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China draws three-stage path for Myanmar, Bangladesh to resolve Rohingya crisis

By *Yimou Lee*

NAYPYITAW (Reuters) - China called for a ceasefire in Myanmar's Rakhine State so that Rohingya Muslim refugees can return from Bangladesh, proposing a three-stage approach to the crisis as diplomats from 51 mostly Asian and European countries gathered in Myanmar on Monday.



Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi attends the 13th Asia Europe Foreign Ministers Meeting (ASEM) in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, November 20, 2017. REUTERS/Stringer

More than 600,000 Muslim Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh since late August, driven out by a military clearance operation in Buddhist majority Myanmar's Rakhine State.

Amid a burgeoning humanitarian catastrophe, rights groups have accused the Myanmar military of atrocities, while foreign critics have blasted Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel peace prize winner who leads a civilian administration that is less than two years old, for failing to speak out more strongly.

On Monday, Suu Kyi opened an Asia-Europe Meeting for foreign ministers that had been scheduled in Myanmar before the outbreak of the crisis.

Speaking in the capital of Naypyitaw on Sunday, having arrived from Dhaka, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China believed Myanmar and Bangladesh could work out a mutually acceptable way to end the crisis.

“The first phase is to effect a ceasefire on the ground, to return to stability and order, so the people can enjoy peace and no longer be forced to flee,” China’s foreign ministry said in a statement, citing Wang.

“With the hard work of all sides, at present, the first phase’s aim has already basically been achieved, and the key is to prevent a flare-up, especially that there is no rekindling the flames of war.”

During a meeting on Sunday, the ministry said, Wang told Myanmar President Htin Kyaw, “As a friend of both Myanmar and Bangladesh, China is willing to keep playing a constructive role for the appropriate handling of the Rakhine State issue.”

Visiting Myanmar last week, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made many of the same points, but he also called for a credible investigation into reports of atrocities.

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REPATRIATION PROCESS

Once a ceasefire is seen to be working, Wang said talks between Myanmar and Bangladesh should find a workable solution for the return of refugees, and the final phase should be to work toward a long-term solution based on poverty alleviation.

Myanmar and Bangladesh officials began talks last month to settle a repatriation process for Rohingya refugees, which Bangladesh expects to take to the next level in coming days.

Speaking on the sidelines of the ASEM meeting, European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said, “We believe that stopping the violence, the flow of refugees and guaranteeing full humanitarian access to Rakhine state, and safe, sustainable repatriation of refugees are going to be key.”

Mogherini, who also visited Bangladesh over the weekend, said, “There’s a real possibility of Myanmar and Bangladesh reaching a memorandum of understanding and agreement for the safe repatriation of refugees to Myanmar.”

[Slideshow \(11 images \)](#)



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi attends the 13 th Asia Europe Foreign Ministers Meeting (ASEM) in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, November 20, 2017. REUTERS/Stringer



Rohingya refugees walk towards a refugee camp after crossing the border in Anjuman Para near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, November 19, 2017. REUTERS/Mohammad Ponir Hossain

The European bloc was ready to help with the process, she added. It was unclear, however, whether a safe return was possible, or advisable, for the thousands of Rohingya women and children still stranded on the beaches trying to flee hunger and instability in Rakhine.

Myanmar intends to resettle most refugees who return in new “model villages”, rather than on the land they previously occupied, an approach the United Nations has criticized in the past as effectively creating permanent camps. Besides restoring peace for Rohingya to return, Myanmar also had to resolve the issue of their citizenship, having treated them as stateless for decades, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, told a news conference in Tokyo.



Rohingya refugees walk towards a refugee camp after crossing the border in Anjuman Para near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, November 19, 2017. REUTERS/Mohammad Ponir Hossain

The UNHCR was ready to assist both countries with repatriation, he said, adding that it could help Myanmar with the citizenship verification of the Rohingya. Until now it has not been invited to participate in either. "Much as resources are needed in Bangladesh to respond to the crisis, the solutions to this crisis lie in Myanmar," Grandi said.

VIOLENCE LARGELY OVER

The crisis erupted after the military launched a brutal counter-insurgency operation against the militants after attacks on an army base and 30 police posts in Rakhine on Aug. 25. Myanmar's military has said that all fighting against the Rohingya militants died out on Sept.5.



