

# **Conflict Analysis : The Rohingya Case**

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## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**P0934 BUSSELS SPR I CONFLIT AND SECURITY**

**Word Count: 5073 ( excluding Appendix, bibliography and footnotes )**

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## Introduction to the conflict:

In the context of the modern system of nation-states where territories are demarcated, an individual without a national identity is an irregularity. This is because people cannot escape being connected to a state even when a state does not recognize them' (Farzana).<sup>1</sup> The debate about identity formation is important as it 'demands an exploration of how the state practices its sovereignty and suppresses the voices of the citizens' and non-citizens' experiences of conflict to produce the state's unity.' This process usually results in the failure of the state to resolve cases of violence, generation of forced migration and the creation of stateless peoples (Farzana)<sup>2</sup>.

As we see in many state-centric conflicts today, both citizens and non-citizens have to forcefully emigrate from their country (of origin) to neighboring countries that are usually reluctant in letting them enter. They flee to avoid violence, persecution, and other existential threats which are often produced by the governments (Farzana)<sup>3</sup>. The problems also don't end when people choose to flee. In addition to the loss of a 'familiar socio-economic, natural, and political environments,' involuntary migrants such as the refugees and asylum seekers often face humanitarian problems at their newly arrived destinations. As a result, 'displaced people worldwide are largely marginalized' (Farzana)<sup>4</sup>. Examples of such displacement arising out of state action would include; 'the flight of Tibetans from China to India, the exodus of Sri Lankan Tamils to India, Palestinian refugees in Jordan, the immigration of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar into Bangladesh and India etc.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kazi Fahmida Farzana, *Memories of Burmese Rohingya Refugees* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58360-4>.

<sup>2</sup> Farzana.

<sup>3</sup> Farzana.

<sup>4</sup> Farzana.

<sup>5</sup> Farzana.

The state-centric conflict that we will be looking at is that of Rohingyas in the Arakan region of Myanmar/Burma. (Refer to Map1.1 in Appendix). ‘As Muslims with a culture and Chittagonian dialect of their own, residing in a predominantly Buddhist province of the Arakan (also known as Rakhine, ‘an isolated province in the western part of the country across Naaf River as boundary from Bangladesh.’<sup>6</sup>), the Rohingya are a minority within a minority’ in Myanmar’s ‘diverse ethnic landscape’ (Al-Adawy 2013)<sup>7</sup>.

According to the Rohingya narrative of history, the Arakans had an independent kingdom before it was occupied in 1784 (by the Burmese) and the right to be indigenous to the region is justified in their literature although the claims of the antiquity of existence in the Arakan is quite questionable.<sup>8</sup> Based on evidence, their roots can be traced back to migration from Chittagong (now in Bangladesh), which was triggered when the British empire took over the jurisdiction of the province at the conclusion of the First-Anglo Burmese War.<sup>9</sup> Further, the British colonial records<sup>10</sup> refer to the migrants as Chittagonians.<sup>11</sup> “The usage of the term ‘Rohingyas,’ now generally used to refer to the Muslims in the north of the Rakhine state”, signified in its essence a political movement prominent during the 1950s which endorsed “a socio-cultural understanding of Muslims in Arakan as a separate ethnic group fighting for political autonomy.”<sup>12</sup> In the larger scheme, it was a step in the process of legitimization of the right to self-determination over the region. This core belief also led to the formation of a political consciousness of distinct Muslim interests in the region which was a precursor to a succession of militant organizations trying to achieve the same<sup>13</sup>. Regardless of the truth value

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<sup>6</sup> Aye Chan, ‘The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)’, 2005, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Heba Al-Adawy, ‘Persecution of the Rohingya -The Dark Side of Development in Myanmar’, *Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad* XXXI, no. 4 (2013): 43–65.

<sup>8</sup> Chan, ‘The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)’.

<sup>9</sup> Chan.

<sup>10</sup> The British census (1931) makes a distinction in between an older community of Muslims known as “Arakan Mahomedans” and the more recent migrants who they called “Chittagonians.”

