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How are the Power Elites Being Used
by the Buddhist Leadership to Eradicate the Rohingya in Myanmar?

by

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Dedication

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asia Nations
BCG	Boston Consulting Group
BSPP	Burma Socialist Program Party
CCC	Clean Clothes Campaign
DDSI	Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LPD	Landing Platform Docking
MaBaTha	Association for the Protection of Race and Religion
MEC	Myanmar Economic Corporation
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
OCMSA	Office of Chief of Military Security Affairs
PDF	Peoples' Defense Force
SEES	Stat Economic Enterprises
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPP	Socialist Program Party
UMEHL	Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
WFB	Border Guard Forces Police
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

How are the Power Elites Being Used
by the Buddhists to Eradicate the Rohingya in Myanmar?
Thesis Abstract--Idaho State University (2023)

This thesis examines the situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The Rohingya, the largest group of Muslims within Myanmar, have faced persecution for years. Understanding the Rohingya's current situation necessitates understanding the Buddhist influence in Myanmar and their ties with the power elites: the military, the economic elites and the government, or political elites. The influence of the Buddhists along with the power elites has been instrumental in the near eradication of the Muslim Rohingyas from Myanmar through human rights violations and civil rights violations. Understanding the history of the Rohingyas and the actions taken by the Buddhists, the military, the economic elites and the political elites help explain the Rohingya's situation today and help describe what is needed to help the Rohingya people.

Key words: Myanmar, Burma, Rohingya, Power Elites, Buddhists

CHAPTER I - Introduction and Significance

In March of 2023, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced cuts to its per-person food vouchers from \$12 to \$10 a day. On April 1, it was announced that the amount would be \$8 a day starting June 1, 2023. This was devastating news for the refugees in Cox's Bazaar where over one million Rohingya refugees are trying to survive. The Rohingya will be left with a diet of rice, chickpeas, eggs, and onions. Prior to the March news, 12% of the children were acutely malnourished and 41% chronically malnourished. These numbers are expected to go up with the shift in food vouchers. WFP's country director, Don Scalpelli stated that "anything less than \$12 is insufficient for nutrition for women and children but also for the protection, safety and security for everyone in the camps" ("Rohingya Refugees Decry"). Another \$876 million is needed for the Rohingya refugees as well as Bangladeshi hosting communities ("Rohingya Refugees Decry"). Overall, this cut in aid seriously impacts the nutrition and security of Rohingya refugees, people who have already faced extreme violence and repression.

Mr. Nay San Lwin, co-founder of the advocacy group Free Rohingya Coalition, believes that lack of funding promotes riskier decisions by the Rohingya—and situations where they may become victims of human trafficking, domestic violence, murder, drugs or increased militancy from the armed Rohingya groups. In addition, numerous Rohingya are fleeing to other neighboring countries, or have been relocated to Bhasan Char, a destitute island, by Bangladesh to ease the burden on their country. Repatriation to Myanmar is not an option at present because no firm agreement is in place for a peaceful return, with guarantees of citizenship and ability to own land and find jobs, for the Rohingya (Lwin).

Tragedy is not new to the people of the Cox Bazar, mainly Rohingya from Myanmar. Understanding how we, as a global community, can help avoid future tragedies for these people means we must understand why they have fled Myanmar and are living in this refugee camp. This thesis attempts to delve into some of the reasons behind the flight of the Rohingya, looking at how the power structure in Myanmar has worked against these people. In particular, this thesis attempts to answer the research question: How have the power elite been used by the Buddhists since 2012 to eradicate the Rohingya in Myanmar?

The Muslim Rohingya of Myanmar have been the victims of severe discrimination, violence and loss of civil rights due to Buddhists and the power they exert over the government, military and elites. The decades of atrocities against the Rohingya are the impetus for the work of this thesis. It explores the power of religion, militaries, government, and elites and the violence and upheaval brought about in Myanmar. It intends to show, by using the Power Elite Theory, that the human rights, civil rights, violence and refugee status are impacted by the structure of Myanmar, in particular put into action by the Buddhists who exert great power over the government, the military and the elites. To achieve this, this thesis addresses a variety of topics including background to the country of Myanmar and the Rohingya people, an overview of the Power Elite Theory and a discussion of how power is used against the Rohingya and what can be done moving forward. As such, this thesis is set up in the following manner: Chapter 2 provides a background to the country of Burma/Myanmar and an overview of the power elite (the government, military and economic elites in addition to the Buddhists), Chapter 3 gives an overview of the history and plight of the Rohingya people, Chapter 4 provides the theoretical framework with a focus on the Power Elite Theory, Chapter 5 presents a literature review, and

Chapter 6 brings the previous ideas together in a discussion of the power elites in Myanmar today and offers some suggestions for the future and conclusions.

Chapter II – Background and Literature Review: Burma / Myanmar

The Rohingya consider Myanmar their homeland, thus it is necessary to understand the general history and background of Myanmar in order to understand the complexity of the Rohingya situation. As such, this chapter gives a general overview of Myanmar (formerly Burma).

Burma changed its name to Myanmar in 1986. Some countries, including the United States, did not acknowledge that change and still use Burma when referring to this country. Both names are used in this thesis, depending upon the timeframe (events before 1986 reference Burma), and the sources used (as noted above, some scholars still utilize the name Burma while others utilize the name Myanmar).

Overview

Myanmar is a country of mountains, valleys and long rivers. It has an abundance of natural resources such as hardwood, rice, tin, ivory and precious jewels. The history is rich in stories of kings and kingdoms, traders of imports and exports. The Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal are two important bodies of water off the coast of Myanmar. Myanmar is bordered by China, India, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand and is strategically located near Indian Ocean shipping lanes. (See Figure 1 Map of Myanmar). Historically, and today, most of the people have lived and continue to live along the coastal regions where they have made and make their living fishing (Myat, Elias, and Poole).

Figure 1 Map of Myanmar (CIA World Factbook)



The People of Myanmar

The following 7 paragraphs are taken from David I. Steinberg's book "Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know": The Pyu were the first migrants to found a great kingdom in the territory now called Myanmar. The Pyu were devout Buddhists who ultimately claimed over 18 kingdoms, mainly in the southern portion of Myanmar. To the south of the Pyu lived the Mon, another early group to settle in Myanmar. Over time the Mon gained control of the southern region of Myanmar, especially by controlling trade routes. In the northern part of Myanmar, the

Bamars (Burmans) rose to power. By the mid-9th century, after many years of dynastic struggles, the Bamars led a powerful kingdom that unified Myanmar and inaugurated the Bamar domination of what is today called Myanmar. The unification of all parts of modern Myanmar marked the beginning of the region as a distinct political entity. The kingdom survived until 1276 when it fell to Kubla Khan.

For the next 3 centuries, the region was plagued by disunity and consequently divided into small states. The ensuing dynasties competed for control and engaged the Arabs, Portuguese British and French in trade. Ultimately these dynasties were merged and set up a king as the head of state and the patron of Buddhism—a figurehead who both conquered neighboring lands and renounced the world. This was also the time when the Buddhist monks were formally organized and, although technically supposed to be outside the sphere of politics, molded public opinion. The king and the Buddhist monks controlled virtually all of the productive land in Myanmar, minimizing opposition from economic elites or landed hereditary nobles. It was also during this period of time that the Kamans and the Rohingya, both Muslim groups, were known to have settled in Burma.