Rohingya refugees wait for vehicles to reach a refugee camp in Bangladesh November 19, 2017. REUTERS/Mohammed Ponir Hossain

The group behind those attacks, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), had declared a one-month ceasefire on Sept.10, which was rejected by the Myanmar government. But there have been no serious clashes since.

The United States and other Western countries have become more engaged with Myanmar since it began a transition to civilian government after nearly 50 years of military rule.

Myanmar's generals retain autonomy over defense, internal security and border issues in the current power-sharing arrangement.

China, with close ties to both Myanmar and Bangladesh, has long been a key player in lawless borderlands where rebel ethnic groups have battled Myanmar's government for decades in a conflict driving thousands of refugees to seek shelter in China.

Reporting by Ben Blanchard in BEIJING, Antoni Slodkowski in YANGON and Thomas Wilson in TOKYO; Editing by Simon Cameron-Moore

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Why Aung San Suu Kyi isn't protecting the Rohingya in Burma

What prompted her to cast aside her moral authority?



This can no longer be said to be the face of a humanitarian hero. (Aung Shine Oo/AP)



By Joshua Kurlantzick -- Joshua Kurlantzick is a senior fellow for Southeast Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations.

September 15, 2017

Burma is essentially run by one of the world's most lauded humanitarians — a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and a democracy icon. Aung San Suu Kyi, who leads the party in charge of the government, suffered more than two decades of repression, including a long house arrest, rather than leave the country or abandon her quest for elections.

Yet since her party took power last year, Suu Kyi — the country's de facto leader, though not its official president — has stood by and watched the slaughter and flight of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Rohingya, a Muslim minority more than a million strong. In 2016, Burma's military was engaged in a campaign of brutal suppression in Rakhine state, in the west of the country. Then, scattered attacks by Rohingya militant groups on police posts prompted an even harsher counterattack from the generals, reportedly joined by vigilante groups and other state security forces. That cycle intensified further this summer.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other monitors have [cited](#) expulsions of Rohingya from towns, campaigns to burn whole villages and [killings](#) by the armed forces in Burma (which is also called Myanmar). In recent weeks alone, some

370,000 Rohingya have [fled](#) into Bangladesh, according to United Nations estimates. The U.N. rights chief [calls](#) the campaign in Rakhine a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing." NPR [noted](#) that "reports of unbridled murder and arson, rape and persecution have followed [Rohingya] out of Myanmar's western state of Rakhine, sketching a stark portrait of government violence."

Suu Kyi, whose National League for Democracy party was also repressed and brutalized by the armed forces during the long era of military rule, refuses to look squarely at the crisis. She has yet to visit the center of the violence, and in her public comments, she has refrained from criticizing the armed forces. This month, she [claimed](#) that there was an "iceberg of misinformation" circulating about the situation in Rakhine. Her office has [mocked](#) supposed "fake news" about the plight of the Rohingya. And her spokesman [told](#) local news outlet Frontier Myanmar that Rohingya "are holding weapons – swords, daggers, catapults and home-made rifles" – and then seemed to give non-Rohingya carte blanche to shoot Rohingya if they perceived danger from them.

Why did somebody who achieved so much good become complicit in so much ugliness? There are several possible, interlocking reasons.

First, Suu Kyi's current silence is consistent with her approach to the Rohingya for years: She has never demonstrated much sympathy. On the campaign trail before the November 2015 election, she [strove](#) to avoid discussing violence in Rakhine, even though an earlier wave had destroyed Rohingya communities and no militant group had yet emerged there. When she did speak about the Rohingya, she called reporters into a news conference shortly before the [vote](#) and told them not to "exaggerate" the difficulties that the Rohingya faced.



Aung San Suu Kyi's fall from grace

Why has Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel laureate and Burma's de facto civilian leader, been so unwilling to condemn the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in her country? (Joyce Lee, Ishaan Tharoor/The Washington Post)

It's possible that this disinterest reflects Suu Kyi's personal views, but it's impossible to know for sure. One of her best-known biographers, Peter Popham, [has written](#) that Suu Kyi is not, at her core, a bigot: She has had senior advisers who are Muslims (although not Rohingya). And "one of the key figures in persuading her to dive into the democracy movement" was a best-selling dissident Muslim author, Maung Thaw Ka, Popham notes.

