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China's Role in Conflict Mediation: A Case Study of the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Since 2012, when Xi Jinping became general secretary of the Communist Party of China, China's mediation tactics have moved in a different direction. In 2017, as violence swept across Rakhine State in Myanmar, there was an influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, placing enormous constraints on the developing country. China has maintained friendly relations with Myanmar, made investments in both Myanmar and Bangladesh via projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, and overseen two failed repatriation processes to send Rohingyas back to Myanmar. This raises the question of whether China, being an emerging global superpower, intends to preserve peace and stability or whether its actions reflect a salami-slicing strategy to expand its sphere of influence across the world. Given the uncertainty of the repatriation of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh, this chapter analyses China's role as a mediator in the crisis and its implications.

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Introduction

In August 2017, the Myanmar military-led brutal attacks against the Rohingya community in Rakhine State resulted in the deaths of over 24,000 Rohingya Muslims (Habib, 2019), mass destruction of their villages, and the fleeing of approximately 742,000 Rohingyas to neighbouring Bangladesh (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2019a). A United Nations (UN) fact-finding mission reported serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations and recommended investigations of senior military personnel for crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes (UNHRC, 2018a). Today, Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar region is host to some of the world's largest and most densely populated refugee camps.

In September 2018, the UN Human Rights Council passed a motion to prepare a panel to investigate the possible genocide taking place in the state of Rakhine. However, this was met by strong opposition from China, with support from the Philippines and Burundi, whereas more than 100 countries were in favour (Routray, 2018).

The same year, in a conversation with Bangladesh's foreign minister, Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, and his counterpart from Myanmar, Kyaw Tint Swe, China's state councillor, Wang Yi, was quoted as saying, "The Rakhine state issue is in essence, an issue between Myanmar and Bangladesh. China does not approve of complicating, expanding, or internationalising this issue. China hopes that the two countries can find a resolution via talks, and China would be willing to continue providing a platform for this communication" (Reuters, 2018). China's then-deputy UN ambassador, Wu Haitao, also publicly reiterated the need for the international community "to view the difficulties and challenges confronting the government of Myanmar through objective optics, exercise patience, and provide support and help" (Reuters, 2018). He also added that, "all parties should work constructively to help reinforce this momentum, de-escalate the situation and

alleviate the humanitarian conditions step-by-step" (Gao, 2017).

This chapter covers how China played the role of mediator between Myanmar and Bangladesh, despite having a non-interference policy, and explores the prospect of China playing a positive role in the Rohingya repatriation process in the near future.

Bangladeshi context of the Rohingya crisis

The massive influx of refugees in 2017 was not the first time Bangladesh witnessed such an event. Bangladesh has been housing Rohingyas facing persecution and violence in Rakhine since 1977. More than 2,00,000 Rohingyas made their way into Bangladesh between 1977 and 1978 (Faye, 2021). Further, in the early 1990s, about a quarter of a million Rohingyas fled to the neighbouring lands of Bangladesh when military presence in Rakhine increased, bringing with it forced labour, rape, and torture (Faye, 2021).

Ever since the Rohingya started fleeing from the crimes against humanity in Rakhine, Bangladesh has kept its borders open to fleeing Rohingya refugees, which is regarded as a sign of the country's goodwill. With international support, Bangladesh has improved and expanded its existing refugee camps, negotiated with the Myanmar government, and is currently vaccinating children as well as registering the Rohingya population.

Since late 2020, Bangladesh has relocated around 20,000 Rohingya refugees to Bhashan Char and plans to move roughly 1,00,000 to the newly emerged silt island (Human Rights Watch, 2021), a solution intended to address the overcrowding in mainland camps in Cox's Bazar. Though Bangladesh has been receiving international aid for the upkeep of these refugees, the pressure on the land has been significant (Kumar, 2021). Amid criticism, the rest of the world must take notice that Bangladesh has single-handedly managed the crisis, with no guaranteed solution in sight.

Bangladesh is strongly opposed to the idea of integrating the Rohingya into its population. Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen reiterated this view in 2021 when he responded to the World Bank's proposition for integrating Rohingyas into Bangladesh, "We took a very strong stance. We didn't like it and opposed it strongly. We conveyed it" (Moinuddin, 2021). The movement of refugees into Bangladesh has put significant pressure on local public services while simultaneously aggravating climate vulnerability. As efforts to repatriate the refugees have made little progress and with international fatigue setting in, Bangladesh has restricted the free movement of Rohingyas and installed barbed wire around the camps.