By the 1800s, the British interest in Myanmar increased. They fought for the territory, wanting to make the region a province of India. With the military win, the British named the territory Burma, in honor of the Burmans. The British also decided to eliminate the monarchy and separate the government from religious affairs. The loss of independence was hard for the people of Myanmar, and armed resistance continued for many years. Under the monarchy, the government and the Buddhists had shared a symbiotic relationship, with financial and moral support that gave legitimacy to both groups and provided for some checks and balances. Thus,

the demise of the monarchy and Buddhist monkhood, twin pillars of the society of Myanmar, was devastating to the country.

While under British control there was sustained unrest and those in power changed frequently. Finally, after three wars with Britain, in 1824, 1852, and 1885, the region became a British colony known as British Burma. During this time, the British economic impact on the region expanded, and changed the socio-economic structure of the region. British Burma was a part of the export-oriented enterprise of the British, benefitting wealthy British rather than the people of Myanmar. Additionally, the British social impact also expanded, they continued to work against Buddhism. The British set up schools that spoke against Buddhism, as a means to disempower the Buddhists. Although there were efforts by the people of Myanmar to create alternative schools and associations to strengthen Buddhism, most of the power was in the hands of the British. Overall, for 53 years the relationship between Burma and the British remained contentious (Steinberg).

In 1937 the British separated Burma from India and granted Burma its own constitution. Shortly thereafter, during World War II, the Burmese leaders wanted to bargain with the British government, hoping the British would want their support in the war. When this was not well received, the Burmese turned to Japan, who attacked British territories including Burma. Japan ended up occupying the country in 1942, ultimately declaring Burma a sovereign state, yet in reality controlling through a puppet government. The Burmese then turned back to the British who started discussion for a peaceful transfer of power. In 1948 Burma gained its independence.

Since that time, many of the governments, and military, have managed to minimize the influence of the people, or at least some groups of the people. Mirroring the tactics of the British

to disempower some in order to empower others, the governments of Myanmar have quite consistently emboldened some groups and have globally isolated their people.

Even though Burma is a unified, independent country, the political and religious divides still exist. Furthermore, the desire for power, or for the Buddhists desire to regain power, has created a trend of continued violence by the Buddhists and military toward ethnic communities, particularly the Muslims of the Rakhine State. Overall, since independence, the Buddhists have wielded an enormous amount of power over the government and the military. Additionally, because they wanted Burma to be “pure”, to be 100% Buddhists, they have utilized their power to systematically rid the country of the Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. (Yin, Elias, and Poolos).

Myanmar’s Government

Today, Myanmar is officially a parliamentary republic government with a Prime Minister and two vice presidents. The legal system is mixed, including English common law and customary law. However, in 2021, the military took over the government, declaring a state of emergency. Thus, currently, the country is under a military rule. Furthermore, in January 2023, the military regime announced a 6-month extension on the state of emergency that they put into place in 2021 (CIA World Factbook). This will likely delay elections that had been scheduled for August 2023.

Myanmar’s constitution, the supreme law of Myanmar, was approved by referendum in 2008. Within the constitution, it is stated that the Armed Forces retain substantial control of the government; 25% of the seats in Parliament are reserved for serving military officers, and numerous ministries are mandated to have leadership by a serving military officer (CIA World Factbook).

Myanmar's bicameral Assembly of the Union consists of the House of Nationalities and the House of Representatives. Despite the constitution calling for a bicameral parliament, on February 1, 2021, the military regime dissolved the entire Assembly of the Union (both houses), thus currently the State Administration Council (SAC) governs in place of the Assembly of the Union. Myanmar's judicial system is based on a British-era system and the constitution provides for a supreme court, a constitutional tribunal, and lower courts. However, the current military regime rules by decree, thus, there are minimal legal guarantees, and the judiciary is not independent (Hardig).

Historically, Myanmar has had many political parties, representing diverse political perspectives. However, in 2023, the military regime announced a new law that restricts political parties and their ability to participate in elections, and thus centralizes power. This severely restricts the number of official political parties within the country. It has also limited the amount of political participation allowed within the country—a direct response to the public protests that have occurred since the military coup (Hardig).

The constitutional structure of Myanmar's government appears to allow for broad, although militarily focused, participation and representation. However, the actual government that exists today, there are few avenues for participation, particularly from groups who are not seen as regime-supporting, Buddhists groups.

Myanmar's Military

The CIA World Factbook provides detailed information on Burma's military, indicating that the Burmese Defense Service (aka Armed Forces of Burma, Myanmar Army, Royal Armed Forces, or the Tatmadaw) consists of: the Army (Tatmadaw Kyi), Navy (Tatmadaw Yay), and Air Force (Tatmadaw Lay), the People's Militia, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Burma (People's) Police Force, and the Border Guard Forces/Police.

Under the 2008 constitution, the Tatmadaw controls appointments of senior officials to lead the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Border Affairs, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. As an addition to this power, in March 2022, a new law gave the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw the authority to appoint or remove the head of the Burma Police Force, the group primarily responsible for internal security (CIA World Factbook). The Border Guard Police is administratively part of the Burma Police Force but operationally distinct; both are under the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is led by an active-duty military general and itself subordinate to the military command. Estimates vary widely as to the size of active-duty personnel from approximately 300,000 to as many as 400,000 (CIA World Factbook).

Since the country's founding, the Tatmadaw has been heavily involved in domestic politics and the national economy. The Tatmadaw controlled the government of the country for five decades following a military coup in 1962, and even prior to the most recent coup in 2021, the military already controlled three key security ministries (Defense, Border, and Home Affairs), one of two vice presidential appointments, 25% of the parliamentary seats, and had a proxy political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) (Hardig). In addition, the Tatmadaw also holds economic power: it owns and operates two business conglomerates that have over 100 subsidiaries (CIA World Factbook). The business activities of these conglomerates include banking and insurance, hotels, tourism, jade and ruby mining, timber, construction, real estate, and the production of palm oil, sugar, soap, cement, beverages, drinking water, coal, and gas. The military also manages a film industry, publishing houses, and television stations.

The following information is taken from a BBC investigation in 2021: Given its control of the Burmese Politics Force, the Ministry of Border Affairs, and the Ministry of Home Affairs,

it is clear that the Tatmadaw's primary operational focus is internal security. This explains why the Tatmadaw is conducting widespread counterinsurgency operations against anti-regime forces. These operations are deemed necessary for control of the public, and focus mainly on those individuals involved in the armed rebellion launched following the 2021 coup, and on an array of ethnically-based separatist groups. The Tatmadaw has been accused of abusing its power, committing atrocities in the conduct of its campaign against the insurgency and separatists (BBC).

Within the Tatmadaw, the Army is the dominant service, and largely configured for counterinsurgency operations, although it has some conventional warfare capabilities. Its principal combat forces are organized into 10 centrally-commanded light infantry/rapid reaction divisions, approximately 20 regionally-based, divisional-sized “military operations commands,” and several brigade-sized “regional operations commands.” (CIA World Factbook). The Army’s insurgency operations are supported by the National Police, which has dozens of paramilitary combat police battalions. The Air Force also has a large counterinsurgency role with more than 100 combat-capable aircraft and helicopters, ground attack aircraft and helicopter gunships, complemented by some multipurpose fighters. Finally, the Navy has traditionally been a coastal defense force, with the majority of the combat fleet consisting of fast attack and patrol vessels. However, in recent years the Navy has expanded its blue water capabilities, and has a small force of frigates and corvettes, as well as a landing platform docking amphibious assault ship and 2 attack submarines acquired since 2020 (CIA World Factbook).