But Suu Kyi does represent her party. And there was little concern among the NLD rank and file in 2015, or even now in 2017, about violence against the Rohingya. Many NLD members, like a significant share of the Buddhist majority, simply think that the Rohingya are outsiders – called "Bengalis" by many Burmese – who do not deserve to live in the country, even though some have been there for generations. Last year, Suu Kyi reportedly [asked](#) the U.S. ambassador in Burma not to refer to the group as Rohingya, a sign that she sees them this way, too.

That means there is no political benefit to challenging majority views toward the Rohingya. The NLD [did not put up any Muslim candidates](#) during the 2015 national elections. Other former pro-democracy leaders, who also were harshly repressed by the military during the decades of junta rule, have [expressed](#) far stronger anti-Rohingya sentiments than Suu Kyi ever has.

These sentiments coincide with a growing Buddhist nationalist movement. As a recent International Crisis Group investigation [revealed](#), this political and social movement is building extensive services at the community level. Buddhist nationalist groups offer what the ICG calls "a sense of belonging" for many young Buddhists. Such groups are the type of grass-roots organizations that no politician likes to alienate. Suu Kyi does not depend on the movement's support — many hard-line Buddhist nationalists view her as soft on the Rohingya — but she also probably does not want a major rift with it.

Since taking control of the government — at least, the ministries not controlled by the military — Suu Kyi has made clear that she has two major [priorities](#): trying to improve Burma's economy and, most important to the government, making peace with the ethnic armies that have waged long insurgencies in northern and northeastern parts of the country.

Suu Kyi has launched an ambitious peace process with a number of insurgent groups, clearly seeing it as essential to her legacy and to making the country whole. Her father, the independence leader Aung San, tried to lay the groundwork for a federal Burma and prevent this civil conflict, but he was assassinated not long after he came to an initial agreement with ethnic minority groups. So all other issues are second to the economy and the peace process, as a government spokesman [told](#) the New York Times, playing down the relative importance of "democracy and human rights, including press freedom."

Suu Kyi may also believe that her ability to stop the brutal military campaign in Rakhine state is limited. Although she is the de facto head of government, the top general, Min Aung Hlaing, maintains a great degree of power. Burma's constitution gives the armed forces control over the military budget and over ministries related to security issues; they are also allotted 25 percent of seats in parliament. Perhaps the army will have less power at some point in the future, after a period of civilian rule and a change in the constitution to reduce its role in politics. But until then, Suu Kyi may judge it impractical to waste political capital challenging the military on an issue many people in her party do not care about.

Another problem is that foreign pressure on her to stop the Rohingya crisis seems to have made her even more intransigent. Suu Kyi has always been known as stubborn. (How else does one survive decades under house arrest and other repression?) She also is known to keep her own counsel. She does not have many voices in her inner circle pushing back or offering critiques of her actions — voices that could argue for a change in her Rakhine policy. She has a small staff and reportedly [gets](#) little input from NLD members of parliament. Fergal Keane, a longtime chronicler of Suu Kyi for the BBC, [noted](#) that "last December, when Vijay Nambiar, the UN Special Representative to Myanmar, urged Aung San Suu Kyi to visit Rakhine state, he was rebuffed." Why? Because, as one Suu Kyi adviser told Keane, she simply did not want to be seen as following outside orders. This stubbornness could be multiplied by a feeling of betrayal: The very countries, rights organizations and international leaders who for decades supported Suu Kyi are now inveighing against her.

Suu Kyi has not been totally inactive on the Rakhine crisis. She created a commission of experts, chaired by former U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan, to investigate the violence. This was an important step, and her government has rhetorically committed to implementing the panel's recommendations.

Meanwhile, Suu Kyi may see that, despite criticism of how she has handled the Rakhine crisis, most powerful foreign governments are not going to punish Burma. The White House put out a [statement](#) this past week noting that it was "deeply troubled" by the violence in Rakhine but has done little else. Elsewhere, Delhi has stood alongside Suu Kyi in condemning Rohingya terrorist groups and has [threatened](#) to deport Rohingya seeking shelter in India. Beijing [blames](#) the Rohingya militants for the violence. This month, Suu Kyi's security adviser [noted](#) that "friendly countries" such as China would block any resolution at the U.N. Security Council criticizing Burma.