<sup>11</sup> Chan, ‘The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)’.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques P Leider, ‘Competing Identities and the Hybridized History of the Rohingyas’, n.d., 28.

<sup>13</sup> Leider.

of their historical narrative, the longevity of the ‘Rohingya’ presence in the Rakhine region gives them a substantial claim for the right to be recognized by the Myanmar government along with the right to reside in the Arakan region.

In the post-independence period (after 1948), Myanmar has experienced a myriad of ethnic conflicts.<sup>14</sup> Rakhine and Rohingya insurgencies erupted in the two decades that followed. As Fanon<sup>15</sup> puts it, decolonization is an unsettling and a violent process resulting from years of oppression by the colonizers. This has certainly been the case in Myanmar where latent inter-ethnic struggles in the region have manifested into violent confrontations in recent history. One of the main reasons for this is that while one ethnic group had the means to gain a significant advantage (through state recognition), the other didn’t. The apparatuses of the central government in Myanmar were occupied by the majority ethnic group, the Burmese in the *de facto* ‘dictatorship’s seizure of power in 1962’ that gave institutional agency to the Burmese to secure their right to self-determination. The Burmese clearly had no intention of being inclusive of the Rakhine and especially the Rohingyas. As a result, today they are one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world<sup>16</sup>.

This institutionalization and thus legitimization of Burmese power was followed by propagation of narratives (commonly accepted among the Burmese) that portrayed Myanmar as a nation for Buddhists (Lian H. Sakhong and Paul Keenan). This amounted to the 1982 Citizenship Law after which Myanmar officially recognized 135 ethnic groups in its Constitution, the Burmese as a majority followed by seven major minorities (Shans, Karens,

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<sup>14</sup> Nehginpao Kipgen, ‘Conflict in Rakhine State in Myanmar: Rohingya Muslims’ Conundrum’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33, no. 2 (June 2013): 298–310, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2013.810117>.

<sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Esther Kiragu, Angela Li Rosi, and Tim Morris, ‘States of Denial A Review of UNHCR’s Response to the Protracted Situation of Stateless Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh’, n.d., 36.

Buddhist Arakans, Kachins, Chins, Kayas and Mons)<sup>17</sup>. The law extended the benefits of citizenship only to the 135 groups it considered to be a part of the nation. ‘By denying citizenship, the government imposed several official and non-official restrictions on all of Rohingya.’<sup>18</sup> The imposition of these restrictions meant that the Rohingya people lacked the ability to acquire necessities such as food and shelter. It also meant that they bore the brunt of state retaliation in the several cases of armed conflict between the insurgent ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) and the Burmese government without having the capacity to either be represented or defended. While the inception of the inter-ethnic conflict could be traced far back into history, the crucial reasons for the current state of the conflict can be attributed to the recent changes in the country’s constitution (ratified in 2008) which was followed by a process of democratization (Hussain 2017)<sup>19</sup>.

A problem that is central to the Rohingyas is the ambiguity that is often found with the formation of their political identity. They are in a state of national limbo (Haque 2017)<sup>20</sup>. Out of approximately 2 million Rohingyas in Myanmar, about 800,000 live in the Northern Rakhine state and about 500,000 have migrated to the other parts of the world<sup>21</sup>. A further estimate of 500,000<sup>22</sup> now live in Bangladesh. While they claim that they have the right to access all the facilities that a Burmese citizen is entitled to, the Burmese government uses rhetoric that paint them as outsiders and the other (by calling them Bengali<sup>23</sup>, illegal immigrants and ostracizing

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<sup>17</sup> Paul L. Keenan and Lian H. Sakhong, eds., ‘Ending Ethnic Armed Conflict in Burma: A Complicated Peace Process: A Collection of BCES Analysis and Briefing Papers’, First print (Yangon: Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2014), 1–71.

<sup>18</sup> Saif Islam, ‘Rohingya Issue “More Economic than Identity Crisis or Religious”’, *ResearchGate*, November 2015, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4811.2407>.

