



THE SENTINEL PROJECT  
FOR GENOCIDE PREVENTION

# Burma Risk Assessment

September 2013

THE SENTINEL PROJECT FOR GENOCIDE PREVENTION IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION DEVOTED TO EFFECTIVE **EARLY WARNING OF GENOCIDE** AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVENTIVE MEASURES BEFORE LIVES ARE LOST.

WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS THROUGH THE CREATIVE **USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND COOPERATION WITH THREATENED GROUPS.**

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## 1.0 - Executive Summary

Following extensive research, the Sentinel Project has concluded that the risk of genocide or related mass atrocities in Burma is extremely high. Despite recent democratic reforms in the country, violence, discrimination, and extrajudicial killings continue and are mostly directed toward the Muslim Rohingya minority in Rakhine state. Violence and other crimes against the Rohingya, which are conducted by both state and non-state groups, are both widespread and systematic.

Confidential and open-source evidence has revealed that, contrary to government statements and most media reporting, inter-ethnic violence is not merely communal or criminal in nature, but is part of a state-sponsored campaign of ethnic cleansing with the distinct possibility of genocide carried out either through extermination by killing squads or more slowly by isolation and starvation. While virtually all of the elements of the genocidal process are present in Burma, it is too early to determine whether genocide itself is currently occurring. Such a determination depends upon both the continued systematic ethnic cleansing of Muslim-populated regions and upon continued isolation, denial of aid, and restriction of movement, which could be interpreted as indicators of genocidal intent. Currently, upwards of 110,000 Rohingya are housed in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, which represents one eighth of the estimated Rohingya population of Burma.

Of the multiple signs of an impending genocide crisis, the Sentinel Project is particularly concerned by the following evidence:

1. Continued periodic outbreaks of organized violence, regularly accompanied by either inaction or participation by government security forces, and *agents provocateurs* of unknown government affiliation;
2. An attempt by local governments within Rakhine to limit Rohingya reproduction by enforcing a two-child limit;
3. A proposed ban on interfaith marriage is supported by extreme nationalist Buddhist monks and is being considered as legislation;
4. The continued denial of aid to squalid camps and continuing movement restrictions, expropriation, displacement, and ghettoization of Rohingya;
5. An attempt to perform a census of Rohingya, violently coercing them to register as “Bengali,” which may facilitate the creation of “death lists”;
6. The continuing arrest of political prisoners despite presidential assurances to the contrary;
7. Official government support for the ultra-nationalist 969 movement, which alienates Muslims and casts them as a threat;

8. Burmese president Thein Sein's proposed plan to resettle the Rohingya population abroad;
9. Thein Sein's proclamation to continue denying citizenship to the Rohingya;
10. The official denial of the existence of the Rohingya and institutionalized usage of hate speech even among moderates; and
11. The silence of political moderates on the plight of the Rohingya.

If Gregory Stanton's rubric of a staged model of genocide is applied to Burma, a "genocide emergency" must now be declared and the options for intervention are limited. At the international, state-focused level, United Nations Security Council must be mobilized and heavy assistance must be provided to the Rohingya in preparation for their self-defense. Since humanitarian assistance is denied in Burma, preparations must be made for the continuing outflow of refugees. Refugee camps in bordering countries are already overcrowded and in poor condition with Thailand and Bangladesh receiving most of the people fleeing the violence.

## 2.0 - Introduction

The Sentinel Project has determined that Burma is at extremely high risk of genocide. While the recent political reforms and democratization of Burma as well as the relaxation of sanctions against the former pariah state may mitigate the risk of full-scale extermination, nearly all other recognized risk factors for genocide exist in the country to a very high degree. In addition, research shows that states in transition tend to be at a higher risk for genocide than stable regimes, even those of authoritarian orientation.

While the violence against the Muslim Rohingya minority is being consistently described by the mainstream news media as “inter-communal” the Sentinel Project has found the Burmese government to not only be apathetic to the cause of the Rohingya, but to be actively participating in efforts to ethnically cleanse Burma of Muslims. Recent government actions at the highest levels have included a proposal to resettle the Rohingya in other countries, a proposal to enforce a two-child limit for the minority, and ongoing campaigns to forcibly register Rohingya as “Bengali,” a term that constitutes hate speech because it implies that they are illegal immigrants. Ethnic persecution and discrimination in Burma is systemic and government sponsored.

“Inter-communal” violence should demonstrate that respective communities are acting more or less as cohesive wholes; however, the beliefs and attitudes of the “communities” said to be involved in the violence vary widely, as was demonstrated in Lashio in May 2013 when monks sheltered Muslims from violence in Buddhist temples. Only the ethnic nationalist 969 movement claims to be a grassroots campaign, but evidence has linked the movement to the Burmese government, whose historical ideology aligns closely with 969’s current objectives.

The matter of what future actions or inaction on the part of the Burmese government may constitute genocide is a key issue for the Sentinel Project. The proliferation of internally displaced persons camps in Rakhine state (also known as Arakan) and sealed-off ghettos within urban areas may constitute genocide by isolation, starvation, and deprivation of the necessities of life if done with the intent to destroy the group. Historically, not all genocides have been committed solely through mass killing, and if the Rohingya continue to be systematically purged from towns, villages, and cities throughout Rakhine and Burma in general, and if the IDP camps continue to be deprived of aid, the intent of genocide will appear more certain.

## 3.0 - Background Information

### 3.1 - Historical

The roots of inter-ethnic tension can often stretch back further than living memory. During the seventeenth century elements of the Indian Mughal Empire conquered Southeast Asia and forcibly converted some Hindu and Buddhist believers to Islam. This historical event was exploited by Burmese nationalists well into the twentieth century, such as to build support for anti-Indian and anti-Muslim riots in Burma during the 1930s. Although many Rohingya Muslims arrived in Burma centuries ago from Bangladesh, India, and China, they are often called “Bengalis,” with the speaker meaning that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in an attempt to deny the legitimacy of their presence in Burma. This term is also applied to other Muslims in Burma regardless of their ancestry. Burmese government policy reflects the false social memory of the recent arrival of Rohingyas (allegedly during British colonial rule) by refusing to grant them citizenship and treating them as illegal immigrants. Prominent political figures including President Thein Sein have falsely referred to the Rohingya as “Bengalis.” When historical grievances, regardless of their veracity, are used for political ends, especially when those historical grievances reach back for generations, it can be said that there is a “social memory” of historical incidents that are believed to be unresolved and which are used to mobilize action in the present. The social memory of inter-ethnic tension plays a large but not exclusive role in modern Burma.

Colonial rule in Burma began in 1824 as a consequence of British victory in the First Burmese War. Following two additional wars, the entire territory of what was then Burma came under the control of the British with the assistance of native colonial administrators from India. At this time, Indians began to dominate the cultural and economic life of Burma, which resulted in resentment and ethnic tension. The anti-Muslim riots of the 1930s, which included massacres of Muslims by Buddhists, were as much a product of economic tension as they were a product of social memory. Indians were favoured for employment over Buddhist Burmese, and the economic depression of the 1930s exacerbated pre-existing social tensions. Due to this unprecedented wave of immigration, which at the beginning of the twentieth century reached an average of 250,000 people per year, Burmese Buddhists equated the Indian Muslims, Burmese Muslims, and Indian Burmese Muslims, and tensions grew along ill-defined ethno-religious lines, with Buddhists coining anti-Muslim hate speech terms which are still in use today. For example, from this period onward, the word *kala* or *kalar* became a racial slur for any person of Muslim or Indian appearance and has occurred frequently in recent Burmese anti-Muslim hate speech, including appearances in the state media, to describe the Rohingya Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hindstrom, Hanna. "State Media Issues Correction After Publishing Racial Slur." 6 June 2012. *Democratic Voice of Burma*. <<http://www.dvb.no/news/state-media-issues-correction-after-publishing-racial-slur/22328>>



The early riots had an anti-Muslim focus partly because the Buddhists were afraid to protest directly against British rule and so much of the violence revolved around recasting the conflict as a matter of religious differences rather than a protest against a vastly superior colonial force. Today the myth that Muslims were somehow favoured by preceding governments and are an economically advantaged merchant class persists,<sup>2</sup> with much of the violence encouraged by the move toward democracy as the supposed Muslim protectors in government are divested of power. The rejection of Rohingya citizenship on the basis of their arrival during the colonial period shows how strongly this period of Burmese history influences present politics.

In 1942, British forces in Burma retreated from the invading Japanese army and armed the Muslims in Rakhine state. Mutual massacres of Buddhists and Muslims ensued in the resulting interregnum, and during the remainder of the Second World War, Muslims, many of whom were loyal to the British before the war, were generally aligned with Allied forces while Buddhists aligned with the Japanese or nationalist groups. The memory of this period looms large in Rakhine State and Burma, with approximately 5,000 Muslims killed by Rakhine Buddhist nationalists on 28 March 1942 and Rohingya Muslims killing approximately 20,000 Rakhine Buddhists.

The British began to transfer power to Burmese rulers in 1947 under interim leader General Aung San, who sought to unite the many minority groups through the creation of a federalist union. Aung San was assassinated in 1947, but the Panglong Agreement, of which he was the primary architect, became the focal point of civil conflict until the present day. British rule ended in 1948 when Burma gained full independence and the country immediately descended into ideologically and ethnically motivated civil war. In 1962, following a military coup, the “Burmese Way to Socialism” headed by General Ne Win transformed Burma into one of the world’s poorest nations.

The Burmese military fought several wars of attrition with ethnic minorities in the eastern border regions as well as against the Rohingya, who had formed a mujahideen movement to create an Islamic state along the border with Bangladesh. It should be noted that while it appears today that the Rohingya Muslims are at the greatest risk for genocide, over half a million members of other ethnic minorities have been displaced in Burma, including the Kachin, Shan, and Mon. Countless human rights violations by the military have been reported, including systematic rape, torture, the burning of villages, forced labour, abductions, and the recruitment of child soldiers.<sup>3</sup> While ceasefires have been signed by the present quasi-civilian government, tensions and sporadic violence still persist, and peaceful protests by Burma’s majority Buddhists have been met with equally violent reactions, particularly in 1988 during the “Four Eights

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<sup>2</sup> “Why Buddhists and Muslims are Killing Each Other in Myanmar.” 31 May 2013. *The Globe and Mail*. <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/why-buddhists-and-muslims-are-killing-each-other-in-myanmar/article12285778/>> and Schissler, Matt. “Everyday Ethnic Tensions in Myanmar.” 27 March 2013. *New Mandala*.

<<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2013/03/27/everyday-ethnic-tensions-in-myanmar/>>

<sup>3</sup> Adams, Brad. “Myanmar Army Continues to Live in Denial Over Abuses.” 9 May 2013. *Human Rights Watch*. <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/09/myanmar-army-continues-live-denial-over-abuses>>

Uprising” and in 2007 in response to the “Saffron Revolution.” Free elections have been proposed by the new civilian government, ostensibly to include former exiles such as Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of General Aung San.

### 3.2 - Geography

Burma’s geography has made it a crossroads for the many peoples of Southeast Asia. Historically speaking, the all-important trade routes between India and China passed directly through Burma, thus making the state relatively wealthy through the constant exchange of goods.

Burma is divided by three major mountain ranges running roughly north to south from the Himalayas. Between the mountain ranges is fertile and agriculturally viable land, a factor that helped Burma become a self-sustaining and mainly agricultural economy bolstered by international trade. Nearly two thousand kilometers of coastline also resulted in cultural exchanges and trade, especially with travelers from India. The Rohingya may have arrived on the coast as early as the eighth century BCE. Burma’s largest river, the Irrawaddy, has also been a major influence on the nation’s history as it has been a trade route for centuries and provides historically important water access to the last royal capital, Mandalay.

Burma shares many variously porous borders with Bangladesh, India, and its longest border with China in the west and northeast, and Laos and Thailand in the east. In addition to the historical impact of Burma’s geography, many of Burma’s modern-day refugees have sought safety in neighbouring countries. Conversely, the 1990s saw the immigration of nearly 300,000 Chinese from Yunnan and Szechuan provinces into Mandalay, largely reshaping the demographics of Burma’s most significant city. Approximately 30 to 40 per cent of Mandalay’s population is ethnic Chinese.

Many of Burma’s ethnic minorities are concentrated in specific areas. The Rohingya, for example, live mostly in Rakhine State, in the west of Burma. The Kachin minority is native to northeast Burma, and the Shan people are directly southeast sharing a border with China. Several recent incidents, however, have shown that interethnic and interreligious violence, especially between Muslims and Buddhists, can occur almost anywhere, with outbreaks occurring in places such as Lashio in Shan State.<sup>4</sup> It should also be noted that some of the most virulent hate and support for the 969 movement, which boycotts Muslim businesses, can be found in places where there are few or no Muslims at all.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ferrie, Jared. “Buddhist Mobs Attack Muslim Homes in Myanmar, One Dead.” 29 May 2013. *Reuters*. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/29/us-myanmar-violence-idUSBRE94S0JD20130529> >

<sup>5</sup> “Why Buddhists and Muslims are Killing Each Other in Myanmar.” 31 May 2013. *The Globe and Mail*. <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/why-buddhists-and-muslims-are-killing-each-other-in-myanmar/article12285778/>>

## 4.0 - Key Actors

### 4.1 - Individuals

#### Thein Sein

Thein Sein, the president of Burma, is important not only because he leads the executive branch of the government, but because he is one of the principal propagandists against the Rohingya, indicating that the national government may be complicit in, or covertly involved in, inter-ethnic violence. Thein Sein is a former military commander who served as prime minister from 2007 until retiring, and in 2011, became Burma's first civilian president since the 1962 coup d'état.