Given her moral stature, her history and her power in Burma, Suu Kyi's inaction has surely worsened affairs. She has shown the military that it can act with impunity, and her public statements have done nothing to challenge people within her party who don't see the issue as important. Her indifference has hurt aid organizations' ability to get people on the ground and to potentially raise money to help the Rohingya.

Suu Kyi can still make a difference, though. By speaking out more about the plight of the Rohingya, she could boost international aid efforts to keep Rohingya in camps in Bangladesh – and temporary places of shelter inside Burma – from dying. And in the end, she is the popularly elected leader in Burma; while Buddhist nationalist groups and generals might dislike a visit by her to Rakhine, they would be unlikely to stop her. She knows these things. But she has watched the humanitarian crisis unfold anyway.

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Region: **Asia**

Theme: **Crimes against Humanity, Law and Justice**

Going to the ICJ: Myanmar, Genocide and Aung San Suu Kyi's Gamble

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#) >> Global Research, December 04, 2019



Leaders currently in office rarely make an appearance before either the International Court of Justice or the International Criminal Court. International law remains affixed to the notion that heads-of-state are, at least for the duration of their time in office, safe from prosecution. Matters change once the time in office expires.

Be that as it may, Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi, with an ever dwindling number of peace prizes and awards to her name for questionable responses to the plight of the Rohingya Muslim minority, has a plan. She intends to personally plead the case of her country against charges of genocide being made in the International Court of Justice. As the Ministry of the Interior [has claimed](#), the argument against state brutality against the Rohingya has arisen due to ignorance about "the complexities of the issue and the narratives of the people of Myanmar."

The case itself is drawn from the well of universal jurisdiction, a concept that Henry Kissinger finds so troubling to the freedom of flexible statecraft. The former US secretary of state, in 2001, [warned](#) that subjecting international relations to judicial procedures came with risks.

“The danger lies in pushing the effort to extremes that risk substituting the tyranny of judges for that of governments; historically, the dictatorship of the virtuous has often led to inquisitions and even witch-hunts.”

Kissinger ignores a lingering point stretching back to Roman law that universal jurisdiction, or at least the rhetoric of it, can be exercised against certain crimes that might revolt the tender conscience humanity. Piracy, for instance, might be punished as an extra-territorial offence, though it should [not be confused](#) as being on all fours with international criminal law. “I need not tell you the heinousness of this offence,” [came](#) the pre-deliberation address to the jury in the piracy trial of Capt William Kidd in 1701. “Pirates are called ‘*Hostes humani generis*’ the enemies of the people.”

In this instance, the threat to Myanmar’s authority does not come from an internal action, but from the West African country of The Gambia as a representative of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Last month, a 46-page application was submitted by the Muslim-majority state to the ICJ, alleging the commission by Myanmar’s authorities of mass murder, rape and the destruction of communities living within Rakhine State, ostensibly as part of a “clearing” program. “The genocidal acts committed during these operations were intended to destroy the Rohingya as a group... by the use of mass murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the systematic destruction by fire of their villages, often with inhabitants locked inside burning houses.”

UN to Resolve the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis

Some 720,000 Rohingya were forced to flee to Bangladesh in light of these operations, and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, established by the UN Human Rights Council, revealed nothing in the way of redeeming evidence on the part of government authorities. Its [August 2018 report](#) made special mention of the predations of the security forces in Rakhine State, though also noted the actions of armed ethnic groups in Kahin and Shan States. More [detailed findings](#) were published the following month.

The Mission, having designated the Rohingya to be a protected group, [satisfied itself](#) that acts of genocide had been committed. “Perpetrators have killed Rohingya, caused serious bodily and mental harm to Rohingya, deliberately inflicted conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of Rohingya, and imposed measures intended to prevent births to Rohingya.”