The military is supported by hundreds of pro-government militias. Some of these groups are integrated within the Tatmadaw’s command structure as Border Guard Forces, organized as battalions with a mix of militia forces, ethnic armed groups, and government soldiers that are

armed, supplied, and paid by the Tatmadaw (BBC). Other pro-military regime militias that are not integrated within the Tatmadaw command structure receive direction and some support from the military. A third type of pro-regime militias is the small community-based units that are armed, coordinated, and trained by local Tatmadaw forces. These groups are activated as needed. Overall, each of these militia groups are a part of the larger force used to control the public; the military regime has raised new militia units to help combat the popular uprising.

The military is powerful in Myanmar. This power comes from the constitution, but more so from the current military regime. In addition, the power of the military is expanded by support from militia groups within Myanmar.

Myanmar's Economic Elites

Historically Myanmar did not have much of an economic elite class. The wealth was in the hands of the government and Buddhists, then in the hands of the British. It was not until independence that the elite, and middle classes, were prominent within Myanmar. These classes grew for a time under Myanmar's sovereign rule, but were impacted by military coups.

Lindsay Maizland writes that during the decades of independence, Myanmar has struggled with military rule, civil war, poor governance and wide-spread poverty. Myanmar is a diverse country with more than 100 ethnic groups (see Table 1) with 2/3 of the population being ethnic Burmans who enjoyed privileged positions in society as well as high positions in the military. Conversely, the other ethnic groups have faced systemic discrimination, lack of education, no opportunities in government and abuses at the hands of the military. For many years, human rights advocates have documented the Tatmadaw's abuses against civilians. Abuses include extrajudicial killings, forced labor, rape, torture, and use of child soldiers. In 2016 and 2017, the Tatmadaw and local security forces maintained brutal campaigns against the Rohingya, killing thousands of people and burning 100's of villages (Maizland 3). Rights groups

and the United Nation's office suspect that the military committed genocide against the Rohingya (Maizland 5).

Table 1 Ethnic groups in Myanmar by percentage (CIA World Factbook)

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Burman	68%
Shan	9%
Karen	7%
Rakhine	4%
Chinese	3%
Indian	2%
Mon	2%

In 2018, the government reopened the country to tourism and foreign travelers in general. With this change, there was a great hope for economic growth with many opportunities for retail growth, construction and tourism. According to Bharadwaj et al., of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), the middle and affluent classes would double in size, accounting for 15% of the country's population by the year 2020, should the country's economic reforms sustain their momentum. Although these optimistic projections were not realized due to the effects the 2021 coup had on the population, Myanmar does have an elite class today (Bharadwaj et al.).

The elites that are a part of Myanmar's business community have made their money in industries such as construction, oil production, mining, rubber and logging (Globe 1). Many of these industries were started under the British, but have been expanded by a select few—cronyism is alive and well in Myanmar. The business elite have invested wealth in hotels and office buildings while outside, in direct contrast, are the average Burmese citizens doing their best to survive. Besides these legal sources of wealth, other sources include arms dealing, and the smuggling of gems, drugs and timber. In addition, the Tatmadaw, as noted previously, also holds corporate interests. As a result, they have economic strength which they use to

institutionalize their dominance. (Yamahata 4). Finally, ethnic Chinese, who were born in Myanmar, make up a portion of the ultra- wealthy within Myanmar.

Today's economic elite in Myanmar is composed of a relatively small group. Following the military coup d'état in 1962, policies were adopted that aimed to promote Myanmar self-sufficiency through tight state control over economic activities. Thus, according to Yamahata, the true elites of Myanmar today are the Tatmadaw or military forces. Thus, the Tatmadaw has become the country's predominant political, economic, and cultural elites, overshadowing any other contending force. Today, other than the Buddhists, the military is the most deeply embedded institution in Myanmar's politics, economy and society (Yamahata 1).

CHAPTER III - Buddhists

While the origin of the Buddhists of Myanmar is difficult to decipher, there is archaeological evidence suggesting they date back to the 5th century. Buddhism (specifically Theravada Buddhism) has been the state religion of Myanmar since 1961. It is practiced by nearly 90% of the population, or 45 million followers (Pew Research). Myanmar is the most religious Buddhist country in terms of the proportion of monks in the population and proportion of income spent on religion (Office of International Religious Freedom). Thus, it is not surprising that the Buddhists in Myanmar wield an enormous amount of power within the country. In addition, the Buddhists also wield an enormous amount of power over the government and the military. “Nine out of 10 people are Buddhists as are the top leaders in the business world, the government, the military and the police.” (Office of International Religious Freedom 2).

Types of Buddhism

There are three major sects of Buddhists: Theravada, Mahayana, and Tantric Buddhism (Swearer). Theravada Buddhism, mentioned above, is the predominant sect in Myanmar. This is considered the more traditionalist type of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism is a Buddhist school that came to prominence during the reign of King Asoka the Great around 250 BC, and is the main form of Buddhism practiced in Southeast Asia, especially Sri-Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar. Theravada can be translated as “the teaching of the Elders”, respectfully pointing out its direct descent from the Buddha and his disciples, or as “the ancient teaching”, a reference to the unchanging and universal nature of the truths that the Buddha rediscovered. Theravada Buddhists purport that these truths have been preserved in their most original form in this orthodox Buddhist school (Swearer).

Mahayna Buddhism is the second type of Buddhism. Mahayna means “great vehicle” and was developed in India. Mahayna Buddhism came about when new texts were added to the Buddhist canon—which caused rifts among the various types of Buddhism. Reformers called themselves the “greater vehicle” (Mahayana) and labeled the traditionalists the “lesser vehicle” (Theravada). Mahayana has its greatest impact in Japan, China and Korea. There are very few Mahayna Buddhists in Myanmar; the number is so small that there is no documentation on these Buddhists.

The final type of Buddhism is Tantric or Esoteric Buddhism, sometimes called Vajrayana (the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt). Tantric Buddhism was developed about 500–600 C.E. in India. An offshoot of Mahayana Buddhism, the origins of Tantric Buddhism can be traced to ancient Hindu and Vedic practices, including esoteric ritual texts designed to achieve physical, mental, and spiritual breakthroughs. Tantric Buddhism is sometimes described as offering a shortcut to enlightenment. Because some practices subverted mainstream Buddhism and Hinduism, its practitioners were secretive. The Tantric Buddhists were run out of Burma in the 11th century (Swearer).

The Buddhists’ dynamics and power in the region of Myanmar has mainly encompassed Theravada Buddhism. However, even with a fairly consistent type of Buddhism, there have been many changes in the beliefs and practices of Myanmar’s Buddhism. These changes stem from different trade, cultural relationships and conflicts with other kingdoms and countries, especially India, Thailand and Sri Lanka, which affected Myanmar’s Buddhism. Similarly, modernity and the British in the 19th century also impacted Myanmar’s Buddhism (Swearer).