Thein Sein has made public attempts to form lasting peace with virtually all of the many nationalities in Burma<sup>6</sup> but he has refused to recognize the Rohingya as citizens, proposing to the United Nations that the Muslim minority, totalling about 800,000 people, should be resettled in another country – a plan that the UN rejected and which eerily shadows early stages of other well-known genocides.<sup>7</sup> Thein Sein rejects the reality that the Rohingya have lived in Myanmar for centuries. His statements alone indicate the possibility of impending genocide, specifically preparation for denial: “There are no Rohingya among the races [of Burma].”<sup>8</sup> However, it is clear that not all parties view Thein Sein as a potential perpetrator; an Associated Press report argued that some experts believe “[...] the anti-Muslim campaign has covert official backing, perhaps from hard-liners seeking to weaken President Thein Sein and his reform agenda.”<sup>9</sup> In July 2013, Thein Sein issued a condemnation of *Time Magazine's*, which had named U Wirathu, a monk and known propagator of hate speech, “The Buddhist Face of Terror.” Thein Sein thus showed support for the notorious anti-Muslim monk. Regardless of whether Thein Sein supports or condemns inter-ethnic violence, as Burma's president he is a key person of interest in both the possible provocation or prevention of violence.

#### Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of the national hero General Aung San. A pro-democracy politician and human rights activist, Suu Kyi spent 15 years under house arrest for opposing Burma's military regime. Before winning the 1990 election by a landslide, she was placed under house arrest and the Burmese government refused to relinquish power.

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<sup>6</sup> Lintner, Bertil. “Rain for Myanmar's Peace Parade.” 25 June 2013. *Asia Times*. <[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/SEA-01-250613.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/SEA-01-250613.html)>

<sup>7</sup> “UN Rejects Thein Sein's Potential Rohingya Plan.” 13 July 2012. *Democratic Voice of Burma*. <<http://www.dvb.no/news/un-rejects-thein-sein%E2%80%99s-potential-rohingya-plan/22893>>

<sup>8</sup> Gearan, Anne. “Burma's Thein Sein Says Military 'Will Always Have a Special Place' in Burma.” 19 May 2013. *Washington Post*. <[http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-05-19/world/39376769\\_1\\_president-obama-than-shwe-sanctions](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-05-19/world/39376769_1_president-obama-than-shwe-sanctions)>

<sup>9</sup> “Why Buddhists and Muslims are Killing Each Other in Myanmar.” 31 May 2013. *The Globe and Mail*. <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/why-buddhists-and-muslims-are-killing-each-other-in-myanmar/article12285778/>>

International outcry followed and the imprisoned Suu Kyi<sup>10</sup> received dozens of awards including the Nobel Peace Prize, the US Congressional Gold Medal, and honorary Canadian citizenship – only the fourth person to ever receive the honour. Released in 2010, Suu Kyi still holds crucial influence over much of the Buddhist population and in 2012 her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won 43 out of 45 vacant seats in the Burmese lower parliament.

Many foreign governments and organizations have expressed deep concern over Suu Kyi's silence regarding the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya. Her silence may be politically motivated since she would risk popular backlash for siding with the deeply unpopular cause of the Rohingya. Some of her more inflammatory positions either question the possibility of citizenship in Burma<sup>11</sup> or, in the case of one spokesperson's remarks, deny the existence of the Rohingya altogether.<sup>12</sup> However, when districts in Rakhine State imposed a two-child limit on the Rohingya to buttress the officially denied policy of ethnic cleansing in May 2013, Suu Kyi openly opposed the enforcement of the law, taking the risk of alienating her support base. Her party also reversed its history of denial, suggesting granting the Rohingya citizenship while ironically still employing hate speech against them, calling them "Bengalis."<sup>13</sup>

Suu Kyi's status as one of Burma's most radical reformers shows how popular anti-Muslim sentiment is even among the moderate and democratically minded. Her position on the Rohingya will undoubtedly influence the fate of the group in Burma, for better or worse. Bertil Lintner, a formerly blacklisted journalist and expert on Burma told the *Global Post*, "The only person who can unify the country is Aung San Suu Kyi because her father General Aung San promised autonomy for all ethnic groups."<sup>14</sup> Her influence is only bound to increase if the liberalization of the country's political sphere continues.

## Wirathu

Wirathu, usually denoted with the honorific "U," is the head abbot of Masoyein monastery in Mandalay. The monastery was historically a center of opposition to the authoritarian military junta, but since the appointment of the reformist government, Masoyein has increasingly become a center of anti-Muslim hate with Wirathu as the central figurehead. Wirathu has allegedly described himself as the "Burmese Bin Laden"<sup>15</sup> and has professed

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that while the Western media often refers to Aung Saan Suu Kyi simply the two names which occur last, Burmese naming traditions have no set given and family name. Individuals can also change their names at any point, often without government oversight, to signal a change in life, a characteristic of the Buddhist faith.

<sup>11</sup> Hussain, Misha et al. "Rohingya Refugees Leave Burma to Seek Help in Bangladesh-Video." 22 June 2012. *The Guardian*. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/video/2012/jun/22/rohingya-refugees-burma-bangladesh-video>>

<sup>12</sup> Winn, Patrick. "Suu Kyi Spokesman: 'There is no Rohingya.'" 2 May 2013. *Global Post*.

<<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/myanmar/130501/suu-kyi-no-rohingya>>

<sup>13</sup> Aung Hla Tun and Jared Ferrie. "Suu Kyi Denounces Two-Child Limit on Rohingya Families." 27 May 2013. *Reuters*.

<<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/27/us-myanmar-rohingya-suukyi-idUSBRE94Q08J20130527>>

<sup>14</sup> Lin, Kaye. "Blacklisted Journalist Bertil Lintner Returns to Burma After Nearly 30 Years." 20 June 2013. *Asian Tribune*.

<<http://www.asiantribune.com/node/62740>>

<sup>15</sup> Wirathu has since denied applying the label to himself, instead attributing the origins of the label to the Muslim minority in Burma.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/18/buddhist-monk-spreads-hatred-burma>> and Pinnock, Jamie. "Is Wirathu Really the 'Burmese Bin Laden.'" *Arakan Rohingya National Organization*. 9 July 2013. <<http://www.rohingya.org/portal/index.php/burma/63-news--article/661-burma-is-wirathu-really-the-burmese-bin-laden-.html>>

admiration for neo-Nazi groups.<sup>16</sup> While currently Burma's regime is proclaiming respect for freedom of speech, Wirathu has been jailed several times in the past for inciting hate against Muslims.

Wirathu's lectures are characterized by inflammatory anti-Muslim hate-speech. In a speaking engagement in March 2013 Wirathu said: "now Moulmein is about to fall into the Enemy's hand, or the hands of the Niggers [Kalars], that is, of course, unless we fail to mobilize our Buddhist public's force." Wirathu's appeal to nationalism is total and all-encompassing: "the Buddhist public needs to adopt a nationalist mindfulness – in virtually everything we do - that is, we must eat, sleep, see, hear, speak, and breathe nationalism."<sup>17</sup>

In the 1 July 2013 issue of *Time Magazine*, journalist Hannah Beech named Wirathu "The Face of Buddhist Terror," with other journalists describing him as having a "rock-star" following in Burma; this status was illustrated by a social media group created by defenders of Wirathu that garnered over 10,000 followers in just three days between June 20 to 23 before being shut down. On 23 June 2013, Wirathu linked to a petition from his Facebook account protesting *Time's* allegations. In two days, the petition reached over 63,000 signatures. Both instances are a remarkable reaction in a country where only 26 per cent of the population has electricity and only an estimated one per cent of Burmese are online – one of the lowest internet penetration rates in the world.<sup>18</sup> In a controversial show of support for Wirathu, President Thein Sein condemned the *Time* article in Burmese but not English,<sup>19</sup> showing a degree of congruence with him despite his reputation as a pernicious demagogue. Moreover, on 30 June 2013, hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Yangon to protest against *Time* in an officially sanctioned show of support for Wirathu and his hate speech. The sanctioning of protests in a country where civil unrest is often met with government violence constitutes a dangerous promotion – one that undermined the Burmese government's claim to be a neutral defender of freedom of speech rather than a force colluding with hard line nationalists.

Wirathu, as the leader of Masoyein and a Buddhist religious scholar, has considerable authority over his followers. He has become the most outspoken proponent of the controversial 969 movement, a campaign with the main goal of boycotting Muslim businesses and refusing service to Muslim customers in Buddhist businesses. Wirathu has spoken out against intermarriage between Muslims and Buddhists and has helped to propagate rumours that encourage violence, particularly deadly pogroms such as those seen in Rakhine State. He has also attempted to discredit Suu Kyi by alleging that Muslims have infiltrated her camp.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lin, Kaye. "Blacklisted Journalist Bertil Lintner Returns to Burma After Nearly 30 Years." 20 June 2013. *Asian Tribune*.

<http://www.asiantribune.com/node/62740>

<sup>17</sup> Zafrudin, Abdul Rahman. "Haul Ven. Wirathu, the Regime's 'fall' monk, to the Hague and Try him for Openly Inciting Crimes Against Humanity." 25 March 2013. Blog. <http://drkokogyi.wordpress.com/2013/03/25/haul-ven-wirathu-the-regimes-fall-monk-to-the-hague-and-try-him-for-openly-inciting-crimes-against-humanity/>

<sup>18</sup> Researchers from The Sentinel Project discovered the page before it was taken down, likely by Facebook, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2013.

<https://www.facebook.com/supportwirathu>

<sup>19</sup> (In Burmese) <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/zg/briefing-room/news/2013/06/23/id-3765>

<sup>20</sup> Winn, Patrick. "Myanmar '969' Crusade Breeds Anti-Muslim Malice." 27 March 2013. *Global Post*.

<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/myanmar/130326/969-anti-muslim-buddhist-riots-burma>

Unverified and often unfounded rumours play a large part in catalyzing ethnic violence and genocide, with Burma's violence being no exception. Wirathu has been central in recycling some longstanding rumours and myths about the Rohingya while also fabricating and disseminating new ones. He alleges, for instance, that Muslims commit 100 per cent of rape cases in Burma, and that intermarriage is forced upon Burmese to increase the Muslim birthrate and outnumber Buddhists (Muslims represent a mere four to five per cent of Burma's population).<sup>21</sup> He also alleges an international conspiracy of economic attacks on Buddhist businesses financed by Saudi oil money<sup>22</sup> and that Muslims burned down their own houses in Meikhtila so that they could receive international aid.<sup>23</sup>

Another key factor in facilitating genocide is framing the outgroup as a threat, and Wirathu's virulent hate speech accomplishes this objective by portraying Buddhists as defenders of their religion and nation rather than as aggressors. Wirathu casts himself as a pro-democracy activist and a defender from Muslim attacks; in reality, he is anything but. Wirathu has also played an important part in dehumanizing the Rohingya, an important stage in preparing for genocide, going so far as to liken the group to the invasive African catfish.<sup>24</sup> In a 18 June 2013 interview with PBS, Wirathu said that "Anywhere Muslims are a majority, there is violence, like what happened in Rakhine state. That is why our idea is to control the Muslim population."<sup>25</sup>

Wirathu is a key figure in both the ethnic cleansing of Meikhtila and motivating possible future acts of violence in the western state of Rakhine. In recent cases of inter-ethnic violence, it has been noted by several news sources and non-governmental organizations that the violence and killing was not random, but actually well-organized by Burma's political and religious leaders.<sup>26</sup>

## Min Aung Hlaing

The Senior General of Burma's *Tatmadaw*, or Armed Forces, Min Aung Hlaing featured prominently in the 2009 civil war between Burma's military and the Kokang minority, the latter being warlords involved in the drug trade fighting under the name Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, a nominally communist force. As a sign of the significant crimes against humanity attributed to the *Tatmadaw*, Min Aung Hlaing's campaign resulted in 37,000 Kokang refugees fleeing to China. As the commander of the military, Min Aung Hlaing is instrumental in Burma's developing democracy since he has the authority to assume control of the country in a declared emergency. Thus, under such circumstances, he may act against the

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<sup>21</sup> Wade, Francis. "The Monks Who Hate Muslims." 23 April 2013. *World News Australia*.

<<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1759216/Comment-The-monks-who-hate-Muslims>>

<sup>22</sup> Winn, Patrick. "Myanmar '969' Crusade Breeds Anti-Muslim Malice." 27 March 2013. *Global Post*.

