

Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Reaction of United Nations Security Council's Permanent Members

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Abstract

Rohingya are the residents of Myanmar since centuries and few of them migrated from Bangladesh during British Raj and after then permanently settled in Myanmar. But unfortunately, the Government of Myanmar denied their citizenship in early 1980s. Their rights were snubbed by the government from time to time but the year 2017 was deadly one for them. In late August 2017, humanitarian crisis gain momentum in Myanmar and drew the attention of whole world. The crisis emerged when defence forces of Myanmar started the genocide of the Rohingya of the state of Rakhine (Myanmar) under the patronage of government. Even videos were viral on social media in which it was shown that how Rohingya's were chopped down from head to toe. The world major players, human right organizations and activities have reacted to this massacre carried out by Myanmar forces.

Research Statement:

This paper is an attempt to explore the causes and background of this massacre and the reaction of United Nations and its permanent members of Security Council that are responsible to keep peace and tranquility in the World. This study would also try to explore the steps taken by UN and UNSC to tackle this humanitarian crisis.

Methodology:

This study is based on primary as well as secondary data. Primary data in the form of press release, statement issued by political entities of China, Russia, Myanmar, French, U.K, U.S and U.N. were used to analyse the data. Reports and papers of U.N., State department of United States and other Human Right organizations were also utilized for analysis. Secondary data also collected from books, research journals, periodicals and newspapers were also used in this paper.

Key Words: Myanmar, UNSC, humanitarian crisis, massacre, Rohingya

Background

The state of Myanmar (Burma) was once the part of British colony but in January 1948 it broke the shackles of slavery and became an independent state (Siti Khalijah, 2014). Since that various ethnic groups were residing in the state (Myanmar Census Report 2014-2016). Buddhists were the dominant ethnic group of the Myanmar. Almost 80 to 90 percent population of the state practice Buddhism and on this ground Buddhism was declared as the state religion (Engy, 2018). Various ethnic groups like Christians, Muslims, and Hindus etc. cover the other 10 percent of population. 135 ethnic groups were legitimately accepted by Government of Myanmar but 'Rohingya Muslims' a minority group living since centuries in Myanmar were not recognized by their own state (Washington Post, 2017). The main concentration of 'Rohingya Muslims' are found in Rakhine state of the Myanmar. 'Rohingya' covers one third population of the 'Rakhine state'. Till 1962 'Rohingya' could take part in the mainstream of Myanmar but after that they were sidelined by the government of their own state (S.N. 2013). In 1962, when General Ne Win took the responsibility of government, he asserted a number of strides to crush and reject the individuality of 'Rohingya'. One of such stride was the 'Operation Nagamin' in late 1977. Operation was propelled with an objective to exclude the immigrants from the state. The communities and settlements of 'Rohingya' were scalded, women were mob raped, their shops and other assets were demolished and forced them to leave the state as they were considered immigrants. This 'operation' became a cause to deport 200,000 'Rohingya' from Myanmar. Another substantial stride taken by government of Myanmar to extinguish the race of 'Rohingya' was the policy of 'Citizenship Law' in 1982. According to this law 'Rohingyas' were immigrants that derived from Bangladesh although there were empirical evidence that demonstrate the 'Rohingya' were living in Myanmar since centuries and few of them travelled from Bangladesh since British time period. 'Citizen Law' contradicts with the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (United Nations, 1954). According to 'Citizen law' limitations were enforced on 'Rohingya' to move freely, intolerant marriage policy, two child policy, employments, to get secondary education, and practice religion freely (Nurul, 2006). Restriction on liberty of religion was against the 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' (International Covenant on Civil and Political Right, 1966). Unfortunately this 'Citizenship Law' was not amended or removes by the subsequent democratic governments. Even neither the Nobel Peace Prize holder Aung San Suu Kyi nor the human right activists of the state spoke for the rights of 'Rohingya'

minority. They faced acute international criticism on their silence but no tangible step was taken to abolish this law (Nehginpao, 2013).