Enough, then, to go on in terms of mounting a legal action, albeit in slightly different circumstances. The instance of this case is irregular, given that the ICJ usually undertakes such hearings after consulting the findings of other tribunals, be it the International Criminal Court or those of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

The decision by Suu Kyi to take the matter on personally in both roles as state counsellor and foreign minister is garnering mixed reviews. In Myanmar, propaganda units have been mobilised. Support for the decision is being encouraged in the days leading up to the December 10-12 hearings through [planned rallies](#) being organised by the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) in Yangon, Mandalay, Monywa, and Mawlamyine.

Numerous armed groups have [expressed their approval](#). Nyi Rang, external relations official for the United Wa State Army (UWSA) is one. “We are proud and supporting her taking responsibility and travelling to face the trial.” Colonel Khun Okkar, chairman of the Pa-O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO) is another. “We need to show our solidarity with the government which is trying to prove that the offences cannot be classified as genocide.”

This position, it should be said, [is not universally shared](#) within Myanmar itself. This stands to reason: not all ethnic armed organisations within the state are rooting for a government deemed the handmaiden of military brutality. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA), the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA) suggest that claims of genocide are not only plausible but historical, having taken place over seven decades of civil war. According to a sombre spokesman for the AA, “She [Aung San Suu Kyi] should not be defending war criminals who try to hide behind the term ‘the charge of the nation’.”

The prosecutor of the ICC has also opened up a preliminary investigation into the matter, an action [approved](#) by the Pre-Trial Chamber III of the ICC, though the action is limited by the fact that Myanmar is not a signatory to the court's statute. That said, the three-judge panel reasoned that an investigation could take place as long as part of the alleged criminal conduct occurred in the territory of a State Party. Myanmar may well not be a State Party, but Bangladesh most certainly is.

The Gambia case promises to revisit the at times contentious basis as to how universal jurisdiction is invoked, [despite the acceptance](#) by such organisations as Amnesty International that most UN Member States “can exercise universal jurisdiction over one or more crimes under international law, either as such crimes or as ordinary crimes under national law.”

The sight of Suu Kyi, defending the actions of the military against what security forces deem legitimate counterinsurgency operations, is going to paint a bleak picture indeed. From the giddy summit of peace prizes and romanticised positions against tyranny, the civilian leader of Myanmar has become a powerful exponent of a certain brand of blood soaked Realpolitik, state brutality sanitised and reasoned.

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Region: [Asia](#)

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“The Military Plan to Wipe Out All Muslims in Myanmar”

By [Amelia Smith](#) >> Global Research, September 29, 2017 [Middle East Monitor](#)



“This village is a Muslim-free zone,” reads a sign hanging at the entrance to a village in an area of Myanmar outside Rakhine state. The orders are directed at the country's Rohingya population, an ethnic group of around 1.3 million that live mainly in Rakhine and who have been described as the “world's most persecuted minority”.

It's not difficult to see why. Since 1992 the Burmese government has imposed heavy restrictions on the Rohingyas. If they want to travel from one town to the other they have to pass immigration checkpoints and to do so the administration must grant them permission.

Because requests are regularly turned down the Rohingyas have become isolated within their own country:

“They’ve kept us in an open-air prison for more than 25 years. Since 1978 they are propagating and they are brain washing the public that these people are invading the country, that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh,” says Nay San Lwin, an activist and blogger who has adopted the prefix “Ro” on social media to identify himself as Rohingya.

“This is our own native land,” he continues. “We gave them an open channel to debate with us but nobody dares to debate with us because they know they are lying.”

“We entered the Rakhine land before the seventh century, then the Rakhine Buddhists invaded us in the eleventh century. Those living in the southern part were driven out from the southern side to the northern side. [Then they said] these people are invading our country from the northern side. It’s similar to Israel and Palestine’s history, as we know Palestinians became like the immigrants.”

As Muslims the Rohingya already live in a majority Buddhist country but the military, says San Lwin, want Myanmar to be “pure Buddhist”. To achieve this they stoke tension between the Buddhists and Muslims and try and force the Rohingya to flee:

“Rakhine has two or three insurgency groups fighting for the land. The Burmese government always creates communal problems and keeps them busy so they are always fighting with the Muslims and they have no time to fight with the Burmese government.”

In addition to this Rohingyas are barred from entering certain professions; they are discriminated against in the education system, in health services and when they are practicing their religion.