<<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/myanmar/130326/969-anti-muslim-buddhist-riots-burma>>

<sup>23</sup> "Man of Peace Venerable Wirathu Approves Violence to Rohingyas." *The Australian*. <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/man-of-peace-venerable-wirathu-approves-violence-to-rohingyas/story-fnb64oi6-1226654775865>>

<sup>24</sup> "Portraits: New Numerology of Hate Grows in Myanmar." 28 April 2013. *Associated Press*. <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/portraits-new-numerology-hate-grows-myanmar-0>>

<sup>25</sup> PBS Interview: [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/jan-june13/myanmar\\_06-18.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/jan-june13/myanmar_06-18.html)

<sup>26</sup> "All You Can Do is Pray." 22 April 2013. *Human Rights Watch*. <<http://www.hrw.org/node/114882>>

Rohingya minority on his own recognizance, as he is also rumoured to have previously ignored governmental instructions to cease attacks against the Kachin minority as a prelude to peace negotiations.<sup>27</sup>

## 4.2 - Organizations

### Nasaka

Nasaka is Burma's border security force, which has been accused of complicity and active involvement in the ethnic cleansing of Rakhine State. In March 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma urged the Burmese government to suspend the force's operations. Open source videos available on video sharing websites show Nasaka troops killing Muslims indiscriminately and Rohingya bloggers regularly report on threats and occurrences of arbitrary arrest, extortion, torture, and murder. In early May 2013, several Rohingya were arrested and tortured and several fled after refusing to label themselves with the hate term "Bengali" when approached by Nasaka surveyors.<sup>28</sup> The surveying of Rohingya itself is an ominous development since it may be a stage of preparation to facilitate future mass killings.

On 12 July 2013, Thein Sein announced the disbandment of the Nasaka ahead of a presidential visit to the United Kingdom. According to government sources, Nasaka's leader was convicted of corruption charges in 2012 and the force will ostensibly stop operations in Rakhine State, handing security duties over to local police.<sup>29</sup> Whether the Nasaka actually ceases to function or continues operating under the guise of another agency remains to be seen.

### Tatmadaw

The Tatmadaw, or Burmese Army, is perhaps the most powerful organization in modern-day Burma. The military ruled directly starting in 1962 and despite the new reformist government, which is headed by a former military general, the Tatmadaw still holds considerable power; however, contrary to popular myths promoted by the media and even Aung San Suu Kyi, the army does not appear to have the right to unilaterally dismiss the civilian government according to the current constitution.<sup>30</sup>

The army has a long history of war crimes, including rape, torture, the burning of villages, the recruitment of child soldiers, ethnic cleansing, and murder. Approximately 500,000 people of all minorities have been displaced in Burma, many fleeing the Tatmadaw and its reputation for violence and abuse. The army's most recent civil conflict with the Kachin

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<sup>27</sup> Paquette, David. "Min Aung Hlaing Appointed Vice-Senior General." *The Irrawaddy*. 3 April 2012. <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/1890>>

<sup>28</sup> Nai, Aye. "Rohingya's Face Riot Charges for Refusing to Register as 'Bengali.'" 22 May 2013. *Democratic Voice of Burma*. <<http://www.dvb.no/news/rohingyas-face-riot-charges-for-refusing-to-register-as-bengali/28370>> and "Nasaka Uses 'Bengali' in Place of 'Rohingya' in Surveys." *Kaladan Press Network*. 10 May 2013. <<http://www.kaladanpress.org/news/330-news-2013/may-2013/4209-nasaka-uses-bengali-in-place-of-rohingya-in-surveys>>

<sup>29</sup> Ferrie, Jared. "Myanmar President Disbands Controversial Border Force." *Reuters*. 15 July 2013. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/15/us-myanmar-security-idUSBRE96E0B420130715>>

<sup>30</sup> "Political Myths." *Network Myanmar*. Accessed 24 July 2013. <<http://www.networkmyanmar.org/index.php/political-myths>>

minority has resulted in some 70,000 civilians being displaced. In recent outbreaks of violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority in 2012, Tatmadaw units openly supported or contributed to the mob violence which appeared spontaneous but which was actually a well-organized campaign of ethnic cleansing. The rule of law is unknown in the Tatmadaw and its various war crimes and crimes against humanity have never been investigated.<sup>31</sup>

## Lon Thein

On 10 June 2012, after waves of mutual inter-ethnic violence between both Rohingya and non-Rohingya Muslims and Arakanese Buddhists, Thein Sein declared a state of emergency in Rakhine, transferring power to the military. With this began an organized campaign of violence against the Rohingya supported by the paramilitary security force Lon Thein. According to Human Rights Watch, Lon Thein – along with the army, police, and Nasaka security forces – committed killings, mass arrests, and looting against the Rohingya population in northern Arakan.<sup>32</sup>

## Swan Arshin

Little can be said for certain about Swan Arshin, a secretive organization whose name translates to “Masters of Power” and has no public face and no official involvement in Burma’s government or security apparatus. The group is surrounded in myth and legend, with some analysts arguing that Burma’s long tradition of “tea culture” combined with severe restrictions on free speech have made it difficult to separate truth from fiction regarding contemporary events and organizations.<sup>33</sup>

The Irrawaddy News Agency notes that the recent violence in Burma is widely accepted to be at least partially the responsibility of Swan Arshin, an organization made infamous by their rumoured involvement in the 1996 and 2003 attacks on Aung San Suu Kyi.<sup>34</sup> At that time, the organization was a tool of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association which evolved into the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).<sup>35</sup> The USDP flatly denies that it had anything to do with Swan Arshin;<sup>36</sup> however, the group was credited with involvement in 2007 attacks on pro-democracy demonstrators during the “Saffron Revolution,”<sup>37</sup> attacks which the former military government clearly orchestrated.

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<sup>31</sup> Adams, Brad. “Myanmar Army Continues to Live in Denial Over Abuses.” *Human Rights Watch*. 9 May 2013.

<<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/09/myanmar-army-continues-live-denial-over-abuses> >

<sup>32</sup> “HRW - The Government Could Have Stopped This; Sectarian Violence and Ensuing Abuses in Burma’s Arakan State.” 1 August 2012. *Human Rights Watch*.

<sup>33</sup> Selth, Andrew. “Burma: Conspiracy and Other Theories.” 5 June 2013. *The Interpreter*.

<<http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2013/06/05/Burma-Conspiracies-and-other-theories.aspx>>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Zarni, Maung. “Myanmar Old Military Monsters Stirring Up Trouble.” *Blog: Dr. Abdul Rahman Zafrudin*.

<<https://drkokogvi.wordpress.com/2013/06/02/myanmar-old-military-monsters-stirring-up-trouble/>>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Selth, Andrew. “Burma: Conspiracy and Other Theories.” 5 June 2013. *The Interpreter*.

<<http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2013/06/05/Burma-Conspiracies-and-other-theories.aspx>>



The ideology of national unity by forced assimilation is a common feature across 969, the former and current military and quasi-civilian governments, and current extreme nationalist militias. Like the elusive Taung Tha Army, Swan Arshin appears to be aligned with the ultra-nationalist 969 movement, with some going as far to allege that the Swan Arshin and 969 leadership have deep links with one another.

According to expatriate medical doctor and blogger Abdul Rahman Zafrudin, Swan Arshin “consists in part of persons recruited through local township councils from local merchants and others who must obtain permits for their livelihoods and are thus obliged to comply with official demands.”<sup>38</sup> The organization is also alleged to be filled with marginalized social outsiders, including violent criminals, and is rumoured to be injected into areas where inter-ethnic tensions are running high. Swan Arshin likely utilizes common strategies used by extermination militias in the past, recruiting unemployed youth to participate in creating social unrest in exchange for a small wage or a meal.<sup>39</sup>

Zafrudin alleges that the militia engages in staged events, real inter-ethnic violence, and propagates hate speech in order to organize unrest and give it the appearance of spontaneity.<sup>40</sup> Media reports have, in the past, described this type of social unrest to be the doing of “pro-government” gangs. Regardless of where violence breaks out geographically, these mobs affiliated with or inspired by Swan Arshin appear to be armed similarly, possessing swords, machetes, iron rods, and sledgehammers, items which could be easily obtained anywhere and which do not give the appearance of an organized government militia.<sup>41</sup>

Some argue that the ethnic cleansing of key locales in Burma is not the only purpose of Swan Arshin; rather, its primary purpose is to create instability within the country for the current quasi-civilian government and sway the balance of power back to the military by making the use of military force necessary for maintaining peace. Military hard-liners such as Aung Thaung are thought to be behind the group, though they have denied these alleged connections.<sup>42</sup> Despite the numerous claims about the extent of the involvement of Swan Arshin in recent violence, very little can be separated from conspiracy and legend and confirmed with confidence.

## Taung Tha Army

Taung Tha is an armed organization, described as a “Buddhist Militia,” linked to Aung Thaung, a military hard-liner and politician from the area where the organization gets its name. Little is known about the secretive group but it has been connected both to old proponents of the military regime and the ultra-nationalist 969 movement which aims to ethnically cleanse

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<sup>38</sup> Zarni, Maung. “Myanmar Old Military Monsters Stirring Up Trouble.” *Blog: Dr. Abdul Rahman Zafrudin*. <<https://drkokogyi.wordpress.com/2013/06/02/myanmar-old-military-monsters-stirring-up-trouble/>>

<sup>39</sup> Burma: 2007 Protests Against Fuel Prices.” August 2007. *Asian Human Rights Commission*. <<http://campaigns.ahrchk.net/burmaprotests/BurmaProtests2007.pdf> >

<sup>40</sup> “

<sup>41</sup> Zarni, Maung. “Myanmar Old Military Monsters Stirring Up Trouble.” *Blog: Dr. Abdul Rahman Zafrudin*. <<https://drkokogyi.wordpress.com/2013/06/02/myanmar-old-military-monsters-stirring-up-trouble/>>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Burma of the Muslim minority. While the Sentinel Project cannot confirm the existence or history of operations of the militia, if Taung Tha does exist and operate as it is rumoured to, it may be key to both the military's covert efforts to undermine the civilian government and possibly also to the execution of genocide in its final stages.

## 5.0 - Risk Factors

Genocide and related mass atrocities feature common patterns, precursors, catalysts, and triggers. This is a deliberate and often bureaucratic process deeply bound to the structure and operation of the modern state. As such, the Sentinel Project uses a matrix of risk factors which have historically preceded mass atrocities in order to assess the risk of genocide in a situation of concern. These are divided into five categories: Sociocultural, Economic, Political – Institutional, Political – Regime and Ideology and Conflict and Upheaval.

In virtually all of these categories, Burma appears to be at a very high risk for genocide in the near future. Nearly all known attributes shown historically to lead to genocide are not only present in Burma, but exist to a high degree. In light of this evidence, the Sentinel Project recognizes that Burma is in a state of genocide emergency and that actions taken to counter the commission of mass killings must take the late stages of preparation into account.

### 5.1 - Sociocultural

Sociocultural risk factors are based on a matrix of seven attributes which increase the likelihood of genocide. A state or an organization within a state is more likely to carry out genocide under the following circumstances: that distinctive groups exist within its social structure and are clearly delineated; there exists a harmful aspect of ethnic nationalism which is exclusionary toward a targeted group; there is a legacy of hostility or specific grievances between groups; the target group has suffered prior persecution; the target group is devalued culturally and is viewed by the public to be an obstacle to economic progress; and lastly, that the demographic profile of the society is such that there exist a disproportionately large number of youths who are impoverished or unemployed.

#### 5.1.1 Existence of Distinctive Groups Separated by Social Divisions

Burma has long been a mosaic of diverse religions, ethnicities, and languages. While there are a total of 135 ethnic groups recognized by Burma's government, with eight major groups, some groups like the Shan, for example, are divided within themselves by languages that differ significantly. While the military regime that seized power in 1962 has consistently enforced a Buddhist identity and ethnic-nationalist rule much to the detriment of civil peace, Burma did not initially strive to model itself after the ethnically homogenized nation-states that characterized the twentieth century and dominated much of its history.

After independence from the British Empire was promised in 1947, Burma's leadership began to negotiate a multi-ethnic structure that acknowledged in principle the goal of an autonomous federalized system based on free governance among most minority groups, excluding the Karen, Mon, and Arakanese. This negotiation, resulting in the Panglong Agreement, formed the basis of modern Burma. Its lack of fulfillment following the

assassination of General Aung San became the catalyst for civil war from 1948 to the present, with nearly all of Burma's minorities waging armed conflict against the government. Major conflicts have involved the Kachin, Karen, Rakhine, Kayah, and Shan and their respective armed wings. Since 1962, Burma has been both mired in civil war and has undertaken campaigns of ethnic cleansing including the little-known mass exodus of 100,000 Chinese orchestrated by General Ne Win in the late 1960s.

The fourth largest ethnic group in Burma, the Rakhine people, also known as the Arakanese, is concentrated in western Burma, bordering Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal, and is mainly a Buddhist population. The Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Rakhine, are acknowledged to be among the greatest victims of the Burmese civil war.<sup>43</sup> In areas of Rakhine where Muslims and Buddhists coexisted before recent ethnic cleansing operations, they were primarily separated into ethnic enclaves, which contributed to social and economic division and stratification. At the national level, Muslims were barred from Burma's military, the only path to political power in Burma, and from many civil administration positions.

Despite the multitude of ethnicities, languages, cultures, and religions in Burma, the majority-Buddhist government continues to enforce the "Myanmar ideology," which forces assimilation and leaves much of Burma's population without political representation.