Buddhism and Conflict

When one thinks of Buddhists, one thinks of peace, caring and meditation. The world sees Buddhism as the Dalai Lama, crimson-robed, barefoot monks moving among the people

spreading good will and kindness. It is unusual to link Buddhism to violence but as is outlined in this thesis, Buddhists do resort to violence when it comes to protecting their country. The desire to make Myanmar “pure” is driving the Buddhists to discrimination and violence. They are afraid that the Muslims will take over their country, religion and land, despite the fact that, according to the Office of International Religious Freedom, US Department of State’s 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom, only 4.3% of the 55 million population of Burma are Muslim (14).

Thomas Fuller of the New York Times quotes from radical Buddhist leader, Ashin Wirathu as saying that the Muslim minority in Myanmar are “the enemy”. He rants that “You can be full of kindness and love, but you cannot sleep next to a mad dog” referring to the Muslims (1). “I call them troublemakers because they are troublemakers. I am proud to be called a radical Buddhist” (Fuller 1). While Wirathu claims no responsibility for the riots and the killings of the Muslims, it is safe to say that he has been able to incite protests and violence with his rhetoric. Myanmar Buddhists want to be the only religion, to be a “pure” state. They want no competition, and no threats of losing their land to ethnicities, particularly to Muslims and specifically to the Rohingya.

The discrimination against Muslims in Myanmar has led to Buddhist extremism, which is becoming more of an issue for the country. Post-independence socio-economic issues, and the perception that Buddhism is under siege in Myanmar has provoked this extremism and the attacks against Muslims. There is now a large group of militant Buddhists who promote the supremacy of Buddhism, and can be Islamophobic, ethnocentric and chauvinistic (Fuller 2). These beliefs are foreign to the romantic, pacifistic and compassionate Buddhism history, yet they exist in Myanmar due to the Buddhists perceiving a threat from Islam. What began in 2012

as skirmishes in backcountry villages has become a country-wide fundamentalist, pro-Buddhist movement whose agenda includes boycotting Muslim-made goods and promoting the killing of Muslims. As such, the extremist Buddhists are tarnishing what was once seen as a remarkable and rare peaceful transition from military rule to democracy (Swearer).

Though there are many Buddhists who disagree with the militant actions, they are a silent majority. This is due in part to the power that comes from aligning with the other elites and from the power of protecting Buddhism as a justification for actions within a majority Buddhist country. Quoting Michael Jerryson “A monk’s cultural position within Burmese Buddhism strengthens his authority when he frames his preaching and actions as a defense of Buddhism. Without responding to the logic of these authorizing discourses, responses intended to counter the violence emerging from Buddhist nationalism and promote tolerance, will be ineffective” (794). Thomas Fuller quotes Ashin Sanda Wara, head of a monastic school in Yangon, as saying “monks in Burma are divided 50-50 between moderates and extremists” (4).

Power of Extremist Buddhism

The extremist Buddhists are fighting for power—in particular giving power to the Buddhists and taking it from the Muslims. Peter Lehr, who is a leading authority on Buddhism militancy, sheds light on the Buddhists and dispels the outside perspective of pacifism being Buddhism’s trademark. In respect to Theravada Buddhist discourse on violence, he examines how teachings provide for concessions because violence is unavoidable. He explains that religious discourse recognizes that violence happens. Mr. Lehr surveys Myanmar’s history, demonstrating that Buddhist militancy existed prior to independence, with monks becoming involved in violent resistance during the colonial era. He is emphatic that all Buddhists not be linked to the extremist or militant monks and that they must engage in a “tightrope walk, with the

possibility of being summarily disrobed because of having committed a disrobing offence should they take their righteous violence too far” (Lehr 276-277).

Jerryson quotes Charles Lindholm who believes cultural and mechanisms of authority-production are a way to explain the power and resonance of preaching and writing by contemporary Burmese monks (800). As an example, Ashin Wirathu, a radical monk, has charisma and a wide audience even though his rhetoric is vile and threatening. He is able to incite the military into violence with the help of the government and the elites.

Jerryson also quotes Theologian Charles Kimball who states “the invocation that the ends justify the means is a common way to persuade religious followers to commit violence” (807). This dynamic is certainly present in Myanmar and the “underlying imperative is enhanced by monastic endorsement of the threat narrative” (Jerryson 807). In places such as Myanmar, “religious cultural authority of monks reaches beyond text and ritual and is embedded deeply within society” (Jerryson 811). Arnold and Turner, explain why we shouldn’t be surprised that Buddhists are violent:

There is no shortage of instances of violence. Sri Lanka’s long civil war (1983-2009) involved a great deal of Buddhist nationalism. Political violence in Thailand has often seen Buddhist involvement. Histories of Buddhist societies are as checkered as most human history. It is important to note that the current violence against the Rohingya is not just a religious matter. Myanmar’s long history of exclusion and violence toward the Rohingya is framed by the question as to who counts as a legitimate ethnic minority and who is judged to be a foreigner and thus an illegal migrant.

Tommy Walker notes that it is not just the Muslims who are targeted by the Buddhists, although the Rohingya face a lot of the violence and discrimination. And the Burma Human Rights Network, a local group, stated that the military regime has a long history of targeting

religious minorities. Walker writes, “A crackdown on religious groups has escalated [in Myanmar] since 2021. All of the religious groups are being caught up in the fallout from the military coup” (1). In the Chin state, where more than 90% of the residents are Christian, the military killed civilians and destroyed religious buildings in October, 2021. Father Domanic, a Catholic priest states that “no religion can do well” in Myanmar (Walker 2).

The history of Myanmar and its Buddhist population, sheds light on the Rohingya situation. The following chapter explains how the Rohingya, though they have proven their rights to be citizens, have suffered unspeakable violence incited by the Buddhists and carried out by the government, the military and the economic elites.

CHAPTER IV - The Rohingya

The Rohingya are an Indio-Aryan ethnic group that predominately follows Islam. They consider the Rakhine State in Myanmar their homeland (see Figure 2), although many have become internally displaced, or have fled to refugee camps such as Cox Bazaar in Bangladesh since 2017. Rakhine State is Myanmar's least developed state with a poverty rate of 78% compared to the 37.5 % national average (Banerjee). Widespread poverty, poor infrastructure and lack of employment adds to the tensions between Buddhists and Muslims.

Figure 2 Map of Rakhine State (“Caged without a State”)



The Rohingya maintain that they are indigenous to western Myanmar; however, the government considers the Rohingya as British colonial and post-colonial migrants from Bangladesh. The government recognizes the Kaman as Myanmar's precolonial Muslim population, and suggests that the Rohingya conflate their history with that of the Kaman in order to advance their own separatist agenda. Thus, although Myanmar is a patchwork of 135 ethnic and religious groups, and is consequently considered one of the most diverse countries in the region, the Rohingya have been singled out as being unworthy to have legitimate ethnic status or

citizen status. Because of this, they are unable to receive any type of education, medical care, necessities such as food and work. According to Amitav Acharya, “The Myanmar census does not include the 1.2 million Rohingya Muslims of the Rakhine State, who are not enumerated in the census and are ‘officially’ considered a foreign population by the Central government” (Acharya 45). Furthermore, the Rohingya have been denied citizenship under the 1982 Myanmar nationality law. This, along with other legislation, restricts the Rohingyas’ freedom of movement, access to education and employment.

People from Bangladesh have traded with people in the Rakhine State of Myanmar for hundreds of years. With trade came settlement, thus come of the individuals from Bangladesh established themselves in Myanmar, forming a Muslim community. During the British colonial period in the 1800’s, additional people from Bangladesh were brought to Myanmar to work in the British-led administration, adding substantially to the Muslim community in 50 years. This increase in Muslims was resented by some Myanmar people, forming the root causes of much of the animosity against the Rohingya.