When Myanmar won its independence from the United Kingdom in 1948 the Rohingya were recognised as an official ethnic group and enjoyed full citizenship rights. But in 1974 the government launched operation Jasmine and took away their citizenship and national registration cards.



A Rohingya Muslim woman fled from ongoing military operations in Myanmar’s Rakhine state and is seen holding her children at a refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh on 20 September 2017 [Safvan Allahverdi / Anadolu Agency]

The Plight and Persecution of the Rohingyas in Myanmar

After it had effectively rendered them stateless some 270,000 Rohingyas fled the country. Under the 1982 citizenship law the government asked everybody to apply for a new citizenship card, many of which were refused on the basis that Myanmar did not recognise them as one of its 135 ethnic groups.

In 2001 San Lwin left Myanmar legally to work in Saudi Arabia because back then his parents were officials of the state and had citizenship. But eventually the embassy stopped renewing his passport, he became stateless, and he migrated to Europe.

A particularly vicious wave of violence against the Rohingya began in August this year when the military launched an “anti-terror” operation, beating, raping, shooting and torturing Rohingyas and burning down their villages.

If you count the Rohingyas who have previously fled the country, there are now roughly 800,000 who are seeking refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh. Videos posted on social media capture hundreds of Rohingyas walking through mud and water barefoot, their possessions gathered in bundles on their back.



Much of the anger has been directed at Myanmar’s de facto leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has failed to condemn the army’s abuses and has instead labelled the Rohingya terrorists, argued that the military are victims of a misinformation campaign and even accused women of reporting fake rapes.

Suu Kyi seems to be indifferent to her long fall from grace. [Over 400,000 people have signed](#) an online petition to strip her of her peace prize, led by those who campaigned for her release in the late eighties when she was held under house arrest for her efforts to bring democracy to a country living under a military dictatorship and was consequently revered as a symbol of peace.

“She was my hero too in the past,” San Lwin tells me. “We supported her, all Rohingya supported her; our expectation was that the Rohingya’s situation would change if she got into power. But sadly the opposite is happening. We did many campaigns when she was under house arrest – demonstrations in UK and France, online petitions, we celebrated her birthday.”

When Suu Kyi founded the National League for Democracy (NLD) party in 1988 many Rohingyas joined her party in northern Rakhine state, San Lwin tells me. In the 1990 election four candidates from northern Rakhine stood but they didn’t win mainly because the Rohingyas had their own political party.

“All the Rohingya members got their identity cards from the party and on those cards the Rohingya name was clearly mentioned. Now all those party members are denied their existence,” he says.

Between 1948 and 2015 Rohingyas enjoyed their full voting rights and were elected into parliament. Whilst Suu Kyi was under house arrest one of the founders of the NLD branch in Buthidaung Township, U Kyaw Maung, was arrested repeatedly by military intelligence and tortured to death for refusing to resign from the party.

San Lwin doesn't think there are any Rohingya left who still support Suu Kyi:

“She never took the side of the Rohingya people or the other ethnic minorities. She doesn't want to lose her position because she struggled for many, many years to get this position, that's the reason she's not condemning [the violence]. On the other hand she's taken the side of the military, which means she's against us. Also she's denying our existence.”

On the whole, news coverage in the West of the latest atrocities have been pretty accurate, reckons San Lwin. However India – where Islamophobia is rising and hate crimes against Muslims are increasing – is pumping out a lot of fake news whilst China is simply a propaganda machine for the [Myanmar] government, says San Lwin.

Officially, the Myanmar government is not allowing any reporters – or unofficially any aid – into Rakhine state but earlier this week the Chinese media visited the area. “One of the reasons they are burning all the houses and clearing the land is they have an agreement with China,” says San Lwin.

The \$10 billion Kyauk Pyu Special Economic Zone Project agreed between China and Myanmar will see oil and gas pipes built in Rakhine state and has been criticised by activists who question whose land will be appropriated for construction to begin, and where the people living there will go.

San Lwin believes that the main reason behind all this violence is not necessarily this project. Neither is it the physical appearance of the Rohingya, nor their ethnic group or the language they speak. The problem, says San Lwin, is their religion.