### 5.1.2 Ethnic Nationalism

Perhaps one of the most tangible signs of the conflict between the majority Buddhist population and minority populations in Burma is the military junta's renaming the state to "Myanmar" in 1989. The name change was the epitome of the "nation-building" efforts by the military government dating from the 1960s – an effort that began with the assassination of the federalist General Aung San and continues in an effort to forcibly assimilate the state's diverse populace. While, etymologically speaking, the demonyms "Myanmar" and "Burmese" are the same, "Myanmar" is synonymous with being ethnically Bamar, and being ethnically Bamar is synonymous with being Buddhist. Lian Sakhong, director of the Burma Center for Ethnic studies, references a Burmese saying to illustrate this point "*Buddabata Myanmar Lu-myo*" (to be Myanmar is to be Buddhist). This official policy of "Myanmarization," or Mahar Myanmar, was meant to promote assimilation into the "Myanmar" religion, ethnicity, and language.<sup>44</sup> The subsequent elections which had showed support for minority autonomy reignited the assimilation effort among reactionaries and minorities were ultimately left with little political legitimacy and representation.

Understanding the government's historical efforts to build a nation in Burma using forced assimilation and violence is essential to comprehending the otherwise baffling support of the ultra-nationalist 969 movement and why organizations overtly hostile to human rights

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<sup>43</sup> "Ethnic Nationalities of Burma." Accessed 24 July 2013. *Oxford Burma Alliance*. <<http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/ethnic-groups.html>>

<sup>44</sup> Sakhong, Lian H. "The Dynamics of Sixty Years of Ethnic Armed Conflict in Burma." January 2012. *Burma Center for Ethnic Studies*. <<http://burmaethnicstudies.net/pdf/Analysis%20Paper%20No%201.pdf>>

are gaining favour with the current policy of “disciplined democracy.” While appearing to depart from the long history of forced assimilation, the government’s subtle backing of the 969 movement is actually realizing a decades-long mission of Burma’s ruling elite: to achieve the popular dominance of the Bamar and ethnically homogenize the nation-state. 969 has become an unofficial mouthpiece for the current government – a propaganda department that causes them no loss in political capital on the international scene because it can be easily dissociated from official government public relations as a nationalist movement exercising free speech. 969 has merely supplanted official government attempts to create national consciousness among the Bamar majority.

### *5.1.3 Legacy of Inter-Group Hatred or Grievance*

A legacy of hatred between groups can greatly increase the likelihood of hatred resurfacing and violence reoccurring, even if previous grievances have roots going back decades or centuries, beyond living memory. The history of tension between the majority Buddhist Arakanese and the Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine State is well established. Massacres between the groups occurred during the Second World War and the perception that Muslims historically sided with the British Empire still looms large in modern Burma, where, as in many post-colonial states, the population still harbours resentment toward the former colonizing country even when the “social memory” of colonial Burma exceeds living memory.

The fact that the 2012 Rakhine State Riots occurred when they did is not merely a matter of coincidence. In fact, the riots, which saw the displacement of 90,000 people (mostly Muslims), coincided with the seventieth anniversary of the 1942 massacres of thousands of Muslim and Buddhist civilians on opposing sides of the Second World War. The Rohingya are not merely associated with specific incidents like the 1942 massacre, but with being part of the ruling class during colonization, a mistaken perception based on the conflation of Indian Muslims with Burmese.

The reality that violence can be directly linked with the historical memory of past incidents means that modern grievances of historical wrongs can lead to action and violence in modern day Burma. This legacy greatly increases the risk of future inter-ethnic violence and even genocide.

### *5.1.4 Prior Persecution of the Outgroup*

Immediately after the military coup in 1962, Burma’s government began to take action against ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya. A series of state policies restricting Rohingya freedom of movement and invalidating their citizenship documentation was initiated in an attempt to drive them from the country. The 1977 Dragon King operation, which was aimed at foreign elements in the state, became little more than attacks on the Rohingya minority by both

the Tatmadaw and the ethnic Rakhines. In 1978, over 200,000 Rohingya fled the violence into Bangladesh but many returned a year later.<sup>45</sup>

Previous unsuccessful attempts to cleanse Rakhine State of “undesirable” elements resulted in a higher risk of genocide as the local and national governments have attempted to both deal with a present-day ethnic “problems” and “right” the historical “wrong.” It also serves as evidence that the Rohingya cannot simply be resettled in another region and may indicate to ultra-nationalists that extermination is the only option.

### 5.1.5 Cultural Devaluation of Outgroup

A common prelude to genocide is a concerted attempt to devalue the target group’s cultural contributions to history and to the nation. A devalued group is more likely to be seen by potential perpetrators and bystanders as worthless or a parasite on valued groups, and goes hand-in-hand with dehumanization. A by-product of Burma’s Mahar Myanmar ideology of nation-building has been not only the devaluation of Muslim culture but also a concerted attempt to rid Burma of all culture that is not distinctly Bamar. This included the forcible standardization of language, education, the names of children, and culture. “The Burmese Way to Socialism” comprised much of the same nation-building efforts as were attempted by the Soviet Union, with similar results: nationalities inside Burma were suppressed by force but would quickly resurface and resist, thus resulting in civil war and unrest.

Muslim culture is not only devalued but also seen as an active threat by ethnic-nationalists. Cultural symbols of Islam are usually attacked during instances of inter-ethnic violence, with mosque burnings being a common feature of outbreaks of violence in Lashio, Meikhtila, and Sittwe. Among nationalists, rumours abound that Mosques are used simply to pool the resources of Muslim communities to buy favour from the government.

The Rohingya in Burma are particularly subject to cultural devaluation and their cultural status within Rakhine and Burma in general place them at an especially high risk for genocide. Extreme nationalists view their contribution to the nation to be null. Upon blaming Rohingya for the July 2013 Gaya explosions in India, extreme nationalist monk Wirathu told *Outlook Magazine*, “Though they [Muslims] live here, they’re doing nothing good for Myanmar.”<sup>46</sup>

### 5.1.6 Outgroup Viewed as an Obstacle to Economic Progress

The risk of genocide in a given state is increased if the potential perpetrators view the target group as an obstacle to economic progress, especially in regions where rates of poverty

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<sup>45</sup> United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Burma [Myanmar]: Information on Rohingya refugees*, 7 December 1999, MMR00001.ZNK. <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a6a41c.html>>

<sup>46</sup> Thiri Thu, Eaint. 'I'm Sure Rohingyas are Behind Bodh Gaya Blasts.' 13 July 2013. *Hindustan Times*. <<http://www.hindustantimes.com/editorial-views-on/InterviewsNews/I-m-sure-Rohingyas-are-behind-Bodh-Gaya-blasts-Myanmar-monk/Article1-1091607.aspx>>

are high. In Burma, popular rumours are circulated both out of ignorance and out of the intent to incite hatred. Matt Schissler, a Westerner who has lived in Yangon since 2007, offered the following narrative of the beliefs of his Buddhist hosts:

“Muslims only hire Muslims and only shop at Muslim shops. Buddhists don’t do the same. Muslims receive outside funding from other countries that gives them an unfair advantage against Buddhist shops. They pool taxes to their Mosques to bribe government officials and politicians to take (undefined) actions that give them a collective market advantage.”<sup>47</sup>

The 969 movement, an ideology spreading rapidly in Burma, holds at its most fundamental level trappings of economic jealousy and the threat of Muslim domination perceived by Buddhists. The 969 sticker is a prolific marker of Buddhist shops, even among moderates who believe in the good fortune of the Buddhist numerology it espouses. 969 can often be seen spray painted around scenes of anti-Muslim riots and on Muslim property. The movement aims to boycott Muslim businesses but also to refuse Muslim customers – it is an all-out economic war on Burma’s Muslims. The ruling government’s strong defense of 969 indicates that it is not merely a grassroots populist movement but rather is officially aligned with the current quasi-civilian regime. This perception of the Muslim minority in Burma as an economic hindrance increases the risk of inter-ethnic violence.

### 5.1.7 Population Growth and Youth Bulge

A disproportionate “bulge” of young people in the demographic makeup of a population can predispose a region to instability and violence, especially when combined with high unemployment. Such a situation often becomes fertile soil for extreme ideologies, facilitates militia recruitment, and makes their soldiers more desperate.

Burma’s demographic composition is one of the few factors that do not predispose the country to genocide. One must keep in mind, however, that no authoritative census has been carried out in decades and that the numbers analyzed are merely estimates. According to open source Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents, approximately 26 per cent of the population falls into the age group of 0-14 years, around 18 per cent into 15-24 years, and 43 per cent into the 25-54 year range. When compared to violence-prone countries like Somalia, with 44.7 per cent of the population 0-14 years old, the stark difference becomes clear. According to a recent study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, Burma may actually suffer from the opposite affliction with an aging population unable to support the boom of economic growth expected to encounter the opening of Burma’s inexpensive labour market. In the opinion of the OECD, although Burma has a

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<sup>47</sup> Schissler, Matt. “Everyday Ethnic Tensions in Myanmar.” 27 March 2013. *New Mandala*. <<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2013/03/27/everyday-ethnic-tensions-in-myanmar/>>

comparatively young population, the current generation may have aged to the detriment of development within the next decade.<sup>48</sup>

## 5.2 - Economic

The opening up of Burma presents a swiftly changing economic landscape. After seizing power in 1962, Burma's military junta transformed the country from a major rice exporter with an average prosperity higher than China, to one of the most impoverished countries in the world.<sup>49</sup> Recent political reforms have led to the easing of trade restrictions on resource-rich Burma and an inflow of Western capital. Thus, many of the harsh economic conditions which might increase the likelihood of inter-ethnic violence are beginning to show signs of abating, although the pace at which they do and whether or not they continue depends on the regime's commitment to democratic change and transparency, and whether or not minorities will benefit along with most Burmese.

The Sentinel Project risk assessment schema outlines four key economic factors that affect the likelihood of organized inter-ethnic violence and genocide: whether a large proportion of the population endures long-term harsh living conditions; whether deprivation is combined with inequality that is clearly based on membership to a specific group; whether the state has experienced recent and severe economic cataclysm; and the international economic integration of the state under the ruling regime.

### 5.2.1 Long-Term Difficult Life Conditions

Burma's gross domestic product (GDP) is an estimated 88 billion USD, currently less than one per cent of Asia's and approximately equal to some cities in developed countries.<sup>50</sup> Burma's per-capita GDP is around 1,400 USD with 25 per cent of the population living below the poverty line; only four per cent of Burma's population earns enough money for discretionary spending. In addition to its very low rate of production, constant deficits have forced reliance on Burma's central bank, which has compensated by printing money, resulting in inflation averaging 23 per cent over the previous decade, a factor which particularly affects the poor.<sup>51</sup>

Burma's artificially imposed economic woes stretch back nearly as far as living memory. In 1988, the military government completely devalued certain currency denominations in order to confiscate wealth from the Burmese people, an act which rendered a staggering 75 per cent of currency worthless. The financial crippling of a large majority of Burmese citizens played a

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<sup>48</sup> Chen, Sharon. "Myanmar Risks Getting Old Before Becoming Rich, OECD Report Says." 17 July 2013. *Bloomberg*.

<<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-07-18/myanmar-risks-getting-old-before-becoming-rich-oecd-report-says.html>>

<sup>49</sup> Steinbock, Dan. "Myanmar – Asia's Next Tiger?" 17 May 2013. *Economy Watch*. <<http://www.economywatch.com/economy-business-and-finance-news/myanmar-asias-next-economic-tiger-dan-steinbock.16-05.html>>

<sup>50</sup> Sampson, Pamela. "Report Says Resource-Rich Myanmar Could See Its Economy Quadruple by 2030." 31 May 2013. *The Province*. <<http://www.theprovince.com/business/Report+says+resourcerich+Myanmar+could+economy+quadruple+2030/8461074/story.html>>

<sup>51</sup> Steinbock, Dan. "Myanmar – Asia's Next Tiger?" 17 May 2013. *Economy Watch*. <<http://www.economywatch.com/economy-business-and-finance-news/myanmar-asias-next-economic-tiger-dan-steinbock.16-05.html>>



significant role in precipitating the 1988 uprisings.<sup>52</sup> Today, amid the increasing demand and price for products and services, average Burmese struggle to live on the equivalent of 1 to 2 USD per day.<sup>53</sup> Where extra money does exist, their distrust of the Burmese banking system means that accumulated wealth is secretly cached rather than put to productive use.<sup>54</sup> The current desperation is such that Aung San Suu Kyi reported to the International Labor Conference in 2012, “It is not so much joblessness as hopelessness that threatens our future. Unemployed youth lose confidence in the society that has failed to give them the chance to realize their potential.”<sup>55</sup> Burma’s economic situation in its cities, countryside, and especially in IDP camps, has provided fertile breeding grounds for extremism, with the latter being linked to international terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda.<sup>56</sup>

### 5.2.2 Socioeconomic Deprivation Combined with Group-Based Inequality

In addition to the support for local autonomy catalyzed by the draconian rule of Burma’s military dictatorship, widespread poverty has been a source of support for the country’s many ethnic rebel groups and their often illicit economic activities, particularly the growth, manufacture, and trade of opium and other drugs. Drug trafficking, import, export, and money laundering are not only practiced by local drug lords and liberation armies, but also by the Burmese government, state corporations including the Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise, and the Burmese army. The monetary value of the opium trade in Burma has matched legal exports, thus making the nation second only to Afghanistan in production worldwide. Even so, this may speak more about the weakness of the legal Burmese economy than it does about the strength of the illicit narcotics trade. Burma is a country rich in untapped and underdeveloped natural resources and if trade liberalization continues, along with improvements to electricity generation and the quality of education, the demand for Burmese labour may surge as well.<sup>57</sup>