World War II exacerbated the animosity. During this time, the Rohingya Muslims supported the British while many Buddhists supported the Japanese. After Myanmar gained independence in 1948, the Muslims fought for equal rights but were defeated, solidifying the divide between the Rohingya and the Buddhists of Myanmar.

The Muslims of Myanmar have been targeted by the military and by the Buddhists since 1948. In particular, the Rohingya have been subject to torture, rape, murder, burning of villages and forced displacement within Myanmar as well as refugee camps in Bangladesh. Their story of discrimination, violence against their people and properties and refugee status in bordering countries is important to address.

Conflict between the Buddhists and the Rohingya

The militant Buddhists have exerted their vast power over the government and military to promote unspeakable horrors against the Rohingya. The human rights violations alone should be enough for action to be taken. Physical torture, rape, dismemberment, burned villages, economic devastation and having to flee to Bangladesh to live a life of fear and meagre existence is too much for far too long. Yes, the Chin and the Karen have suffered as well and have had to flee to other countries, but for the Rohingya, it has been constant discrimination and violence since 1948. The conflict that ensued in 1948, and continues today at a more increasingly violent level, initially began as a difference in religions between Buddhists and Muslims.

There are historical reasons why Myanmar has great tolerance for Buddhists and not for the Muslim population, in particular Myanmar's Rohingya. Arnold and Turner believe that Myanmar's experience under British colonial rule caused religion—mainly Buddhism—to be an important and operative aspect of Burmese identity. Religious identity under British rule became significant – significant enough that it can now be mobilized to turn a large number of Buddhists against the Muslim neighbors with whom they lived peacefully for generations. Furthermore, colonial discourse that praised Burmese Buddhists for their tolerance functioned in part to condemn the 'superstitious and backward' practices of caste Hindus and Muslims in colonial Myanmar. This discourse was picked up by Burmese nationalists and is now invoked, tragically, to justify the violence towards the Rohingya Muslims (Arnold and Turner 4).

CHAPTER V - Theoretical Framework: The Power Elite Theory

The theoretical framework for this paper is based on the Power Elite Theory (Mills). The Power Elite Theory addresses the idea of power stratification and the extent to which societies are dominated by elites. This thesis uses the Power Elite Theory as a means to show that the elites of Myanmar have perpetuated the persecution and genocide of the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar, a subject which is expanded upon in future chapters. Power elites exist in every country in much the same form. The first section of this chapter discusses the general ideas of the Power Elite Theory. Then the chapter continues with a discussion of not only the traditional power elites: political, military and economic elites (Mills), but also the role of the religious elites within Myanmar.

The Power Elite Theory

The development of the Power Elite Theory stems from work on social class ties and other background characteristics of elites, and the extent to which the society is open (or not) for those from non-elite backgrounds (Mills). Mills makes several profound observations on power and power elites, including the ideas that “Balance of power implies equality of power, and equality of power seems wholly fair and even honorable, but in fact what is one man’s honorable balance is often another’s unfair imbalance” (246).

David Rothkopf quotes Mills as designating the top tier of business, government and military communities as being a remarkably small overlapping echelon of deciders, or “power elites”. Within each country, the power elite is composed of men whose positions enabled them to transcend the ordinary environment of men and women. They are in a position to make decisions having major consequences. They are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. They rule the big corporations and the machinery of the state.

They direct military establishments and they occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure in which are now centered the effective means of the power, wealth and celebrity. (Rothkopf 8).

Scholars of the Power Elite Theory include Domhoff who showed that one of the important means of domination is for the elites to hold key institutional positions in society. Similarly, Dye shows the connections between the government elite and the corporate elite. Sonquist and Koenig show the interconnections between government power and economic power—highlighting how the political and economic elites work together. In other words, scholars of the Power Elite Theory look at to what extent the elites dominate society.

Research on the issue of elites has focused on racial, regional, educational and religious backgrounds that bring elites together (Prewitt and McAllister; Schoenfeld). Of particular interest for this thesis is the research on religion and the power elites. Much of this focuses on the loyalty of the religious elites to the political elites (Schoenfeld; Spenkuch and Tillmann). This thesis adds to the research by not only examining the role of the religious elites, the Buddhists, in controlling Myanmar's non-elites, in particular the Rohingya, but also by discussing how Myanmar's power elites show their loyalty to the religious elites, Buddhists, rather than vice versa.

Religious “Power Elites”

Organized religions have emerged as support systems for political hierarchies throughout time. Barber sheds light on Christian religions and the fact that they “buddy” up to the rich and powerful and side with the elites in preserving social inequality. He appreciates Karl Marx and his viewpoints on religion, particularly the statement that religion helps the populace remain calm despite the inequality of the class system. Religion provides a justification for inequality by sapping the revolutionary fervor of the masses, rendering them passive in the face of

injustice” (Barber 3). Thus, religions have been used to perpetuate the elite control; the religious elites ask people to obey not only those who are the heads of their religious entities, but also other lawful superiors including the government, the aristocracy, and the economic elites who enjoyed hereditary wealth and political power (Barber 2-5).

Organized religions help hierarchical political systems but they are also hierarchical. Catholics have the Pope and Archbishops as part of their hierarchy just as other Christian religions, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, have multiple layers of leaders from the president of the church down to local leaders. Similarly, the leadership of Buddhism is organized into the following hierarchy: The Dalai Lama, Buddhist monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. In each of these examples, people holding these offices are considered power elites. They are highly influential not only to their congregations but to their communities as well.

Elizabeth Oldmixon considers the role of religious elites as seeing themselves as high within the elites’ organizational framework. The ranks of religious leadership are dominated by men; non-elites and marginalized groups, often minorities, are devalued and not admitted into the leadership ranks. This denying non-elites access to become a part of the religious elites is important not only due to the devaluing of people, but also because in “some national contexts, religious institutions are an arm of the state, which does not permit any corporate religious activity other than its own” (Oldmixon 877-878).

To fully understand the role that the religious elite can play in a country, two cases are briefly covered. The first, El Salvador, looks at the role of the religious elites to support and embolden the traditional power elite. The second, Iran, looks at how the religious elite are emboldened by the traditional power elite, creating a situation where Mills’ power elite help the

religious elites to subjugate specific groups of people. This second example is key to understanding the situation in Myanmar.

El Salvador

El Salvador is one of the world's most violent countries (Clark 1). This violence is due, in part, to the fact that in El Salvador the power elites have used religion as a means to maintain power. With 45.9% of the population as Catholic (Zinn 1), and many having strong views that upholding Catholicism is important, religion can be utilized as a way to influence the mass public. Pulling on the people's religious convictions has allowed the elites of El Salvador to the use of the Catholic Church as a means to manipulate power for years.

One of the most notable events in El Salvador's history that, reveals the elites use of the Catholic Church as a means to hold power is the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Romero had denounced the military government – thus the military and political elites –because of violence. Romero did not care about politics but he did care for his congregation and how the country's politics effected the people of El Salvador. Many of the people were starving and being brutalized. Romero was openly critical of the injustice and state violence—speaking out against the political elites and military; he was very verbal when others in the church were not. Romero railed against the repressive military government and an economy in which a few had vast riches and the majority lived in destitution.