Ethnic groups such as the Dainet or the Marmagyi share the Rohingyas physical appearance, language, tradition and culture yet are not Muslims, so they are recognised as official ethnic groups and have been granted full citizenship rights. Other Muslims in the country, says San Lwin, are also suffering:

“[The military] have a plan to wipe out all the Muslims in the country. This is the long-term plan. In 20 years, after they have cleared all the Rohingya population, there will be other ethnic cleansing of the other Muslim minorities in the country.”

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Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Why U.S. and Saudi Arabia Back Rohingya in Myanmar

By [Sara Flounders](#) >> Global Research, October 12, 2017

Demonstrations, protests and online petitions have appeared worldwide to defend the struggle of the Rohingya people who have been driven from Myanmar into exile. What is of concern is that political forces with no history of or interest in defending the rights of these oppressed people, including the U.S. and Saudi regimes, have joined this effort.

While he was threatening People's Korea, Iran and Venezuela in his United Nations speech, U.S. President Donald Trump also demanded that the U.N. Security Council take “strong and swift action” to end violence against Myanmar's Rohingya population.

U.S. government officials, including U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Vice President Mike Pence, have called for immediate action and delivery of humanitarian aid to the Rohingya.



Featured image: British colonial forces in Myanmar, known at the time as Burma.

Since Washington and Riyadh are inflicting a murderous war on millions of people in Yemen, not to mention in other parts of the world, working-class movements and anti-imperialist forces around the globe are asking what is behind their sudden concern for a small ethnic group in Southeast Asia. Could it have something to do with geopolitical maneuvering in Myanmar between China and the U.S.?

As a huge developing economy with central planning, significant state ownership and cash reserves, China is in a position to offer extensive infrastructure development. China's One Belt One Road project and other economic plans are attracting great interest.

U.S. policy is increasingly geared toward disrupting these development plans with vastly expanded militarization and regional wars. This is the strategy behind the Pentagon's "Pivot to Asia." A Western network of nongovernmental organizations and Saudi-backed extremists are part of the disruption.

Myanmar and the Rohingya

Myanmar, earlier called Burma, is a formerly colonized, underdeveloped and extremely diverse nation of 51 million people. It has 135 distinct ethnic groups among its eight nationalities.

Myanmar is a resource-rich, strategically important country bordering China, Bangladesh, India, Thailand and Laos. It's important to Wall Street banks and U.S. policy makers as a major exporter of natural gas, and there are plans to make it a conduit for oil.

Within Myanmar, the Rohingya people are an oppressed ethnic group of approximately 1 million people. A majority of Rohingya are Muslim, though they make up less than half of Myanmar's Muslim population, which is scattered throughout the mostly Buddhist country. The Rohingya are considered stateless. They live in the state of Rakhine, on the Bay of Bengal, and share a long border with Bangladesh.

In articles on Myanmar and the Rohingya, [Reuters News](#) (Dec. 16, 2016), [Chicago Tribune](#) (Aug. 31), [Wall Street Journal](#) (Sept. 13) and the think tank [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) (Sept. 7), all reported Saudi support for the Rohingya struggle.

Oil, Gas and Geopolitics: US Hand in Playing the Rohingya Crisis against China

The group carrying out armed resistance in Myanmar, known as Harakah al-Yaqin (HaY, Faith Movement in Arabic) and now called the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, is headquartered in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Atallah abu Ammar Junjuni, a Pakistani national who lived in Saudi Arabia, is the leader of ARSA. This group led a coordinated attack on 30 Myanmar military posts on Aug. 25.

The Myanmar military responded with a wave of repressive attacks on the Rohingya that drove tens of thousands of people over the border.

U.S./Saudi crimes in Yemen

Meanwhile, the Saudi kingdom is carrying out a genocidal war on Yemen, enforcing a blockade of food and aid against the poorest country in Southwest Asia. This war is only possible using U.S.-made jet aircraft and bombs. The Saudi military cannot fly its own jet aircraft or carry out bombing runs without direct U.S. assistance and in-air refueling. In addition, the Pentagon is now carrying out at least one covert strike every two days in Yemen.

Yemen is caught in "the world's largest hunger crisis," which is "man-made" and is starving "an entire generation." (Washington Post, May 19) According to U.N. figures, more than 7 million Yemenis are close to famine. The World Health Organization has warned of "the worst cholera outbreak in the world" in Yemen. (CNN, Oct. 4) The U.N. counted 777,229 cholera cases as of Oct. 2, many of them in children.