Two factors have ultimately led to the popular and governmental creation of group-based inequality between Buddhists and Muslims in Burma with what little wealth does circulate in the country. One factor was the founding and popularization of the so-called 969 movement which attempted to attach a religious meaning to the pervasive boycotting of Muslim businesses proffered by ethnic nationalists. The other factor originated in several waves of ethnic cleansing, mostly between June 2012 and 2013, which resulted in the total number of

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<sup>52</sup> J.T. “Too Many Chits for Kyat.” 30 May 2013. *The Economist*. <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/05/myanmars-remittances?fsrc=scn/tw/te/bl/chitsforkyat>>

<sup>53</sup> Steinbock, Dan. “Myanmar – Asia’s Next Tiger?” 17 May 2013. *Economy Watch*. <<http://www.economywatch.com/economy-business-and-finance-news/myanmar-asias-next-economic-tiger-dan-steinbock.16-05.html>>

<sup>54</sup> J.T. “Too Many Chits for Kyat.” 30 May 2013. *The Economist*. <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/05/myanmars-remittances?fsrc=scn/tw/te/bl/chitsforkyat>>

<sup>55</sup> Ives, Mike. “Myanmar’s Youth Wait for Key Fruit of Reform: Jobs.” 1 June 2013. *Christian Science Monitor*. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2013/0601/Myanmar-s-youth-wait-for-key-fruit-of-reform-jobs>>

<sup>56</sup> Otis, Daniel. “Burma’s ‘Hidden Genocide’: A Rare Visit to Rohingya Refugee Camps.” 18 May 2013. *The Toronto Star*. <[http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/05/18/burma\\_cyclone\\_and\\_monsoon\\_could\\_unleash\\_a\\_flood\\_of\\_hate\\_between\\_buddhists\\_and\\_muslims.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/05/18/burma_cyclone_and_monsoon_could_unleash_a_flood_of_hate_between_buddhists_and_muslims.html)>

<sup>57</sup> Sampson, Pamela. “Report Says Resource-Rich Myanmar Could See Its Economy Quadruple by 2030.” 31 May 2013. *The Province*. <<http://www.theprovince.com/business/Report+says+resourcerich+Myanmar+could+economy+quadruple+2030/8461074/story.html>>

displaced Muslims reaching more than 130,000.<sup>58</sup> The camps are virtually cut off from international aid, Rohingya are denied citizenship, and are therefore unable to benefit from Burma's liberalizing economy. Those Rohingya Muslims not isolated in IDP camps report frequent financial extortion and even robbery by Burmese authorities, including the army, police forces, and intelligence services.

Despite their economic destitution, the Rohingya are perceived by Buddhist nationalists as having an unfair economic advantage, a rumour buttressed by unfounded claims of foreign subsidization of Muslim businesses and a historical conflation of Muslims with British colonial administrators. In a June 2013 interview, nationalist monk and hate speech propagandist Wirathu said that "Muslim men marry Buddhist girls, but Muslim girls are taught not to marry anyone of a different religion. Muslims never sell their land or property to Buddhists and instead buy off Buddhists' houses. In this way, they are expanding their control, and are dominating the economy of our major cities."<sup>59</sup>

### 5.2.3 Sudden and Severe Economic Hardship

In many ways, Burma appears to be on the verge of an economic boom as countless Western companies never before seen in the country react to the easing of trade restrictions and begin to inject capital into a long-depressed economy. More experienced in Burmese dealings, and less concerned about human rights, countries like China and Thailand have preceded the West in developing Burma's natural resource industry and have found challenges due to Burma's lack of critical infrastructure and its inter-ethnic unrest, both of which have endangered its nascent fossil fuel industry. Among the most crippling of obstacles to alleviating the economic hardship of the average Burmese, however, is the rampant corruption and lack of transparency which pervade the country, both attributes found by the Revenue Watch Institute to be among the worst in the world.<sup>60</sup> Worries persist that while the per-capita income of Burmese citizens may rise, corruption may mean that a large percentage of Burmese will still live below the poverty line in a similar situation to that seen in Equatorial Guinea, where despite a rate of per-person prosperity higher than the United Kingdom, three quarters of the population still live in poverty.

Thus, the economic condition elevating the risk of genocide in Burma is not expected to be a sudden economic downturn, but rather the lack of fulfillment of the promise of progress and relief following long-term economic hardship. Burma may indeed suffer from what economists have called "Bangladesh Syndrome," a lack of investment and even decline of labour demand caused by Burma's constant shortfall of electricity generation. Only 26 per cent of Burmese have access to electricity, and while there is no shortage of proposals and plans for

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<sup>58</sup> Sampson, Pamela. "Report Says Resource-Rich Myanmar Could See Its Economy Quadruple by 2030." 31 May 2013. *The Province*. <<http://www.theprovince.com/business/Report+says+resourcerich+Myanmar+could+economy+quadruple+2030/8461074/story.html>>

<sup>59</sup> Sampson, Pamela. "Report Says Resource-Rich Myanmar Could See Its Economy Quadruple by 2030." 31 May 2013. *The Province*. <<http://www.theprovince.com/business/Report+says+resourcerich+Myanmar+could+economy+quadruple+2030/8461074/story.html>>

<sup>60</sup> "Secrecy in Oil, Gas, and Mining Conspires Against Economic Development." 15 May 2013. *Revenue Watch Institute*. <[http://www.revenuewatch.org/news/press\\_releases/launch-revenue-watch-2013-resource-governance-index](http://www.revenuewatch.org/news/press_releases/launch-revenue-watch-2013-resource-governance-index)>

electricity generation, the Burmese government has failed to take action with regards to assurances and support for such plans.<sup>61</sup>

#### 5.2.4 Economic Status of the Regime

Burma is rich in agricultural potential and natural resources. The state's long history of economic woes is entirely self-imposed and there is little beyond governmental policy that prevents the economic success of Burma. The opening up of Burma economically may mean a mitigation of the risk of genocide, and not only in terms of economic risk factors. As Burma becomes more thoroughly integrated with the world economy, its freedom to deal harshly with inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions will decrease as economic sanctions become a potentially more impactful penalty.

Two divergent trends are already evident in the context of the economic opening of Burma. First is a concentrated campaign of signing ceasefires and settling inter-ethnic disputes with Burma's many ethnic minorities, many of whom have been at war with the government for over half a century;<sup>62</sup> second is a campaign of secrecy and denial with regard to the Burmese government's involvement in the ethnic cleansing of its one unrecognized minority, the Rohingya. Were it to arise, overwhelming direct evidence of Burma's involvement in genocide and ethnic cleansing could mean a reversal of previous trade policies, endangering the current government in the lead-up to proposed free elections. As the economic interdependence of Burma increases, so will efforts to ensure that the regime does not become connected to crimes against Muslims.

#### 5.3 - Political – Institutional

Burma's Political – Institutional risk factors generally put it at a higher risk for genocide since the country's political culture is oligarchical and characterized by opaqueness and corruption. Transparency International, an organization that rates corruption worldwide, has ranked Burma at 172 out of 176 on its Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating a very high level of corruption.<sup>63</sup> This is a particularly alarming factor in Burma since many agencies operate independently and without any regard for the rule of law. This casts doubts on the regime's ability to function, reform, and carry out its legal and constitutional obligations implicit in democratic governance.

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<sup>61</sup> Boot, William. "'Bangladesh Syndrome' Looms Over Burma's Electricity Crisis." 16 May 2013. *The Irrawaddy*. <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/34663>>

<sup>62</sup> Despite having signed a ceasefire in May, some elements of ethnic Kachin, the last ethnicity to form a ceasefire with the Burmese government, have reported repeated clashes with the national army. Linn, Zin. "Analysis: A Long Way to Create a Peaceful Kachin State in Burma." 24 June 2013. *Asian Correspondent*. <<http://asiancorrespondent.com/109737/analysis-a-long-way-to-create-a-peaceful-kachin-state-in-burma/>>

<sup>63</sup> See: <<http://www.transparency.org/country#MMR>>

The Sentinel Project measures the likelihood of genocide in terms of a state's political institutions by evaluating five major areas: the degree of democracy in a state; the frequency and method by which political leadership changes over time; the reputation and history of key state security agencies and internal troops; the level of expenditure on the armed forces; and whether or not the state is isolated from the international community.

### 5.3.1 Low Degree of Democracy

In 1988, the same time as the Velvet Revolutions which swept the socialist republics of the former Soviet Union, Burma had its own pro-democracy movement protesting government corruption and lack of freedom, commonly known as the "8888 Uprising." Thousands of protestors were killed by junta forces and a coup d'état changed the leadership of the authoritarian state. General Saw Maung, the new ruler, declared martial law in order to restore peace.

In 1990, Burma held free elections in which Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won by a landslide. Although many continue to report that the military government refused to recognize the results of the election by not ceding power as agreed, no such contract was made since the purpose of the election was never defined by the government and all parties involved knew that a transfer of power would not immediately take place.<sup>64</sup>

Yet another protest movement emerged in August 2007 which was precipitated by the government's plan to withdraw fuel subsidies, which caused a dramatic increase in the prices of fuel and food in a country where chronic malnourishment is a problem for over 30 per cent of children. The movement, symbolized by Buddhist monks, became known as the "Saffron Revolution" and the reigning junta brutally cracked down on protestors yet again. Estimates of individuals injured and killed vary but average estimates place them at over one hundred.

In 2010, a nominally civilian government led by Thein Sein was given a mandate in an election marred by irregularities and boycotted by the NLD. The new government has pledged to hold free elections again, and reforms have led to an easing of trade restrictions imposed by Western countries. With many reforms such as freedom of the press threatening to be reversed or not enacted fully, and with Burma's history of superficial change, the degree of democracy at present is still considered to be low, increasing the weight of this risk factor for possible genocide since the government still operates mostly without accountability to citizens.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> "Political Myths." *Network Myanmar*. Accessed 24 July 2013. <<http://www.networkmyanmar.org/index.php/political-myths>>

<sup>65</sup> Linn, Zin. "Burma Reform Hampered by Three Draft Laws." 15 June 2013. *Asian Correspondent*. <<http://asiancorrespondent.com/109248/burma-media-reform-mystified-by-three-draft-laws/>>

### 5.3.2 Frequent Changes in Political Leadership

Myanmar has had only two major shifts in power since the despotic but relatively stable military junta came to power in 1962. One shift was a violent coup d'état in 1988 during the 8888 Uprising when General Saw Maung took power. In 1992, Saw Maung resigned his post, citing health reasons, and General Than Shwe took power in a peaceful transition.

Although the government continued to rule as a military junta, Than Shwe relaxed some economic rules and attempted to crack down on corruption in 1997. Amnesty International described human rights abuses under Shwe as widespread and systematic with as many as one million Burmese alleged to be imprisoned in labour camps.<sup>66</sup>

In 2010, power changed hands yet again when Thein Sein won the controversial 2010 general election. The election was boycotted by the NLD, a party that had won 80 per cent of seats in 1990. The United Nations declared the elections fraudulent.

