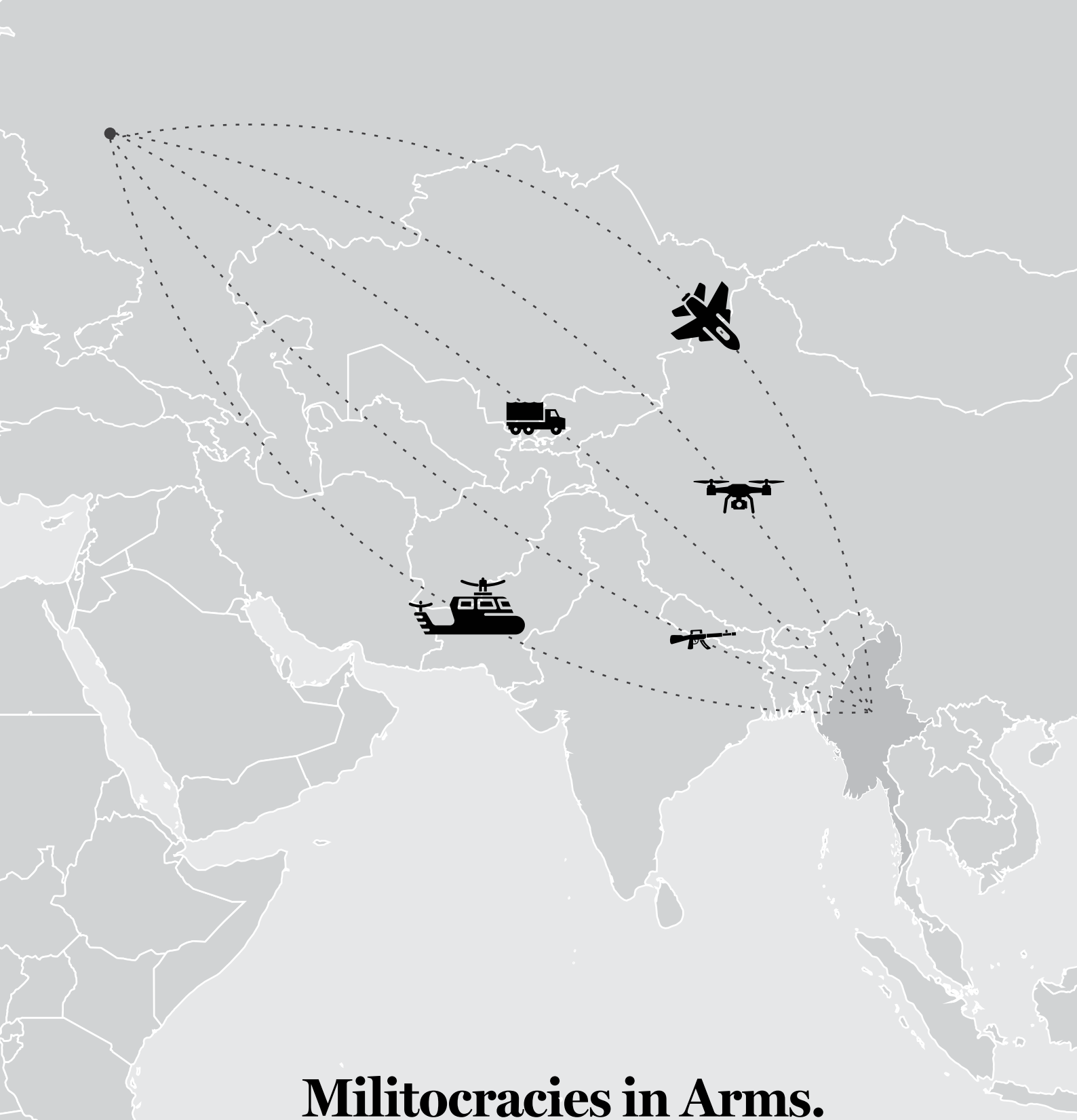


Militocracies in Arms. Russia–Myanmar Relations

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STUDY COMMISSIONED BY THE HANNS SEIDEL FOUNDATION
DECEMBER 2025–MARCH 2026

Hanns Seidel Foundation

Militocracies in Arms.
Russia–Myanmar Relations

ISBN 978-3-88795-643-1

Publishers Copyright 2026
Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung e.V., Munich
Lazarettestr, 33, 80636 Munich,
Tel. +49 (0)89 1258-0
E-Mail: info@hss.de, online: www.hss.de

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Layout and Artwork yingtzarm.design

Suggested citation Andreas Heinemann-Grüder & BA Polina Lebedeva. 2026. Militocracies in Arms. Russia–Myanmar Relations. Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung e.V.

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Executive Summary

Russia's approach to Myanmar is part of a larger behavioral pattern: The support of autocratic regimes of the so-called Global South in an attempt to capitalize on anti-Western, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and so-called traditionalist sentiments. Part of this collaboration of autocracies is the spread of strategic narratives about Western supremacy and imperialism. After two decades of neglect and diminished capacity as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has been reviving some of the military, economic, and political relationships and methods of the defunct USSR.

Myanmar seeks cooperation with Moscow to address the country's energy crisis by importing Russian oil and partnering with Russian energy companies to exploit domestic hydrocarbon reserves, develop renewable energy sources, and provide nuclear power through the transfer of small modular reactors. The Myanmar Armed Forces rely heavily on Russian-made aircraft and drones to suppress the insurgency inside Myanmar. The military's advances against insurgents in 2024 and 2025 resulted in large part from the expansion of drone warfare, air raids, and artillery operations for which Russian equipment, technical support, and tactical counterinsurgency advice proved decisive. Russia's offer of intelligence bolsters the military junta's fight against insurgents. Myanmar officers reportedly receive intelligence training in Russia, assistance in operating surveillance hardware, but also the know-how to manipulate social media and information environments.

Russia has raised expectations that it will build a deep sea port, a coal-fired thermal power plant, and an oil refinery in Myanmar, but these declarations have not yet been followed through by tangible action. At the same time, Myanmar is the only Southeast Asian country to transfer military supplies to the Russian Armed Forces for use against Ukraine, although on a far smaller scale than China, North Korea, or Iran.

While Russia is constrained and weakened by its war against Ukraine, the survival of Myanmar's military regime depends crucially on Russian military assistance. The relationship is asymmetric—a lifeline for Myanmar and, for Russia, part of a larger power projection strategy in the Global South. Myanmar is one of several countries of strategic interest for Russia in Southeast Asia, alongside Vietnam, Indonesia, and North Korea, which are more significant in terms of size, markets, and military power. Furthermore, Russia must also contend with Chinese business, military, and geopolitical interests, as Southeast Asia falls within China's sphere of influence.

Russia's ambitions for power projection by means of arms exports do not match reality. After peaking in the early 2010s, Russian arms exports had already begun falling globally in 2019 (down by nearly 20 percent relative to 2011) and dropped to levels not seen since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia's war against Ukraine significantly accelerated this general decline—in 2022, exports had fallen by nearly 70 percent relative to 2011, the high-water mark for the Russian arms industry, with deliveries to just 12 countries globally.[1] Since Russia was preoccupied with its war against Ukraine, Belarus filled some of the gaps.

Germany and the European Union (EU) should expand their sanctions policy against Russia—especially targeting the shadow fleet—to include the Russia–Myanmar arms, oil, and gas trade. Germany and the European Union should develop a common approach to isolating Myanmar's junta and make this part of their foreign policy portfolio with ASEAN states. Weakening the junta in Myanmar should be part and parcel of curbing Russia's access to resources used for the war against Ukraine.

1 Cullen Hendrix, Russia's Boom Business Goes Bust, Foreign Policy, May 3, 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/03/russia-arms-sales-weapons-exports-worldwide-ukraine-war/

1 Introduction: Two Autocracies at War

Russia's autocratic regime has been providing a temporary lifeline to other autocratic regimes such as those in Syria, Sudan, Venezuela, the Central African Republic, and has been supporting military take-overs in Africa (Libya, Egypt, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) by offering arms and ammunition, military training, intelligence, by delivering energy supplies or selling oil and grain, and by investing in joint ventures and the organization of propaganda campaigns. But how viable is cooperation between autocratic regimes when each is striving for its own survival? Russia relies to a significant extent on its technological legacy of the Soviet Union, its natural resources and its exploitation of anti-Western sentiments in the Global South, but it is no longer able to offer an alternative model of development. Its capabilities to project hard power are constrained by the war of attrition against Ukraine and by Western sanctions. Yet Russia's willingness and ability to transfer tested and time-proven military knowledge and technologies to repressive, if not totalitarian, regimes should not be underestimated. Since the 2021 coup, Russia has continued to provide air force equipment and has allegedly become the Myanmar military's strongest foreign backer. In return for Russian arms deliveries, Myanmar has supplied the Russian army with mines and has returned previously purchased tank sights, obviously needed in the war against Ukraine.[2]

Myanmar–Russia relations have strengthened considerably since the military putsch in Myanmar on February 1, 2021. Russia has been providing aircraft, drones, artillery, training, and operational knowledge. The junta, in turn, has endorsed Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine since February 2022 and delivers ammunition and arms produced in Myanmar.[3] Myanmar's interest in developing relations with Russia was initially spurred by its overreliance on China and by the need to mitigate Western sanctions. Russia has advanced to become Myanmar's

2 Defense Express, Rossiyani viznali, sho berut u Myanmi 120-mm mini, i ne prosto neimovirno, , Defense Express, September 3, 2023, https://defence-ua.com/news/rosijani_viznali_scho_berut_u_mjanmi_120_mm_mini_i_tse_prosto_nejmovirno-12727.html

3 This paragraph draws on Ian Storey, Myanmar-Russia Relations Since the Coup: An Ever Tighter Embrace, ISEAS Yusuf Ishak Institute, Commentary 2023/92, www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2023-92-myanmar-russia-relations-since-the-coup-an-ever-tighter-embrace-by-ian-storey/

largest source of military assistance. Military collaboration has been central from the outset, but it is also expanding into economic, technological, and educational spheres, at least on the level of policy declarations.[4]

Russia's influence significantly depends on the Myanmar military remaining in power and on its arms sales related to the ongoing internal war in Myanmar. While China's economic interests in Myanmar favor a certain degree of stability, Russia's inroads depend on the exploitation of instability. Vulnerable or pariah states with shadow economies, unresolved internal conflicts, and energy dependencies have provided conducive environments for Russia's exercise of influence. Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Venezuela, Syria, Mali, or the Central African Republic provide evidence of this pattern. Russia exploits vulnerabilities, creates dependencies, and adopts a transactional approach. Not all declarations of solidarity and friendship should therefore be taken at face value.

This report is a pilot study that maps the drivers, dimensions, and patterns of cooperation, its viability and prospects. It is based on secondary literature, news reports, semi-structured interviews with experts on and from Myanmar conducted mostly in December 2025, open-source intelligence, and the use of databases on arms exports. Most of our respondents from Myanmar preferred not to be identified by name or quoted verbatim. Several Russian military experts were contacted but did not respond to our queries. The closed nature of both the Russian and Myanmar regimes imposes limits on data collection, triangulation, and verification. Certain insights are therefore based on interpretations by our interlocutors and plausibility assessments. A gray zone of informed guesswork remains.

Publications on Russia–Myanmar relations consist of historical accounts, overview policy papers, and news agency reports; however no comprehensive in-depth study is currently available. Keeping these caveats in mind, we are nonetheless convinced that identifying patterns of cooperation between Russia and Myanmar broadens the overall understanding of the multilateralist nature of autocratic resource pooling and may thus inform counterstrategies, including assessments of international isolation and sanctions' effectiveness.

4 ISP Myanmar, Asymmetric Alliances: Understanding the Myanmar-Russia Partnerships in a Shifting Global Landscape, unpublished paper, 2026.