In spite of working for the people, Romero had no support from the hierarchy of the church. In El Salvador, the Catholic Church chose to remain “neutral” within political affairs, although they often did this by showing support to the government. They had no wish to ruffle the feathers of the government or the military. Romero did lash back at the military, and spent many years of his life detailing the struggles of his people: murders, disappearances and attacks on workers and organizers. He reported on the difference between what the people saw happen

and official accounts, made by the government and military—the political elite. (Manning 1-5). In 1980, Romero was gunned down while leading mass. Although no one was convicted for the murder of Romero, the UN-created Truth Commission for El Salvador concluded that a military leader, who later founded a right-wing nationalist political party, ordered the killing.

This is one example of where the religious elite in El Salvador increased the power of the political elites. This type cooperation among the religious elites and political and military elites is still happening in El Salvador today, although not to the same degree. For example, in 2022 the Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador, the capital city, praised the government's crackdown on gangs and months-long state of emergency. Critics say the campaign has violated human rights and swept up apparently innocent people ("Salvadoran Archbishop").

As Benedicte Bull's research on the elites in Central America points out, the role of religion is not only that of a resource that can be wielded by elites but is also a necessary element of the 'ideological frameworks' that shape the mind-set and thus help control the public. Thus, El Salvadoran elites' use of religion has allowed them to maintain control over the people, keeping the power elites in power (Zavala-Pelayo).

Iran

Another way the religious elites can be connected to the power elites is in situations such as Iran, where the religious elites hold control of the government and country. Today's leaders of Iran stake their legitimacy and very survival upon claims to Islamic leadership, specifically on Shia Islam. This choice of the Shia sect of Islam points to political agendas and a society divided along sectarian lines.

Shia groups had long experienced marginalization at the hands of political elites wishing to retain power. Thus, in the decade after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran's military elite were persuaded to join the religious elites to help establish Shia groups and

empower a once-oppressed group. The government elites quickly followed (Article 3.16 of the Iranian Constitution) to provide support to Shia groups, and thus the religious elite.

Within Iran today, the use of religion as a validating force continues (“World Report 2022: Iran”). In 2022, authorities, comprised of the traditional power elites, along with the religious elites, brutally repressed widespread protests demanding fundamental rights, such as labor union strikes against rising prices, and teacher protests for fair wages and better healthcare, with security forces unlawfully using excessive and lethal force against protesters. Internationally this was seen as a move to maintain the power of the religious elites—utilizing the political, military and economic (“traditional”) elites in a manner that also provides them with more security and power. Authorities have shown no willingness to investigate serious human rights violations committed under their control. The use of the elitist government and the power of Islamic religion provides them with the perceived right to do whatever they deem necessary to keep people in line.

Iran’s government arrested and sentenced scores of peaceful human rights activists on vague national security charges, while failing to investigate reports of abuse or torture by police and security forces. Security agencies targeted ethnic and religious minorities and violently enforced discriminatory dress codes for women. Iranian law denies freedom of religion to Baha’is and discriminates against them. Authorities continue to arrest and prosecute members of the Baha’i faith on vague national security charges and to close businesses owned by them. Iranian authorities also systematically refuse to allow Baha’is to register at public universities. The government also discriminates against other religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims, and restricts cultural and political activities among the country’s Azeri, Kurdish, Arab, and Baluch ethnic minorities. Minority activists are regularly arrested and prosecuted on arbitrary

national security charges in trials that grossly fall short of international standards. The government has also restricted the use of minorities' language and cultural activities. The hierarchy of the Iranian government and Islam are able to do whatever they want to people of other faiths.

Even within this year, 2023, on May 24, the nongovernmental organization Imam Ali's Popular Student Relief Society (IAPSRS) posted on its Twitter that the government ordered the dissolution of the group, accepting the Interior Ministry's assessment that IAPSRS had "deviated" from its original mission and "insulted religious beliefs." The court cited "questioning Islamic rulings" and "promoting falsehood by publishing statements against the Islamic Republic of Iran" as evidence of "deviation." Iran's government and the Islamic religion are so closely tied together that they are able to use their joint elitist power to maintain power for both.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the Power Elite theory in regards to government, military, economic elites and religion. The influence of these groups, good and bad, have determined much of what has happened and is happening in the world today. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's warning in 1961 is a fitting end to the chapter. His words are as timely now as they were in 1961.

The conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual-is felt in every city, every Statehouse, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist (Eisenhower).

The following chapter looks at how the interactions of the power elite in Myanmar, the political, military, economic and religious elites, is shaping the way the country has treated and continues to treat the Rohingya.

CHAPTER VI – Discussion: The Power Elites and Myanmar Today

This chapter attempts to answer, why are the Buddhists using their power over the government, the elite and the military to eradicate the Muslim Rohingya from Myanmar? To do this, the chapter starts with an overview of Myanmar today and then discusses how this is connected to the treatment of the Rohingya.

Today Myanmar has a population of 58,000,000 people. It is one of the world's poorest states, with decaying social structures, lack of health care, education, agriculture and nutrition. Food insecurity is high among the problems facing the people of Myanmar. Furthermore, since the COVID-19 pandemic and the February, 2021 military coup, underdevelopment, climate change, and unequal investment threaten progress and sustainability planning (Edwards).

Among the issues facing Myanmar today is the fact that it has “the highest number of child soldiers, highest levels of infant mortality and lowest levels of spending on health and education” (Phan xii). In addition, the UN has accused the government of crimes against humanity due to the use of slave labor - the highest in the world (Phan xii). Finally, Myanmar has high levels of corruption and media censorship, engages in ethnic cleansing, still uses land mines, and denies international aid to its population (Phan xii).

These issues are representative of the intense social issues within the country—namely the conflict surrounding the Rohingya. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are 1.2 million displaced persons of concern in Myanmar due to government offensives against armed ethnic minority groups (mainly the Rohingya), natural disasters, and forced evictions (Grandi). This figure includes 810,000 internally displaced people and 600,000 stateless Rohingya of which 148,000 remain displaced (Grandi). However, the number of

stateless persons is dramatically lower than it was due to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh since the 2017 military crackdown (Grandi).

Discussion

In order to answer the research question presented at the start of this thesis, how have the power elite been used by the Buddhists since 2012 to eradicate the Rohingya in Myanmar? it is necessary to understand what has been happening to the Rohingya in Myanmar since 2012. Understanding this also necessitates a brief explanation of the 1990s because, though persecution of the Rohingya began much earlier, the 1990s saw a major upswing in the violence towards the Rohingya in Myanmar. This violence set up the issues of 2012 when the Rakhine State Riots erupted, intensifying conflict between the Muslim Rohingya and the Buddhists of Rakhine State.

Rohingya refugees arriving in Bangladesh in 1991 and 1992 were fleeing human rights violations happening in the Rakhine State. Violations included executions, torture, rape, forced labor and deportation. Widespread repression by the Burmese security forces gave them no choice but to leave Myanmar in huge numbers. Repression occurred in the context of the Burmese authorities' denial of citizenship rights to the Rohingyas. Under the 1982 Citizenship Law most Rohingyas along with members of a few other ethnic minorities were denied recognition as citizens. To further this, in the 1990's President Thein Sein, under pressure from Buddhist nationalists, refused to provide identification cards to the Rohingya. This coordination between the Buddhists and political elites disempowered the Rohingya who were forced to carry cards that identify them as foreigners with no citizenship.