The frequency of leadership changes in Burma has so far been low and so it is not seen as concerning from a genocide risk perspective. Thein Sein has been generally viewed as a moderate and in addition to releasing Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest has met with her and established a dialogue with the political opposition in general. However, since violence in Burma's past has often been a popular pretext under which the military has increased its influence over domestic policy, destabilizing elements including the actions of hard-line, allegedly military-supported organizations such as Swan Arshin and Taung Tha could be used to shift political leadership yet again if such organizations go unchecked and if the military is not placated by the political leadership. Aung San Suu Kyi has already shown deference and respect to the armed forces despite a history of being victimized by the junta and a reputation as one of its staunchest opponents.<sup>67</sup>

### 5.3.3 State Security Agencies Operate With Few Constraints

In Burma, state security agencies, including the police, army, internal security troops, and border security, have a history of atrocities and corruption, particularly in Rakhine State, home of the Rohingya. Recently, their role in civil unrest has ranged from outright participation in ethnic cleansing to apathy to active intervention. The latter was seen in a recent standoff in Lashio, when police refused to hand over a Muslim man to be lynched by an angry mob,<sup>68</sup> and

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<sup>66</sup> Norman, Joshua. "The World's Enduring Dictators: Than Shwe, Myanmar (Burma)." 2 June 2011. *CBS News*. <[http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543\\_162-20068075-503543.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-20068075-503543.html)>

<sup>67</sup> Fuller, Thomas. "Myanmar Jarred by Peace Laureate at Military Parade." 27 March 2013. *New York Times*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/world/asia/daw-aung-san-suu-kyi-appears-at-burmese-military-parade.html>>

<sup>68</sup> The ensuing violence in Lashio was in reaction to police refusal to hand over the man. Many eyewitnesses reported outsiders armed with machetes and iron pipes terrorizing Muslims who eventually sought refuge in Buddhist temples. Ferrie, Jared. "Mobs Attack Muslim Homes in Myanmar, One Dead." 29 May 2013. *Reuters*. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/29/us-myanmar-violence-idUSBRE94S0JD20130529>>

in Nammatu village, when police and army units prevented a gang of Buddhist “thugs” from harming a young Muslim girl.<sup>69</sup>

This kind of active intervention is uncommon and the prevention of violence is haphazard at best. Bans on unlawful assembly were imposed in Meikhtila after three days of violence, and in Lashio, after two. In many cases, security forces are ordered to stand by and do nothing; in other cases, such as the incident reported by the Daily Telegraph, security forces are directly involved in the execution of civilians and the disposal of bodies in mass graves.<sup>70</sup>

According to the *Rohingya Blogger* website, security forces such as the Nasaka and Intelligence Department Staff are also known to extort Rohingya by kidnapping and falsely imprisoning Muslims until ransom is paid; incidences of extortion were reported as recently as June 2013.<sup>71</sup> In May 2013, a particularly disturbing incident occurred involving the Ministry of Immigration and Population. In a small village outside of Sittwe, a town that made news when ethnic cleansing was carried out in October 2012, Nasaka and government officials attempted to survey Muslims and register them as “Bengali,” a term that implies they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Since recording the name and location of every individual of an “undesirable” group may indicate that the organization or preparation stage of genocide is present, it was particularly disconcerting that violence broke out in reaction and that a Muslim man who refused to register was arrested. Another witness, whose wife was taken by police in retaliation, is not even a Rohingya but rather a member of the Kaman ethnicity, a group officially recognized by the Burmese government.<sup>72</sup>

Attempts to “Bengalize” the Rohingya have recurred several times with reports that victims are tortured and beaten until they sign papers indicating they are Bengali (see Appendix 1). In another incident, between 20 and 23 June 2013, 34 people were forcibly registered by the authorities in a village near the border town of Maung Daw.<sup>73</sup>

A human source inside Burma informed the Sentinel Project that the census was part of a campaign to appease foreign governments demanding that the Rohingya be granted citizenship. The source reported under the condition of anonymity that:

Rohingya IDP have had theft of their legal documents throughout the anti-Muslim campaign in Rakhine since June 2012. The international community has repeatedly asked that the Burma government address citizenship. Of course, the “census” and its most-to-all Bengali registrations will be their answer to the international demand. Naturalization will be an “option” but eligibility for naturalization will be highly

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<sup>69</sup> Myanmar Chronicle via Social Media (Burmese) 21 June 2013.

<[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=504713922931930&id=456664931070163](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=504713922931930&id=456664931070163)>

<sup>70</sup> McElroy, Damien. “Burmese Security Filled Mass Graves with Muslims.” 22 April 2013. *The Telegraph*.

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/burmayanmar/10008702/Burmese-security-filled-mass-graves-with-Muslims.html>>

<sup>71</sup> “Intelligent (sic) Department Staff Extorting Money Like a Robber.” 10 June 2013. *RB News*.

<<http://www.rohingyablogger.com/2013/06/intelligent-department-staff-extorting.html>>

<sup>72</sup> Vrieze, Paul and Htet Naing Zaw. “Gov’t Measures Keep Tensions High in Arakan, One Year After Violence Began.” 10 June 2013. *The Irrawaddy*. <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/37006>>

<sup>73</sup> Myaing, Aye. Blog: “A List of Victims of Devastative Forced Bengalization.” 27 June 2013. *Rohingya Blogger*.

<<http://www.rohingyablogger.com/2013/06/a-list-of-rohingya-victims-of.html>>

discriminatory. There will be massive forced deportation and violent Rakhine intolerance of these “discovered” Bengali leading to another wave of killings and exodus leading to further death at sea and persecution at Burma[’s] neighbor[ing] countries.

The aforementioned Rohingya campaign reports and the Sentinel Project’s corroborating evidence indicate that, contrary to government rhetoric, the ethnic cleansing and potential genocide in Burma is not “communal” or “criminal” in nature, but rather state organized.

The history of Burma’s security forces and their participation in crimes against humanity serve to illustrate that they are organizations capable of carrying out genocide with impunity. In the event that ethnic cleansing evolves into a final phase of outright mass killing, the security forces are likely to provide cover for plainclothes paramilitary organizations like Swan Arshin in order to facilitate the denial of genocide by Burma’s government, which is becoming increasingly dependent on continuing international economic cooperation. So far, incidences of ethnic cleansing have been systematic and well-organized but carefully engineered to look random and spontaneous; this type of violence could not have occurred without the complicity or indifference of the state security apparatus. The president of Burma alleged that violence has been criminal and not inter-ethnic or religious in nature. On 25 June 2013, however, the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar (Burma) Tomas Ojea Quintana contradicted this claim and told Australian television that abuses against the Rohingya in particular were “widespread and systematic” and that crimes against humanity are committed with “impunity.”<sup>74</sup>

### *5.3.4 High Level of Military Expenditure*

According to open source documents from the US CIA, Burma rates 18<sup>th</sup> in the world in military spending by percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) at 4.8 per cent, only 0.2 per cent more than the United States. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, however, found that only four other countries in the world spend more on their militaries.<sup>75</sup> Burma publicly acknowledged its military budget for the first time in 2013, revealing that it is equivalent to 1.15 billion USD. While this amounts to slightly over 20 per cent of the government’s total budget, and allegedly represents a slight decrease from 2012, additional sources of funding are written into Burmese law that allow the military to secure funds for nearly any requirement without parliamentary approval. Burma’s defence spending stands in stark contrast with its spending on education and healthcare, which together account for less than nine per cent of the annual budget.

Burma’s military has been described by several reporters as a “state within a state” and high-ranking army personnel live a parallel existence unencumbered by the crippling poverty experienced by nearly a third of Burmese citizens. Furthermore, since a quarter of the seats in

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<sup>74</sup> “UN Disputes Myanmar President’s Denial of Religious Violence: ABC Interview With Quintana, 25 June 2013.” 25 June 2013.

Maungzarni.com <<http://www.maungzarni.com/2013/06/un-disputes-myanmar-presidents-denial.html>>

<sup>75</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: <<http://milexdata.sipri.org/files/?file=SIPRI+military+expenditure+database+1988-2012.xlsx>>

parliament are allocated to the military and many civilian members of parliament are former military members, the armed forces enjoy a lack of opposition and are not subject to the rule of law for atrocities committed either in the past or in recent months. From the perspective of the Sentinel Project's risk assessment framework, Burma's military expenditure paints an ominous picture for the likelihood of genocide and other mass atrocities since the Burmese military clearly maintains a very capable and well-resourced force with significant freedom of action to actively repress either real or perceived internal opponents.

### 5.3.5 Isolation from the International Community

Burma was largely isolated from the international community until the recent wave of reform which began in 2011. Professor Robert Leiberan, the maker of a secret documentary *They Call it Myanmar: Lifting the Curtain*, argued in 2012 that Burma was the world's second most isolated country, with North Korea being its only rival for that distinction.<sup>76</sup> Like totalitarian North Korea, Burmese human rights violations and aggression (mostly internal in the case of Burma) have resulted in embargoes, sanctions, and trade restrictions which have been eased only very recently. Also like North Korea, China has been Burma's main supporter and has facilitated the continued survival of its notorious regime.

The ending of isolation in Burma is a mitigating factor in terms of the risk of genocide because nations that are highly integrated both economically and diplomatically with the international community are historically less likely to experience genocide. However, Burma appears to be isolating parts of its territory where the gravest abuses still occur and has blocked aid from reaching IDPs. While Burma may be opening up its major cities to intercommunication and less restrictive journalism, the areas that are the most likely to experience crimes against humanity and genocide remain cut off from the outside world and authorities are free to act unfettered by the rule of law and continue to violate basic human rights.

## 5.4 - Political – Regime & Ideology

The Sentinel Project considers six facets of a ruling regime and state ideology that may affect the likelihood of genocide within a situation of concern: whether there exists charismatic leadership or a cult of personality in the regime or influential organizations; whether or not the regime has publicly committed to a harmful ideology; whether the regime has demonstrated a history of using force and coercion to maintain its position of power; whether the government practices discrimination against certain targeted groups within the state; whether the state promulgates the idea that a target group is a danger to the broader society, particularly groups forming its support base; and the degree of protection for freedom of speech as provided for in law and practice.

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<sup>76</sup> "Secret Film Reveals Isolated Burma." 19 March 2012. *Times of Malta*. <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120319/arts-entertainment/Secret-film-reveals-isolated-Burma.411739>>



### 5.4.1 Charismatic Leadership that Creates Mass Followership

Charismatic leadership and popular movements in Burma have historically been the domain of its religious institutions rather than its political leaders. The totalitarianism espoused by communist ideology, which elsewhere in the world used atheism to pry influence away from the ancient religious establishment, was never fully realized in Burma, where the “Burmese Way to Socialism” combined Marxist-Leninist rationalism with Buddhist mysticism. Although Thein Sein’s predecessor, General Than Shwe, attempted to build a cult of personality around himself in the twilight years of his rule,<sup>77</sup> the result did not take hold the way it had in other authoritarian states.<sup>78</sup> When Thein Sein came to power, his utter lack of charisma was considered an asset. “He is not a fire-breathing dragon, so he doesn’t pose any threat to Than Shwe, who will continue to exercise absolute power” Aung Zaw, editor of *Irrawaddy Magazine*, told the BBC in 2012.<sup>79</sup> Although there are well-founded doubts that Than Shwe is exercising any form of power at present,<sup>80</sup> it is beyond question that other military hardliners are wielding considerable power in the shadows of Burma’s new government.

Both the 1988 uprising and the 2007 “Saffron Revolution” have featured Buddhist monks at their forefronts both as intellectual leaders as well as grassroots activists. While the political opposition offered by Burma’s religious leaders has often been the bane of the military junta, the new regime has co-opted the outspoken religious leaders who they perceive to be complimentary to their policy. The virulent religious nationalism offered by the 969 movement is a convenient tool to unite a fragmented people; opponents or peacemakers can be denounced as irreligious and unpatriotic, or be accused of endangering the public.

At the center of this ideology of unity is 969 leader and Buddhist monk Wirathu. Wirathu’s many speaking engagements, which draw crowds in the thousands, elicit mass followership among a populace that until recently had little access to information from the outside world. In response to *Time Magazine’s* article criticizing Wirathu for spreading hate, over a thousand Buddhist monks and Burmese citizens participated in an officially sanctioned protest on 30 June 2013 in the streets of Yangon. The social media reaction to the *Time* article garnered tens of thousands of followers, which is significant considering Burma’s extremely low level of internet penetration. Measuring the alleged “rock star” following of controversial 969 leaders reported by the media is difficult, yet these examples serve to illustrate the strong influence that charismatic religious leaders hold over the Burmese public.

### 5.4.2 Commitment to a Harmful Ideology

Although Burma’s government presents its own role as that of a neutral democratizing institution, it has repeatedly committed itself to ideologies of hate and exclusion, as seen in

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<sup>77</sup> Kurlantzick, Joshua. “Burma’s Dear Leader.” 23 April 2006. *Washington Post*. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/21/AR2006042101768.html>>

<sup>78</sup> Rogers, Benedict. “Unlike Than Shwe, Kim Jong Il was a Master of Thought Control.” 20 December 2011. *Democratic Voice of Burma*. <<http://www.dvb.no/analysis/unlike-than-shwe-kim-jong-il-was-a-master-of-thought-control/19265>>

<sup>79</sup> “Profile: Burma President Thein Sein.” 12 October 2012. *BBC*. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12358204>>

<sup>80</sup> “Political Myths.” *Network Myanmar*. Accessed 24 July 2013. <<http://www.networkmyanmar.org/index.php/political-myths>>

how the Rohingya are denied what is possibly the most crucial aspect of the legal protection of the state – citizenship. The government officially refers to the Rohingya as “Bengalis,” a tactful cover for hate speech used to exclude them from the many officially recognized ethnicities of Burma. Moreover, the government has risen to the defence of the controversial 969 movement espoused by right-wing nationalist monks with links to the previous military junta.<sup>81</sup> The minister of religious affairs is counted among the followers of both 969 and Thein Sein and he has defended its most outspoken proponents. Moreover, Thein Sein’s recent defence of ultra-nationalist Wirathu exclusively in the Burmese language presents strong evidence the government is attempting to downplay its ideology to the international community, which may demand human rights as a condition for Burma’s liberalized relations with the West.

Popular political parties in Rakhine State have also committed to an ideology that is plainly oriented toward genocide. For example, Rakhine Nationalities and Development Party (RNDP), the largest party in Rakhine State, published an editorial in November 2012 outlining the justification for the mass extermination of the Rohingya, arguing that “In order for a country’s survival, a survival of a race, or in defence of national sovereignty, crimes against humanity or inhuman acts may justifiably be committed.”<sup>82</sup> Oo Hla Saw, a member of the RNDP told the *Guardian* in December 2012 that “[t]here are outside radical elements [at play] and [the Rohingya issue] is a tool of Islamicisation [sic]. That is why we are afraid.”<sup>83</sup>

The dangerous ideology and increasing tempo of inter-ethnic violence is partially due to democratization since each party attempts to garner the widest appeal and therefore takes advantage of anti-Rohingya and general anti-Muslim feeling, a sentiment deeply ingrained in Burma’s history and spurred on by recent events in Burma and abroad. The popularity of anti-Muslim feeling is so widespread that even the country’s most liberal reformers are often silent about abuses against Muslims for fear of alienating their support base.

