Rakhine State at the Crossroads: Geopolitics, State Interests, and the Continuing Rohingya Catastrophe

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Abstract

Rakhine State has turned into a flash point in geopolitics, turning into the most contested and ethically compromised region in Asia. Long been neglected, Rakhine today is a geopolitical magnet as a major economic corridor, hosting strategically crucial deep-sea port projects as well as defined by the Rohingya genocide, the worst humanitarian crisis in these times. Bangladesh, China, India, Russia, and the United States have each deepened engagement in the region in multiple domains, wanting influence over maritime infrastructure, security dynamics, and political developments. In addition to the global actors, the native powers like the Arakan Army are the biggest contestants for power in the region, emerging as dominant political power with growing control, while the Myanmar military regime is struggling to retain control or at least stay in a bargaining position. This article addresses the geopolitical competition, internal conflict, and state-imposed statelessness in this region. The article argues that the Rohingya crisis is entangled with the strategic targets of regional and global actors in the region, not only with the structural violence of the Myanmar state. From complex conflict dynamics to the documented genocide, the article provides a consolidated analysis of Rakhine's transformation into a crossroad of global power struggles and mass suffering.

Keywords: Rakhine state, Rohingya, Myanmar, Refugee crisis, Humanitarian crisis

1. Introduction

For centuries, Rakhine State, silently lying at Myanmar's western coastline, functioned as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia, a channel for commerce, religion, and migration with a remarkable history and culture. But in the twenty-first century, the region came to the global spotlight, not for its history but for the humanitarian crisis unfolding on its border, reaching the red marker of genocide that was defined as a textbook example of genocide

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by the United Nations, followed by mass displacement of native Rohingya people, adding heavily to the global refugee crisis. Despite the humanitarian crisis, regional and global powers dealt with Rakhine as a strategic aim. Its deepwater coastline, geographical location at the key shipping routes, and potential for infrastructure development to be a key commercial point have turned it into a geopolitical chessboard (Yun, 2019).

The political situation of Myanmar has altered with the alteration of power dynamics within the state. The state engineered ethnic tensions with Myanmar turned into a fire that went out of control. Emergence of the militant groups challenging the Myanmar military, the Tatmadaw, reshaped the challenges and the rise of the Arakan Army as an intensive power has actually recalibrated the whole power dynamics in Myanmar internally as well as for the regional investors seeking strategic goals within Myanmar territory (Walton & Thu, 2021).

China is the biggest investor and stakeholder in the region that has heavily invested in Rakhine under the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Following China, India came to invest in Rakhine under its “Act East” policy. India invested heavily in the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project, considering it a key power point to securing more control over its seven North Eastern states (United States Department of State, 2022). Bangladesh is struggling to cope with the outcome of the conflict in the form of a million refugees in its territory, with no power over any stakeholders in the region to influence political or security decisions. In this situation, the US is keen to gain influence in the region, especially to counter China’s growing power in the region. All this power struggle at this crossroad has made any political stability in Rakhine even more challenging. In this vulnerability, those who had been native to these lands for centuries, the Rohingya, remain stateless victims of genocide, and are largely excluded from political processes. Their situation demonstrates the reality of global hype of human rights, human costs of geopolitical competition, and global neglect for human misery, where strategic goals take central position in diplomatic alignments (World Bank, 2020).

1.1. Rakhine as a Strategic Frontier

Rakhine’s unique strategic position, being situated along the Bay of Bengal, is Myanmar’s gateway to deep-water maritime routes. Rakhine enjoyed a history of being an independent kingdom that offered a trade network extending from Bengal to Sri Lanka, Thailand, and beyond. But this

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connectivity was interrupted in the 17th century, followed by repetitive periods of repression and resistance that have continued till now (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

During the British colonial period, Rakhine transformed into an agrarian hinterland with its ports retaining their military and commercial significance. Like many other conflicts left behind by British rule in the region, Rakhine has struggled through multiple ethnic conflicts since Myanmar's independence in 1948. Long spans of neglect, along with militarisation and political marginalisation, are bound to result in intense local resentment towards the central governments (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2023–2024).