China's interest in Myanmar

Myanmar sits to the south of China and holds great strategic utility—it acts as a critical junction between South, East, and Southeast Asia. China's interest in Myanmar is not only strategic but also economic. The proposed China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to connect China's Yunnan province with Mandalay in Central Myanmar while stretching southeast down to Yangon and southwest to Rakhine. In addition, China has heavily invested in Myanmar's infrastructure sector, including the development of the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ), which will revolve around the deep-sea port in the Bay of Bengal. The construction of this deep-sea port and the Kyaukphyu SEZ was one of 33 deals signed between China and Myanmar under the CMEC initiative during Xi Jinping's two-day state visit in 2020, the first by a Chinese leader in 19 years (Aung & McPherson, 2020). In 2021, Chen Hai, ambassador of China to Myanmar, said: "[China is] committed to promoting national stability, economic growth and improvement of people's livelihoods, and safeguarding democracy and rule of law" (Strangio, 2021).

Established ties between Myanmar and China through long-term investments, such as those in the Shan, Chin, and Rakhine provinces, may

place China in a position to mediate between Bangladesh and Myanmar with regard to the Rohingya crisis. This may also bring about an impetus for positive change as clashes between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Myanmar forces have hampered several Chinese investments in the state of Rakhine.

Sino–Bangla relations

In a December 2018 seminar titled "China–Bangladesh Relations: Prognosis for the Future," China's Ambassador to Bangladesh, Zhang Zuo, in his speech, called attention to the various facets of the Sino–Bangla relationship, which was elevated to a strategic partnership of cooperation after the successful state visit of President Xi Jinping to Bangladesh in October 2016 (FMPRC, 2018a):

"China and Bangladesh are neighbors who look out for each other during either safe or disturbing times. In the face of opportunities and challenges, we should work together to be good partners for peace and cooperation.... China will continue to play a constructive role in properly solving the problem of Rakhine State in accordance with the three-phase solution of stopping violence, repatriation and development, and support Bangladesh and Myanmar to find a proper way for the repatriation of the displaced people, as well as a proper solution for the issue of the Rakhine State through dialogue and consultation... China encourages the construction of the 'Belt and Road' initiative... We should strengthen communications, improve cooperation mechanisms, promote the security of projects under the 'Belt and Road' initiative, improve law enforcement capabilities and safe construction cooperation, take effective measures to ensure the protection of life and property of employees of the projects, institutions and enterprises in the other country, and continue to deepen practical cooperation in all areas of law enforcement and security" (FMPRC, 2018a).

China and Bangladesh have been on relatively good terms since 1975. Their economic alliance was strengthened after Bangladesh formally signed the BRI in October 2015, a move that

complements the strategic partnership between the two countries (Mint, 2021). In fact, the agreement made Bangladesh the second-largest recipient of Chinese funds in South Asia following Pakistan (Rahman, 2021). As in Myanmar, China has also heavily invested in Bangladesh, which is a large market for Chinese goods. To further strengthen the Sino–Bangladesh bilateral relationship, China granted Bangladesh duty-free access to 97% of tariff products under the Duty-free Quota-free scheme (Dhaka Tribune, 2020). China is now Bangladesh’s largest trading partner (Ramachandran, 2019). In October 2020, China signed 27 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with Bangladesh, which were valued at US\$ 24 million (Pitman, 2020). Bangladesh had to turn to China as Western sources had refused to fund several infrastructure projects. However, China has been steadily investing in Bangladesh’s infrastructure development, including upgrading Chittagong Port, constructing railway links (such as the Trans-Asian Railway), and investing US\$ 1 billion for improving digital connectivity (Ramachandran, 2019).

China's changing response to the Rohingya crisis

The first instance of information on aid released by the Chinese embassy in Bangladesh is on September 28, 2017, and it stated that 150 tonnes of aid had been released to “refugees who had poured into Bangladesh recently.” Declaring appreciation for the humanitarian assistance provided by Bangladesh thus far, the statement added that—as China’s “good old friend,” Bangladesh would continue providing support (Gao, 2017). Surprisingly, the Chinese foreign ministry, in its official statement, made no mention of the term “Rohingya” and rather used the word “refugees.” Perceived as an attempt to placate Myanmar, this move received heavy criticism from the international community. Moreover, in another statement provided by Lu Kang, the spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry, the term “refugee” was replaced by “displaced people,” a subtle insinuation of apathy and disassociation from the plight of the Rohingyas:

“The Chinese side is highly concerned about the difficulty facing Bangladesh in resettling the displaced people in the Myanmar-Bangladesh border area. In order to help the government of Bangladesh with the resettlement efforts, the Chinese government has decided to provide emergency humanitarian supplies to the government of Bangladesh, the Chinese side supports Bangladesh’s efforts to resettle the displaced people properly and stands ready to continue providing assistance to Bangladesh as its capacity allows” (Gao, 2017).