<sup>19</sup> Naveeda Hussain, ‘Federalism, Freedom and Fear-Mongering: Democratization and Violent Conflict in Rakhine State, Myanmar’, December 2017, [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/80585/1/2017\\_Kiessling.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/80585/1/2017_Kiessling.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Md. Mahbubul Haque, ‘Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority and the 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37, no. 4 (2 October 2017): 454–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1399600>.

<sup>21</sup> Haque.

<sup>22</sup> Syeda Naushin Parnini, ‘The Crisis of the Rohingya as a Muslim Minority in Myanmar and Bilateral Relations with Bangladesh’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33, no. 2 (June 2013): 281–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2013.826453>.

<sup>23</sup> Haque, ‘Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority and the 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma’.

their historical experiences in the region) with no legitimate right to reside in the region. The rhetoric in the country of destination, usually Bangladesh and India also paint them as temporary residents or outsiders and despite acknowledging their refugee status and the existential threat that they face at ‘home,’ they intend to eventually push for their return.

## Recent confrontations

There has been a great amount of interest in the Rohingya Muslim situation of Myanmar, particularly in the aftermath of violence that took place in the months of June and October in 2012 (Kipgen)<sup>24</sup>. The recent manifestation of the conflict, unlike its precedents, did not start with ‘direct state orchestration’ (Al-Adawy)<sup>25</sup>. Tensions were particularly high when pamphlets (circulated in a small township named Ramri) claimed that a Buddhist woman had been raped by 3 Muslims. As an act of revenge, in a nearby village, ten Muslims were detained and killed<sup>26</sup>. As a result of such confrontations, mobs from both sides of the conflict began to clash with each other. President Thein Sein, upon the announcement of the state of emergency, gave the control of the riot-ridden regions to the Myanmar military. The clashes took place in both June and October. Both basically resulted in the systematic persecution of the Rohingyas. Despite the state government denying complicity of the state in the systematic persecution of the Rohingyas, it nevertheless played a role in stoking fear and animosity. The ‘only solution’ as suggested by President Thein was of the expulsion of the Rohingyas to other countries, or to camps that are overseen by the UNHCR (Al-Adawy)<sup>27</sup>.

What brought this conflict to the limelight in the recent times was the blatant ethnic cleansing as a form of retaliation, disproportionate in nature, to attacks by the ARSA. They are an armed

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<sup>24</sup> Kipgen, ‘Conflict in Rakhine State in Myanmar’.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Adawy, ‘Persecution of the Rohingya -The Dark Side of Development in Myanmar’.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Armstrong, ‘Q&A: What’s behind Sectarian Violence in Myanmar?’, CNN, October 2012, <https://www.cnn.com/2012/10/26/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-violence-explainer/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Adawy, ‘Persecution of the Rohingya -The Dark Side of Development in Myanmar’.

insurgent group that claims to fight the Myanmar Government for the Rohingyas. Some consider it to be the first armed Rohingya resistance to have an organized retaliation to the oppression by the military and the Rakhine Buddhists in the region. It is still not clear as to how much backing is given to the ARSA by the Rohingyas. Head (2017)<sup>28</sup> states that conversations with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh reveal that there are several among the ethnic group who do not support actions of the militant group. Several others also claimed that they were being coerced to join the ARSA militia<sup>29</sup>. This indicates that the interests of the militant group and that of the Rohingya people might fundamentally differ. A crucial point (that goes beyond the scope of this research) would be in examining if the decision-making processes of the military (of the Myanmar government) are managed by the state or operate under different leaderships. This would also shed light in the inability of Aung Suu Kyi to mitigate the situation despite being the *de facto* leader.

ARSA first emerged in 2016 when they claimed responsibility for attacks on police outposts in October<sup>30</sup>. The attackers reportedly carried weapons such as machetes and bamboo sticks.<sup>31</sup> The group has since then been classified as a terrorist organization and a ‘threat to national security’<sup>32</sup> by the Myanmar government. Their leader, Ata Ullah, was born to Rohingya parents in a refugee camp in Pakistan and gained an education and worked in Saudi Arabia before returning to Myanmar to be the focal point of the resistance<sup>33</sup>. The primary motive of ARSA, as stated by one of its members, is providing defense against the violent oppression from the

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Head, ‘The Truth about Rohingya Militants’, BBC News, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41521268>.