2 Russian Interests

Myanmar's military junta and Russia's militocracy publicly claim to be strengthening their cooperation—two autocratic regimes engaged in large-scale wars against external (Russia) or internal (Myanmar) forces perceived as fundamental threats to the survival of their respective autocratic regimes. Both closed regimes suppress democracy, civil society, human rights, and independent media. They rely on the security apparatus as the core 'winning coalition' of their regimes. Both claim to conduct 'special military operations' rather than outright wars of annihilation against populations unwilling to relinquish their collective identity. Both regimes are vulnerable due to international sanctions, shunned by most of their neighbors, economically in dire straits, and desperately focused on regime survival—both societies are effectively held hostage by ruling elites who view themselves as surrounded by internal and external enemies. The logic of political survival compels them not only to suppress opposition groups but also to keep regime insiders, the cronies, under tight control. Both regimes, particularly their security services, are highly corrupt. Yet the costs of war constrain the available hand-outs for patronage—the material basis of cronyism in both regimes is shrinking. With Myanmar's economy in a tailspin, one is inclined to ask whether the junta can remain in power only with Russian assistance—apart from the pivotal role of China as a direct neighbor and long-term ally.

Both countries share a long history of political and military cooperation going back to Myanmar's independence in 1948. Myanmar's political system, particularly its constitution, even incorporated certain features of the Soviet federal system. In 1962, the military putschists of the time declared their intention to build socialism in Burma. Yet ties with the Soviet Union remained limited. Contemporary cooperation rests on legacies of the past, shared autocratic values, anti-Westernism, and pariah status in international relations. These ideational foundations are, however, firmly hedged by a business-like cost-benefit calculus. The resources of both countries and their violent conflicts determine the intensity of collaboration. Both parties invest in maintaining the relationship, but it remains interactional. As a result, declaratory policy statements are not always matched by deeds, and most long-term investment projects—unlike arms sales—have not yet come to fruition.

Since the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Vladivostok in 2012, Russia has increasingly engaged with East Asian countries. It seeks to capitalize on rapidly developing Asia–Pacific markets to promote economic and security relations with countries beyond China, including with Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.[5] Myanmar is one of Russia's anti-Western partners in Southeast Asia, and the military junta has increasingly relied on weapons from Russia since the putsch in 2021. The junta seeks military and political backing in its war against insurgent ethnic armed groups.

Myanmar's military chief Min Aung Hlaing and President Vladimir Putin met in Moscow in early March 2025. The junta leader was accompanied by nearly 20 cronies and businesspeople, some of whom are on a U.S. sanctions list. During the visit, Myanmar and Russia signed ten agreements covering trade, banking, mining, information technology, tourism, and energy.[6] "Ties between our two countries are developing progressively," Putin declared, while Myanmar's chief military praised Russia as a "friendly country."[7] The intended areas of cooperation extend to the military, the energy sector, science and technology, and tourism. By 2025, Min Aung Hlaing had already made five visits to Russia since the coup in February 2021, courting Putin, who has not paid a reciprocal visit to Myanmar.

In a world in which Russia continues to generate adversaries through its pursuit of restored great-power status, its leadership reaches out to needy rogue states. Russia's objective is to cultivate Myanmar as a military, political, and economic ally. A 2022 PeaceNexus report neatly summarizes Russia's rationale: "In 2021, the Myanmar military joined the circle of Russia's closest partners in the region. Motivated by geopolitical considerations, Russia refused to side with the West over Myanmar, opting instead to use its permanent seat at the UN Security Council to shield the military regime from international pressure, as it had done in 2007 and 2017. Russia sides with Myanmar against criticism in the United Nations. In 2007, Russia thus vetoed together with China a draft UN Security Council resolution condemning Myanmar for its human rights record and framing the military leadership as a threat to international security."[8]

After the coup, Russia seized new opportunities in military cooperation, political alliance-building, and economic collaboration. Its strategic ambitions vis-a-vis Myanmar include military power projection, including access to deep-sea ports, exports of arms, oil, and nuclear power plants, partnership in circumventing sanctions, the dissemination of anti-Western strategic narratives, and the expansion of a network of collaborative autocratic regimes. Following Soviet-era patterns, Russia's ruling elite continues to think in terms of zero-sum games—the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Myanmar's junta, in turn, seeks access to Russian military technology, particularly aircraft, helicopters, drones, and artillery, as well as operational expertise. Dependent on China's political backing and investments, the regime also strives to balance its one-sided reliance on China by strengthening ties with

5 Kristian Lundby Gjerde, Russia's turn to Asia: Myanmar seen from Moscow, Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI), Policy Brief 10/2017. https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/russia-s-turn-to-asia-myanmar-seen-from-moscow

6 Hein Htooo Zan, Planeload of Cronies Accompany Myanmar Junta Boss on Russia Trip, Irradaway March 7, 2025, https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/planeload-of-cronies-accompany-myanmar-junta-boss-on-russia-trip.html.

7 Putin and Myanmar junta chief set to deepen military and economic ties, The Star, March 5, 2025, https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2025/03/05/putin-and-myanmar-junta-chief-set-to-deepen-military-and-economic-ties.

8 Peace Nexus Foundation, Russia's Policy in Myanmar and in South East Asia, Research Paper March 2022, https://peacenexus.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/V2-Report-Russian-Policy-in-Myanmar-and-SouthEast-Asia-1.pdf

Russia. Whether cooperation with Myanmar will serve as a springboard for expanding Russian influence in Southeast Asia remains uncertain. Russia's influence depends on the military regime remaining in power, which would ensure a continued Russian presence. Russia is a significant player, though secondary to China. Myanmar's sham elections in January 2026 may contribute to reduce its regional isolation, but the country remains more of a liability than an asset.

Since 2021, Russia has actively sought new clients in Myanmar, reaching out to potential partners—much as in Soviet times—via the Russian Society for Friendship and Cooperation with Myanmar. The head of this organization had met junta leader Min Aung Hlaing at least twice by the time of writing.[9] One of its vice presidents, who had worked as an advisor to the Russian Embassy in Myanmar, was allegedly promised a share of future unarmed vehicle (UAV) sales to Myanmar—the 'friendship' society would function as a commercial broker.

After the coup, Myanmar found itself isolated, and Russia quickly stepped in to deepen ties. In March 2021, Russia's deputy minister of defense was the only foreign representative to attend Myanmar's military parade. Just a few months later, in June 2021, at the invitation of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Hlaing visited Moscow. In February 2022, Hlaing openly endorsed Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[10] In July 2022, Kyaw Hlaing again visited Moscow to meet with Shoigu, indicating Myanmar's potential purchase of Russian fuel and discussing plans for Russia to build nuclear power plants and oil wells in Myanmar.[11]

In August 2022, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov traveled to Myanmar to meet Hlaing and the junta-appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wunna Maung Lwin. Lavrov praised the intensification of relations since the coup: "In 2021, our trade went up by 20 percent to $430 million, and it has increased another 50 percent in the first five months of this year (over 2021). There is every indication that the current pace will continue. We will do all we can to facilitate this. We have good potential in the energy industry, including nuclear energy. Rosatom State Corporation is working with its partners on using nuclear technology for non-energy purposes. …Roscosmos is creating infrastructure for the remote probing of the Earth's surface in cooperation with its Myanmar colleagues. Other key industries are also making steady headway."[12] On February 26, 2026, Dmitry Bakanov, head of the Russian space agency Roscosmos, stated during a visit to Myanmar that Russia would assist in selecting and training Myanmar's first cosmonaut. Roscosmos signed an agreement with its Myanmar counterpart to develop cooperation in human spaceflight.[13] If implemented, such initiatives would further bind Myanmar to Russia and likely entail political expectations in return.

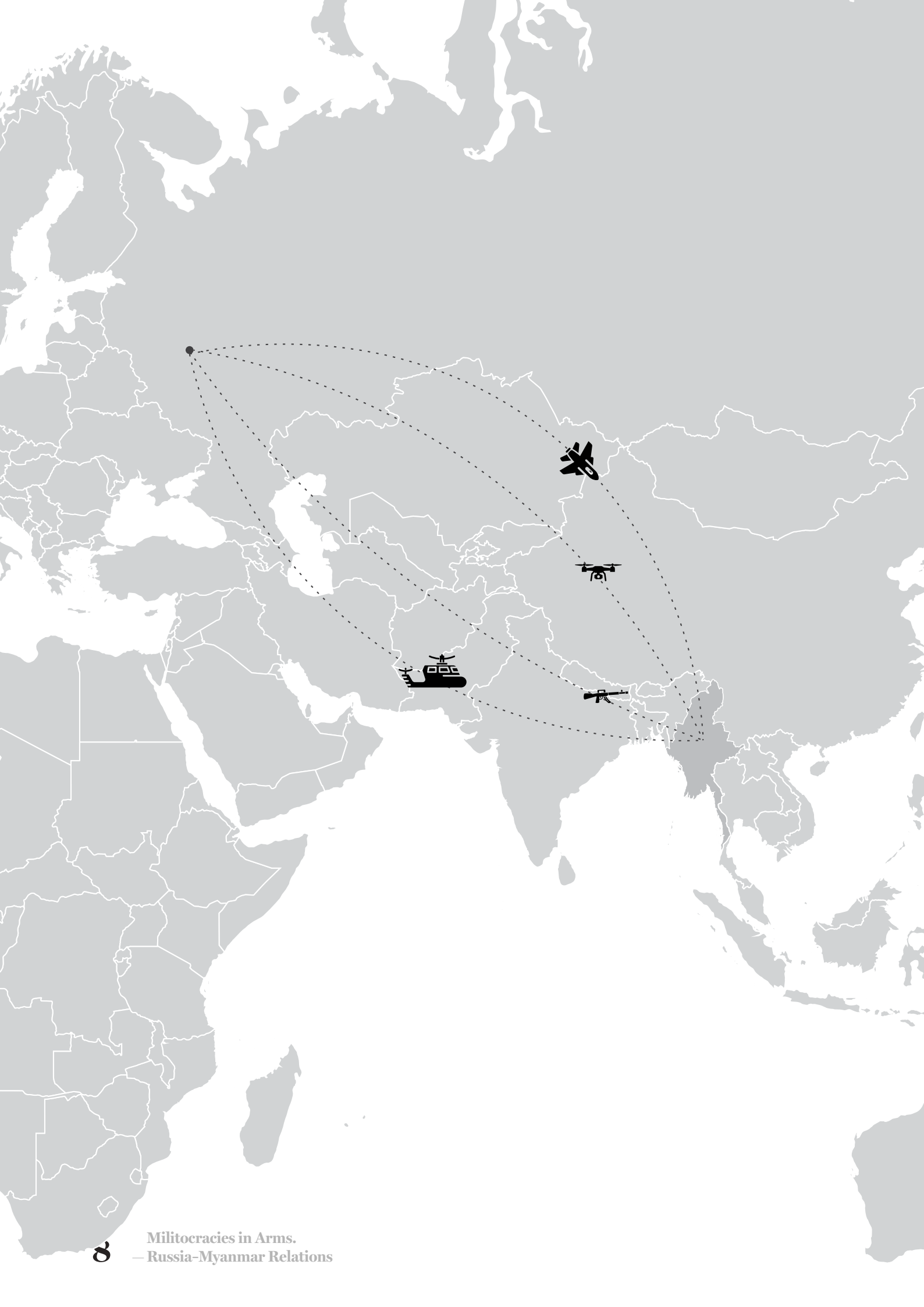
9 Albatross Drones in Exchange for a Coup: How Russia Cooperates with Myanmar, Kyiv Post Nov. 8, 2025, https://www.kyivpost.com/post/63687#articles-sub-title-1