This clear disenfranchising of the Rohingya helped embolden those who wanted to see the Rohingya eliminated from Myanmar. As such, these groups perpetrated sectarian violence in 2012 and 2016. This violence resulted in tens of thousands of Rohingya fleeing their homes. Following the 2012 issues, in October 2014, the political elites of Myanmar drafted an Action

Plan for the Rakhine State. Under the Rakhine State Action Plan, the Rohingya must demonstrate their family has lived in Myanmar for at least 60 years. If they can do this, then they qualify for a lesser naturalized citizenship and the classification of Bengali. If they cannot do this, they are put in detention camps and face deportation—a means to help eradicate the Rohingya from Myanmar. In addition, the repatriation of children born to parents who left the country illegally or fled persecution, those Rohingya children born in refugee camps, has been made difficult if not impossible. This is another way in which the political elites have reinforced the Buddhists' intention to remove the Muslim Rohingya from Myanmar.

In 2016, Myanmar's first democratically elected government in a generation came into power but this government has done nothing to help the Rohingya and other Muslims. Even the democratically elected power elite were cautious. They did not want to dictate domestic security issues since the military automatically held 25% of the legislative seats and ran the security entities in the country. In addition, they did not want to alienate Buddhist nationalists nor to threaten the power-sharing agreement the civilian government maintains with the Buddhists and the military.

More recently, the Buddhists-Rohingya issue came to a head in 2017, with a major military crackdown against the Rohingya. This event included targeted attacks, murders, and arson, sending hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh. At this time the Buddhists and the military elites worked together to help them minimize the number of Rohingya within Myanmar. Because the Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) claimed responsibility for attacks on an army post and on police, the government declared ARSA a terrorist group and opened the door for the military to launch a brutal campaign destroying hundreds of Rohingya villages and forcing nearly 700 thousand Rohingya to leave Myanmar (Hossain and Hosain 1).

Approximately 6700 people were killed between August 25 and September 24, 2017, including some who were trying to flee (Hossain and Hosain 1). Myanmar's security forces allegedly opened fire on fleeing civilians, and planted land mines near border crossings the Rohingya were using (Hossain and Hosain 1). The Rohingya fleeing attacks and violence in the 2017 exodus joined around 300,000 people already in Bangladesh from previous waves of displacement, effectively forming the world's largest refugee camp (Grandi). Thus, it was at this time, in 2017, that the UN declared the Rohingya crisis an emergency. Since the 2017 crackdown, the treatment of the Rohingya has not improved, the political and military power elites, nearly always Buddhists, were still working with the Buddhist religious elites (Grandi).

Finally, even the explanations for recent waves of inter-religious violence against Rohingya Muslims of Rakhine State, are noted to be historically complex and, as previously described, are due to tensions that have existed for decades. The Buddhist organization, Ma Ba Tha, or the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion, is led by Buddhist monks and has between 20,000 and 80,000 members in the capital alone. In 2017, the nationalistic rhetoric found appeal among wide swaths of the Buddhist population and made Buddhist nationalism an important social force in Myanmar. There was significant popular support for the military actions among Myanmar's Buddhists (Hardig and Sajjad). Buddhist monk, Wathawa, (called MaBaTha monk) rallies his militia and underscores the close alliance the military has forged with the Buddhist hierarchy (Aung and McPherson). Desire to maintain financial assets in the hands of Buddhists, the economic elites, in addition to the design to have Myanmar be a "pure" Buddhist state are the basis for many of the arguments the current Buddhist-led, military regime use today. Furthermore, today, rising Buddhist-Burman ethno-nationalism, fanned by the 969 Movement led by Buddhist monks, has resulted in the rapid dissemination of hate speech against the

Rohingya. This has given many within the elite groups a justification for further removal of the Rohingya and has reignited lingering resentment between their communities. Thus, while peace building is possible, many challenges remain. Tacit approval by the government (political elites) of discriminatory policies toward Rohingya, and the widespread impunity for most perpetrators of violence, including the authorities and military elites remain a key concern for any solution to Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya.

Overall, to answer the research question, how have the power elite been used by the Buddhists since 2012 to eradicate the Rohingya in Myanmar? it is clear there has been substantial power given to the Buddhists and they have used this to encourage action from the traditional power elites. The amount of control the Buddhists have working with the other parts of the power elite (the political, military and economic elites) is extensive. Many Buddhists are supporters of the new junta. The military have built strong ties with them by lavishing them with gifts and cultivating a shared ultranationalist and often Islamophobic vision. Some monks, like Wathawa, claim to have thousands of armed followers and are rallying militia fighters against armed pro-democracy groups. Wathawa and other ultra-nationalistic monks, have appeared marching alongside soldiers, carrying weapons. One witness, an anonymous source, had seen militia training happening at his monastery in Kantbalu, in central Myanmar (Aung). In Myanmar's current government, the military regime, is joined to Buddhists who, not surprisingly, listen to and work with the Buddhist religious elites. Likewise, the military has been noted as using the Buddhist monks as a means of gaining legitimacy (Mendelson). This coordination against the Rohingya between the military elites and the Buddhist, religious elites, is helping to empower both groups. These examples show that the military and the government

are substantially entwined with the Buddhists, so much so that at times it is difficult to see where the line is drawn.

Myanmar's military has held a prominent political position in the country for decades, from 1962 and 2011. The military has drawn a significant level of legitimacy from nationalism, which in Myanmar is intrinsically linked to Buddhism (Hardig).

The Buddhists have used diverse tactics to draw in the political elites and have used many excuses to justify their goal of having the country free from other (non-Buddhist) religions. The Buddhists have perpetuated the violence, the lack of citizenship, and the threats against Rohingya's businesses and those who frequent the businesses. They have made it virtually impossible for the Rohingya to have any kind of power, or life, in Myanmar.

CHAPTER VII - Conclusion: What Can Be Done?

Answering the research question presents a picture of how the power elites have been used by the Buddhists, since 2012, to help minimize, if not eradicate, Myanmar's Rohingya population. This suggests that in order for there to be true change, there needs to be change within the power elite, and in particular with the Buddhists. This leaves the question of what can be done to address the issues of Myanmar's Rohingya.

Steps for Change

A number of steps need to be taken to both push for change with the power elite, and to address the Rohingya's situation. The global community should not lose focus on the fact that the power elite, led by the Buddhists, have perpetrated much of the violence against Myanmar's Rohingya. Thus, in order to address the issues, it is necessary to understand the problems that exist and then offer possible steps to move forward. The following are crises points to be addressed, as developed by David I. Steinberg.

1. Socioeconomic crisis: One half of the Rohingya population lives below or at the poverty line as defined by the World Bank; these numbers are not accepted by Myanmar's military regime.
2. Youth crisis: Mobility of Rohingya is controlled by the military, jobs are scarce, and education is lacking. A pervasive dissatisfaction and frustration have caused some 1% of the total population to escape Myanmar, either legally or illegally, to foreign lands. This is a long-term crisis of human capital.
3. Crisis of minorities: One third of the population in Myanmar is made up of minorities. Each ethnic minority wants to preserve their traditions, language and

culture. A significant portion of the major minority groups, including the Rohingya, have been in active revolt against the state at some time.