<sup>29</sup> Head.

<sup>30</sup> Faisal Edroos, ‘ARSA: Who Are the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army?’, 13 September 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/myanmar-arakan-rohingya-salvation-army-170912060700394.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Edroos.

<sup>32</sup> Utpala Rahman, ‘The Rohingya Refugee: A Security Dilemma for Bangladesh’, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 8, no. 2 (28 May 2010): 233–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562941003792135>.

<sup>33</sup> Adil Sakhawat, ‘Who Is Ata Ullah – the Man at the Heart of the Myanmar Conflict?’, *Dhaka Tribune* (blog), 20 October 2017, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/south-asia/2017/10/20/ata-ullah-man-heart-myanmar-conflict/>.

state.<sup>34</sup> With the primary donors for this political movement allegedly only coming from the Rohingya diaspora in Saudi Arabia<sup>35</sup>, it is likely that the longer the confrontation stretches out, the greater the susceptibility of this group to be involved with transnational terror networks such as the Al-Qaeda and ISIS. This will especially be the case if regional powers such as India and China along with the rest of the international system do not play an active role in steering the conflict to a peaceful settlement. It would be in the long-term interests to assist in maintaining the stability of the South-Asia region. It should be prioritized over relatively short-term economic and geo-strategic interests of individual states. While on one hand the lack of an active foreign participation strengthens the case for the existence of ARSA to defend the basic human rights of Rohingyas against state atrocities, the military actions of the insurgent group have been confronted with a disproportional use of force, genocidal in nature, by the state. The majority of the victims of this crossfire are the non-militant Rohingyas.

While both the Rakhine and the Rohingyas have distinctive historical narratives, what they share in common is that they are both marginalized by the centre. The crucial point that sets them apart is that while the Rakhine Buddhists are recognized by the Myanmar government as a minority ethnic group, the Rohingyas are not. What makes their recognition important is that they have the means to be represented in the democratic system to further their interests in the Arakan region which conflict with that of the Rohingyas who have no say in the political processes. Considering the historic animosity arising from a conflict of interests in the Arakan with the Rohingya Muslims, it is an easy option for the Rakhine Buddhists to avail the assistance of the Burmese government to achieve their mutual goals. The evidence for this can

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<sup>34</sup> Edroos, 'ARSA'.

<sup>35</sup> Edroos.

be found in first hand testimonies of the victims who claim that the military along with the Rakhines, were involved in raiding and burning of Rohingya villages in the Arakan region<sup>36</sup>.

Due to the lack of a substantial pressure from the from the International System and the disproportionate nature of the confrontation (in between the Rohingyas and Rakhine Buddhists aided the Burmese government and military), the Rohingya people are vulnerable to several humanitarian problems such as human trafficking, food insecurity and health insecurity<sup>37</sup>. The article aims to provide recommendations to the actors to ensure that the basic human rights are respected and some form of peaceful settlement (that is inclusive of the rights of Rohingyas) is achieved.

Bangladesh has been a primary actor in the Rohingya conflict. In the 1970s, the Myanmar Defense Services (MDS) went on a mission to root out the insurgent groups in the Arakan. These clashes sparked a mass displacement of over 270,000 into refugee camps in the Cox Bazaar District of Bangladesh<sup>38</sup>. The ensuing refugee crisis and dismal conditions for the refugees created a fertile ground for nationalist groups to emerge.<sup>39</sup> Two of the prominent groups among many were called the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO) whose strongholds operated from inside Bangladeshi territory. These groups were responsible for political support and the planning of small-scale military operations across the border in Myanmar, most attacking state apparatuses. Although they did extend their support to the counter-offensive against Burmese military, as Brennan and O'Hara<sup>40</sup> state, their association to radicalized Islam and its proponents

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<sup>36</sup> 'Evidence of Rohingya Mass Graves Uncovered in Myanmar', 2 January 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/evidence-rohingya-mass-graves-uncovered-myanmar-180201052413608.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Islam, 'Rohingya Issue "More Economic than Identity Crisis or Religious"'.  
<sup>38</sup> Rahman, 'The Rohingya Refugee'.