10 The head of Myanmar's military government visits Russia for cooperation talks with Putin, AP News, March 5, 2025, https://apnews.com/article/min-aung-hlaing-myanmar-junta-russia-putin-d1700f85a360632bcfb0b0f0c3edff55

11 Myanmar leader shops for support, weapons in Moscow, Al Jazeera, July 12, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/17/myanmar-leader-goes-shopping-for-support-weapons-in-moscow

12 Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions following talks with Foreign Minister of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Wunna Maung Lwin, Nay Pyi Taw, August 3, 2022, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1824868/

13 Russia to Help Select and Train First Myanmar Cosmonaut, Reuters Feb. 26, 2026, https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2026-02-26/russia-to-help-select-and-train-first-myanmar-cosmonaut



3 Arms Imports from Russia

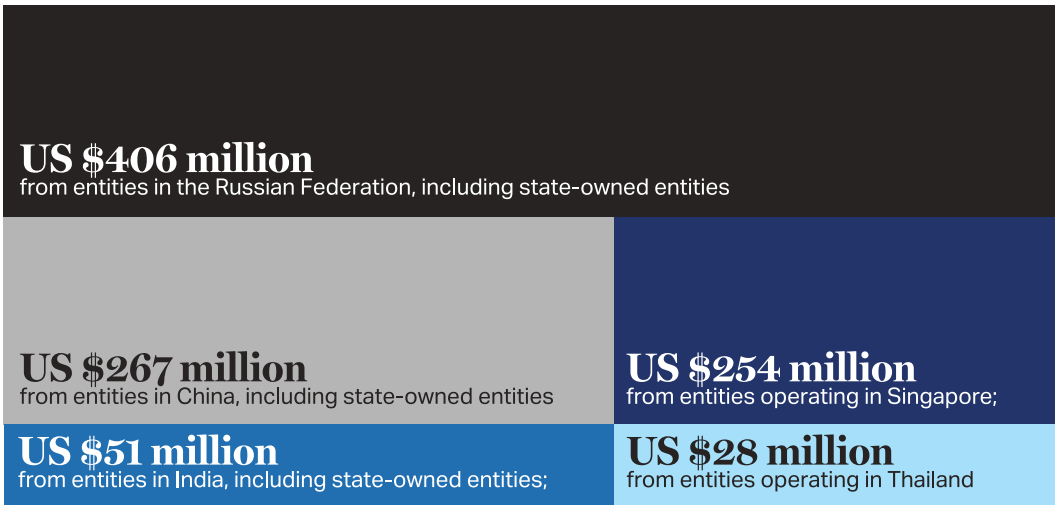
By the late 1990s, Myanmar had begun to diversify its arms supplies beyond China. Since then, Russia has has grown into a major military partner, supplying arms and conducting joint training exercises. By spring 2023, the Myanmar military had imported at least US $1 billion in arms and raw materials for weapons manufacturing since the coup in February 2021. In the first year after the coup alone, Russia supplied Myanmar with US $276 million worth of weapons and military equipment.[14] Russia and China have been the main suppliers of weapons to the Myanmar military, accounting for over US $400 million and US $260 million respectively since the coup.[15] However, the war in Ukraine has been causing supply shortages on the Russian side.

The May 2023 report of the UN Human Rights Council documents imports of helicopters, reconnaissance and attack drones, advanced missile systems, tank upgrades, radio and communication equipment, radar complexes, and components for naval vessels, as well as the transfer of substantial spare parts for these systems. The report also documents the purchase of manufacturing machinery, tools, equipment, and critical raw materials by the Myanmar military's Directorate of Defense Industries (DDI). Beyond arms imports, the DDI domestically manufactures bombs and machine guns, relying in part on raw materials supplied by enterprises from Singapore, China, and Thailand.

14 Rabia İclal Turan, UN expert says Myanmar military imported more than $1 billion in arms since coup. Russia, China, Singapore, Thailand, India major suppliers aiding military, says UN Special Rapporteur, Anadolu Agency (AA) May 18, 2023, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/un-expert-says-myanmar-military-imported-more-than-1-billion-in-arms-since-coup/2900044#:~:text=WASHINGTON,been%20used%20by%20arms%20dealers; Molfar Intelligence Institute, Albatross Drones in Exchange for a Coup: How Russia Cooperates with Myanmar, Kyiv Post Nov. 8, 2025

15 Thomas Andrews, UNHCR, May 17, 2023, UN expert exposes $1 billion "death trade" to Myanmar military, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/un-expert-exposes-1-billion-death-trade-myanmar-military

For the first two years after the putsch, the UN report identifies the following trade in arms and related supplies to the Myanmar military:[16]



Enterprises in Russian shipped at least US $406 million of arms, raw materials, and associated supplies to the Myanmar military or Myanmar arms dealers in the first two years after the putsch. A total of 28 distinct suppliers based in Russia shipped arms to the Myanmar military.[17] Sixteen of those suppliers have been sanctioned by Western countries in response to Russia's war against Ukraine. More than half of the identified arms exports from Russia to the Myanmar military originated from Rosoboronexport. Among its most prominent shipments were the transfer of SU-30 fighter jets and rocket launch systems, as well as supplies for MiG-29 fighter jets.

Transfers by other Russian companies included the delivery of the SOPKA-2 radar complex, tools and accessories for the X-31A air-to-surface missile system, and tools, equipment, and spare parts for a variety of weapons systems, including:


Yak-130 combat/ trainer jets


Mi-2 military helicopters;


Mi-17 utility helicopters;


Mi-24/Mi-35M attack helicopters;


AL-31F jet engines;


GAZ-66 utility trucks;

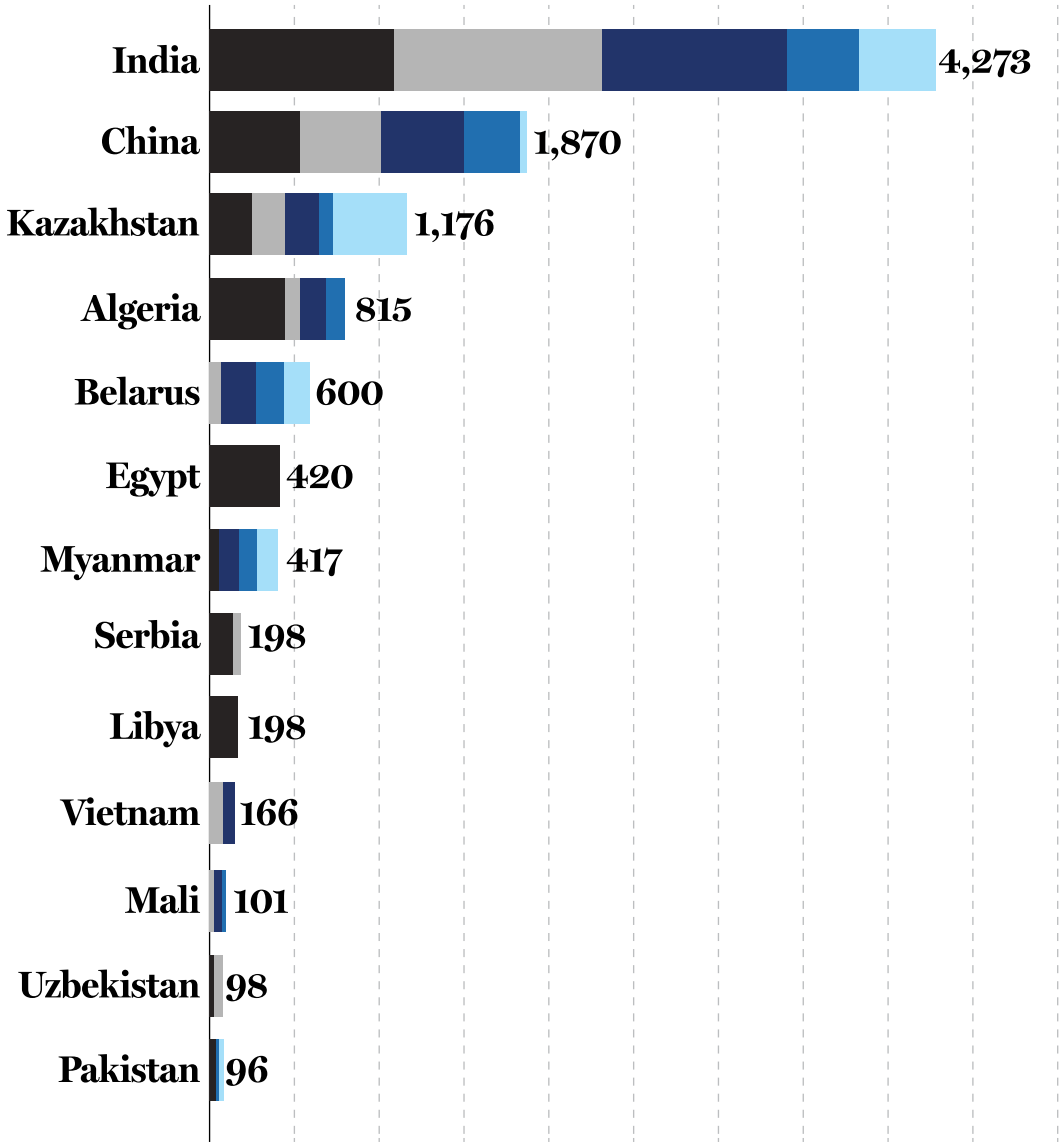

Schiebel S100 reconnaissance and light attack drones

16 Human Rights Council Fifty-third session 19 June–14 July 2023 The Billion Dollar Death Trade: The International Arms Networks that Enable Human Rights Violations in Myanmar, May 17, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/myanmar/crp-sr-myanmar-2023-05-17.pdf

17 United Nations, Myanmar junta using imported arms to commit rights violations: UN expert. AFP, May 18, 2023, https://en.prothomalo.com/international/south-asia/p5111x3j94

Six of the seven private Myanmar companies that received arms from Russia have been sanctioned by either the United States, the United Kingdom, or the European Union, among them Sky Aviator Company Limited, Miya Win International Ltd, Synpex Shwe Company Ltd, Dynasty International Company Ltd, and Myanmar New Era Trading Company Ltd. The seventh, Sky Royal Hero Ltd, a Myanmar entity, which has not yet been sanctioned by any EU member state, contracted repair work on Mi-35M helicopters and is known to have a trading relationship with the sanctioned Sky Aviator Company Ltd.[18]

Arms imports from Russia from 2020 to 2024, by country
(In TIV expressed in millions)



18 https://www.statista.com/statistics/1296249/russia-arms-exports-by-country/

4 Import of Military Aircraft and Drones

After independence, Myanmar relied on Western military aircraft, but from the 1990s onwards it began procuring aircraft from China and Russia. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Burmese Air Force acquired Supermarine Spitfires from Israel, as well as Supermarine Seafires, Percival Provost, de Havilland Vampire, Hawker Sea Fury aircraft from the United Kingdom, as well as Cessna 180 aircraft and Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star jet trainers from the United States and de Havilland and DHC-3 Otter aircraft from Canada, among others. In the early 1990s, the Burmese Air Force bought more than 100 aircraft from China. By 2000, the Myanmar Air Force had received 62 F7 IIK interceptors from China, while Israel refurbished and upgraded the F-7s and FT-7s aircraft and transferred laser-guided bombs to Myanmar. In 1991, the Myanmar Air Force purchased 20 Soko G-4 Super Galeb armed jet trainers from Yugoslavia.