Saudi bombing of sanitation and sewage infrastructure in this impoverished country is a major cause of the deadly epidemic. Yet this desperate crisis was not on the U.N.'s agenda, and is barely mentioned in the media as world leaders met in New York in September. The media focus was on Trump's talk of aiding the Rohingya.

The [U.S. State Department](#) has pledged to provide "emergency shelter, food security, nutritional assistance, health assistance, psychosocial support, water, sanitation and hygiene, livelihoods, social inclusion, non-food items, disaster and crisis risk reduction, restoring family links, and protection to over 400,000 displaced persons in Burma and in Bangladesh."

Remember that the U.S. military is engaged in bombing, drone attacks, targeted assassinations and starvation sanctions against at least eight Muslim countries on any given day: Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides no rights for any of the peoples living within its borders. Minority religious communities and millions of immigrant workers, even after living there for generations, are not counted as citizens. Its vast oil wealth is owned by one family: The House of Saud.

Saudi Arabia has played its reactionary role by funding extremist groups, often with the quiet support of the U.S., in Afghanistan, Syria and across the Middle East. Increasingly in South Asia, Saudi-influenced political and religious extremism is having an impact.

Saudi Arabia spends over \$1 billion to fund 560 Wahhabi mosques and Islamic centers in Bangladesh, which borders Myanmar. This means a new center of reaction in almost every village and town in Bangladesh. Similar funding has been long underway in India and Pakistan.

U.S. pivot to Asia

U.S. and Saudi support for the Muslim Rohingya is based on the U.S. declared “pivot to Asia.” For U.S. strategists, it is a way to block Chinese influence in a strategic region.

Eighty percent of China’s needed oil and much of its trade passes through the Malacca Straits – a narrow choke-point between Indonesia and Singapore – and into the increasingly tense South China Sea. U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups stationed there could easily blockade this movement of needed resources.

To counter U.S. aggressive moves, China’s development programs are aimed at diversifying and finding ways around a direct confrontation with U.S. military power.

China is building a deep-sea port, industrial park, and gas and oil pipelines at Kyauk Pyu in Myanmar on the Bay of Bengal. This would provide China with an alternative route for energy imports from the Middle East that avoids the Malacca Straits. The multibillion-dollar construction project is also enormously beneficial to Myanmar’s economy, aiding development of its gas fields. U.S. and Saudi intervention in the escalating Rohingya struggle threatens this development project.

There is no region in the developing world, whether in Asia, Africa or Latin America, where U.S. imperialism, in its present stage of decay, plans to assist desperately needed economic development. The U.S. economy is geared to super-profits through war, weapons sales and onerous debt. U.S. imperialism can only continue its domination by disrupting the development of any potential competitors or economic bloc of competitors.

Divide-and-rule tactics

By consciously supporting and inflaming both sides of a national struggle, the cynical Western imperialist powers are employing a longtime divide-and-rule tactic meant to dominate a whole region by becoming the outside arbiter.

U.S. imperialists have done this in many international crises. In Iraq, the U.S. built bases in the Kurdish region while claiming to support the unity of the Iraqi state. Playing on this division has strengthened the ruinous involvement of the Pentagon in the region.

In the Philippines a sudden insurgency of a minority Muslim population on the island of Mindanao has become the latest excuse for the U.S. to offer joint training and stationing of its troops there. Myanmar refugee camps in Bangladesh may become recruitment areas for the Islamic State group (ISIS) and staging grounds for future interventions, said Forbes, a magazine about corporate finance, last July 11.

Pentagon plans for expanded intervention, coordinated with Saudi organization and funding, can be seen in this warning by the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#):

“There is legitimate concern that the violence will attract outside forces. Now that thousands of battle-hardened, ISIS-affiliated foreign fighters are seeking new missions beyond a shrinking Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, new opportunities to defend Muslims will inevitably appeal to them.” (Sept. 7)

All the countries of the region, including Bangladesh, Myanmar and China, have every interest in a peaceful reconciliation for the Rohingya people. The region needs coordinated development, not the enormous disruption of war.

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