<sup>39</sup> Elliot Brennan and Christopher O'Hara, 'The Rohingya and Islamic Extremism: A Convenient Myth', The Diplomat, accessed 3 May 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/06/the-rohingya-and-islamic-extremism-a-convenient-myth/>.

<sup>40</sup> Brennan and O'Hara.

(prominent transnational terrorist organizations such as ISIS, AL-Qaeda and Jamaat-e-Islami) is more of a convenient myth rather than being based in credible evidence. Further, ‘the Rohingya issue is being used by Naypyidaw, international terrorist organizations, and certain domestic groups to serve their own agendas.’<sup>41</sup> This certainly does not mean that such links do not exist, but it does expose the fragility of the situation in hand. Regardless of this, the actions of sympathetic groups in assisting the Rohingya cause through violent means only further victimizes the Rohingyas. The security dilemma that arises for the Bangladesh government is in preventing the spread of Islamic extremism in its boundaries will also assisting the helpless Rohingyas in providing them some form of the basic human security. The danger, from the Bangladeshi perspective, lies in the collusion of pre-existing terrorist networks (in Pakistan, India and its own territories) with the under-equipped pro-Rohingya movements. Additionally, there is always a pressure to maintain cordial relations with Myanmar as it is the focal point of trade with in between South Asia and the Asia Pacific along with South East Asia.

While through official statements<sup>42</sup> the UN has tried to increase the international pressure on the government of Myanmar to take more responsibility to end the conflict, their main actions in the conflict have been limited to providing humanitarian aid to the victims of the conflict. There have also been talks of making use of R2P (Responsibility to Protect) as they see the ethnic cleansing and genocide as a failure of Burmese governance. In light of the failures and criticisms of the implementation of the R2P mechanism in previous cases, there is a growing disincentive to implement it in Myanmar. While the aims of ASEAN clearly give their assurance to maintaining peace and stability in adherence to the UN Charter<sup>43</sup>, the fundamental principle of non-interference in internal matters of other member states, upon which the very dynamic of cooperation exists, trumps such rather superficial commitments. Such

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<sup>41</sup> Brennan and O’Hara.

<sup>42</sup> S. K. B. H. Abdul Rahman, ‘Rohingya Muslim Ethnic Violence: World’s Response and The Role of United Nations’, *Faculty of Islamic Studies*, International Conference of Global Islamic Studies, 2014, 13.

<sup>43</sup> ‘ASEAN |’, ASEAN | One Vision One Identity One Community, accessed 3 May 2018, <http://asean.org/>.

commitments have led the international actors to be more passive in their approach to the conflict. The only form of foreseeable means through which that Rohingyas seem to have a chance at acquiring basic human necessities is by giving up their identity. This entails learning another language and changing surnames in order to pass off individuals eligible to receive a citizenship status in other countries, including Bangladesh and India. However, such actions play into relieving the pressure on the Myanmar government to give the Rohingyas an official recognition.

The following section will briefly introduce the puzzle before moving on to the next section which gives recommendation specific to the various primary and secondary actors in the conflict.

## Introduction to India and the puzzle

A contradiction arises out of the Indian situation when looking at their ambitions and their actions. The Indian identity considers ethnic diversity and ideals of multiculturalism core aspects of its identity. As the former Prime Minister of India (Manmohan Singh) puts it, ‘If there is an idea of India by which India should be defined, it is the idea of an inclusive, open, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual society...’<sup>44</sup> In terms of geo-political interests, Indian interests lie in fostering strong political, social and economic relations with its immediate and extended neighbours while also increasing its sphere of influence in the region. In East Asia, Indian interests mainly lie in tapping an upcoming economic powerhouse’ (The Stanley<sup>45</sup>). Another major point of interest is for India to be the focal point of counter-resistance to the hegemonic oppression of China in the region.