Between 1991 and 1997, the Myanmar Air Force procured a range of helicopters from Russia and Poland, acquiring 20 PZL-Swidnik Mil Mi-2 and 13 PZL W-3 Sokol helicopters from Poland and 13 Mil Mi-17 from Russia. These helicopters were deployed in operations against ethnic armed groups in the Irrawaddy River delta. Mil Mi-2 helicopters were fitted with weapons to provide ground attack and air cover during air assault operations. In 2001, the Myanmar Air Force purchased 12 MiG-29 fighter aircraft (10 MiG-29Bs and two MiG-29UB two seats trainers) from Belarus.[19]

In December 2009, Myanmar signed a €400 million (about US $571 million) deal with Russia's Rosoboronexport for 20 MiG29D fighters (ten MiG-29B, six MiG-29SE and four MiG-29UB) as part of a US $570 million defense package with Russia. The Russian offer reportedly prevailed over a Chinese offer to supply 4+ generation J-10/ FC-20 fighters, or the cheaper JF-17/ FC-1 Thunder lightweight fighter.[20] The air force also ordered ten Mil Mi-35 gunship helicopters as part of a US $71 million defense package signed in December 2009. The Myanmar Armed

19 As an overview: Myanmar Air Force - Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar_Air_Force

20 Burma Buys 20MiG-29 Fighter Jets, The Shew Gas Bulletin, vol. 3, issue 9, Dec–Jan 9-2010, https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs08/SGB03-09.pdf

Forces ordered six Su-30 SM fighters from Russia in 2018.[21] Furthermore, in 2025, Myanmar's military became the first foreign operator of the new Russian transport helicopter (Mi-38) produced by the Kazan Helicopter Plant..[22]Russian-origin aircraft have been frequently deployed in airstrikes against insurgents and civilians since the military came to power in February 2021.

As early as in 2017, four years before the putsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, General Min Aung Hlaing, visited Russia together with Lieutenant General Soe Htut and Brigadier General Nyunt Swe. The delegation attended an arms exhibition, where they were welcomed by Yevgeny Khlebtikov, Deputy Director General of the Joint Stock Company (JSC) "Set-1". General Hlaing paid particular attention to the armored vehicles on display and also expressed interest in the anti-terrorist robotic systems "Scarab" and "Sphere", produced by JSC Set-1.[23]

In January 2021, before the military coup, The Moscow Times reported that Russia had agreed to supply the Myanmar military with Orlan-10E UAVs for reconnaissance.[24] In May 2024, it reportedly purchased a batch of Orlan-10 UAVs and anti-drone equipment.[25] Russia's support was complemented by Chinese and Indian participation in joint drone training at air force bases in Myanmar.[26] Myanmar has increasingly imported Orlan-10E and Albatross M5 drones since 2025,[27] both of which offer greater operational range and ceiling than the hand-launched Israeli Skylark-1LEX drones purchased by the Myanmar military in the 2010s and deployed during the 2019–2020 conflict in Rakhine State. Orlan-10E drones are typically deployed in groups of two or three: The first is used for reconnaissance at altitudes of 1,000 to 1,500 meters (3,300 to 4,900 feet), the second for electronic warfare, and the third as a data relay platform.[28] The Orlan-10E was developed by the Special Technology Center (STC) in St. Petersburg as a compact, catapult-launched drone with a light weight of 18 kg and a flight speed of 70–150 km/h, an endurance of 15 hours, and a maximum operating ceiling of 6,000 m. It has been battle-tested in Syria, the Donbas war of 2014–2022, and the war against Ukraine since 2022.

Russia has further strengthened the Myanmar junta's drone warfare capabilities by supplying electronic-warfare and reconnaissance systems. In November 2025, Myanmar received RB-504A-E anti-drone systems and Orlan-30 reconnaissance drones,

21 Defense Mirror, Russia Begins Assembly of Su-30SMs Meant for Myanmar, DefenseMirror.com, April 29, 2019, https://defensemirror.com/news/24658/Russia_Begins_Assembly_Of_Su_30SMs_Meant_For_Myanmar

22 Ivan Khomenko, Myanmar's Military Junta Becomes First Foreign Buyer of Russia's Mi-38 Helicopters, United 24 Media, Nov. 10, 2025, https://united24media.com/latest-news/myanmars-military-junta-becomes-first-foreign-buyer-of-russias-mi-38-helicopters-13274.

23 Molfar Intelligence Institute, Albatross Drones in Exchange for a Coup: How Russia Cooperates with Myanmar, Nov. 8, 2025, https://www.kyivpost.com/post/63687.

24 Uliana Pavlova, Pjotr Sauer, "Russia to Deepen Ties With Myanmar Military Junta, Top Defense Official Says in First Visit After Coup," The Moscow Times, March 26, 2021, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/03/26/russia-to-deepen-ties-with-myanmar-military-junta-top-defense-official-says-in-first-visit-after-coup-a73387.

25 The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Myanmar Military Bolsters Drone Capabilities after Russia Visit, DVB, May 22, 2024, https://english.dvb.no/myanmar-military-bolsters-its-drone-capabilities-after-visit-to-russia/.

26 Ibid.

27 Russian Suicide Drones Headed to Myanmar as Junta Ramps Up Air War: Report, The Irrawaddy, December 16, 2025, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmars-crisis-the-world/russian-suicide-drones-headed-to-myanmar-as-junta-ramps-up-air-war-report.html

28 STC Orlan-10 - Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/STC_Orlan-10

manufactured by the STC in Saint Petersburg and exported through Rosoboronexport.[29] The Russian drones "are being deployed mainly in Kachin and northern Shan States, where ethnic armed groups frequently use modified DJI and Autel commercial drones for reconnaissance and improvised attacks."... "In Kachin State and northern Shan State, elements of the RB-504A-E jamming system have been positioned near certain military airfields and artillery batteries, tasked with detecting rebel drone transmitters and disrupting the flight of commercial drones made by DJI, such as the Mavic 3 Pro, 3T, 350 RTK, or by Autel Robotics. The Orlan-30 drones are used for reconnaissance and fire control, in coordination with these latest-generation electronic warfare systems. Since the deployment, insurgent ethnic armed groups have noticed intermittent GPS and radio disruptions—consistent with the RB-504A-E jamming capabilities—likely supported initially by Russian technicians."[30] In November 2023, Aleksandr Mikheyev, director of Rosoboronexport, stated that Russia was not exporting the Lancet drone due to high domestic demand.[31] Myanmar may nevertheless receive a batch of Zala Lancet loitering munitions for field testing.

According to a report by the Joint Peace Fund, the establishment of a drone warfare directorate in Naypyidaw in early 2024—tasked with managing acquisitions, training, maintenance, strategy and counter-drone operations, as well as deployments—has proved crucial in constraining the resistance. Between 20 and 30 Russian personnel are reportedly advising on drone development and counterinsurgency tactics and are stationed at three field training facilities for army drone units: the Taung Nyo Air Defense School in Naypyidaw Division, the No. 3 Basic Military Training Camp in Yamethin, Mandalay Region, and the No 5 Air Defense Battalion at Hmawbi in Yangon Region).[32]

The Myanmar junta has acquired and is deploying Russian-made drones, including the Orlan-10E and the larger Orion-2 (Helios) surveillance drones. In November 2025, Myanmar received Russian anti-drone equipment, and a shipment of Orlan-30 reconnaissance drones. According to Ukrainian intelligence, which is cooperating with the Myanmar resistance, the drones are used against armed insurgents.[33] In 2020, Russian companies Albatross LLC and Set-1—the latter producing radio modems for Albatross UAVs—began negotiating the sale of Albatross drones to Myanmar's Ministry of Defense.[34] Albatross drones are produced in the Alabuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Tatarstan region near the town of Yelabuga, an industrial park where businesses benefit from corporation tax exemptions.[35] The Alabuga manufacturing complex has pivoted to drone production since the start of Russia's war against Ukraine, producing Iranian-designed Shahed attack drones and Albatross reconnaissance drones.
Before Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, Albatross imported the following components for its drones: electronic circuits

29 Intelligence Online, Moscow quietly bolsters Myanmar junta's drone warfare capabilities, Intelligence Online, December 10, 2025, https://www.intelligenceonline.com/asia-pacific/2025/12/10/moscow-quietly-bolsters-myanmar-junta-s-drone-warfare-capabilities,110574451-art

30 Ibid.

31 Reuters, Russia not exporting Lancet drones as domestic demand high – TASS, Reuters, November 15, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-not-exporting-lancet-drones-domestic-demand-high-tass-2023-11-15/

32 Joint Peace Fund, Russia's Military Footprint in Myanmar, unpublished paper, December 2025.

33 Intelligence Online 10 Dec. 2025, https://www.intelligenceonline.com/asia-pacific/2025/12/10/moscow-quietly-bolsters-myanmar-junta-s-drone-warfare-capabilities,110574451-art

34 See on the following: Albatross Drones in Exchange for a Coup: How Russia Cooperates with Myanmar, Molfar Intelligence Institute, November 3, 2025, https://www.molfar.institute/en/albatross-drones-in-exchange-for-a-coup-how-russia-cooperates-with-myanmar/

35 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabuga_Special_Economic_Zone

from Malaysia, Korea, Japan and China; servo drives from Savox (Finland); engines from Scorpion (US-China); radio channels from RFDesign (Australia); and propeller blades from Aeronaut (Germany). Other components in the Albatros-M5 UAV were sourced from Malaysia, China, Korea, Singapore, Australia, Sweden, and Switzerland, with some raw materials of German origin, including German-made carbon fiber used as filler material for sandwich carbon composite sheets.[36] German-made propellers were used in seven Russian drone models: Granat-1, Granat-2, Granat-3, Tachion, ZALA-42104M, Grusha, and Orlan-2.[37] The German companies were reportedly unaware that the blades were being used for military purposes.

Myanmar's cash-strapped military is interested in a licensing deal that would allow domestic production of Albatross drones, but no formal agreement for the licensed production within Myanmar has been reported by the media. Russian drones still appear to rely on electronic components produced in Western countries. In response to U.S. and EU sanctions, Russia has sought cooperation with third-party suppliers as alternative sources. Israeli cyber networks in Bangkok have reportedly supported Russian–Thai aviation firms to circumvent sanctions.[38] Russia's new AI-enabled drones continue to rely on smuggled Nvidia chips.[39]

Information about cooperation between JSC Set-1 and the Myanmar military first emerged on March 10, 2020. The Myanmar company Alliance Engineering Services Co. Ltd expressed interest in Set-1 wireless communication equipment for a new reconnaissance UAV under development by the Myanmar Air Force. The Myanmar company had relied on Yaroslav Mikhailovich Gontarenko ("Mr Slava") a Russian intermediary with professional experience in Myanmar to facilitate the contract.

One of the Myanmar partners of Set-1 is businessman U Tay Za, owner of the Htoo Group of Companies, which has served as an intermediary in supplying weapons to the Myanmar military. The Htoo Group is a private conglomerate with close ties to the Myanmar military leadership, operating in trade, banking, mining, tourism, and aviation. In 2017, the Group provided financial support to the Myanmar Armed Forces during its military operations in Rakhine State and subsequently served as an intermediary for supplying military equipment used against civilians protesting the February 1, 2021 military coup. The group has been sanctioned by the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, and Monaco. Sanctions should be extended and coordinated to cover the entire Dynasty Group network and its directors and shareholders, as well as Global Top Link Technologies Company Limited, its CEO Dr Sein Htoo, and other Myanmar military arms brokers.[40]

Russia has set up a shell company in Singapore—Ammertex—to evade sanctions by shipping Set-1 products to Singapore and purchasing microchips for delivery to

36 Secret development of Russia and what is hidden behind the Alabuga project (Part 3), Hack Your Mom May 20, 2024, https://hackyourmom.com/en/drony/sekretna-rozrobka-rosiyi-ta-shho-hovayetsya-za-proektom-alabuga-chastyna-3/

37 Is Russia violating EU sanctions?, BILD February 2, 2019, https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/politik-ausland/german-propellers-on-putins-drones-is-russia-violating-eu-sanctions-59846310.bild.html

38 Matt Bernardini, Louis Raymond, Israeli cyber networks in Bangkok supporting Russian-Thai aviation firms, Intelligence online, December 4, 2025, https://www.intelligenceonline.com/asia-pacific/2025/12/04/israeli-cyber-networks-in-bangkok-supporting-russian-thai-aviation-firms,110570829-eve

39 David Hambling, Russia Has An Arsenal Of New AI Drones Built With Smuggled Nvidia Chips, Forbes, August 8, 2025, https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2025/08/08/russia-has-an-arsenal-of-new-ai-drones-built-with-smuggled-us-chips/

40 https://www.wassenaar.org/the-wassenaar-arrangement/.

