



Elevating the Spring Revolution from Tactical Engagements to Operational Excellence

5 March 2026

Executive Summary

After five years of determined resistance, Myanmar’s pro-democracy forces have evolved beyond reactive, scattered tactics and now face the imperative to adopt systematic, coordinated planning for sustained success. This evolution is evident in the shift from early, locally initiated ambushes in 2021–2022—often small-scale, ad hoc operations targeting isolated patrols or convoys—to large, synchronized campaigns such as Operation 1027 in northern Shan State in late 2023. During Operation 1027, the Three Brotherhood Alliance orchestrated simultaneous attacks on multiple junta positions and key transport arteries, disrupting command and control across a broad region. The practical impact of these regional joint operations is clear: in Operation 1027 and subsequent offensives, resistance forces captured over 220 junta positions nationwide, seized control of strategic towns and border crossings, and compelled the military to overstretch scarce reserves across multiple fronts. These developments demonstrate that the transition from isolated tactical battles to the operational level—executing strategic, regionally coordinated joint operations—yields tangible results. Achieving further progress now requires the formulation of a unified joint strategy, the establishment of a Joint Operational Command, and the definition of a clear tactical chain of command.

1. The Strategic Imperative: Moving Beyond the Tactical Level

Currently, much of the resistance effort operates at the Tactical Level, focusing on individual battles, skirmishes, and the immediate deployment of soldiers and weapons. While tactical victories are vital, they cannot win a war without broader coordination. Early in the conflict, most People’s Defense Forces (PDFs) and local defense units concentrated on small-scale IED attacks and village-level ambushes. These actions, while courageous and sometimes effective at disrupting junta movements, rarely shifted the broader balance of control and were often disconnected from any coordinated theater-wide plan. For example, in 2021 and 2022, PDFs in the Sagaing and Magway regions carried out numerous hit-and-run attacks. Still, the lack of integration into a larger operational framework meant these efforts struggled to generate the cumulative strategic effects necessary for lasting change.

The revolution must now step up to the Operational Level, which serves as the bridge between high-level political or strategic goals and ground-level tactical fighting. At this level, it is essential to organize large-scale or regional joint campaigns, making deliberate decisions about where, when, and how to fight to achieve strategic objectives. Recent campaigns illustrate this operational approach in Myanmar. For example, Operation 1027 in northern Shan State integrated drone strikes, road interdictions, and town assaults across a wide area to sever junta supply lines and isolate garrisons—moving beyond attacks on individual checkpoints to disrupt the enemy’s operational cohesion. Similarly, the Karenni-led Operation 1111 around Loikaw aimed to encircle



the state capital and control key routes, seeking to fundamentally alter the strategic situation in Kayah State rather than accumulate isolated tactical victories.

As the ancient military strategist Sun Tzu observed: **"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."**

Remaining solely at the tactical level risks exhausting resources in uncoordinated battles. To avoid "noise before defeat," the resistance must integrate deliberate planning and execution.

2. Formulating a Joint Strategy

Before launching operational campaigns, allied forces must establish a unified Joint Strategy. A robust strategy requires aligning three core components—Ends (objectives), Ways (methods), and Means (resources)—while balancing operational risks. A failure to align these elements, such as pursuing ambitious “Ends” with inadequate “Means,” typically results in overstretched forces and wasted efforts.

Practical experience from the Spring Revolution illustrates both the benefits and challenges of alignment. For example, the Brotherhood Alliance explicitly framed Operation 1027 not only as a territorial offensive but as part of the broader goal to “eradicate the military dictatorship,” ensuring local operations were clearly linked to the wider strategic “End.” Conversely, several PDFs in central Myanmar have hesitated to fully integrate under the National Unity Government (NUG) command, citing perceived gaps between ambitious political objectives and the current capacity or clarity of the formal chain of command. This hesitancy underscores the risk of misaligning “Ends” and “Means,” thereby undermining overall effectiveness.

As Sun Tzu stated, **"Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win"**. Systematic strategy formulation ensures the resistance "wins first" through superior preparation. The months of preparation and coordination that preceded Operation 1027—spanning logistics, intelligence sharing, and political alignment between EAOs and the NUG—demonstrate how deliberate planning can “win first” by creating favorable conditions before the first shots are fired.