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<sup>44</sup> ‘PM’s Speech at India Today Conclave : Speeches : Prime Minister of India - Dr. Manmohan Singh (May 22, 2004 - 26th May 2014)’, accessed 1 May 2018, <http://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=73>; Haque, ‘Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority and the 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma’.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/BacktoRealityPAB214.pdf>

The puzzle that comes to light out of India's goals and its actions are two-fold. India recently rejected access to the Rohingya refugee seekers on the basis that they are vulnerable targets of ISIS recruiters and consequently would be a threat to the national security<sup>46</sup>. Being a multi-cultural nation, this utterance goes against the very grain of that diversity that has been associated with its identity over the years. Secondly, taking a role of mediation to assist in bringing an end to the Rohingya pogrom would add to the credentials of India being a dominant power in the South Asian region. Being a mediator in this conflict would also be a strong utterance in line with the counter-hegemony of China. The actions of India seem to betray its supposed pursuit of such long-term goals.

The policy recommendations in the next section are mainly directed to the institutions with agency to bring peace and stability in the respective region. The policy recommendations in the case of India will also address the puzzle created by two conflicting dimensions of its identity.

## Policy Recommendations

### Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA):

As stated earlier in the paper, the susceptibility of anti-state militant groups and non-militant groups to get involved with activities of the international terrorist organizations increases as the conflict stretches. Keeping that point in mind, the recommendations for the ARSA and other such groups are as follows:

- The leaders should encourage civilians who bear the brunt of the conflict to continue taking pictures, videos and give personal accounts from the field. These testimonies can be used to appeal to the international community. An increasing flow of evidence of

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<sup>46</sup> Swagato Sarkar and Prabhakar Singh, 'India's Role in Rohingya Resolution', *The Statesman* (blog), 19 September 2017, <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/indias-role-rohingya-resolution-1502494710.html>.

atrocities against the Rohingya could generate a stronger sentiment among international actors and underscore the failure of the Burmese government. This would increase the pressure on international actors, whose actions have been minimal, to take stricter measures against the Burmese government.

- The ARSA should strive towards creating an active IT cell that works to continually keep the plight of the persecuted from moving into the peripheral consciousness of the international community.
- Additionally, it is also recommended that the ARSA take up a Gramscian war of position<sup>47</sup> and compromise on their eventual goals of achieving an independent state in the Arakan region or rather, push that for later. Instead, the ARSA should prioritize the achievement of recognition of the Rohingyas from state as an ethnic group. In doing so, they'd have a greater chance of achieving their long-term goals in the future.

#### The Myanmar government:

The continual persecution by the state apparatuses will only highlight the lack of responsibility and accountability of the Burmese government. It will most likely result in stricter measures from the international actors against them. With achieving a functional democracy being the end game for Myanmar, a spilt in the military and government could hamper any path to peacemaking. Keeping in mind that a peaceful settlement would be favorable for all parties involved, the recommendations for the Myanmar government are as follows:

- The government absolutely must deal with the status of statelessness of the Rohingyas for any of the other recommendations to work. This could be done by bringing amendments to the 1982 citizenship law; by a disassociation of citizenship and ethnicity

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<sup>47</sup> Robert W Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method', n.d., 14.

and an acceptance of naturalization as a qualification valid to acquire citizenship<sup>48</sup>. Further, it should take accountability for its wrong-doings by punishing those who were involved in the human rights violations.

- The government should work towards facilitating the entry of any incoming humanitarian aid in the Arakan region. They should work closely with Bangladesh and the UN to create a multi-lateral agreement which would enable the humanitarian aid and mediation within the region possible<sup>49</sup>.
- Enable Rohingya representatives to partake in the recently established democratic system.
- The government should take the role of mediation and foster dialogues in between the Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingyas. The government should ensure a peaceful environment for interaction, not only for the representatives of their respective ethnic groups, but also for civilians themselves interactions.
- Political Instability and indulgence in conflict creates an unfavorable atmosphere for pursuing goals of trade and development. It would thus, be in the interests of the Myanmar government to encourage and work towards peace in the region.
- The paper also recommends that the government set up a committee consisting of representatives of the government, Rohingya, Rakhine, and the UN to ensure that process of implementation is carried out.
- The government should also make use of its membership in the ASEAN to seek help from the member states in transitioning the conflict to a peaceful situation.