Russia.[41] Ammertex sells audio and video surveillance systems and markets Set-1 products.[42] The company is headed by Russian entrepreneur Elena Holloway, formerly known as Berezhnaya and Fedorova, originally from Moscow and currently residing in Singapore. Ammertex has changed its business classification twice: from "production of communication equipment" to "management consulting services" in August 2024, and to "business consulting" in March 2025.

Between January and April 2022, Ammertex made nine purchases of various equipment from CJSC RMD, the official exporter of Set-1 products.[43] These purchases included television cameras, video recording equipment, devices for transmitting or receiving voice, images, or other data—including communication equipment for wired or wireless networks—microphones, remote-control equipment, and digital cameras, likely intended for use in drones. Among Ammertex's partners is the Kazakh company Too Da Group 22, which was added to the EU sanctions list in June 2024 for supplying German-origin microchips to Russia to circumvent sanctions.[44]

In April 2020, on behalf of the Myanmar Air Force, Ivan Htet, son of its former commander-in-chief, expressed interest in the Set-1 radio modem and potentially in an all-weather reconnaissance drone for infantry needs".[45] The Russian side considered the Albatross M5 commercially viable for sale to Myanmar.[46] Set-1 has played a central role in Myanmar–Russia military–technological relations, including providing information about the Albatross M5 unmanned aerial system.[47] The Russian defense minister signed an agreement with Rosoboronexport to supply Orlan-10E UAVs, while Albatross specialists were to train Myanmar UAV operators in Russia.[48]

In February 2021, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Myanmar. Only ten days later, the coup d'état took place. Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing had in all likelihood informed Shoigu about the military's plans. The two countries concluded agreements to supply the Myanmar Armed Forces with Russian Su-30 fighters, Yak-130 combat training aircraft, and Mi-17 helicopters. Russia had previously sold MiG-29 aircraft, Mi-35P, Mi-24 and Mi-2 helicopters, Pechora-2M anti-aircraft missile systems, armored vehicles, artillery systems

41 Intelligence Online, "Ammertex, a Gateway for FSB Surveillance Service Providers' Imports in Singapore," Intelligence Online, September 22, 2021, https://www.intelligenceonline.com/europe-russia/2023/09/22/ammertex-a-gateway-for-fsb-surveillance-service-providers--imports-in-singapore,110056256-art.

42 Ammertex' address in Singapore: 21 Bukit Batok Crescent, WCEGA Tower #29-74, Singapore 658065, Phone: +65 81382788, Email: info@ammertex.com; their website was offline at the time of writing in December 2025. Ammertex' registration credentials in Singapore are found here: https://www.sgpbusiness.com/company/Ammertex-Pte-Ltd.

43 The company is listed as active since 2010 in a Russian company register, but its website did not open at the time of writing, the products and services are not mentioned in the register, it has allegedly only three employees, https://zachestnyibiznes.ru/company/ul/1107746866039_7714820700_ZAO-RMD

44 Artem Volkov, Kazakhstanskaya kompaniya prodavala mikrochiptsy v Rossiyu i popala pod sanktsii, Orda.kz, June 25, 2024, https://orda.kz/kazahstanskaja-kompanija-prodavala-mikrochipy-v-rossiju-i-popala-pod-sankcii-388238.

45 Under Min Aung Hlaing, the children of generals have established their own companies to supply the military, see Myanmar's Corrupt Air Force Gets big Budget Raise as Airstrikes Escalate, The Irrawaddy May 9, 2023, https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/myanmars-corrupt-air-force-gets-big-budget-raise-as-airstrikes-escalate.html

46 Molfar Intelligence Institute, Albatross Drones in Exchange for a Coup: How Russia Cooperates with Myanmar, 2025, https://www.molfar.institute/en/albatross-drones-in-exchange-for-a-coup-how-russia-cooperates-with-myanmar/

47 Kirill Ryabov, Parameters and Capabilities of the UAV 'Albatros M5, Top War, October 1, 2024, https://en.topwar.ru/251107-parametry-i-vozmozhnosti-bpla-albatros-m5.html.

48 On Orlan-10, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/STC_Orlan-10.

and radar stations. During Shoigu's visit in January 2021, the two countries agreed on the sale of Orlan-10E UAVs, Pantsir-S1 anti-aircraft missile systems, and radar stations.

At the time of the military coup, the Myanmar Air Force already had a test model of the Albatross M5 UAV, which Russia had delivered in late 2020. Albatross conducted remote training for Myanmar UAV operators in 2021, along with demonstration flights for senior military officials. Russian forces have used Albatross M5 UAVs in the war against Ukraine for reconnaissance and artillery adjustment. The Ukrainian Defense Forces' continued interception and destruction of these drones may offer relevant lessons for Myanmar's resistance movement.

As of late 2020, Albatross had neither a laser rangefinder-based target designation system nor a UAV video-feed system for tracking and identifying targets. Negotiations with a potential customer were ongoing regarding the development of the first system, while the software component of the latter, being developed under the Start-2 project, was still in progress and expected to be completed by May 2021. At that time, Albatross was offering Myanmar UAV capabilities that did not yet fully exist.

Albatross lists loitering munitions among its main product lines, including an aircraft-type strike drone based on the Iranian Shahed-101 and Shahed-107 UAVs deployed in the war against Ukraine, as well as reconnaissance UAVs and decoys—so-called false targets, under the working name "Albazavr". The offer to Myanmar included two Albatross M5 UAVs with all required payloads and equipment, in particular, coordinate-measurement systems and video-stream object tracking, with options to purchase one, five, 50, or 100 UAVs. Cooperation between Albatross and Myanmar nonetheless appears to have slowed.

5 Military Training and Joint Military Exercises

Myanmar reportedly sends over 300 military officers to Russia for training each year.[49] As Russia supplies critical military hardware, including fighter jets such as the Su-30SME, submarines, and air defense systems, Russian training programs also cover familiarization with these advanced military technologies. Myanmar's officers are regularly trained at Russian military academies, notably at the Military University of the Ministry of Defense. Myanmar's military units also participate regularly in the International Army Games and combat training events organized by Russia. The International Army Games (IAG), often referred to as the 'War Olympics,' are an annual global military sports event organized by the Russian Ministry of Defense, in which dozens of countries compete in tank biathlons, tactical shooting, and engineering challenges, alongside military expos and recruitment activities. At the time of writing, apart from the military training, an estimated 800 civilian students from Myanmar are studying in Russia, including at Moscow State University (MGU), Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), and Tomsk State University. In total, some 7,000 students from Myanmar have studied in Russia—a long-term investment in cultivating Russian-speaking 'ambassadors' of bilateral cooperation.

In recent years, cooperation between Myanmar and Russia has included joint naval exercises, such as the first Myanmar–Russia Maritime Security Exercise (MARUMEX) in 2023, which started at the port of Thilawa in Myanmar. The main goal of the exercise held in November 2025 was to train coordination between the naval vessels of the two countries in the waters of Southeast Asia. Over the course of two days, the crews worked through a series of combat scenarios: searching for submarines, firing torpedoes, and rescuing a vessel supposedly captured by pirates.[50] Beyond these regular, but limited, naval exercises, no joint air force or infantry exercises have been reported.

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49 Maung Yit, Following the Powerful – Myanmar Military Council's Trip to Russia and Its Strategic Shift, Moemaka, March 5, 2025, https://moemaka.net/eng/2025/03/following-the-powerful-myanmar-military-councils-trip-to-russia-and-its-strategic-shift/

50 Andrey Burkov, Rossiya I Myanma hachali masstabnoe ucheniya po sashite sudokhodstva v Yugo-Vostochnoi Azii, Informatsionnoe agenstvo delovoi zhurnal profil, November 13, 2025, https://profile.ru/news/politics/rossiya-i-myanma-nachali-masshtabnye-ucheniya-po-zashhite-sudohodstva-v-jugo-vostochnoj-azii-1779634/

In early March 2026, in one of the biggest Myanmar travel chats for Russians on Telegram (1500+ members), one user shared the following message (trans.): "For the attention of travelers... I am currently on a work trip... The trip involves arming the local army... Every morning, local military officials brief us on the situation in Naypyidaw and Yangon, as this trip will eventually take us to Yangon... There has been an increase in attacks by "local guerrillas" on people of European appearance, followed by beatings and robbery... Be careful, friends."



Despite saying that this was done in order to "urge Russian-speaking citizens to focus as much as possible on ensuring their personal safety," this user immediately faced backlash for revealing potentially sensitive information about the details of their "work trip" and was questioned for their credentials by other group members: "I appreciate your warnings to our compatriots, but surely you could do so without mentioning your connection to the Tatmadaw," said one member; "This is a turncoat," said another.

The author of the original message went on to mention that The Jasmine Hotel in Naypyidaw "currently has many of these, as you say, 'turncoats' from Moscow" and that the user themselves works "with rockets and air defense." It is impossible to independently verify the credentials and claims of the user but it is consistent with other threads of evidence. On March 5, 2026, three Russian Navy vessels arrived at the Thilawa Port in Yangon "for a goodwill visit" of six days.[51] Additionally, the role of The Jasmine Hotel in receiving foreign military delegation has been documented before, particularly for Iran[52] and India.[53] The user was unlikely to have been a part of this delegation as they were in Naypyidaw while the fleet was in Yangon, so if their statements are true, it supports the idea that Russia (either through state military, private defense companies, or both) is conducting several simultaneous support programs for the Myanmar junta.

51 "Russian Navy Vessels Arrive at Yangon's Thilawa Port for Goodwill Visit," MDN - Myanmar Digital News, March 6, 2026, https://www.mdn.gov.mm/en/russian-navy-vessels-arrive-yangons-thilawa-port-goodwill-visit.

52 "The Jasmine Hotel, a Luxurious Myanmar Sanctuary Where Sanctions-Hit Pasdaran and Junta Meet," Intelligence Online, April 21, 2023, https://www.intelligenceonline.com/middle-east-and-africa/2023/04/21/the-jasmine-hotel-a-luxurious-myanmar-sanctuary-where-sanctions-hit-pasdaran-and-junta-meet.

53 "Indian Military Goodwill Delegation Departs Myanmar," Global New Light Of Myanmar, September 19, 2025, https://www.gnlm.com.mm/indian-military-goodwill-delegation-departs-myanmar/.

6 Military Cooperation with Belarus

Since 2014, meetings between Min Aung Hlaing and senior representatives of the Myanmar military, and their Belarusian counterparts have become increasingly frequent. In November 2014, Min Aung Hlaing traveled on a first visit to Minsk for meetings with President Lukashenko and Belarusian Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikovich. Lukashenko noted Belarus' readiness to "cooperate with Myanmar in the military–technical sphere, training of personnel."[54] Military collaboration between the Myanmar military and Belarus takes place under the auspices of a Myanmar–Belarus Joint Military Commission on Technical Cooperation, which meets annually to discuss arms sales, manufacturing, technology transfer, and training.