3. Establishing a Joint Operational Command Structure

To execute joint operations effectively, the revolution must implement a robust Joint Command Structure. Operating successfully under such a structure requires three key elements:

- **Clear Communication and Unified Command:** Establishing clear roles, responsibilities, and a well-defined chain of command is essential for effective joint operations. Open, standardized communication across all units helps maintain alignment and situational awareness. Progress is already visible: in 2025, the NUG’s Ministry of Defence announced a unified PDF command to bring regional units under a more



consistent command-and-control framework, directly addressing concerns about fragmented authority and weak coordination. At the same time, the Mandalay PDF—now recognized as a Special Mobile Division—has participated in coordinated campaigns across Mandalay Region and southern Shan State alongside ethnic allies, providing a practical example of the benefits of clear operational tasking and unified command across multiple townships.

• **Interoperability and Integrated Training:** Different branches and regional forces must ensure that their systems, equipment, and procedures are interoperable. Regular joint training exercises are vital for building teamwork and mutual understanding. The Mandalay PDF’s collaboration with the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) exemplifies this. Although formally under NUG command, the MDY PDF often operated under de facto TNLA operational control in northern Shan and Mandalay. This allowed the MDY PDF to leverage TNLA’s experience, logistics, and battlefield procedures to capture towns such as Singu and Madaya and to contest key routes, including the Mandalay–Mogoke road. Such practical cooperation and shared training demonstrate how interoperability can translate into operational success. Such experiences show that systematic joint exercises and shared standard operating procedures are not theoretical luxuries but practical requirements for coordinating complex, multi-front operations under fire.

• **Mutual Trust and Respect:** Effective joint operations rely on recognizing each branch’s unique contributions and fostering a collaborative culture. While absolute trust is not always necessary, working toward shared goals builds the confidence required for meaningful cooperation. The expansion of the Spring Revolution into a broader, multi-ethnic coalition—including PDFs and established organizations like the Kachin Independence Army, Karen National Union, Chin National Front, and Karenni National Progressive Party—has relied on concrete trust-building measures. These include political recognition of ethnic grievances and agreements on a future federal model. As a result, this emerging coalition, though still fragile, has enabled unprecedented cooperation between Burman-majority resistance forces and long-standing ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), further strengthening the movement’s operational capacity.

4. Refining the Tactical Chain of Command

At the operational and tactical levels, the Unity of Command—one of the nine fundamental principles of war—must be strictly observed. This principle ensures that all forces operate under a single commander with the requisite authority to direct them toward a unified purpose. Unity of command enhances coordination and ensures that tactical actions on the ground directly support the overarching strategic intent. Current dynamics show both the opportunities and pitfalls of this principle. In Mandalay Region, the MDY PDF’s dual linkage to the NUG MoD and the TNLA has increased its combat effectiveness but also introduced command complexities that sometimes blur accountability and decision-making authority. Conversely, in coordinated offensives such as



Operation 1111 around Loikaw, Karenni forces benefited from a clearer joint command arrangement in which multiple groups operated under a unified campaign plan for the siege of the state capital.

These cases suggest that formalizing who has final operational authority in specific theaters—while still respecting local autonomy—is essential to ensure that tactical actions consistently reinforce a shared campaign design.

5. Embracing a Hybrid Organizational Model

As the revolution formalizes its command structures, it should embrace a Hybrid Organizational Model that combines the strengths of centralized direction (the "Spider") with decentralized resilience (the "Starfish"). Myanmar's resistance already approximates a hybrid structure in practice. The NUG and bodies such as the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) serve as a central strategic "spider," articulating a federal democratic vision and coordinating diplomacy and resource flows. At the same time, local PDFs, urban cells, and community-based support networks operate as "starfish" nodes that can act autonomously when communication with the centre is disrupted.