#### 5.4.3 Orientation Towards Force and Coercion to Seize and Maintain Power

The relationship between rulers and the ruled in Burma has been almost exclusively characterized by the use of force. Like many authoritarian states, there have been few transfers of power between governments and when these changes have occurred they have always been accompanied by violence and repression. The 8888 uprising, which saw thousands of people killed, ended in a coup. The 1990 election was annulled by the government and the winner, Aung San Suu Kyi, was placed under house arrest. The 2007 Saffron Revolution was also met with force.

In recent history, every time the military regime has been challenged, the response has been swift and violent. The county’s most vaunted reformist and long time victim of the military government, Aung San Suu Kyi, has seemingly acknowledged the military’s place even

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<sup>81</sup> Marshall, Andrew R.C. “Special Report: Myanmar Gives Official Blessing to Anti-Muslim Monks.” 27 June 2013. *Reuters*.

<<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/27/us-myanmar-969-specialreport-idUSBRE95Q04720130627>>

<sup>82</sup> *Progress Magazine*, No. 12. Volume 2, Nov 2012, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Hodal, Kate. “Trapped Inside Burma’s Refugee Camps, the Rohingya People Call for Recognition.” 20 December 2012. *The Guardian*.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/20/burma-rohingya-muslim-refugee-camps>>

in any government that she may one day lead in the event of an electoral victory. Her symbolic gesture of attending a military parade in May 2013, seen by many as acknowledging the military's rightful place of power, might signal her attempt to avoid a violent backlash if, in the wake of an open election, her party wins and the military leadership does not feel threatened. Very recent history shows, however, that if the transition toward a civilian, democratically elected government is too swift, the Burmese military will most likely intervene forcefully in order to maintain power. This may not auger well for the Rohingya, since secretive organizations backed by hard-line military elements may instigate inter-ethnic violence as a pretext for the seizure of power.

#### *5.4.4 Severe Government Discrimination or Active Repression Against Communal Groups*

Burma has a long history of aggressive relationships with ethnic minorities within its borders. While the government tries to maintain a neutral image with regard to the Rohingya, there is ample evidence that it practices both discrimination and active repression, the most significant of which was an amendment to the 1982 citizenship law that revoked their citizenship. According to the government, the Rohingya, a people who have lived in Burma for centuries, are illegal immigrants and therefore stateless persons.<sup>84</sup> Recently, the central government failed to oppose an existing law that stipulates a two-child limit for the Rohingya, a law aimed at controlling the population that was immediately declared a violation of human rights by international organizations, including Human Rights Watch. A more concerning development is the Ministry of Immigration and Population's attempt to register Muslims under the hate speech term "Bengali," a discriminatory action that may indicate preparation for genocide.

The Burmese military and other state instruments of force have actively participated in ethnic cleansing and have failed to protect Burma's minority Muslims in outbreaks of organized violence such as that in Meikhtila, for which Human Rights Watch has presented satellite imagery depicting the complete destruction of Muslim neighbourhoods.<sup>85</sup> The government's support for the 969 movement, which aims to discriminate against Muslims in all spheres of life, has reinforced the connection between communal discrimination and official government policy. President Thein Sein's plan to resettle the Rohingya abroad has also shown that the Muslim minority is deemed undesirable by their own government, who are attempting to carry out well known pre-genocidal steps to rid Burma of unwanted ethnicities.

#### *5.4.5 Ruling Group Deems Outgroup to be Dangerous*

The casting of a group of "undesirable" people as a threat to the ruling group is an essential step toward genocide since it portrays the perpetrators as defenders rather than aggressors. One event in Meikhtila was particularly illustrative of the societal fear and

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<sup>84</sup> Nebehey, Stephanie et al. "Myanmar Must Protect Muslims and Halt Discrimination: U.N." 31 October 2012. *Reuters*.  
<<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/31/us-myanmar-un-idUSBRE89U12T20121031>>

<sup>85</sup> "Burma: Satellite Images Detail Destruction in Meiktila." 1 April 2013. *Human Rights Watch*.  
<<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/01/burma-satellite-images-detail-destruction-meiktila>>

government treatment of Muslims. *Irrawaddy* reports that “on the evening of March 21, the Rangoon-based Eleven News published photos of a long queue of Muslims being forced to leave the town. What is significant in the photos is that the refugees, including women, children and elders, were ordered to keep their hands up as they were escorted out of the town by security guards.” *Irrawaddy* goes on to summarize the totality of the perceived Muslim threat, saying that “They are accused of dominating the economy, destroying the cultural fabric of society by spreading Islam in every way possible, luring women into Islam, and then monopolizing political power. The anxiety is that the Burmese race/nation will become extinct if liars, aliens, ruthless people, and those who bite the hands of their own masters (referring to Muslims as dogs) are not expelled.”<sup>86</sup> This anxiety was corroborated by *Global Post*’s interviews with locals in Rangoon: “The people are fearful of the Muslim community. We don’t want our country to be taken over by Muslims. This is a Buddhist society.”<sup>87</sup> During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the Tutsis were referred to as “cockroaches” before they were killed; in Burma, the Muslims are likened to the invasive African catfish or to mad dogs.<sup>88</sup>

Recently, the organizers of the 969 movement rather than the government have been the principal propagandists against the Muslim threat; however, the link between the two is well established. Buddhist abbot Wirathu has been a principal figure in casting the Muslim minority in Burma as a threat. Among many other alleged offenses, Wirathu claims that Muslims are waging a campaign of slow extermination against the Buddhist majority by intermarriage, forced conversion, economic exclusion, and violence, including rape. Wirathu’s Facebook page has recently featured a series of photographs ostensibly showing Muslim mujahideen inside Burma armed with assault rifles and light machine guns.<sup>89</sup> The pictures were actually produced several years ago in Bangladesh and depict a group not present in Burma.<sup>90</sup> The organization in question has actually never had armed elements within Burma. Accusing the target group itself of genocide is historically a common precursor to genocide since it provides motivation for the true perpetrators and morally justifies their crimes in the eyes of the more moderate general public. The alleged and widely held beliefs regarding the “danger” of the Muslim minority are considered by the Sentinel Project to be a serious aggravating factor in possible future inter-ethnic violence in Burma.

#### 5.4.6 Low Degree of Freedom of Speech

Recent reforms in Burma have been accompanied by an influx of government authorized media into the Burmese market. Formerly exiled and blacklisted journalists have returned,

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<sup>86</sup> Tuskangate, Kosak. “Burmese Neo-Nazi Movement Rising Against Muslims.” 24 March 2013. *The Irrawaddy*.

<<http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/30321>>

<sup>87</sup> Lin, Kaye. “Blacklisted Journalist Bertil Lintner Returns to Burma After Nearly 30 Years.” 20 June 2013. *Huffington Post*.

<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/burma-journal/blacklisted-journalist-be\\_b\\_3469613.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/burma-journal/blacklisted-journalist-be_b_3469613.html)>

<sup>88</sup> Fisher, Max. “I am Proud to be Called a Radical Buddhist:’ More Burmese Embracing Anti-Muslim Violence.” 21 June 2013. *Washington Post*.

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/06/21/i-am-proud-to-be-called-a-radical-buddhist-more-burmese-buddhists-embracing-anti-muslim-violence/>>

<sup>89</sup> See: <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=293979880745527&set=pcb.293986294078219&type=1&theater>> and

<<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=293984897411692&set=pcb.293986294078219&type=1&theater>>

<sup>90</sup> Winn, Patrick. “Islamists Claim New ‘Jihadis’ will Avenge Myanmar’s Rohingya.” 15 July 2013. *Global Post*.

<<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/myanmar/130715/myanmar-jihad-rebels-rohingya>>

publications have been started, and Burmese residents have begun to participate in social media. In a positive development, 2012 marked the first time since 1996 that Burma was not listed among the world's top jailers of journalists by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) due to the pardons issued to dozens of imprisoned reporters.<sup>91</sup> While this has generally been portrayed as part of the opening up of Burma and an introduction of legally-recognized freedom of speech, the reality is that the censorship board abolished by the regime has been replaced with a new agency, meaning that current laws are not abolished but merely unenforced, and that draft laws currently being considered in Burma are no less harsh on critics of the regime.<sup>92</sup> Online bloggers are also subject to arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, and CPJ reported that the still-in-effect 2004 law regarding unauthorized Internet communication carries a fifteen-year prison sentence.<sup>93</sup> The proliferation of Internet technology in Burma may simply represent an opportunity for the Burmese government to construct a larger and more efficient surveillance program.

## 5.5 - Conflict and Upheaval

Internal conflict and instability are among the key factors which influence the likelihood of genocide. The Sentinel Project evaluates six important facets of conflict and upheaval including: the history of conflict between groups; any past occurrence of genocide; the political stability of a state; ongoing insurgency or civil war; whether there have been recent large-scale, non-violent, anti-government protests; and whether there is current political conflict over the power, status, and rights of minorities. All of these factors are present in Burma and place the country at a higher risk of genocide.

### 5.5.1 History of Conflict

The civil war in Burma is the longest-running civil war in history, dating back to its transition from colonial rule in 1947-48. The ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse state initially strove to create a federal system characterized by minority representation and decentralized government. Perhaps most importantly, this vision included wide-ranging provisions for the autonomy of each state. The Panglong Agreement, signed by the Burmese interim government and some of the ethnic minorities (Shan, Kachin, and Chin), promoted this post-colonial concept for Burma; however, the assassination of its architect, General Aung San in 1947, and ensuing political and ethnic uprisings, replaced the federal system with a socialist government when General Ne Win orchestrated a coup in 1962. The new revolutionary council embarked upon a campaign of nationalism that instead strove to assimilate, by force when necessary, Burma's many cultures under a single Bamar Buddhist identity.

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<sup>91</sup> "Number of Jailed Journalists Sets Global Record." 11 December 2012. *Committee to Protect Journalists*. <<http://www.cpj.org/reports/2012/12/imprisoned-journalists-world-record.php>>

<sup>92</sup> Linn, Zin. "Burma Reform Hampered by Three Draft Laws." 15 June 2013. *Asian Correspondent*. <<http://asiancorrespondent.com/109248/burma-media-reform-mystified-by-three-draft-laws/>>

<sup>93</sup> Crispin, Shawn W. "Online and in Danger in Burma." 13 June 2013. *Committee to Protect Journalists*. <<http://www.cpj.org/reports/2013/06/online-and-in-danger-in-burma.php>>

The socialist rejection of a federal system sparked civil war among the signatories of the Panglong Agreement and other, unrepresented minorities such as the Christian Karen. While the rights outlined in the agreement were initially the goal of minorities in Burma, armed conflict turned those demands into wars of secession. Unfortunately, while ceasefires have been signed and only sporadic fighting continues, many ethnic minorities of Burma are still technically at war with the central government.<sup>94</sup>

### 5.5.2 History of Genocide

Despite the continuing civil unrest dating back to Burma's independence, the country remains without a history of genocide in accordance with the legal definition of this term;<sup>95</sup> instead, the term "ethnic cleansing" is often applied. In the 1960s, Burma was effectively ethnically cleansed of ethnic Chinese under General Ne Win when the government initiated a campaign of persecution that included mass riots such as those employed against the Muslim population today, ultimately leading to the mass exodus of some 100,000 Chinese.

Although many of the conditions defining genocide stipulated by international law certainly apply to Burma's past treatment of minorities and current treatment of the Rohingya, no international body has labelled the actions of the Burmese government as acts of genocide. Guy Horton, a British human rights researcher, referred to the situation in Burma as a "slow genocide," suggesting that the actions of the Burmese government are aimed at eliminating the ethnic minorities in the country; a distinct possibility exists that Burma is doing this slowly in order to evade official international condemnation and therefore prosecution for genocide under the UN Convention.<sup>96</sup>

### 5.5.3 Political Upheaval

The quasi-civilian government ruling Burma is attempting to avoid the chaos of political upheaval by means of a slow transition that the government has dubbed "disciplined democracy," partly due to expedience and partly due to an instinct for self-preservation.

The 1988 Uprising showed the Burmese ruling elite that mass movements can and do occur among the Buddhist majority in Burma and can throw even the strictest police-state into turmoil. The year is remembered as one of bloodshed as thousands of demonstrators were killed by government forces attempting to put down the rebellion which eschewed the economic policies and corruption of the junta.<sup>97</sup> Despite a successful election for the National

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<sup>94</sup> Sakhong, Lian H. "The Dynamics of Sixty Years of Armed Conflict in Burma." January 2012. *Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies*. <<http://burmaethnicstudies.net/pdf/Analysis%20Paper%20No%201.pdf>>

<sup>95</sup> "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." 9 December 1948. *United Nations General Assembly*. <[http://www.oas.org/dil/1948\\_Convention\\_on\\_the\\_Prevention\\_and\\_Punishment\\_of\\_the\\_Crime\\_of\\_Genocide.pdf](http://www.oas.org/dil/1948_Convention_on_the_Prevention_and_Punishment_of_the_Crime_of_Genocide.pdf)>

<sup>96</sup> LaGuardia, Anton. "Burma's 'slow genocide' is revealed through the eyes of its child victims." 24 Jun 2005. *The Telegraph*. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/burmayanmar/1492726/Burmas-slow-genocide-is-revealed-through-the-eyes-of-its-child-victims.html>>

<sup>97</sup> "History of Burma." *Canadian Friends of Burma*. <<http://www.cfob.org/HistoryofBurma/historyOfBurma.shtml>>

League for Democracy in 1990, the country remained at a political impasse.<sup>98</sup> In 2007, scenes of protest were repeated with the Saffron Revolution as monks and their supporters contested the removal of fuel subsidies, which caused sharp price increases for everyday goods.