Past meetings between Myanmar and Belarus held under the auspices of the Joint Military Commission have entailed Belarus offering to repair and modernize Myanmar's armaments and military equipment, as well as the production of advanced military products. Belarus is also implicated in transfers of arms and equipment from Russia, including Russian helicopter gunships (Mil Mi-24/35P) used by the Myanmar military in its airstrikes against insurgents since 2021.[55] Belarusian companies have also played a direct role in the transfer of arms to Myanmar from Serbia. In February 2021, Rada Airlines, transported hundreds of Serbian-made 80mm rockets to Myanmar.[56]

As Russia remains preoccupied with its war against Ukraine, Belarus has stepped in to fill some gaps. The Belarusian regime has deepened its ties with the junta, providing arms, equipment, and training, particularly in air defense command systems and

54 Meeting with Commander in Chief of Myanmar's Army Min Aung Hlaing, November 4, 2014, https://president.gov.by/en/events/meeting-with-commander-in-chief-of-myanmars-army-min-aung-hlaing-10115

55 Myanmar Military, "Myanmar Air Force Mil Mi-35P in Action," YouTube, December 31, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_kJc1N-lwQ

56 Justice for Myanmar, Belarus regime supplying air defence system to Myanmar military and training personnel as aerial terror campaign intensifies, June 28, 2025, https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/press-releases/belarus-regime-supplying-air-defence-system-to-myanmar-military-and-training-personnel-as-aerial-terror-campaign-intensifies

weapons.[57] In March 2025, Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin, the Belarusian Minister of Defense held talks with General Maung Maung Aye, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of Myanmar, with both sides expressing their interest in intensifying and deepening bilateral cooperation.

The opposition news outlet Justice for Myanmar reported on leaked letters from January 2022, which refer to contracts dated August 2019 and June 2021 for the delivery of the Vostok 3D radar system to Myanmar's air defense. Designed and developed by JSC KB Radar, the managing company of Minsk-based Radar Systems Holding, the system is designed to detect airborne objects, measure their range and velocity, automatically track targets and transmit radar data to the control system. The Vostok-E variant, designed and manufactured by JSC KB Radar, serves as a mobile, digital very high frequency radar.[58] The Marker-M is an aircraft positioning complex, which tracks low-observable aerial targets using friend-or-foe identification, object positioning control, and data interchange with an automated air traffic control system.[59] The GMS-II delivery" likely refers to a ground-based missile system. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Myanmar purchased 100 Kvadrat-M SAM systems and related surface-to-air missiles (3M3) manufactured by the Belarusian company Alevkurp JSC in 2016.[60]

Leaked correspondence concerning the deals between the Myanmar military and Belarus suggest that the military junta is increasingly struggling to meet the costs of its international weapons procurement.[61] A leaked letter dated January 2022 confirms that the Belarussian arms exporter BSVT (Belspetsvneshtechnika = Белспецвнештехника) raised concerns over Myanmar's payments, having yet to receive payment for outstanding orders and making a direct request to the Myanmar military's Directorate of Procurement to settle these amounts promptly in cash "as per previous practice".[62] The request also noted that Belarus, keen to receive hard currency or gold, could dispatch an aircraft to Naypyidaw to collect the cash— a procedure that had apparently been employed on previous occasions. Two arms brokers, the Dynasty Group of Companies and Global Top Link Technologies, served as brokers between Myanmar and Belarus. The Dynasty Group of Companies (also known as Dynasty International), sanctioned by the European Union, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, brokered the purchase of arms and related materiel from Russia, Belarus and Germany after the military coup.[63]

57 Ibid.

58 https://bte.by/upload/iblock/fc9/fc9139ca454fa93a57cdaf0a1d2ee03e.pdf

59 Ibid.

60 Facebook entry by Buu Khar, 8 July 2025, view-source:https://www.facebook.com/buu.khar/posts/belarus-is-providing-military-equipment-to-the-burmese-military-junta-as-well-as/4319160194988003/.

61 Justice for Myanmar, Belarus supplying Myanmar air defence operational command system and training defence industry personnel, June 28, 2025, https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/stories/belarus-supplying-myanmar-air-defence-operational-command-system-and-training-defence-industry-personnel

62 Ibid.

63 JFM SWelcomes Canadian Sanctions on Myanmar Military Jet Fuel Supplier and Arms Brokers, Justice for Myanmar, December 10, 2022, https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/press-releases/jfm-welcomes-canadian-sanctions-on-myanmar-military-jet-fuel-supplier-and-arms-brokers

Military training in Belarus

Several Myanmar military students arrived in Minsk in March 2023 to study at the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR), and a number of them were still present in Minsk in June 2025. BSUIR has a military-research faculty comprising departments for communications, tactical and general military training, and radio-electronic engineering for the Belarusian Air Force.

Myanmar military personnel studying at BSUIR are employed at various weapon production facilities in Myanmar overseen by the Directorate of Defence Industries (DDI): Factory DDI 4 in Tat Kon, Naypyidaw, DDI 20 in Ngape, Magway, and Myanmar Heavy Industry 10 in Meiktila, Mandalay.[64] DDI 4 is the central hub among the junta's 25 weapons production facilities and is responsible for conducting research and the design of new weapons for domestic manufacture. DDI 20 produces anti-aircraft guns, including automatic cannons, reportedly with technical assistance from China North Industries Group Corporation (NORINCO).

In January 2025, BSUIR's First Vice-Rector, M.V. Ravydov, visited Myanmar as part of a delegation led by Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs, M.V. Ryzhenkov and met with representatives from Yangon University, Yangon Technological University, and the University of Computer Studies in Yangon. Belarus provides microwave technology to Myanmar which it uses to develop radar systems that detect objects and determine their locations by transmitting and analyzing electromagnetic waves in the microwave range.

In late May 2025, Ihar Voitau, Rector of the Belarusian State Technological University (BSTU) met with the junta's Major-General Ko Lay, Military, Navy and Air Force Attaché of the Myanmar Embassy to Belarus and Russia, and Brigadier-General Kyaw Soe Oo. The parties discussed the training of Myanmar students at BSTU and met with 34 students from Myanmar that were completing advanced studies at various Belarusian universities.

Belarus is a long-standing partner of the Myanmar military junta, with frequent high-level visits for negotiations on arms sales, materiel, and military–technical cooperation. In 2025 alone, junta head Min Aung Hlaing made two visits to Belarus, where he met with representatives of the Belarusian arms company Belarusian Optical and Mechanical Organization (BelOMO Holding), which specializes in laser, optoelectronic, and optomechanical devices, including night vision equipment for small arms that allow for enhanced night-time visibility and targeting. In March 2025, Min Aung Hlaing travelled to Belarus where he met with President Lukashenko to advance defense cooperation. In November 2025, President Lukashenko paid a return visit to Myanmar.

64 https://english.dvb.no/weapons-factories-keeping-regime-in-power-states-analysts/

7 Myanmar's Use of Russian Weapons

Since the putsch in February 2021, "the Myanmar military has conducted airstrikes and land attacks, committed murder, torture, and sexual violence, and pillaged and burned villages ostensibly aligned with opposition groups. These operations have resulted in atrocities amounting to probable war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Myanmar military," according to a 2023 UN report.[65] Since the February 2021 military coup, the UN Special Rapporteur has consistently recommended denying the military junta financial support, weapons, and legitimacy.[66] Russia has been and remains at the forefront of doing exactly the opposite, thereby contributing to systematic human rights violations, including mass atrocities in Myanmar.

On June 18, 2021, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 75/287, which "calls upon all Member States to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar." It passed by a vote of 119 in favor, one against (Belarus), and 36 abstentions. General Assembly resolutions are non-binding but reflect the prevailing opinion of the international community—which Russia openly flouts. As the same UN report stated: "Member States that continue to provide weapons and associated equipment to another State that is engaged in violations of international humanitarian law in many cases violate international humanitarian law themselves."[67]

The UN report stipulates that States "refrain from transferring weapons if there is an expectation, based on facts or knowledge of past patterns, that such weapons would be used to violate the Conventions."[68] The UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), adopted at the UN General Assembly in April 2013, establishes rules governing the trade in conventional weapons, with the stated goals of "reducing human suffering" and "contributing to international

65 Myanmar: Death, destruction and desperation mirror 2017 atrocities – UN report, 02 September 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/myanmar-death-destruction-and-desperation-mirror-2017-atrocities-un-report

66 Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, The Billion Dollar Death Trade: The International Arms Networks that Enable Human Rights Violations in Myanmar, June 19–July 14, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/myanmar/crp-sr-myanmar-2023-05-17.pdf

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

and regional peace, security and stability."[69] The ATT applies to battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, large-caliber artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, missiles and missile launchers, and small arms and light weapons. The ATT has been ratified by 117 states, including China, but neither by Russia nor the United States.[70]

In December 2017, Russia voted together with China, Belarus, and Syria against a UN General Assembly resolution supported by 122 states, which demanded an end to military operations against the Rohingya in Rakhine state.[71] The Russian ambassador to Myanmar justified the Myanmar military's genocidal actions against the Rohingya as legitimate anti-terrorist actions.[72] In Chechnya, however, the crowd at a public rally on September 4, 2017—reportedly drawing one million participants—protested against the atrocities committed against the Muslim Rohingya.[73] Russia's official solidarity with the Myanmar military divided the country.
The Myanmar military's advances against insurgents in 2024 and 2025 resulted from several converging factors: additional manpower supplied through conscription; Chinese pressure on the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)—two major opposition movements in the northeast—that freed up troops for deployment on other fronts; and an expansion of drone warfare, air raids, and artillery operations, for which Russian equipment, technical support, and tactical advice on counterinsurgency proved decisive.[74]
Russia's post-coup arms transfers to the Myanmar military violate customary international law, as they are being made with full knowledge of the Myanmar military's bombing of civilian populations—conduct that mirrors Russia's own approach to war in Chechnya, Syria and Ukraine.[75] The fighter jets and missiles are significant contributors to the junta's aerial bombardment of civilians. Under international humanitarian law, Russia is obligated to halt further arms transfers, given that it is aware the Myanmar military is systematically committing violations of international humanitarian law using its weapons. As a participating state of the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technology, these sales also run counter to Russia's obligations under the Arrangement, albeit non-binding ones.[76] Under the Agreement, Russia is obligated to "prevent the acquisition of armaments and sensitive dual use items for military end-uses, if the situation in a region or the behavior of a state is, or becomes, a cause for serious concern to the Participating States."[77]

69 United Nations, The Arms Trade Treaty, https://www.thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/TheArmsTradeTreaty1/TheArmsTradeTreaty.pdf

70 Ibid.

71 Rossiya i Kitai progolosovali v OON protiv rezolutsii po situatsii v shtate Rakkhain, TASS Dec. 24, 2017, https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4839635

72 Lyudmila Plotnikova, Kak rossiyan zamanivayut v rabstvo v koll-tsentry v Myanme I pochemu etogo ne stoit boyatsya prostomu turistu. Posol razvenchal mify o strane, Komsomolskaya Pravda Feb. 11, 2026, https://www.kp.ru/daily/27761/5208380/

73 Putin o situatsii v Myanme, 24 Mir Sept. 5, 2017, https://mir24.tv/news/16266049/Tihonov_Al@mirtv.ru

74 Joint Peace Fund, Russia's Military Footprint in Myanmar, unpublished paper, December 2025.

75 Marcel Van Herpen, Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

76 What Is the Wassenaar Arrangement?, The Wassenaar Arrangement, https://www.wassenaar.org/the-wassenaar-arrangement/

77 https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/wassenaar-arrangement/

8 Intelligence Sharing

Russia has signed cooperation agreements on information security with countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. In 2004, agreements with Iran, Myanmar, Ethiopia and Uzbekistan entered into force. Intergovernmental agreements are currently in force with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

A Joint Statement of the Participants of a Roundtable on "International Cooperation in the Field of Information Security" in Moscow (May 29, 2025) was signed by representatives of Russia, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Cuba, North Korea, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Vietnam, Kuwait, Niger and Sudan.[78] Myanmar is thus part of Russia's broader policy to prevent cybercrime, monitor data traffic, and share intelligence.[79] It is worth noting that Russia's cooperation partners in this domain are almost exclusively autocratic regimes, particularly recently established military dictatorships.

During Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Moscow in spring 2025, it was announced that Russia had established a joint satellite imagery analysis center in Myanmar and had offered to "share information captured by its reconnaissance satellites with the regime for military purposes."[80] An analyst from Griffith University (Australia) suggested that "this step potentially marks a major enhancement of the junta's ability to monitor developments in and around Myanmar, and to plan its military operations against the country's opposition movement."[81]

78 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Joint Statement of the Participants of the Roundtable 'International Cooperation in the Field of Information Security', The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, May 29, 2025, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/regprla/2021697/

79 Iran Press, Agreements on Security with Iran, Myanmar, Ethiopia to Come into Force in 2024, Iran Press, April 24, 2024, https://iranpress.com/content/278667/agreements-security-with-iran-myanmar-ethiopia-come-into-force-2024.

80 Andrew Selth, Commentary: Myanmar's Junta May Have Struck a Deal with Russia to Boost Its Imagery Intelligence – but Why?, CNA, March 16, 2025, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/myanmar-junta-russia-military-satellite-intelligence-sharing-5000496.

81 Ibid.

Russia's offer bolsters the military junta's fight against insurgents. Myanmar officers reportedly receive intelligence training in Russia, assistance in operating surveillance hardware, but also the know-how to manipulate social media and information environments. China. However, appears to be the more important partner for intelligence cooperation.[82]

82 Interview of the authors with Myanmar expert Igor Blazevič, Nov. 25, 2025, World Movement for Democracy.

9 Propaganda

During the Soviet era, the KGB sought to engage so-called agents of influence in Myanmar (then Burma). The KGB trained Myanmar officers in the Soviet Union, and spread pro-Soviet and anti-American propaganda as part of its psychological warfare against the United States in Southeast Asia, using the services of the Sovinform bureau, Russia's Soviet-era international information and propaganda agency.[83] The Soviet Union maintained three intelligence units in Myanmar—political, economic, and military. In 2023, Russia's "Firehose of Propaganda"[84], the Sputnik International News Media, signed a content-sharing agreement with the junta's news agency, the Global New Light of Myanmar.[85] In countries of strategic interest, Putin's Russia has revitalized Soviet so-called active measure practices by influencing electoral campaigns, spreading disinformation, engaging agents of influence, bribing politicians, and operating Russian-controlled media outlets.

In addition, joint plans are underway to expand Russian-language instruction in Myanmar, where it is currently taught at two universities[86] and the armed forces academy.[87] The two countries have expressed their intension to establish a joint comprehensive school in Myanmar and to bring more Russian teachers into the country through the Russian Teacher Abroad program.[88] In 2022, Min Aung Hlaing attended the opening ceremony of the Myanmar Cultural Center in Russia.[89]

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83 Aleksandr Kaznacheev, Inside a Soviet Embassy. Experiences of a Russian Diplomat in Burma, Philadelphia and New York, 1962.

84 https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html

85 The Irrawaddy, Myanmar Junta Adds Russia's 'Firehose of Propaganda' to Its Arsenal, September 7, 2023, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmars-crisis-the-world/myanmar-junta-adds-russias-firehose-of-propaganda-to-its-arsenal.html

86 Tsentr Prosvetitelskikh Initsiativ Ministerstva Rossiskoi Federatsii, Vtoroi Tsetr otkrytogo obrazovaniya otkryli v Myanme, July 3, 2025, https://mpcenter.ru/novosti/1099/

87 Sergey Lisnevskii, Voennye Myanmy gotovyatsya izuchat russkii yazyk, Ridus, June 22, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20130719005635/http://www.ridus.ru/news/95559/

88 TASS, RF otkroet v Myanme shkolu i rasshirit obuchenie russkomu yazyku April 5, 2025, https://tass.ru/obschestvo/23305857

89 TASS, V Kaluzhskoi oblasti otkryli kulturnyi tsentr Myanmy, June 10, 2022, https://tass.ru/obschestvo/15197221.

Another well-documented tool of Russian influence is the Orthodox Church. In February 2025, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture organized the official signing ceremony for the registration of the Statute of the Parish of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Southeast Asia, Russian Orthodox Church, in Yangon, effectively granting it permission to start religious activities in Myanmar.[90] Official statements about the construction of the first Russian Orthodox Church in Myanmar, intended to "attract more Russian tourists" started as early as May 2023;[91] however, as of December 2025, no updates about the construction process have emerged.

Besides military alignments, Russia and Myanmar have also forged a mutual political endorsement strategy, primarily by supporting each other's contested elections and through diplomatic and media statements that lend legitimacy to their authoritarian regimes.

Russia has actively aided junta in organizing its post-2021 coup elections, widely criticized as shams due to opposition suppression and violence. In September 2023, Myanmar's election commission delegation visited Moscow, signing a memorandum on electoral cooperation covering "voter education," "effective media utilization," and Russia's "election methods," all tactics helping create an illusion of legitimacy.[92]

Myanmar's junta has reciprocated by publicly praising Putin's March 2024 landslide win. Min Aung Hlaing sent a congratulatory message stating Putin's victory "indicates he has the support of the Russian people."[93] Myanmar was also one of the few countries to send a delegation to observe the Russian elections.[94]

In March 2025, Min Aung Hlaing met Russia's State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin in Moscow to discuss how Russia can Myanmar for holding the 2025-26 elections.[95] In December, Russia was among the eight countries to serve as an international observer (along with China, India, Belarus, Vietnam and others). [96]

90 One News Editor Team, Russian Orthodox Church Granted Permission to Conduct Religious Activities in Myanmar, February 19, 2025. https://onenewstvchannel.com/en/politic-en/foreign-affair-en/russian-orthodox-church-granted-permission-to-conduct-religious-activities-in-myanmar/

91 Government of Republic of the Union of Myanmar, MoHT Union Minister Holds Talks with Russian Orthodox Archbishop, Myanmar National Portal, May 5, 2023. https://myanmar.gov.mm/news-media/news/latest-news/-/asset_publisher/idasset354/content/moht-union-minister-holds-talks-with-russian-orthodox-archbish-1.

92 "UEC Delegation Returns from Russia Following Cooperation Talks," Global New Light Of Myanmar, September 12, 2023, https://www.gnlm.com.mm/uec-delegation-returns-from-russia-following-cooperation-talks/.

93 "Myanmar Junta Boss Lauds Putin's Win in Widely Condemned Presidential Vote," The Irrawaddy, March 19, 2024, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-boss-lauds-putins-win-in-widely-condemned-presidential-vote.html.

94 "UEC Chair-Led Delegation Arrives Back from Russian Federation," MDN - Myanmar Digital News, March 22, 2024, https://www.mdn.gov.mm/en/uec-chair-led-delegation-arrives-back-russian-federation.

95 "Russia to Support Myanmar's Election," Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Rome, March 5, 2025, https://merome.org/russia-to-support-myanmars-election-5-march-2025/.

96 Amit Ranjan, "Ballots without Democracy in Myanmar ," The Wire, February 18, 2026, https://thewire.in/south-asia/ballots-without-democracy-in-myanmar.

10 Tourism

In October 2025, Russia and Myanmar signed an agreement on the complete abolition of the visa regime for citizens of both countries, allowing stays of up to 30 days for tourist or business purposes.[97] These loosened restrictions have, however, created loopholes for criminal activity. The Russian Embassy in Myanmar has explicitly warned Russian citizens to exercise caution regarding online job advertisements offering high-paying positions in fields like tourism on Thai territory, stating that criminal organizations are highly likely to be behind such recruitment.[98] Once in Thailand, deceived individuals—who may believe they are traveling for legitimate work—are illegally transferred by human traffickers across the border into scam compounds in Myanmar, such as the KK Park area in Myawaddy, often crossing the Taungjin River.[99] Authorities have noted that more than 90 percent of foreigners illegally entering the KK Park area to engage in online fraud arrived via Thailand.[100] The victims' documents are subsequently confiscated, and they are forced to work in illegal call centers involved in cybercrime. Certain ethnic armed groups and state-embedded actors are complicit in the operation of these cyber scam centers in Myanmar.[101] Foreign victims come predominantly from China, Southeast Asia, South Asia and Africa. Given that human trafficking is a well-entrenched business involving criminal networks, private sector actors, and corrupt law enforcement agencies in Russia, some Russian and Belarusian victims may also have found themselves in Myanmar via trafficking networks operating in their home countries. In 2024 and 2025, the Russian Embassy in Myanmar assisted in the repatriation of 18 Russian nationals who had been involved in the activities of online scam centers.[102]

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97 Izvestia, Russia and Myanmar Have Agreed on a Visa-Free Regime, Iz.ru, October 28, 2025, https://en.iz.ru/en/1980580/2025-10-28/russia-and-myanmar-have-agreed-visa-free-regime

98 Posolstvo Rossii v Respublike Myanmy, O pokhishenii grazhdan Rossii v vovlechenii v nezakonnuyu deyatelnost, October 2, 2025, https://myanmar.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/o_pokhishchenii_grazhdan_rossii_i_vovlechenii_v_nezakonnuyu_deyatelnost/

99 Lena Dzhes, Tsifrovoe rabstvo v Myanme: kak ustronea set moshennicheskikh fabrik v strane, ForkLog, June 16, 2025, https://forklog.com/exclusive/tsifrovoe-rabstvo-v-myanme-kak-ustroena-set-moshennicheskih-fabrik-v-strane

100 The Insider, Vlasti Myanmy zayabili o snose 148 zdanii na territorii razgromlennogo moshenicheskogo tsentra KK park, November 9, 2025, https://theins.ru/news/286640

101 Global Organized Crime Index 2025, Myanmar, Russia, ocindex.net/country/myanmar/russia

102 Eighteen Russians Freed from Scam Call Centers in Myanmar in two Years, TASS 10 Feb. 2025, https://tass.com/politics/2084395

11 Investment Projects

Russia's engagement with the Myanmar military junta has become a cornerstone of the latter's strategy for weathering international sanctions and maintaining economic and political stability, as demonstrated by the rapidly deepening relationship in the financial sector. High-level diplomatic efforts reinforce this bond, as seen during talks at the Eastern Economic Forum in September 2025, where Russian adviser Anton Kobyakov emphasized the considerable potential for joint work across a wide range of areas.[103] According to public statements by Vladimir Putin, total bilateral trade between the countries increased by approximately 40 percent in the previous year, reaching roughly US $2 billion.[104] Crucially, Russia supplies a substantial share of Myanmar's fuel needs, providing 90 percent of the oil consumed in the Myanmar market.[105]

Beyond the energy sector discussed above, Russia and Myanmar have formalized several joint investment projects related to agriculture. During the Eastern Economic Forum in September of 2025, the two countries discussed a proposed joint national agricultural project focused on constructing the largest grain elevator in Southeast Asia.[106] A further project underway is the construction of an organic fertilizer plant, for which the RC-Investments Fund is already ordering equipment and beginning construction, benefiting from preferential terms granted by Myanmar for the import of construction materials.[107]

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103 Eastern Economic Forum, "Prospects for Cooperation between Russia and Myanmar Discussed at EEF 2025," Eastern Economic Forum, September 5, 2025, https://forumvostok.ru/en/news/v-ramkah-vef-2025-obsudili-perspektivy-razvitija-sotrudnichestva-rossii-i-mjanmy/

104 RIA Novosti, Rossiya postroit v Myanme AES I pervuyu pravoslavnuyu tserkov,– Putin, March 4, 2025, https://crimea.ria.ru/20250304/rossiya-postroit-v-myanme-aes-i-pervuyu-pravoslavnuyu-tserkov--putin-1144658254.html

105 Ibid.

106 Eastern Economic Forum, Prospects for Cooperation between Russia and Myanmar Discussed at EEF 2025, 2025, https://forumvostok.ru/en/news/v-ramkah-vef-2025-obsudili-perspektivy-razvitija-sotrudnichestva-rossii-i-mjanmy/?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

107 Ibid.

Economic Zones

In early 2025, Russia and Myanmar signed a memorandum to jointly develop Dawei special economic zone (SEZ), a 196-square-kilometer industrial project in southern Myanmar centered on a deep-sea port and oil refinery. This project marks a milestone in their strategic partnership. Dawei SEZ is one of three special economic zones in Myanmar designed to attract businesses by lowering environmental regulations, offering tax breaks, and waiving minimum wage requirements. Besides the deep-sea port and oil refinery, Dawei SEZ is reportedly to include a steel mill, fertilizer and petrochemical plants, industrial factories and operations, a reservoir and a road connecting Dawei to Kanchanaburi, Thailand.[108] Proposed infrastructure also includes a 660 MW coal-fired power plant, transport hubs, and a refinery capable of processing 100,000 barrels of oil per day. Ambitions and reality do not match yet. For Moscow, the project may provide a crucial ocean gateway to Southeast Asia, offering strategic and military leverage in the Asia-Pacific. The Myanmar junta regards this cooperation as a means of gaining international legitimacy and balance its dependence on China in the face of Western sanctions.