Myanmar's willingness to have foreign investment and the desire of regional powers for access to the Bay of Bengal exponentially magnified the strategic importance of the Rakhine state. The discovery of large natural-gas deposits off the coast was a significant turn in making this region a battleground for influence and power. China saw this as a dream finally coming true, a direct access point to the Indian Ocean (UN Human Rights Council, 2018).

China found it as an alternative to the vulnerable Malacca Strait and invested heavily in a gas and oil pipeline project that connects Kyaukphyu to the Yunnan province. India rushed in to claim its share of influence too and began the Kaladan project, aiming to connect Kolkata with Myanmar's inland transport networks from where it seeks its way to India's Northeastern states, otherwise only connected with a narrow strip of land called "Chicken Neck" in North of Bangladesh (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2023–2024). These regional and global ambitions of multiple powers turned Rakhine into a geopolitical chessboard.

Rakhine has faced extreme political instability due to its discriminatory state policies fueling tension between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingyas, and the regional strategic ambitions of the external powers further deteriorated it. The law-and-order situation worsened to the extent that the region saw extreme violence in 2012 that intensified, resulting in genocide of Rohingya Muslims by 2017, resulting in mass expulsion of Rohingya Muslims from Rakhine into Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2024). Despite its own socio-economic challenges, Bangladesh turned into an unwanted host for nearly one million Rakhine refugees. Now the ground realities of politics, security, and future possibilities are changing once again, and that's due to the exponential rise of the Arakan Army, emerging as the main power broker

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and key holder for the stability needed for infrastructure projects (South Asia Network on Economic Modeling [SANEM], 2022).

1.2. Research Objective

The principal focus of this research is to explain how Rakhine State has become a geographical intersection of competing national, regional, and global influences that shape effective control and management (governance), security, and humanitarian circumstances for the local population. Additionally, this study illustrates how the Rohingya Crisis and the events surrounding it are not only an intra-ethnic issue, but instead represent a larger strategic competition among competing state interests and changing dynamics of power for both the country and the region.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Myanmar's Role and Interests in Rakhine

For Myanmar's central government, the Rakhine have long been seen through the lenses of an interconnected economy and security. Economically, the state hosts some of Myanmar's most valuable natural resources and key strategic locations such as Shwe gas fields, a major natural gas field in the Bay of Bengal, located approximately 60 kilometres offshore from Kyaukphyu and their associated pipeline infrastructure, which generate a significant revenue for government and military-owned enterprises as well as the port offers great potential for expanded maritime trade, though its development has been politically strained (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

Even after losing territorial dominance in many parts of the country, the Tatmadaw has maintained fortified positions around key infrastructure sites because preserving control over these assets is imperative for the Myanmar military regime, as control over contested regions allows for the military to negotiate from a position of strength with both domestic armed groups and foreign investors (Ganguly & Scobell, 2020).

Security is another central concern, as the Tatmadaw has long portrayed Rakhine as a volatile frontier, in need of heavy militarisation. Military presence is often justified through the manipulation of ethnic tensions, particularly those between the Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya. Discrimination was institutionalised in 1982 with the passing of a Citizenship Law, denying most Rohingyas their right to citizenship, despite centuries of their documented presence (Ober, 2019). This legal justification produced

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the ideal conditions for systemic repression, the peak of which was seen during the 2017 genocide. Termed as a “clearance operation”, the genocide forced over 740,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh, and there is no official count of the people killed in this genocide.

The Rohingya genocide has been tolerated, if not largely endorsed by Myanmar’s political and military leadership, to create a nationalist rhetoric. This rhetoric, supported by influential monastic networks, framed the Rohingya as both a demographic and security threat to create the ideal ideological environment for the military to act with impunity during the 2016/2017 operations. Doing so reassured them that the state apparatus and public sentiment would shield it from any form of accountability (South Asia Network on Economic Modeling [SANEM], 2022).

Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar’s military has been making efforts to maintain its influence over Rakhine, amid the rising local support for the Arakan Army, against which it has been oscillating between ceasefire agreements and renewed confrontations. Alongside this, the Rohingya issue is used strategically, both to resist international pressure and to negotiate with foreign governments who are interested in repatriation plans. Yet despite eroding territorial control, Myanmar’s junta is still a key factor in Rakhine because of its continued control over national policy, its role in international diplomacy, and its overriding ability to obstruct or facilitate foreign projects. Its main interests remain maintaining its strategic leverage, preserving its revenue streams, and preventing regional autonomy, which would weaken the centralized state (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2022).

2.2. China’s growing influence and long-term vision in Rakhine

Out of all the external powers exerting their influence in the region, China's presence in the Rakhine State is mightiest. This is China’s accurately calculated strategy, carefully focusing on securing China’s long-term energy security by avoiding vulnerable maritime chokepoints with a huge potential of empowering China across the Indian Ocean. Rakhine is integral in achieving these goals, as this is where China can get direct access to the Bay of Bengal, something it has been seeking for a long time.

China’s strategically most important project in Rakhine is the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), an extension of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and deep-sea port

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have central importance in CMEC. The port is supposed to serve as a major maritime economic location for Chinese economic activity destined for Yunnan. It will free China from dependency on the Strait of Malacca, which is under US naval dominance. The oil and gas pipeline's operation has already proven the potential of this route by serving the transportation of hydrocarbons directly from Kyaukphyu to Kunming, which has enhanced China's energy diversification and resilience many times (Amnesty International, 2017).

The SEZ and port reflect China's global vision of infrastructure locations that amplify economic interdependence with host nations, which provides for potential stability for both. China has invested in multiple domains of engagement in the case of Rakhine as it is investing in infrastructure and diplomatic support to the military junta on international platforms while significantly engaging with ethnic armed organizations like the Arakan Army, bringing it into a strong position to negotiate between the Tatmadaw and the AA which controls territory essential for the protection of Chinese investments, keeping its investment and potential influence intact in multiple contrasting situations in future, regardless of which domestic actor dominates Rakhine. China's approach is pragmatic and openly advocates that its interests lie in stability and uninterrupted access to infrastructure, not in who holds power in the Rakhine (International Crisis Group, 2023).

China's reluctance to condemn the Rohingya genocide while the United States is an advocate of Rohingya rights illustrates how human rights are used as a strategic chess piece. China has protected Myanmar from United Nations Security Council sanctions on the argument that penalties would further destabilise the region and halt development projects. But instead, China proposes bilateral refugee repatriation agreements between Myanmar and Bangladesh, which is impossible given the hostile ground realities for Rohingyas, but these proposals allow China to score points on constructive diplomatic engagement while avoiding endangering relations with the Tatmadaw. At the same time, China understands the changing geopolitics of Rakhine and recognises the control of the Arakan Army as avoiding recalibration of relations. This has implications for the governance of project sites while AA's expanding control over administrative functions (International Crisis Group, 2019).

China's investments are designed to anchor Myanmar firmly within China's geopolitical orbit and ensure that the Bay of Bengal becomes an extension of Chinese maritime reach, no matter who rules the state and how the map may

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alter in the future. China has calculated to remain imperative in Rakhine's future (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

2.3. India's Strategic Stakes and Security Concerns

India's role in Rakhine is defined by its geographical vulnerability. The region is crucial to India's Act East Policy, which aims to strengthen links with Southeast Asia and challenge China's exponentially growing influence in the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, India's biggest investment in that region, defines India's interest and strategic focal points (International Crisis Group, 2019). The Kaladan project aims to link Kolkata to Sittwe Port by sea and then link the port to Mizoram through multiple transport options. The project is crucial for strengthening India's access and control over the Northeast Indian states, where separatist movements have been persistent since 1947, as well as India's connectivity with Southeast Asia (UN Human Rights Council, 2018).