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Hincks, 'How Aung San Suu Kyi Can Maintain Her Credibility', Time, 24 August 2017, <http://time.com/4913571/myanmar-commission-recomendations-suu-kyi/>.

<sup>49</sup> Parnini, 'The Crisis of the Rohingya as a Muslim Minority in Myanmar and Bilateral Relations with Bangladesh'.

- The paper also recommends that the use of military in case of riots and uprising only be there to defuse situations rather than pursuing responses disproportionate in nature.

### The Bangladesh Government:

‘Good and constructive relations with Myanmar, which is a gateway between Southeast Asia and South Asia and to China in the North, are essential to Bangladesh’s economic prosperity and energy security in the context of new geopolitical paradigm.’<sup>50</sup> While keeping good relations with the Myanmar government are important in addition to state security interests, Dhaka also must be sensitive to the human security concerns of the Rohingyas. The stability of the region is in the interest of Bangladesh. The recommendations are as follows:

- The Bangladesh government should enable collaborative efforts in uplifting the conditions of the refugee camps. Being a member of SAARC, it could make a case of requesting help from its member states to share the burden of uplifting the refugees’ current situation. Additionally, the government could enable the UN and NGOs (international and local) to operate in the relatively safe spaces of Bangladeshi territory while still being the proximity of the conflict-ridden regions.
- The government could work towards formulating laws that enables rights and temporary citizenship benefits to refugees<sup>51</sup> to enable them temporary access to work in the organized economy. The lack of such laws would increase operations in the parallel economy which is an unfavorable situation for Dhaka.
- Acknowledging the Rohingyas as an ethnic group and pressurizing the Myanmar government to do the same could pave the way for collaborative efforts in solving the refugee problem in Bangladesh. A quicker resolution of the issue would reduce the

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<sup>50</sup> Rahman, ‘The Rohingya Refugee’.

<sup>51</sup> Rahman.

exposure of already existing terrorist networks in the region to cooperate with the Rohingyas.

### India:

Although a tertiary actor, this paper encourages India to have a more active role in resolving the conflict, India have had a 'long-standing principle of welcoming refugees'<sup>52</sup> as we have seen with Tibetan refugees, Sri Lankan Tamils, and even Bangladeshi immigrants. Just as in the case of Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees in India seek asylum and the permission to work in the formal economy of the country. However, a key point to look at in addressing the puzzle is the recent change in leadership from the Indian National Congress to a Hindu nationalist party, the BJP. While the ideological standpoint (to create a Hindu India) of the ruling party and the identity of India that has been propagated over the years clash, a secondary reason for the Indian government to not take an active part in the conflict would be to not strain the recently positive relations in between the governments of India and Myanmar. Hence, the recent shift from a multicultural viewpoint also plays into the government's disinclination towards giving access to Rohingya Muslims. This paper would argue that a lack of initiative to bring the conflict to a peaceful settlement is a failure of Indian attempts to secure its interests. Keeping the transition of the Indian outlook in mind, the recommendations are as follows:

- The recent ruling to deport 40000-50000<sup>53</sup> refugees from Indian camps should be withdrawn. Stigmatizing the vulnerable will only result in the perpetuation of the process of radicalism and extremism.
- In the absence of significant Chinese participation, the Indian government should seize the opportunity to prove its credentials to its neighbors and to the world that it is worthy of being a superpower in Asia. It could divert a greater amount of its annual budget to

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<sup>52</sup> Sarkar and Singh, 'India's Role in Rohingya Resolution'.

<sup>53</sup> Sarkar and Singh.

the State of Assam (where majority of the refugee camps for Rohingyas exist at present). This would ease the pressure on the Assamese government in its increased expenditures.

- The Indian government should set up a committee to formulate refugee laws that assure refugees rights and give them empowerment and agency. This would not only be beneficial for the Rohingyas but also assist refugees and asylum seekers of other ethnicities in being a part of the formal framework of the nation. A failure to do so will only encourage participate in the black market and activities avail illegal means of entry into the nation.
- The Indian government should also encourage NGOs to share the burden of their work in uplifting the condition of the refugees. This could be done in the form of subsidies and tax waivers towards local and international NGOs.