After '1982 Citizen Law' 'Rohingya' became the target of military crackdown number of times. The ethnic violence arose between April 1991 and May 1992 compelled 250,000 Rohingya to took refuge to some safer places especially in Bangladesh (T. Raglan, 1994). Again violence vented between the 'Rohingya' and Buddhists community in June and October 2012 (Nehginpao, 2013). This time violence has affected almost 320,000 'Rohinya' in total. Out of 320,000, 200,000 left the Myanmar and 120,000 were internally displaced (Micheal F 2017). For the first time in the history the world community had taken the exodus issue of 'Rohingya' Muslim seriously (Nehginpao, 2013). On the pressure of world community the President of Myanmar Thein Sein constituted sixteen members committee after the June 2012 genocide and then in August formed a twenty-seven member commission. The commission consists of religious Muslim members, intellectuals, politicians, representative of international organization. International agents were incorporated for the transparency of the commission. The materialization of this commission was valued by the international community even the Secretary General of U.N., Ban Ki-Moon sent a testimonial to support this commission (Press Release, 2012). The materialization of the commission did not work and violence resurfaced in October (2012). The chain of violence against 'Rohingya' did not stop here it continue and resurfaced with full momentum in August 2017. This time 288 settlements were scalded by the forces of Myanmar, thousands were killed, raped and almost 700,000 took asylum in Bangladesh. Myanmar was under acute criticism on this humanitarian catastrophe that was called by U.N as 'Ethnic Cleansing' (Reuters, 2018).

Response of United Nations on Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar

The humanitarian catastrophe arose in August 2017 as a result of ruthless military action taken by Myanmar against 'Rohingya' gets numerous reactions from world community. Most of them came up by denouncing and condemning the violence act of Myanmar military (Siti Khalijah, 2014). International, regional and local executives, media (print, electronic and social) and human right societies had alleged Myanmar forces of human right exploitation and annihilation against 'Rohingya' (Micheal. F, 2017).

U. N. the esteemed body of the world having 193 member states, quickly responded on the humanitarian catastrophe arose after August 25, 2017 in Myanmar. U.N. avowed the attack of Myanmar military troops and Buddhist group of the 'Rakhine' state on 'Rohingya' as an 'ethnic cleansings' (Dawn, 2017). The 'Human Right Commissioner of U.N., Filippo Grandi', designated the 'Rohingya' catastrophe as 'A Test Book Example of Ethnic Cleasing' (Joy, 2018). 'Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' of U.N. stated the 'Rohinya' calamity as "One of the world's worst humanitarian crisis" (un.org, 2018). 'Yanghee Lee, a special rapporteur of U.N.' to Myanmar commented on 'Rohingya crisis as 'the hallmarks of genocide against Rohingya' (Dawn, 2018). On November 16, 2017, Human Right Committee, of U.N. General Assembly sanctioned a resolution calling the Myanmar military to stop its annihilation against 'Rohingya'. The resolution was stimulated by Saudi Arabia to stop the worsening human right condition in Myanmar (Ting Shi, 2017). In 2017, UNHCR, UNDP and the Myanmar establishment did a Memorandum of Understanding that present a schema of teamwork to generate conditions for the deliberate, nonviolent, proper and feasible extradition of immigrants from Bangladesh. Human Rights Council selected a 'U.N. Independent Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar'. A report was prepared by this Mission. The report states that harms and exploitation against humankind by security forces of Myanmar were "undoubtedly amount to the gravest crimes under international law" (Secretary General Remarks, 2018). A goodwill diplomat of UNHCR, Cate Blanchett, visited campgrounds of Refugees in Bangladesh in March 2018. She articulated her sentiment that what I saw and perceived was dreadful. Adama Dieng, 'the U. N. Special Counselor on the Prevention of Genocide', after her official visit to sites in Bangladesh said the objective of government of Myanmar was to eliminate the presence of 'Rohinya' from Rakhine state. She voiced her thought by saying that Myanmar government had made no serious strength to guarantee the safety of 'Rohinya' up-till now (Dawn, 2018). In April 2018, Christine Schraner Burgener as Special Diplomat of U.N. was selected to visit Myanmar. She started a process of broad discussions, including with the establishment and with civil society and women's groups of Myanmar.

Myanmar had rejected all the charges upraised by U.N. The statements of U.N. envoy were rejected by the government of Myanmar by protecting itself against 'Rohingya' as a rebellious. Zaw Htay, spokesperson of Myanmar government believed if there would be 'strong

and primary evidence’ of human right exploitation then government would consider it (Dawn, 2018).

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

Over the intelligence reports of human right abuses and exploitation carried out by the troops of Myanmar forces the UNSC delivered a robust criticism. UNSC issued a declaration by communicating its ‘grave concerns’ over the human right condition arose after the ruthless military crackdown by Myanmar. The government of Suu Kyi reacted that “the issues facing Myanmar and Bangladesh could only be resolved bilaterally” and the UNSC would not overlook this fact (VOA, 2018). UNSC diplomatic declaration of November 6, 2017 intensely condemned the violence that had taken place against ‘Rohingya’ (UNORG, 2018). An envoy of UNSC visited the camps where the ‘Rohingya’ took refuge in Bangladesh. The envoy comprised of officials of five permanent and ten non-permanent members of UNSC. During their three days visit they probed about the catastrophe with refugees and local officials (Dawn, 2018). At the end envoy demanded from the government of Myanmar to nonviolent return of the ‘Rohingya’ and ending of discrimination against them that was overlooked and unheard by the Myanmar authorities (Dawn, 2018).