Political upheaval is an aggravating factor for the risk of genocide in Burma. Although mass movements in the past have been anti-government, protests have recently centered on contesting the defamation of Wirathu and support for the anti-Muslim 969 movement, protests which the government has approved and supported. Burma's repressive regime has exploited inter-ethnic grievances in the past in order to detract from unpopular domestic policies, so any future turmoil might be cause for future violence which is supported or even orchestrated by the government.

#### 5.5.4 Ongoing Insurgency or Civil War

Burma's civil war is a conflict with multiple fronts. The war between the Burmese military and the Kachin Independence Army began in the 1960s as a response to General Ne Win's administration and persists in the northern part of the country. The Human Rights Watch *2013 World Report* estimates that 90,000 members of the Kachin minority are displaced and are not only being denied humanitarian aid by the Burmese government, but are also subject to abuses such as extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and forced labour. Attempts to seek refuge in China have been met with more obstacles and have forced the Kachin people back into their territory.<sup>99</sup>

In the east, the civil war in Karen State between the Burmese army and Karen minority continues. The army has used forced pregnancy and child soldiers as instruments of war in order to terrorize the Karen people.<sup>100</sup> It is estimated that approximately 140,000 citizens have fled to neighbouring Thailand and live there as refugees.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, after Cyclone Nargis devastated many parts of the country in 2008, including the Karen state, the Burmese government once again denied aid to its minority populations.<sup>102</sup>

Similar internal wars have played out between the Burmese central government and the Karenni minority, which has an army numbering over a thousand soldiers, and the Shan peoples, of which the Shan State Army and The United Wa Army are a part.

In western Burma, the Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine State, is a group falsely accused of being illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. While the Rohingya are not the only victims of Burma's long history of internal conflict, they are currently the only minority to be refused citizenship by the Burmese government. In June 2012, the army and police forces supported and orchestrated violence against Muslim minorities, destroying mosques and denying the

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<sup>98</sup> Sakhong, Lian H. "The Dynamics of Sixty Years of Armed Conflict in Burma." January 2012. *Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies*. <http://burmaethnicstudies.net/pdf/Analysis%20Paper%20No%201.pdf>

<sup>99</sup> "World Report 2013: Burma." 2013. *Human Rights Watch*. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/burma?page=2>

<sup>100</sup> "Burma." *World Without Genocide*. <<http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/burma>>

<sup>101</sup> "World Report 2013: Burma." 2013. *Human Rights Watch*. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/burma?page=2>

<sup>102</sup> "Burma." *World Without Genocide*. <<http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/burma>>

victims humanitarian aid. In the fall of that year, signs of ethnic cleansing arose when nine Muslim communities were attacked and hundreds of civilians were killed at the hands of both Arakanese Buddhists and government forces.<sup>103</sup>

### *5.5.5 Large-Scale, Non-Violent, Anti-Government Protests*

In 1987, mass riots commenced across Burma when the government devalued the currency, thus wiping out the population's savings; the 1988 uprising and 2007 "Saffron Revolution" also served as proof to the regime that the Burmese populace could be provoked if the rulers made decisions made that were severe enough in their effects on the general population.

In a nation where demonstrations must be officially authorized and are mostly not permitted, these protests have an especially great significance, particularly when they are responded to with often lethal force. However, the mass movements which ushered in the recent waves of reform seem to have been appeased and replaced by the staunch nationalism embodied by the 969 movement, which has succeeded in placing the blame for the continuing hardships of the Burmese people onto the Muslim minorities, thus drawing attention away from one of the world's most corrupt ruling classes. On 30 June 2013, hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Yangon to support the radical ultra-nationalist monk Wirathu. This type of protest could be seen as pro-government since it was not only authorized by the regime, but aligns closely with the military's historical ideology of Bamar nation building.

Unless the current regime is forced to make unpopular decisions, the population of Burma is unlikely to be stirred into activism for the foreseeable future. An unpopular election outcome, however, may be cause for protests and a pretext for continuing inter-ethnic violence.

### *5.5.6 Conflicts Over Status, Power and Rights*

Most twentieth-century Eurasian socialist movements, and many the socialist nation building efforts modeled after them, revealed that while ethnic identities can be suppressed by force of arms and secret police, coercion cannot by itself create a new inclusive national identity. Culture and social memory could hibernate for generations before any number of cataclysmic events cause the collapse of an empire.

The continuing civil war in Burma is characterized by a situation markedly similar to past Eurasian socialist struggles; unrepresented or underrepresented minority ethnic groups have endured decades of repression as a result of Burmese nation-building efforts and are again striving for political autonomy along ethnic lines. Despite open elections in 1990 and a landslide

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<sup>103</sup> "Burma: End 'Ethnic Cleansing' of Rohingya Muslims." 22 April 2013. *Human Rights Watch*. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/22/burma-end-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>



vote in favour of the federalist structure supported by NLD, the regime continued to support, as they always have, an extreme nationalist (and Buddhist) concept of Burma.

While Burma is not fighting a new contest over power, status, and rights, but rather a conflict dating back to the Panglong Agreement of 1947, the Rohingya issue may indeed become the last refuge of the extreme nationalists of Ne Win's legacy. Military hardliners such as Aung Thaung are attempting to create a unifying ideology based on an exclusive, negative nationalism, which is a symptom of the death throes of a failed national myth. Such desperation, especially the desperation of those currently in power, may be an aggravating factor for genocide in Rakhine State.

## 6.0 - Likely Triggers for Escalation

The escalation of violence in Burma has always been reported as a direct result of a specific crime between Muslims and Buddhists, with Buddhists being the victims. In the 2012 Rakhine State riots, it was the rumour of the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman by three Muslim men which precipitated waves of mutual violence, with Muslims bearing the brunt of most attacks. The March 2013 riots that commenced ethnic cleansing in Meikhtila began with an alleged assault on a Buddhist customer in a Muslim-owned gold shop during a dispute over a gold hairpin. In Lashio in June 2013, it was the murder of a Buddhist woman at a gas station which sparked violence.

All of these incidences of inter-ethnic violence began with crimes between a relatively small number of individuals. What characterized the resulting violence was described by many journalists as organized pogroms against Muslims which, if not criminal as the government claims, were likely pre-planned. Unconfirmed reports described some mobs as “outsiders” belonging, perhaps, to secretive organizations such as Swan Arshin or Taung Tha Army, both of which are groups tied to powerful leaders in the former military junta. While there does not exist any direct evidence to support this claim, the participation, lack of interdiction, and haphazard or late prevention of violence by Burma’s security forces indicates a sinister side to these allegedly mob-led killing sprees, if not prior planning and organization. Saying nothing of the specific recent incidents in Burma, staged incidents and organized, government-sponsored reactions are well-established methods of genocide.

Although there are few indigenous precedents from which to forecast, any upcoming elections might be a pretext for violence as well. Due to the fact that the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi represent the federalist structure that has been at the center of Burmese post-colonial civil war, any election that results in open elections, whether victory or defeat for the NLD, – could conceivably trigger a violent reaction by the affected communities. A victory for the NLD could incite a reaction from Burma’s swiftly radicalizing nationalist movement. Alternately, the traditional nationalist structure represented by the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) may trigger violence by the ethnic minorities, especially if the USDP does not form definite and mutually respected ceasefires based on plans for future autonomous rule.

Finally, it is evident that even international activities could potentially serve as catalysts for unrest and violence. In 2001, after the then-governing Taliban destroyed statues of the Buddha in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, some Buddhist monks demanded that a Mosque in Taungoo, Burma be destroyed in retaliation. The incident triggered riots resulting in the deaths of nine Muslims, according to Human Rights Watch, including the murder of a family of four. On 7 July 2013, a terrorist bombing was successfully carried out at one of Buddhism’s holiest sites, in Bodh Gaya, India. The motivation cited for the attack, which was carried out by an extremist

Islamist group, was the violence against Muslims in Burma.<sup>104</sup> To date, the incident has not resulted in violence in Burma but radical Buddhists have used it as a polarizing action to cast the Rohingya as a threat.

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<sup>104</sup> Linton, Eric. "Holiest Buddhist Site in India Attacked by Bombs." 7 July 2013. *International Business Times*. <<http://www.ibtimes.com/holiest-buddhist-site-india-attacked-bombs-1335387#>>

## 7.0 - Final Assessment

Genocide scholar Gregory Stanton has recently revised his theoretical understanding of the phenomenon, which now includes ten key stages: classification, symbolization, discrimination, persecution, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, extermination, and denial. There is ample evidence to suggest that every stage except wholesale extermination exists in present-day Burma. Therefore, the Sentinel Project concludes that Burma is currently in a state of genocide emergency.


Recent violence has moved beyond mere pogroms that in the past have terrorized communities, but have been less well-organized and less complete in their function – that is, the ethnic cleansing of entire regions. The Burmese government’s attempt to register all Rohingya has drawn understandable concern as the population is enumerated under the hate speech term “Bengali,” the only purpose of which is the sinister portrayal of the Rohingya as outsiders who do not belong in Burma. The proposed enforcement of a law controlling Rohingya birthrates is a certain indicator of the local government’s attempt to carry out long-term population reduction. One of the most urgent factors at the international level is the mainstream media’s refusal to highlight government non-intervention, complicity, even planning and carrying out of anti-Muslim violence and ethnic cleansing. Media reports tend to describe the violence as inter-communal and not as it truly is – a government orchestrated campaign carefully engineered to appear spontaneous and inter-communal.

The world’s first modern genocide, the extermination of the Herero and Namaqua (1904-1907), relied on isolating the population in areas unsuitable for human life. Similarly, the Armenian genocide in 1915 included both outright killing and death marches into the Syrian desert. Other perpetrators have similarly forced their victims into conditions calculated to cause their deaths even if they were not killed outright in massacres. With these historical precedents in mind, the relocation of Burmese Muslims to IDP camps may constitute genocide if the following conditions are observed: (a) the ethnic cleansing of Burma’s cities, towns, and villages proceeds in a systematic manner resulting in displacement to IDP camps; and (b) the Burmese government continues to deny aid, medical treatment, and sustainable living conditions for the displaced victims, thus making IDP camps tantamount to death camps for their inhabitants.

# Appendix 1

A scanned copy of the form used to forcibly register Rohingya as Bengali (source: *Rohingya Blogger*)

စာရင်းစံဖွဲ့စည်းရေး



အမည်      အဘွားအမ      ✓

အဘအမည်      အဖအမည်      ✓


မွေးသက္ကရာဇ်      05-June-1965

လူမျိုး      ဘင်္ဂါလီ


အိမ်လောင်း      ၅၅/၁

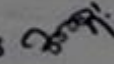
နေရပ်လိပ်စာ      ကရီးကန်ပြင်အနောက်ရွာ၊ ကရီးကန်ပြင်အုပ်စု      ✓

ထက်ဝဲထက်

လက်မ	လက်ညှိုး	လက်ခလယ်	လက်သွယ်	လက်ခွေး
				

ထက်ဝဲထက်

လက်မ	လက်ညှိုး	လက်ခလယ်	လက်သွယ်	လက်ခွေး
				

ထိုးပြုလက်မှတ်      

လာလိသက်သေခံကိစ္စအမှတ်      ၀၁/မတန(လ) ၂၀၁၆၀၀၀      ✓

မှတ်ချက်      ၂၄၈၈ ဌာနချုပ်

နေရာ      ကရီးကန်ပြင်

ရက်စွဲ      12-June-2013

## Appendix 2

An excerpt from the official journal of the Rakhine Nationalities and Development Party:

In 1997, Chinese Leader Deng adopted a world famous policy: one country, two systems. This policy facilitated and smoothed out Hong Kong's integration with mainland China. It was also concerned the survival of China as a whole. If Hong Kong's survival and realities were not taken into account by the mainland Chinese authorities, today's Hong Kong would have been a different entity. Therefore, a leader ought to adopt a decisive policy as demanded by survival realities.

Hitler and Eichmann were the enemy of the Jews, but they were probably heroes to the Germans. The United States was compelled to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Why?

In order for a country's survival, the survival of a race, or in defense of national sovereignty, crimes against humanity or in-human acts may justifiably be committed (as has been the case with the aforementioned two examples - Hitler and the Holocaust and the Americans and the atomic bombs on Japan).

So, if that survival principle or justification is applied or permitted equally (in our Myanmar case) our endeavours to protect our Rakhine race and defend the sovereignty and longevity of the Union of Myanmar cannot be labeled as "crimes against humanity," "inhuman" or "in-humane. [sic]"

We no longer wish to hold permanent concerns (about the Bangali [sic] in our midst). We just want to get it over and done with, once and for all.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Progress Magazine*, No. 12. Volume 2, Nov 2012, p. 3.

## Contributors to the Report

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