### China:

Despite its reluctance to interfere in the conflict, there are ways in which China can contribute to bringing a peaceful settlement. The recommendations are as follows:

- Irrespective of their stance on the conflict, it is essential that China at least work towards ending violent confrontations. If China is to pursue its aspirations of having a greater sphere of influence in Asia, it could make use of its leadership status and pressure the Myanmar government to incorporate the Rohingyas into their policy framework.
- Being a member of the ASEAN Plus Three, China could push the organization to acknowledge and address the issue,

### ASEAN:

Despite the continuous reports with evidence of mass atrocities in Rakhine, the 30<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit failed to bring up the Rohingya conflict in their agendas. On the face of it the member

states follow a ‘non-interference policy in domestic matters of other members.’<sup>54</sup> However, countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, that are majority Muslim countries, have expressed their concerns regarding the issue.

- The vulnerability of the Rohingya causes concerns for insecurity in the form of violent extremism. It would be in the immediate interests of the members to pressure Myanmar into addressing the problems.
- It is in every government’s interest to adopt and institutionalize comprehensive frameworks for managing the movement of people especially when those people need protection<sup>55</sup>.

#### UN:

While the UN has made attempts (through dialogues and statements) at generating international pressure on the Burmese government to work towards resolving the issue, most of their action is the form of humanitarian aid to civilians and victims. Further, differences in opinion among the security council members have prevented definitive action from being carried out.

- The UN members and the security council must identify actions that they can all agree to implement. With human rights being one of the core principles of the organization, the UN cannot remain passive in the conflict.
- The UN should push for taking a mediation role in the conflict. This could be achieved through a multi-lateral agreement involving the various actors in the region. The first step would be to engage the Myanmar government in dialogues directly dealing with

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<sup>54</sup> Jera Lego, ‘Why ASEAN Can’t Ignore the Rohingya Crisis’, The Diplomat, accessed 4 May 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/why-asean-cant-ignore-the-rohingya-crisis/>.

<sup>55</sup> Lego.

the issue. Getting them to officially acknowledge the Rohingyas would be a baby step in achieving a peaceful settlement.

## Conclusion

While the claims for the existence of an independent Arakan kingdom might be questionable, the Rohingya Muslims certainly have a case for naturalization in Myanmar. Their inclusion as an ethnic group in the discourse of Myanmar's policy is integral to finding a meaningful solution to the issue. The issues pertaining to not recognizing the Rohingyas could cause grave insecurity for all the actors involved. The potential for eruption of extremism and radicalization poses a prospect of insecurity in social, political and economic sphere of the South Asian region. Therefore, it is in the interest of the various actors to not let the conflict last any longer than it has to. Another key aspect of the conflict that urgently needs to be dealt with is the disproportionate use of force by the state against militant insurgents and civilians. While several nationalistic Rohingya organizations such as the ARSA, RSO and ARNO claim to defend the helpless, the victims of such confrontations, caught in the crossfire, are the civilians. An increasing influx of refugees and asylum seekers (travelling from the conflict-ridden Rakhine state) into the Cox Bazaar district of Bangladesh has brought up new concerns of security for Bangladesh who are currently singlehandedly dealing with the symptoms of the issue. While on one hand the migrants require security from the life-threatening conditions in Myanmar, they also seek a formal entry into the organized sectors of their new destination. The reluctance of secondary and tertiary actors such as ASEAN, India, China and the UN has assisted in relieving the pressure off the Myanmar government to ensure substantial action. The recommendations consider the obstacles the various actors face in working towards resolving the issue. The motive of the recommendations is to bring an immediate end to violent confrontations and set up the basis for peaceful settlements in the

future. One point for further research would be to look at the dynamics of decision-making processes in the Myanmar government. In addition to the government, if the military apparatus has a leadership of its own, the future policies have to be adjusted accordingly.

## Appendix



Map 1.1<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Keshav Jha, 'Rohingya: People Without A Country', *Coffee With A Story* (blog), 22 September 2017, <https://coffeewithastory.in/article/rohingya-people-without-a-country/>.

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