India's investment in the Kaladan project is facing growing vulnerability. It has faced repeated delays due to ever-growing conflict, political instability, and logistical challenges in the region. The escalation of clashes between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army following the 2021 military coup further complicated the implementation of the projects. Following China's strategy in the region, India has been trying to keep a balance in relations with the Tatmadaw, and although India doesn't publicly acknowledge that the strategic projects in Rakhine cannot advance without taking all relevant political actors on board. Acknowledging those challenging the state can deliver a wrong message from India to the Seven Sister states, where separatist movements are a never-ending problem for the state (International Court of Justice, 2020).

The proximity of unstable Rakhine to India's northeastern states makes India worry for its own stability, as it is a potential route for cross-border militancy and smuggling. India has skilfully used post 9/11 Islamophobia and tried to create a narrative of the possibility of increased radicalisation among displaced Rohingya populations to find legitimacy for its intervention in the region. So far, India remains committed to countering China's influence in the region, presenting itself to other global powers as a tool for countering China's deepening influence, and it is committed to its infrastructure projects in Rakhine (Asia Foundation, 2020).

India's balancing act, maintaining relations with the Military regime while trying to engage with ethnic armed organizations, shows that India is

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following China's diplomatic approach. But compared to China, which champions economic projects, political leverage, and influence on both the Tatmadaw and the AA, India lacks comparable economic dominance in Myanmar and tries to rely more heavily on diplomatic and security channels (World Bank, 2020).

Delays in the Kaladan project have given a loud message of India's diminished strategic influence, openly showing its investment vulnerability in the region. The growing dominance of the AA is compelling reluctant India to recalibrate its engagement framework in the region. India's desire to secure connectivity to its northeastern states, ensure regional security, and counter Chinese influence is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve, especially with the shifting balance of power on the ground (Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

2.4. Bangladesh Carrying Humanitarian Burden, Security Dilemmas, and Regional Strategy

Bangladesh has been burdened with the greatest humanitarian consequences of instability in Rakhine, ending up hosting the world's largest refugee camps. Since the 2017 mass expulsions of Rohingyas from Rakhine, Bangladesh is hosting nearly one million Rohingya refugees, and the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar have become one of the most densely populated settlements on the planet, straining Bangladesh in multiple social and security domains (Amnesty International, 2017).

In this multi-layered conflict, Bangladesh's primary aim is sustainable repatriation of Rohingya back to Myanmar, which looks elusive so far, especially with the growing global power battle in the region and with Myanmar's consistent resistance to creating conditions conducive to repatriation. The military regime has used genocide and ethnic engineering for territorial control, while the Arakan Army, which claims to have come into existence as a reaction to the human rights violations, has not yet articulated any plan for Rohingya citizenship or reintegration.

Bangladesh, therefore, finds itself in diplomatic gridlock with its dependence on China to pressure Myanmar into taking back the Rohingyas, while in reality, China's endorsement for repatriation plans is symbolic rather than substantive. India cannot help Bangladesh either, as India's own influence is diminished and India's policy is primarily guided by its own strategic concerns, not any humanitarian concerns (Ministry of External Affairs,

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Government of India, 2022). The United States itself is looking to enhance its influence in the region, seeking useful partners and keeping all the backdoor channels open for its engagement in the region. Bangladesh cannot look for the US help in repatriation, as it will just be symbolic.

With the crisis deepening and regional as well as global investment in power attainment increasing, Bangladesh is facing mounting socioeconomic and security challenges. Refugee camps have turned into hubs of crime, spilling over, human trafficking, narco economy, and intra-camp violence, further fueled by worsening living conditions and lack of opportunities for refugees. Camps have become recruitment grounds for regional and international powers to gain influence through armed groups. As the international aid has shrunk, the potential for being recruited by crime rings and armed groups is growing, as that's left as the only option for survival for many (United States Department of State, 2022).