Some analysts, however, argue that these plans are primarily symbolic, given Myanmar's financial instability and ongoing internal conflicts. Local communities have raised concerns about potential forced displacement and environmental hazards, including fears that the coastline may serve as a site for a nuclear power project. Ultimately, the project's feasibility remains uncertain, clouded by Russia's war-strained economy and China's regional dominance. Despite the memorandum on investment cooperation in the Dawei SEZ, no Russian company or consortium has joined the project yet. At the time of writing, its official Website only lists an Italian–Thai Development Public Limited Company, the Rojana Industrial Park Public Limited Company, the Thai LNG Plus International Company Limited, and the Thai EGCO independent power producer.[109]

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108 Earth Rights International, Dawei Special Economic Zone, https://earthrights.org/case/dawei-special-economic-zone/

109 Russia signs memorandum to build port, oil refinery in Myanmar, Feb. 23, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-signs-memorandum-build-port-oil-refinery-myanmar-2025-02-23/ https://www.daweisezmc.com/index.php/content/initial-phase-development-consortium

12 Financial Cooperation and Payment Systems

The Myanmar junta claims to exercise strict and comprehensive control over currency exchange through tightly controlled monetary policies and stringent trade regulations. The Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM), which the State Administration Council seized full control of after the coup, has implemented a wide array of policies since 2021 designed to acquire and conserve foreign exchange. The stability of the kyat, despite high inflation and economic turmoil, is attributed largely to these severe controls.[110] These measures include the forced conversion of foreign currency accounts and export earnings of Myanmar firms into kyat at exchange rates arbitrarily set to favor the junta.[111] Worker remittances are also subject to forced conversion and additional taxation.[112] To prioritize regime needs, the CBM has introduced multiple exchange rates and directed efforts to shift trade away from the US dollar by mandating the use of currencies such as the Chinese renminbi, the Thai baht, and the Russian ruble.[113]

Russia provides crucial support to Myanmar's financial flows by establishing an alternative payment infrastructure that enables the country to bypass its reliance on Western financial systems. The two countries have collaborated on creating bilateral payment mechanisms designed to facilitate trade by allowing the use of the Myanmar kyat and the Russian ruble, with the explicit aim of reducing dependence on the US dollar.[114] To this end, Myanmar banks began connecting to the Russian

110 Kim Alan Edwards et al., "Myanmar Economic Monitor : Economic Aftershocks (English)," Myanmar Economic Monitor Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group., 2025, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099061125205014652

111 Sean Turnell, The Military, Money, and Myanmar: Breaking the Nexus, Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, February 11, 2025, https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/SAC-M-The-Military-Money-Myanmar-ENGLISH.pdf

112 Sean Turnell, How Myanmar's Central Bank Facilitates the Junta's Oppression | Lowy Institute, Lowy Institute, July 12, 2024, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/how-myanmar-s-central-bank-facilitates-junta-s-oppression

113 Ibid.

114 Ministry of Information of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, "Warmly Welcome Kyat-Rouble Payment System for Both Countries," 2023, https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi%3Aeng/article/11636.

equivalent of SWIFT, known as the System for Transfer of Financial Messages (Sistema peredachi finansovykh soobshcheniy, SPFS), enabling direct payments via correspondent accounts without recourse to third-country intermediaries.[115] This kyat–ruble payment system was launched with an official start date of October 1, 2023, requiring six private Myanmar banks to open correspondent accounts in Russia.[116] Furthermore, the Myanmar Payment Union has been implementing the Russian Mir card payment system by signing a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) with its Russian counterpart, the National Payment Card System (NSPK), and testing host-to-host connectivity.[117] This made Myanmar the 13th country to adopt Mir cards. As of January 2025, Mir cards are accepted at 67 points of sale across key Myanmar cities, including Naypyidaw, Yangon, and Mandalay, with plans to expand beyond the initial Phase-1 target of 80 terminals,[118] as part of broader efforts to reduce reliance on Western currencies through the conduct of mutual trade in kyat and rubles. Myanmar's Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, Kan Zaw, confirmed in January 2025 that both countries were negotiating a kyat–ruble payment system to streamline trade.[119]

Myanmar's scam compounds have served as a parallel financial architecture—"a shadow banking ecosystem that provides liquidity, transaction anonymity, and laundering capacity."[120] Bypassing SWIFT restrictions imposed by Western sanctions has stimulated bilateral trade in national currencies insulated from sanctions pressure, but has also afforded illicit actors greater opportunities to conceal criminal transactions.[121] There is no evidence that Russia is using Myanmar to circumvent financial sanctions or for money laundering. In late 2022 (November 8–December 2), Russia's financial intelligence unit Rosfinmonitoring provided training to strengthen Myanmar's anti-money laundering and counter financing of terrorism system for Myanmar's Financial Intelligence.[122] In December 2025, however, the European Union announced its intention to add Russia to its list of countries at high risk of money laundering and terrorist financing.[123]

Promsvyazbank (PSB), a major state-owned Russian bank subject to extensive international sanctions, has been actively establishing mechanisms to support bilateral trade and economic cooperation with Myanmar, playing a central role in developing

115 TASS, Myanmar Banks Connect to Russian SWIFT Counterpart, January 27, 2024, https://tass.com/economy/1738175.

116 Ministry of Information of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Warmly Welcome Kyat-Rouble Payment System for Both Countries, 2023, https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi%3Aeng/article/11636.

117 Ibid.

118 TASS, Russia's MIR Cards Accepted in 67 POS in Myanmar — Minister, January 14, 2025, https://tass.com/economy/1898739.

119 Dedollarization Advances: Russia and Myanmar Discuss National Currency Payment System, Binance Square Jan 16, 2025, https://www.binance.com/en/square/post/18956153516273.

120 Emerald Sage, Exposing Asia's shadow banking ecosystem: OSINT insights into Myanmar's cyber scam economy, BioCatch Oct. 2025, https://www.biocatch.com/blog/exposing-asias-shadow-banking-ecosystem-osint-insights-into-myanmars-cyber-scam-economy

121 Ibid; see also: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Casinos, Money Laundering, Underground Banking, and Transnational Organized Crime in East and Southeast Asia: A Hidden and Accelerating Threat, January 2024, https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/Publications/2024/Casino_Underground_Banking_Report_2024.pdf

122 Myanmar Financial Intelligence Unit, 02 Dec. 2022, https://mfiu.gov.mm/en/russia-fiurosfinmonitoring-provides-training-increase-effectiveness-anti-money-laundering-and

123 E.U. blacklisting over 'money laundering and terrorist financing' pushes Russia further into pariah status, Meduza, Dec. 5, 2025, https://meduza.io/en/feature/2025/12/05/e-u-blacklisting-over-money-laundering-and-terrorist-financing-pushes-russia-further-into-pariah-status.

an independent financial, banking, and transaction infrastructure between the two countries. In October 2024, Promsvyazbank launched a cross-border payments service called A7, which has been enabling large-scale evasion of sanctions imposed against Russia. The service claims to have processed over US $86 billion in transactions in less than a year of operation. It is led and majority-owned by Ilan Shor, a convicted fraudster and Moldovan oligarch with Russian citizenship.

A7 uses multiple methods of sanctions evasion, including the creation and promotion of a cryptocurrency in Kyrgyzstan, a network of foreign shell companies, and promissory notes. The service claims to operate over 30 shell companies within its network of payer companies. A7 advertises international import–export services, currency exchange, international payments and purchases, and passive income generation. It operates as a cross-border payment platform and is heavily involved in creating a shadow economy through a network of shell companies and cryptocurrency—specifically the ruble-backed A7A5 token—and moves billions of dollars.[124] In 2025, 60 percent of payments through A7 were directed to China, equating to at least US $240 million per month. In the same year, A7's Sales Department Director Vladimir Luchinsky told a business forum in Kazan that 90 percent of A7's payments were going to Asian countries, predominantly China as well as Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia.[125] Although Myanmar was not mentioned, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

124 This paragraph is based on Centre for Information Resilience, A7 Abroad: Sanctions Evasion as Service, Oct. 2025, https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2025/10/A7-Abroad-FINAL-Copy.pdf.

125 https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2025/10/A7-Abroad-FINAL-Copy.pdf.

13 Policy Recommendations

1. **Germany and the European Union should expand their sanctions policy against Russia to cover the Russia–Myanmar arms, oil, and gas trade. Germany and the European Union should develop a common approach to isolating Myanmar's junta and make this part of their foreign policy engagement with ASEAN states. Weakening the junta in Myanmar should be part and parcel of efforts to curb Russia's access to resources used for the war against Ukraine. Targeting the Russian shadow fleet is necessary not only to undermine Russia's financing of its war against Ukraine, but also to restrict the export of arms, oil, and gas to Myanmar's junta.**

2. **Targeted sanctions are needed to address the complicity of Russia, Belarus, and their businesses in war crimes and crimes against humanity in Myanmar. Arms companies, intermediaries, vessels, and banks involved in the trade should be sanctioned. Western countries should coordinate the tracking and inspection of suspicious cargo on vessels and aircraft known to operate between Russia, Belarus, and Myanmar and should strengthen customs scrutiny at transit hubs through which Myanmar-bound cargo may be routed. A systematic mapping of Russian and Belarusian companies engaged in arms and weapons production for Myanmar is needed.**

3. **Wherever Russian or Myanmar companies use so-called dual use components produced by German or other European companies, the relevant sanctions should be rigorously enforced. Companies located in the European Union, as well as those operating in countries with EU Association Agreements, should be informed through business associations and customs authorities about sanctioned dual use items.**

4. **War crimes require documentation, which should be a joint effort of Myanmar opposition forces and their external supporters. International arrest warrants should be sought through Europol and Interpol against individuals complicit in war crimes.**

5. **The European Union should seek cooperation with ASEAN countries—in particular Singapore, Thailand, and India—in its stand against the Myanmar junta.**

6. **Intelligence fusion among Western services should regularly encompass the collection and assessment of data on Russia–Myanmar transactions.**

7. **The European Union should develop a common refugee and asylum policy for persons facing political persecution in Myanmar.**

8. **The European Union and governments of EU member states should make clear in their communication with opposition forces that supporting cyber scam centers in Myanmar is tantamount to supporting organized crime and is incompatible with EU policy.**

9. **To counter Russia's support for the junta in Myanmar, German and European policy toward Myanmar should make any future resumption of development cooperation and investment contingent on the cessation of lethal weapons imports from Russia.**



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