching a peaceful agreement (Antara News, 2024).

Although China's mediation achieved significant yet limited success. The conflict between the Junta and the MNDAA has subsided, reducing the intensity of fighting in the northern Shan border region and paving the way for economic recovery (Nguyễn et al., 2024). China has also influenced the withdrawal of troops and ensured commitments from both sides to guarantee the safety of Chinese citizens in the border region and protect Chinese projects in Myanmar. However, these achievements remain limited because the TNLA and AA have not yet joined similar agreements, while conflicts continue in other regions (Sebastian Strangio, 2025). Nevertheless, China's mediation efforts have successfully

contained the potential for conflict escalation that could disrupt regional stability, opened opportunities for sustained political dialogue, and reaffirmed its role as an effective regional mediator.

China's mediation in ethnic conflicts in Myanmar has had a significant impact at both the domestic and international levels. Domestically, China has been highly active in resolving these conflicts, playing a major role as a superpower in Southeast Asia and influencing the region's political dynamics. China's involvement in helping to de-escalate the conflict in Myanmar reflects a shift from its previous stance of non-interference (Sun Mon Thant, 2025). This also indicates that China feels the need to maintain stability in a region of vital importance to it. Consequently, China is now more active in diplomacy and willing to assist in resolving conflicts if its interests are threatened.

From an international perspective, China's involvement in the Myanmar conflict is part of the broader competition in the Indo-Pacific region. Myanmar has become a battleground for influence, where China is increasingly strengthening its position, while Western nations such as the United States and the European Union have adopted a more critical stance toward the military government (Jose Setiawan & Winata Bachtiar, 2022). China's involvement in mediating the Myanmar conflict also raises questions regarding the effectiveness and long-term implications of this approach. As for China itself, which has facilitated a ceasefire agreement, it remains to be seen whether this will lead to a more profound and comprehensive resolution of the conflict in Myanmar, particularly following the 2021 coup.

China's involvement in the conflict in Myanmar highlights a broader power struggle in the region. As a major power in Southeast Asia, China seeks to protect its interests while ensuring stability along its borders. However, this role also raises questions about the long-term impact of China's growing influence. Although China's mediation has succeeded in temporarily halting the conflict in some areas, a comprehensive and lasting solution remains elusive. This ongoing conflict remains a major challenge to regional stability and highlights the complexity of the political situation in Myanmar.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the transformation of China's role from a passive supporter of Myanmar's military regime into an active mediator in the post-Three Brotherhood Alliance Operation 1027 conflict is primarily driven by strategic interest calculations rather than a normative shift in its non-intervention principle. China's military and economic engagement has deepened Myanmar's structural dependency on Beijing, enabling the junta to survive domestically while simultaneously narrowing the bargaining space available to ethnic armed organizations. Through the lens of Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), the analysis demonstrates that Chinese mediation emerged only when both the junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance recognized the mutually escalating costs of continued conflict, yet the outcomes of this mediation largely produced a fragile form of negative peace that

leaves the underlying political grievances unresolved. The findings therefore support the argument that China's mediation behaviour can be understood as a form of interest-conditioned engagement that relies on military and economic leverage within a framework of backchannel diplomacy, challenging the conventional assumption that effective mediation requires a neutral and normatively driven third party.

Despite these contributions, this research has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies entirely on secondary data—including academic literature, policy reports, and media coverage—without access to internal diplomatic documents or elite interviews, which constrains the ability to capture decision-making dynamics within Beijing, Naypyidaw, and the leadership of the Three Brotherhood Alliance. Second, most of the primary sources are in English, which may overlook important nuances present in Chinese- and Burmese-language discourses on public and elite perceptions of China's role. Third, the single-case study design, focusing on Myanmar after the 2021 coup and Operation 1027, limits the generalizability of the findings to other conflict settings where China is involved as a mediator. Fourth, the Myanmar conflict remains highly fluid, implying that some empirical observations are time-bound and may require reassessment as the political and security landscape evolves.

These limitations open several promising avenues for future research. Subsequent studies could employ fieldwork and in-depth interviews with policymakers, mediators, and representatives of ethnic armed organizations to generate richer empirical insights into how China's mediation is perceived by key actors on the ground. Comparative case studies that examine China's mediation in other contexts—such as the Iran–Saudi Arabia rapprochement or selected African conflicts—would help test the extent to which the pattern of pragmatic coercive facilitation identified in this article is consistent or context-specific. Future research could also adopt quantitative or mixed-method designs to systematically map the relationship between the intensity of Chinese economic involvement and the likelihood of Beijing assuming a mediation role in intrastate conflicts. Finally, integrating perspectives from constructivism and critical security studies would allow scholars to further unpack how discourses of stability, sovereignty, and non-intervention are mobilized to legitimize a mediation practice that, in substance, is deeply anchored in China's national interests.

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