The United States' growing desire to establish stronger footholds in the Bay of Bengal as part of its China-containment strategy has allowed Bangladesh to leverage its geographical position to strengthen diplomatic relationships. Bangladesh understands that the US support can enhance its bargaining position with both Myanmar and China, and is seeking to use its strategic location to balance relations among competing powers and to enhance its own geographic stability, being surrounded by hostile India (International Crisis Group, 2023). The Rohingya crisis places Bangladesh in a position where it carries a disproportionate humanitarian burden but has no substantial influence over powerful stakeholders in the region and on Myanmar's political decisions. Ultimately, Bangladesh's future stability is inseparable from developments in Rakhine, especially with global power exerting their right to exist in that region.

2.5. The United States and the Quest for Influence Through Bangladesh

The US Indo-Pacific Strategy sees the Bay of Bengal as a stage for rising Chinese dominance and strategic assertiveness, making Rakhine State a zone of indirect US concern as it sits on this maritime gateway, even though the US has limited capacity to influence power dynamics inside Myanmar. Washington's engagement with Myanmar has fluctuated dramatically over the past decade, strengthening during the democratic transition, then collapsing after the 2021 military coup, while growing interest in developing its independent power in the region, seeing Bangladesh as its principal entry

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point into the Bay of Bengal, a region it considers vital to the broader Indo-Pacific strategy (Rhoads, 2021).

Bangladesh's location between India, Myanmar, and major sea lanes gives it strategic value far beyond its size, although all its potential has been practically contained by India. The United States can see significantly amplified Chinese influence in Bangladesh through infrastructure and defence cooperation, especially after the July revolution that apparently curtailed India's hegemony on Bangladesh's diplomatic decision-making (UNHCR, 2024). To counter this growing influence of China, Washington has expanded diplomatic engagement and increased development assistance in multiple domains (International Crisis Group, 2019). The Rohingya crisis serves as a logical diplomatic connection for the US and Bangladesh relations, as the US is the largest donor to the refugee response. This investment in the name of humanitarian aid gives Washington indirect leverage over Rakhine developments, particularly as Bangladesh's policies toward Myanmar shape regional stability. Unlike China and India that have completely ignored the moral side of the conflict, the United States has advocated Rohingya human rights and spoken for democratic accountability becoming one of the first nations to officially declare the treatment of the Rohingya a "genocide", and it supports international legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

US humanitarin pressure over Rohingya genocide is not purely on moral grounds, it is designed to delegitimize the military regime of Myanmar and curtail China's and Russia's ability to normalise engagement with Myanmar's military leaders, coming in a position to become a power broker as human rights advocate for Rohingyas, who are the main stakeholders in any decision on Rakhine future (Chan, 2021). The US is engaging with Bangladesh through projects such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for coastal surveillance, joint maritime exercises, military education and training programs, and counterterrorism cooperation in an attempt to counterweight Chinese maritime ambitions in the region.

2.6. The Arakan Army and Transforming Power Dynamics in Rakhine

The Arakan Army in Rakhine has emerged as the most powerful stakeholder in Rakhine. Starting from a marginal insurgent group just a decade ago, the AA now controls 14 of 17 townships in Rakhine, and it is now in a position that many regional and global powers are seeking to engage with them, as

they are in a position to make decisions on the future of the state. Its dynamic rise has reshaped the whole power scenario of the region, which has compelled all others to recalibrate security and diplomatic strategy in the region (Chan, 2021). With the growing possibility of attaining regional autonomy, the AA is in a position to engage with global investors directly.

By 2024/2025, the AA has been able to achieve control of most of the northern and parts of central Rakhine. It controls local governance from the judicial system to tax collection mechanisms, local administrative committees, and civil service functions.