The five permanent member of UNSC reacted to Myanmar crisis differently. Few of them didn’t take it on humanitarian grounds and they only kept their national interest and strategic relations prime with the establishment of Myanmar.

The United States of America

U.S. was concerned about the ongoing situation in Myanmar. At international, national, regional and multilateral levels and meetings U.S raised awareness regarding the ‘Roingya’ catastrophe (U.S. Dept of State, Supra Note, 74). The authorities in U.S also raised their voice in support of Rohingya’s. U.S. President Trump called the UNSC to take immediate action to end the ‘Rohingya’ catastrophe. ‘Vice President Mike Pence of America’ termed this catastrophe as dangerous for the harmony and peace of the world. ‘U.S. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert’, believed there was crucial need for an independent investigation of the massacre and carnage done by Myanmar establishment and put pressure on Myanmar administration for collaboration in this regard (Dawn, 2018). ‘U.S. diplomat to the U.N. Nikki Haley and Former Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson’, described the catastrophe in Myanmar as

‘ethnic cleansing’ (Jonah, 2018). Nikki demanded for a global embargo on arms deal with Myanmar military forces (U.S Embassy in Rangon, Press Release, 2018). Although U.S and its allies had already imposed arm embargo on Myanmar since 2012. Tillerson visited the Myanmar in November 2017 to report about the ‘Rohingya’ catastrophe (VOA, News, 2017). He believed Myanmar military was guilty for suppression of ‘Rohingya’ (Dawn, 2017). He assumed that the only economic embargo would not helpful to resolve this humanitarian catastrophe (Ting Shi, 2017). US Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken on the eve of sixth anniversary of Rohigya genocide said in a press briefing, we stand with the Rohingya who became the victim of brutalities of their forces and we were the pursuant of the accountability of all responsible for this crisis and genocide (Blinken, 2023).

To stop the catastrophe in Myanmar the State Department imposed restrictions on Individuals of Myanmar responsible for all destruction. Initially State Department conveyed its apprehensions in a way that Myanmar catastrophe threatened the peace of region and might get the consideration of international terrorists (The Daily Star, 2017). It also proclaimed on October 23, 2017 that it was evaluating to enforce sanctions on the responsible authorities for human right abuse (State Department Press Release, 2017). When these threats didn’t work then in December 2017, U.S. not only imposed sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for genocide of Rohingya but also imposed visa restriction on them. In 2022 additional sanctions were imposed by U.S. and its allies on five individuals of Myanmar who were involved in the massacre of People in Myanmar. Even in International Court of Justice U.S. also supported The Gambia which brought case against Myanmar brutalities on its minorities (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Furthermore, the ‘U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’ had stripped of the prominent human right award they had granted to Suu Kyi, which was suspected of her little doing against the ethnic cleansing of ‘Rohingya’ (Dawn, 2018). Beside all other support to Rohingya U.S. also denoted 2.1\$ billions humanitarian assistance for the affected people of Myanmar (VOA, News 2017).

People’s Republic of China

China had deep strategic, economic, political and friendly relations with Myanmar. China had declared Myanmar as ‘Friendly Neighbour’ state. These relation strengthen under Suu Kyi’s government while previously it was not friendly (Dawn, 2017). Myanmar was also part of the

Chinese goal of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and it was also working on oil and gas pipelines there. China was establishing a deep water port and special economic zone in Rakhine state to decrease its dependency on Malacca strait. Keeping its strategic and economic concerns prime, humanitarian catastrophe had secondary significance for China in Rakhine state (Department of State, Press Release, 2017). This was evident from the Chinese stance to oppose the November 2017, UNGA resolution. China opposed the resolution on the ground that Myanmar military crackdown was domestic in nature and it was not a threat to global harmony. ‘Deputy Head of International Department of Chinese Communist Party, Guo Yezhou, Geng Shuang, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman and Liu Weinmin, spokesperson of External Ministry’ periodically stated that China support the Myanmar struggle to bring peace and stability in Rakhine state (Global Split, Dawn, 2017). China supposed that Myanmar establishment could manage its domestic problem and foreign participation would not work appropriately (Dawn, 2017). In a joint press conference with Suu Kyi, Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister, offered three-point solution to the establishment of Myanmar and Bangladesh to manage the current situation that arose after military crackdown in Rakhine state (Ting Shi, 2017). These points were also offered by China in 13th Asia Europe Foreign Minister meeting held on November 20, 2017 (The Rohingya Crisis, 2018). These points included

1. “Cease-fire between the military forces of Myanmar and Rohingya,
2. Repatriation of refugees by granting them citizenship
3. Talks on returning of refugees back between Myanmar and Bangladesh”

(Lee Yimos, 2017).