- A pure centralized system provides discipline and clear command, but is vulnerable if leadership is removed. The junta's own experience illustrates this vulnerability: despite its rigorous centralization, the loss of key bases and transport corridors during coordinated offensives in Shan, Rakhine, Kayah, Chin, and Sagaing has repeatedly forced it to engage in reactive redeployments and to overrely on airpower, eroding its ability to manage multiple crises simultaneously.
- A decentralized network offers high adaptability and survivability but faces coordination challenges. At the same time, analysts have documented how some early PDFs in central Myanmar struggled with ad hoc fundraising, uneven training, and inconsistent rules of engagement, which limited their ability to sustain operations or integrate into larger campaigns. These experiences underscore why a shared strategic core—providing doctrine, logistics support, and political direction—is critical to harness the energy of decentralized actors.

By adopting a hybrid model, the Spring Revolution can maintain a strategic core with empowered local nodes. This allows for central intent and strategic coherence while maintaining decentralized, rapid execution and local battlefield agility.

Conclusion

To succeed, the Spring Revolution must elevate its military approach. By formulating a coherent joint strategy, establishing a unified joint operational command, and relying on thorough preparation rather than purely reactive fighting, the resistance can effectively apply Sun Tzu's ultimate principle: "In war, the way is to avoid what is strong and strike at what is weak".



Institute for Peace and Social Justice

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The coordinated offensives of 2023–2024, from Operation 1027 in Shan State to Operation 1111 in Kayah, demonstrate that when Myanmar’s resistance forces align strategy, joint command structures, and local initiative, they can impose serious, simultaneous pressures on the junta across multiple fronts. The next phase of the Spring Revolution will depend on institutionalizing these lessons—through a robust joint operational command, interoperable and trusted partnerships with EAOs, and a resilient hybrid organization—so that such gains become the norm rather than exceptional moments of opportunity.

Elevating the Revolution: From Tactical Engagements to Operational Excellence

THE ULTIMATE PRINCIPLE:
 "In war, the way is to avoid what is strong and strike at what is weak."

CONCLUSION—STRIKING THE WEAKNESS

Institutionalizing Success
 Victory depends on making the coordinated pressures seen in 2023–2024 the "new norm" through institutionalised joint command and hybrid resilience.



HYBRID MODEL—SPIDER VS. STARFISH



The "Spider" (Centralized Direction)

A central strategic core (NUG/NUCC) provides doctrine, logistics, and political vision but is vulnerable if the "head" is removed.



The Hybrid Ideal

The revolution must maintain a strategic core for coherence while empowering local nodes for rapid, agile execution on the battlefield.



The "Starfish" (Decentralized Resilience)

Autonomous local nodes (PDFs/Calls) provide high adaptability and survivability but struggle with large-scale coordination.

REFINING THE TACTICAL CHAIN—UNITY OF COMMAND

KEY FINDING: Observe the Principles of War. All forces must operate under a single commander with the authority to direct them toward a unified purpose to prevent blurred accountability.



Learning from Operation 1111
 Coordinated offensives in Kayah State benefited from a clear joint command arrangement, allowing multiple groups to operate under a single campaign plan.

ESTABLISHING JOINT OPERATIONAL COMMAND

Clear Communication & Unified Command
 Establishing standardized roles and situational awareness across all units ensures that everyone is moving toward a shared purpose.



Interoperability & Integrated Training
 Different branches must align their systems and equipment through regular joint exercises to build coordination under fire.



Building Mutual Trust and Respect
 Trust is built incrementally through shared goals and political recognition of unique contributions from diverse ethnic and regional forces.

FORMULATING A JOINT STRATEGY (ENDS, WAYS, MEANS)

A successful strategy requires balancing Ends, Ways, and Means while carefully managing operational risks.



Strategic Alignment Framework

The Risk of Misalignment
 Pursuing ambitious "Ends" without sufficient "Means" results in overstretched forces and wasted efforts on the ground.

SUN TZU ON PREPARATION:
 "Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win."

THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE—THE SHIFT UPWARD

Moving Beyond the Tactical Level
 Individual battles and skirmishes (Tactical Level) must be linked to regional joint campaigns (Operational Level) to achieve theater-wide strategic goals.



Tactical Level



Operational Level



SUN TZU ON STRATEGY:
 "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."

Success of Operation 1027
 This offensive captured over 230 positions by disrupting enemy cohesion rather than just attacking individual checkpoints, proving the power of operational level planning.