This has completely undermined the Myanmar military's authority and altered the strategic engagement focal points of China, India, Bangladesh, and other regional players. Although the AA publicly claims neutrality, it endorses the Chinese economic projects and lets them operate on territory under its control. China, for its part, engages with the AA pragmatically to safeguard its pipelines and proposed SEZ. India's engagement with the AA is more challenging as the Kaladan project runs through areas where the AA is active, but the Myanmar military is still in power, compelling India to maintain informal communication channels to avoid disruptions without offending Myanmar military or AA which is a challenging task specially when India doesn't enjoy any power or influence like China (Beech, 2017). India understands that without the AA's cooperation, its strategic projects cannot progress, but the future of the region is still unclear, and any agreement between the military and the AA can further damage India's prospects in the region. Despite occasional ceasefires, the AA and the Myanmar military remain engaged in armed conflict. With the growing influence of AA in the region, a possibility of a quasi-independent Rakhine political entity has emerged, making the future of the state ambiguous.

The AA's inconsistent position on the Rohingya is the most concerning issue, especially for Bangladesh. Some Rohingya communities have reported improved security under AA control compared to Tatmadaw rule, while others fear marginalisation under a future Rakhine nationalist administration (Walton & Thu, 2021). There are unconfirmed reports of the forceful recruitment of Rohingyas, which is a growing concern for the communities still trapped in this conflict. The AA has not yet made its position clear on citizenship, land rights, or political participation for the Rohingya, but they seem keen to recruit them as foot soldiers in the AA. This has further added to the ambiguity of the Rohingya's future as their repatriation depends partly

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on the AA's eventual political settlement with Myanmar and its administrative approach to multi-ethnic coexistence (Barua, 2024).

2.7. Human Rights Violations and Evidence of Genocide in Rakhine:

The humanitarian crisis in Rakhine is not only a political violence but one of the most painful genocides in the 21st century. Major international investigations, including those conducted by the United Nations Independent International Mission on Myanmar, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, have provided consistent evidence of crimes meeting the criteria for "genocide", "crimes against humanity", and "ethnic cleansing" (South Asia Network on Economic Modeling [SANEM], 2022).

The 2016–2017 the genocide committed in the name of "clearance operations" carried out by Myanmar's military involved systematic burning of almost 400 villages resulting in burning the residents alive, systematic killings of thousands of civilians, widespread and coordinated sexual violence, forced displacement of over 740,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh, confiscation of land and destruction of religious sites and blocking of humanitarian access to prevent relief and documentation. Satellite imagery, survivor testimonies, and field investigations all provided evidence of this genocide (UN Human Rights Council, 2018).

In 2022, the United States officially declared that Myanmar's actions constituted text textbook case of "genocide". The Gambia, on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, filed a genocide case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice. Despite global attention, Rohingyas in Rakhine live in apartheid like conditions, as no practical intervention to stop these atrocities has been made. Now, the rise of the Arakan Army and oppressive recruitments has introduced new complexities to their problems, although the AA has not engaged in systematic violence against Rohingyas on the scale of the Tatmadaw (World Bank, 2020).

As of 2025, nearly 1 million Rohingya live in refugee camps in Bangladesh, looking for any opportunity to leave camps through human smugglers, and over 100,000 remain internally displaced in Myanmar. Surprisingly, the UN funding for the refugee response has fallen by more than 50% since 2018, although the crisis has grown, and now Cox's Bazar camps are recording rising malnutrition rates, exceeding 15% in some areas, while almost 40% of

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refugee children lack access to basic education (International Crisis Group, 2019). These figures cannot reflect the real magnitude of the humanitarian crisis that's mostly neglected and the urgent need for durable political solutions.

3. Research Methodology

This research primarily conducts secondary data analysis by adopting qualitative and analytical methodologies to evaluate information from academic journals, policy briefs, and reports from human rights organizations. Moreover, geopolitical trends, conflict patterns, and humanitarian effects related to the Rakhine state are analyzed using information from these sources. Thematic analysis is employed to determine the role of state interests and power competition and their relation to the Rohingya crisis.