Before this press conference, Wang met with Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, in Dhaka and guaranteed her that China would play a productive role to resolve the problem (Ting Shi, 2017). ‘Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative of UN, Wu Haitao’, argued the world community to provide help and support to Myanmar establishment that was confronting the tension aroused in Rakhine. He valued the way the establishment of Myanmar was cooperating with International Organization and International Committee of the Red Cross to conduct the humanitarian tasks (Dawn, 2018).

Lee, the U.N. special rapporteur, demanded from China to stand by human right organizations on Myanmar catastrophe. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman reacted that

‘external actors’ would not be helpful to resolve the catastrophe it might add more problems (reuter.com, 2018). Although Myanmar military was under severe criticism from international community but Commander in Chief of Myanmar military, General Min Aung Hlaing, visited China in late November on the request of Joint Staff Department of China’s Central Military Commission for four days. Where he not only met with President Xi Jinping but also top military leaders of PLA. Both sides assured the military collaboration between the two states.

The International Criminal Court had been stimulating the investigation and tribunal against the individuals guilty for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The only way the leaders of Myanmar could face a judicial reckoning of ICC if the UNSC discussed them. This is not going to materialize because China veto power in favour of its close political partner (the guardian, 2018).

There were three main reasons why China had not condemned the military action against Rohingya minorities. First, It’s the corner stone of China’s foreign policy not to interfere in the domestic issue of other states and Chinese authorities already declared this catastrophe as internal matter of Myanmar. Secondly, China was getting economic benefits and creating its soft image in the minds of people of Myanmar by not criticizing the government of Myanmar and its forces but offering the role of mediator between the Bangladesh and Myanmar to solve this problem as she did and responsible to hold talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar over the issue. Thirdly, how China could criticize the human right violation in Myanmar because she was also handling the Muslim minority of Xinjiang province with iron hands (Joy, 2018)

Russia

Russia and Myanmar had solid defence and strategic relations that geared up by the exchange of high level officials between the two states. Between 1996 and 2016 Russia had even shifted almost 3000 missiles, 100 artillery pieces and 64 air crafts to the state of Myanmar. Data shows that between 2001 and 2021 Myanmar imported \$ 1.7 billion arms from Russia. Like Chinese the Russian government also had their own way to maintain relations with Myanmar government over looking the humanitarian crisis. Russia had also opposed the November 2017 resolution of UNGA that was moved by Saudi Arabia with an ambition to stop humanitarian catastrophe in Myanmar. Russian diplomat to Myanmar, Nikolay Listopadov indicated that Russian were against the intrusion of internal affairs of Myanmar. Russian Foreign Ministry even

did not reply to the request of U.N. special rapporteur to Myanmar that wanted from Russia to condemn the military crack-down against Rohingya.ⁱ Polyanshiy Dmitry, Deputy Russian U.N. diplomat over the Rohingya catastrophe believed that “Issue is still for us to promote bilateral ways to reduce this issue” (Japantimes.com, 2018). Russian top military official visited Myanmar in January 2018. During their visit they had declared to sell six Sukhoi Su-30 jet fighters to Myanmar. State Department spokeswoman, Nasser, condemned the Russian defence ministry to broadcast such military sale at the time when whole world community wants to stop the ‘Rohingya’ catastrophe and the sale of arms to security forces of Myanmar would add fuel on fire rather than helpful to solve the existing problem (usnews.com, 2018). Even in 2020, the military commander of Myanmar visited Moscow to participate in the Victory Day Parade of Russia. He was among few dignitaries from the world that was hosted by Russia on that day (Chaudhury, 2021).

Beside Russian government support to Myanmar authorities there was a public protest on the crisis. Ramzan Kadyroy, a Chechnya’s leaders held a demonstration on September 4, 2017. The demonstration was launched to show unity with ‘Rohingya’. Kadyroy labeled the military crackdown against ‘Rohingya’ as “a Holocaust against Myanmar’s Muslim Community”. Kadyroy criticized the Russian establishment for delivering weapons to security forces of Myanmar. He argued to the Russian establishment that if they would not oppose the military crackdown against the ‘Rohingya’ than their relations with Chechnya would not be remain normal (Samul Ramani, 2018). But such threats didn't work to cease the government support to Myanmar.