4. Crisis of governance: There is a political crisis between democracy and totalitarianism, and between the military and civilian leadership.
5. Crisis of administrative competence: The military regime is a rigid hierarchy and individual actions and initiatives are retarded by fear. Complications by personal loyalties and entourages result in rent-seeking and corruption.
6. Crisis of fear: The Rohingya population fears the state and military power. The military fears and mistrusts foreigners. Fear leads to official censorship; Myanmar is listed as having one of the world's most controlled censorship regimes – 164 points out of 168.
7. Crisis of distribution: In 1988 the government was poor having only \$30 million dollars in foreign exchange reserves. By 2008 they had over \$3.1 billion, none of which was shared with the population to improve their quality of life or raise their standard of living.
8. Crisis of internally perceived legitimacy: How the people of the state perceive the legitimacy of the administration is questionable. Indigenous-cultural-religious factors affect these views.

Each of Steinburg's points can be equated with the Rohingya. The military is controlling their mobility by restricting their movements and by forcing them to flee to Bangladesh or other bordering countries. Many of the youth are in refugee camps with no education, just barely surviving. There are 135 minority groups in Myanmar, yet Rohingya are not considered legitimate minorities even with their pressure against the government and the military to include

them. The Rohingya fear for their lives; this is as daily emotion for those Rohingya who are still living in Myanmar. Fear for those living in Bangladesh is a different emotion because they fear that there will be no food, no medical care and no education. They also fear that they will never see their country again, at the same time fear repatriation.

In addition, each of these crisis points suggest a need for change within the power elite, including the religious elites. Clearly the political elites have set the stage for many of these crises due to their policies. The military elites perpetuate the fear crisis and embolden the political elites through physical intimidation. The economic elites have solidified control of the country's finances; there is a lack of distribution of funds for even basic needs. And the religious elites emphasize unity through Buddhism as a justification for discriminatory and violent actions. As noted by Fuller (3),

If Myanmar is to emerge from military rule and become a modern democratic state, then it must save its Buddhism from descending into extremism. If Buddhist identity is focused upon a narrow and uncompromising view of what it means to be Burmese, then it seems likely that Buddhism will become a form of state-sponsored religion promoted by the military. While there is nothing fundamentally wrong with this type of Buddhism, it is clearly engendering a nationalistic fervor, and atrocities are being committed and justified.

Actions for the U.S. to Take

In order to find solutions to the above-mentioned crises, in lieu of sanctions, the U.S. government should apply section 604(a) of the International Religious Freedom Act which allows the denial of visas or admission into the U.S. of individuals responsible for or known to have directly carried out particularly severe violations of religious freedom. This could easily be applied to applicants from Myanmar. In addition, the U.S. government must continue to raise concerns about Rohingya Muslims' human rights. Efforts should include:

1. Support interfaith collaborations and advocate for improved access to humanitarian aid in Rakhine State.
2. Encourage religious freedom advocacy among non-traditional audiences, such as the business community and the media.
3. Urge the government of Myanmar to cease punishing expressions deemed blasphemous, defamatory of religion, or contemptuous or insulting to religion.
4. Use the term Rohingya, both publicly and privately, to identify the people and show that they are an ethnicity. This respects the rights of the Rohingya Muslims to identify as they choose. (“Demographics of Burma” 10-11).

Specific Actions for the International Community

Two years after a series of brutal attacks forced more than 740,000 Rohingya to flee Myanmar. Almost one million children, women and men are still living under precarious conditions in the world's largest refugee camp in Bangladesh (Agrawal). Now 61 national and international non-governmental organizations have launched an appeal to the international community to protect the rights and cater to the needs of the Rohingya (Agrawal).

First, the Government and the people of Bangladesh should continue to generously host nearly one million Rohingya refugees. “While UN agencies and over 130 local, national, and international NGOs have supported the Government of Bangladesh to provide life-sustaining assistance, refugees require much more than basic support for survival; they need their rights, security and dignity. Many long to return but fear further violence and persecution back home” (Tabacek et al.).

Second, addressing the issue of voluntary repatriation, but with guarantees of safety for the Rohingya would benefit many that today live in the refugee camps. Despite recent reports about possible expedited repatriation to Myanmar, the current conditions leave Rohingya

refugees doubting their safety and not believing they would be granted equal rights (Tabacek et al.). Furthermore, current levels of engagement do not afford them their right to make informed decisions about their future, including voluntary return. NGOs in Bangladesh and Myanmar are committed to providing assistance, but call for critical action by all parties.

Third, financial and political support needs to be sustained. In response to the current crisis, national and international organizations in Bangladesh and Myanmar remain committed to providing assistance and protecting the rights of refugees, stateless, internally displaced persons. These groups are willing to help support the Rohingya until appropriate solutions to their displacement within and outside Myanmar are identified. These efforts take both financial and political support.

Finally, backing the processes that on-the-ground NGOs suggest are needed to create long-term change is vital. These suggestions include:

1. Ensure meaningful participation of Rohingya in decision making processes about their future: In light of ongoing discussions to expedite returns, the Rohingya must be meaningfully engaged by the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in any discussions and decision making about their future (including their safe and voluntary return) through an inclusive process involving children, youth, women, elderly and persons with disabilities.
2. Respect Rohingya's human rights in Myanmar: The Government of Myanmar should address the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine State by implementing the Rakhine Advisory Commission recommendations and creating the conditions necessary to end Rohingya's displacement. Concurrently, the Government of Myanmar should respect each refugee's right to make a free, informed decision about their return. This must

- also reflect calls by Rohingya communities for justice and accountability, citizenship, protection of civilians, freedom of movement, as well as non-discrimination and sustained access for humanitarian organizations, independent journalists and media in Rakhine State, in line with international standards. The international community needs to support these efforts by condemning past and ongoing violence in Myanmar and calling on the government of Myanmar to ensure full respect for human rights.
3. Support Rohingya's inclusive access to education, livelihoods and protection: Create an enabling environment for Rohingya, on both sides of the border, to access rights and services, such as education, skills training and livelihoods. The governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh should reduce the vulnerability of the Rohingya, and host communities, by strengthening protection systems and access to justice for all. The international community should fully fund the 2019 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis and the 2019 Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan to ensure uninterrupted, life-sustaining services to IDPs, refugees and host communities.
 4. Identify medium/long-term solutions: The international community should identify appropriate solutions to the Rohingya's displacement within and outside Myanmar while continuing to support the Government of Bangladesh, progressively implementing the commitments of the Global Compact on Refugees on self-reliance and responsibility-sharing and pursuing a regional solutions approach to address the needs of displaced and host communities (Iffat).

Conclusion

Rohingya Muslims face a difficult day-to-day existence with no way to honor their past, prosper in the present, or make plans for their future. They are the victims of the hatred felt by

the elites: the government or political elites, the military elites, the economic elites and the Buddhist religious elites. The Rohingya are “suspended in time, largely unable to create a better life for themselves or their children” (“Demographics of Burma” 12). It is a moral imperative for the U.S. and the international community to impress upon Myanmar, through every appropriate point of leverage, that neither time nor judgment of history, will reflect kindly on Myanmar if it chooses to procrastinate in addressing this ever-growing crisis.

The potential for a peaceful coexistence of the Buddhists and the Rohingya presents a huge challenge. It is vital to maintain the increasing global attention to the situation of the Rohingya, so that their plight is more than a national or regional issue. Expertise in peace and ethnic conflict, in addition to geopolitical approaches, will be required to solve the Rohingya turmoil.

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