

THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF ROHINGYA CRISIS: THE NEED FOR REDEFINING FOREIGN POLICY OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract

The Rohingya Crisis has morphed into a spiteful series of denied citizenship, persecution, displacement and repatriation deal. The ramification of this catastrophe for South Asian region and specifically for Bangladesh, puts her in a fix while trying to respond with a balanced policy to simultaneously protect her national interest and uphold human security issues of the Rohingyas. This paper argues, while conducting a comparative analysis of responses of other regional actors, that Bangladesh must opt for a peaceful solution to the challenge to ensure protection of her domestic stability and readjust or contextualize her foreign policy norms in line with the changing dynamics of the Rohingya issue. Given the real politik nature/ political realism of Myanmar's foreign policy strategies, this paper urges that Bangladesh's foreign policy towards this problem should include regional counterpart, UNHCR and donor countries. Being critical about purely aid oriented involvement of the regional and global power, this paper advocates for seeking strong global public opinion and international responses in terms of solving this crisis by the foreign and diplomatic activities of Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh, once a source of thousands of refugees and veteran sufferer of genocide, is currently hosting an overwhelming number of refugees from her neighboring country. With its origin embedded in age-old push-in and push-back policies, the recent Rohingya refugee crisis is not a standalone incident at all. Revival of the ancient problem has gained ground in the realm of international studies with added importance than earlier because of the intensity of the atrocities and the massive exodus of displaced people. The current influx was triggered by the incident of an attack on police stations and outposts by relatively new and little known Rohingya Nationalist group named Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on August 2017 with barely some weapons and machetes in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Predictably enough, the attack was disproportionately countered

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by the Tatmadaw (Myanmarese Army) in the forms of atrocities, rape and destruction of properties of the locals.¹

Starting in the 1960s under Burma's military juntas and continuing until today, under a mixed civilian/ military government, Myanmar's laws and policies have deprived most of the Rohingyas of their human rights and basic citizenship.² From 1962, when socialism started to prevail, the country became self-sufficient to some extent and began to do things its own way. The classical realist rulers became extremely dependent on the military for sustainable regimes. The centre's pro-Buddhist attitude, primarily aimed at imparting legality to the military rule, gradually gave way to cater needs of building a mono-religious nation and its ultimate expression was state sponsored violence in forms of ethnic cleansing and genocide.³

This writeup emphasizes on the explanation of the actions of Myanmar's Government from historical instances and present developments and consequently attempts to find out the domestic and foreign policies opted by them to accommodate their cynical attitude towards the Rohingya community. As we proceed with Bangladesh's responses towards the recent refugee crisis, we can compare the policies and actions to those of the former and analyze the latter's efficacy and rationality. There has been a sense of benevolence working within the countrymen and in the region and around the world of barbed fences regarding Bangladesh's immediate response to the crisis situation by opening her border. But lamentably, as soon as the question of burden sharing through refugee intake, moral support for accusing and pressurizing Myanmar to bring an end to their whims and financial assistance came, most of the major regional and global powers kept mum or extended their help in a minimal scale. This article also brings about those responses and simultaneously discusses Bangladesh's domestic and foreign policies to deal with these challenges. Finally, the write up tries to explore if and how Bangladesh needs to redefine or contextualize her age old foreign policy norms to meticulously deal with the recurrently changing dynamics of the problem under discussion.

¹ Bhattacharjee, Aparupa. (2017). Rohingya Crisis: Policy Options and Analysis. Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies. Retrieved from- <http://bipss.org.bd/pdf/Rohingya-Policy%20Brief.pdf>.

² Martin, Michael F., Vaughn, Bruce & Margesson, Rhoda. (2017). The Rohingya Crises in Bangladesh and Burma. Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from- <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45016.pdf>.

³ Ullah, AKM Ahsan. (2017). Rohingya Migration: Is It a Function of Persecution. Retrieved from- <http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/HKU2017-s/Archive/dd088865-65b9-4133-8f49-525700574b98.pdf>.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The data and information used in this article has mainly been collected by secondary analysis of books, book chapters, articles, minutes of roundtable meetings, research findings, newspaper articles and reports. Because of limited time, it was not possible for the authors to collect first hand data and information through visit to the refugee camps or conducting interviews.

FOREIGN POLICY: UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE AND CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH

THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign Policy is the most obligatory and effective component for every sovereign states. The area of foreign policy is always including the components beyond its political and diplomatic relations. Naturally, it covers huge areas like trade, aid, environmental issues or involving various ministries apart from the political and diplomatic relations. Two broad perspectives can be found here- the impact of domestic pressures and the limitations of the external environment.

“The extension of domestic policy is foreign policy”, as Bismarck claimed, the domestic factors constantly play a vigorous role in articulating foreign policy. “The domestic compulsions in the conduct of foreign policy are created in the light of history, national character and the state of political, economic and social developments in the country.”⁴ Politicization of major issues are also very common. Occasionally political ideologies of the dominant parties can have influence on foreign policy formulation. Some other influential components those have serious impact on foreign policy formulation are- geo-strategic position, population, economic condition, ideological environment, military capability, quality of government, national leadership and diplomacy, national history, religion, culture and natural resources etc.

Besides the domestic compulsion, the external factors are also consequential for every country. The regional political environment, distrust among neighbors, shifting balance of power and highly powerful, extremely weak or unfriendly neighbors may cause a state of flux and tension. Recently, because of Globalization, the control over economy and, in some extent, political realities, have shifted from national government to international determiners. In one hand, this process gives much power to the international bodies and, in the other hand, it also shrinks the sovereignty of a state.

The image of a sovereign state rest on its foreign policy and relations as it clearly articulates where its stand. The relevance of this concept become prominent more in this age of globalization where everything is affected by

⁴ Rashid, Harunur. (2012). *Bangladesh Foreign Policy: Realities, Priorities and Challenges*. Academic Press and Publishers Library.