French Republic

French establishment criticized the military crackdown on ‘Rohingya’ Muslim. The French President Emmanuel Macron defined the attack as ‘genocide’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ (times of Israel, 2018). French establishment valued the determinations of establishment of Bangladesh to accommodate largest refugees of current history and requested the Bangladesh to accept the coming refugees that want to take refuge on its land. French establishment also demanded from Myanmar to stop the violence against ‘Rohingya’ and tried to find out a political solution of the catastrophe. French reiterated its support to the humanitarian organization working for current ‘Rohingya’ catastrophe (diplomatic.gouv.fr, 2018).

French establishment supported the November 2017 resolution of UNGA that was moved by Saudi Arabia. French Foreign Minister applauded the agreement that was done between Myanmar and Bangladesh to repatriate the Rohingya refugees. On September 24, 2018 French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian and United Kingdom Secretary Jeremy Hunt organized an event on the Rohingya catastrophe. The determination of Bangladesh was acknowledged in this event and stress was laid on Myanmar for the peaceful and safe return of 'Rohingya' back to their homes (Government of UK, 2018).

United Kingdom

UK had shown deep concern over the Rohingya crisis and their worsening situation due to military crack down against them. Minister for Asia, Mark Field, urged that the 'Rohingya' catastrophe as "unacceptable tragedy" and warned the Suu Kyi's to end this massacre (theguardian.com, 2017). On the demand of U.K. a special convention of UNSC was held to condemned and discussed the ruthless action of Myanmar forces (Kumari Anupama, 2017). UK had contributed more than one third of the total assistance contributed by the international community for the displaced Rphingya's (relifweb.int/report, 2018). U.K Foreign Minister, Boris Johnson visited Myanmar and stressed on the establishment of Myanmar for an autonomous investigation of the catastrophe and hold to account that were responsible. He also stressed the establishment to took such procedures that 'Rohingya' would return back to their homes safe and sound (Dawn, 2018). Leader of U.K Lahour Party, Jeromy Korbin demanded from Suu Kye to stop the massacre of 'Rohingya' (Md Salman Sohel, 2017). Lord Nazir Ahmed, the 'UK Minister of State for the Commonwealth' held military of Myanmar accountable for ethnic cleansing (Dawn, 2018). Britain had seized its educational training course to Myanmar military in its support to 'Rohingya' (Roland Oliphand, 2017). The Army Chief of Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing accused the UK for the current catastrophe as the 'Bengali population (Rohingya Muslims)' came to Myanmar under their time period (Dawn, 2017).

Conclusion

The crisis emerged in Myanmar on August 25, 2017 enforced almost 700,000 to 900,000 Rohingya to leave their own country and took shelter in neighbouring countries, thousands were internally displaced, almost same were killed and women were brutally raped or gang raped. International response on this inhuman catastrophe was not unanimous. Even the permanent

members of UNSC were not on the same page. Rather than criticizing the establishment of Myanmar for carrying out massacre of Rohingya China and Russia supported the efforts of Myanmar to bring stability in the country. China and Russia believed that involvement of any third party can lead to destruction rather than resolving the situation. China itself was under criticism on human rights abuses in Xinjiang provinces. U.K., U.S. and French supported the Rohingya's. The leaders of these nations publicly criticized the Myanmar establishment to carrying out brutal act against Rohingya and demanded for fair investigation against responsible.

But unfortunately the role of UNSC was very limited to restore peace in the Myanmar. Its resolutions were vetoed by China in support of Myanmar. China didn't want any more involvement of US and its forces around its border as at the time of crisis U.S forces were already present in Afghanistan and she believed that interfere of other states always spoil the situation. The problem would be resolved through bilateral talks between Myanmar and Bangladesh and she offered her mediation. But still the problem was on going in Myanmar and no proper solution was taken out to repatriate the Rohingya's or no mechanism were set out to hold the accountability of responsible of catastrophe.

It means such humanitarian catastrophe can occur in future if all the nations of the world do not take this one serious and unanimously criticized it and isolate such nation that are involved in human right abuses at such large scale. The analysis shows that if one nation veto any resolution then all the other nations are helpless to do anything to stop a crisis then in such circumstances what is the use of UNSC that is responsible for peace and tranquility in the world. There must be some change in the rule of UNSC instead of veto power there should be a majority vote decision otherwise due to the interests of 5P the world can be suffer from any humanitarian crisis as we are witnessing the case of Palestine currently where genocide of Palestinians are going on and world is silent spectator or just giving there lip-serves by issuing statement in favour of Palestine and that is not an alternate of sufferings of humanity.

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