4. Discussion

4.1. Rakhine as a Convergence Point of Competing Agendas

Amidst this political fragmentation leading to the possibility of geographical fragmentation, humanitarian catastrophe, power struggle through military means, and beyond, the future of the Rakhine state is jolting in the hands of stakeholders. The battle of strategic interests is intersecting and colliding ruthlessly, shaking the ground for all who may coexist peacefully otherwise (International Crisis Group, 2019).

Rakhine's emergence as a geopolitically important location, offering deep sea access to the Bay of Bengal and being able to offer land routes that connect South to Southeast. This geography drives every major external interest as well as every possible challenge. Each power seeker pulls the power cords in different dimensions, contributing to the instability and vulnerability of all stakeholders. China's support for the military junta while engaging with AA and then India's support for the military in an attempt to save its investment while trying to find a connection with AA and the US going through Bangladesh to win influence even if it has to raise a new armed group in the region, all is contributing to the deteriorating security situation of the whole region.

Bangladesh seeks refugee repatriation but enjoys no direct influence and reluctantly relies on China and India, who do not prioritise Rohingya rights or Bangladesh, the United States champions humanitarian accountability but

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has limited presence inside Myanmar, Myanmar's junta wants international investment but resists political reform necessary for stability and the Arakan Army wants international recognition but remains unclear on their Rohingya policy (Chan, 2021).

4.2. Future Scenarios for Rakhine State

The future of Rakhine remains ambiguous, but it can be translated through several scenarios, depending on domestic conflict and international involvement. Continuation in further fragmentation and growing parallel governance seems to continue at least for the near future. The Arakan Army has established control over large portions of the state that it seems to maintain and possibly expand, creating a parallel governance system (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The Tatmadaw still maintains to cling on strategic hubs such as Kyaukphyu and major military installations, remaining in the decision-making and bargaining position, while foreign actors, especially China and India, seem to recalibrate relations according to whoever controls their project areas. The most unfortunate aspect is that the real stakeholders, the Rohingya communities, seem to remain marginalized, with repatriation stalled indefinitely.

There is a possibility of a negotiated settlement between the AA and the Myanmar military, either directly or as part of future federal arrangements, and that is keeping the regional powers reluctant to make any decisive support for any of these two parties in the conflict. The AA has shown interest in long-term autonomy rather than full secession, and the possibility of a ceasefire could solidify this arrangement, bringing some stability to the region. The situation so far doesn't seem to offer native Rohingyas political inclusion in decision-making for the future of the region they belong to. Global diplomatic pressure can alter this situation in their favour, but no external power seems to be committed to ensuring the acknowledgement of the Rohingyas as crucial stakeholders.

5. Conclusion

Rakhine state holds the key to regional prosperity and stability with its highly important geopolitical and geo-economic location and natural resources, but internal, regional, and global power competition in the region has made the lives of the natives a humanitarian crisis. For Tatmadaw, the power struggle in the region is crucial to maintain Myanmar's stability and sovereignty, as well as to offer its position of power to engage with regional and global

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investors. China sees it as the future of its connection to the Indian Ocean and the strategic energy lifeline. For India, connectivity through this corridor to seven states is non-negotiable. For Bangladesh, the conflict is an ongoing refugee burden, although it is bringing in opportunities for diplomatic ties beyond the region. For the United States, Rakhine is an unavoidable strategic venture to counter China and limit its energy independence. For the Arakan Army, it holds potential for autonomy where they can directly engage and bargain with regional and global powers. These overlapping and sometimes contradictory interests create a geopolitical chessboard in which no party seems to win anytime soon, and the Rohingya vulnerability grows every day. In the end, this power battle and its resulting humanitarian crisis remain entangled. No permanent peace, if possible, without resolving humanitarian crises, and humanitarian crises cannot be solved with peace. Their interdependence is inevitable.

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