Despite the growing Sino–Bangla ties, Beijing appears to be determined to stand with Myanmar on the Rohingya issue. In 2018, Russia and China boycotted talks on a resolution drafted by the United Kingdom at the UN Security Council that aimed to convince Myanmar to allow the return of approximately 7,00,000 Rohingya refugees (Nichols, 2018).

Beijing officially steps in to play mediator: China's “three-phase solution”

In November 2017, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, at a press conference with the then Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, announced a “three-phase solution” to the Rohingya crisis. The first phase involved a ceasefire in Rakhine State to halt further violence and displacement; the second encompassed bilateral dialogue between Bangladesh and Myanmar to find a feasible solution to the crisis; and in light of China’s description of the conflict as a by-product of impoverishment and underdevelopment in Rakhine State, the third solution pertained to poverty alleviation (China Global Television Network, 2017). However, Chinese claims that poverty was the root cause of the conflict were vague and dismissed key factors like the discriminatory 1982 Myanmar Nationality Law that denied citizenship to Rohingya ethnic minorities, thus rendering them stateless.

The “three-phase solution” also failed to acknowledge decades of systemic repression

of Muslim Rohingyas at the hands of the Buddhist majority. The proposal blatantly disregarded the final report put forth by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan under the umbrella of the Kofi Annan Foundation. The report was published on the eve of the 2017 ARSA attacks and highlighted the need for governments to address the socio-economic afflictions contributing to the disproportionate marginalisation and discrimination of the Muslim population in Myanmar. China's conciliatory approach towards Myanmar has helped it build better relations with the Government of Myanmar, especially with the military. Though China maintained that it had no strategic interests in the region, its diplomatic approach has helped keep Western powers at bay while limiting the crisis intervention to China, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. However, China has failed to do anything substantial for the Rohingyas or for Bangladesh as the country shoulders the burden of incoming refugees.

After China announced its "three-phase solution" in early 2021, A.K. Abdul Momen, expressed optimism and confidence in China's capacity to facilitate and moderate the Rohingya repatriation process. The following quotation by him suggests Bangladesh's stance in early 2021: "We still have confidence in China. We maintain friendship with all. China and Japan have advanced. China's progress [on repatriation talks], to some extent, is on the way to implementation" (The Daily Star, 2021).

However, after the colossal influx in 2017, despite attempts at drafting a repatriation mechanism, not a single refugee had returned to Myanmar a year later. In 2018, under diplomatic pressure from China, authorities from Bangladesh and Myanmar came together in a meeting to implement the repatriation agreement as agreed upon in 2017 (ICG, 2018).

China has advocated that both Myanmar and Bangladesh avoid negotiating the repatriation

process at multilateral forums. Wang Yi also hosted a side meeting with Bangladesh, Myanmar, and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in September 2017. The Chinese Public Security Minister, Zhao Kezhi, also met counterparts from Bangladesh and Myanmar after both countries met on October 30, 2017 (ICG, 2018).

As a result, the repatriation attempt took place in November 2018 between Bangladesh and Myanmar without consultation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or representation from the Rohingya population. Only 2,260 people from 485 families were on the list, and the repatriation was to start with the return of 150 refugees each day. However, the refugees on the list went into hiding and refused to go back as they feared for their lives upon return to Myanmar. Subsequent attempts have also failed. Myanmar authorities have not been supportive, according to a Bangladeshi government official stationed at the Rohingya camps during the first repatriation attempt.¹ The Rohingya refugees on the list demanded citizenship, safety, security, shelter, and justice upon their return. Instead, the Myanmar government proposed a digital national verification card (VNC) process, stripping the Muslim Rohingyas of full citizenship (Milko, 2019).

The Rohingyas do not perceive China's involvement positively due to China's policies against the Uyghur people in East Turkistan (Asat, 2020). It is difficult not to question China's neutrality as a mediator. Like the "systemic and institutionalised oppression" committed on Rohingyas in Myanmar (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019, p.67), the Chinese government has detained over a million Uyghur Chinese Muslims in internment camps in the Xinjiang region (Hill, Campanale, & Gunter, 2021). On that note, the "unconscionable treatment" of the Uyghurs and the blatant sympathy demonstrated by Myanmar may have led to hesitation

¹ Interview with former government official of the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Bangladesh

among the Rohingyas to comply with China (Asat, 2020). China's efforts have also been questioned by UN diplomats in Yangon, as they believe China's quick solutions might be apathetic towards human rights issues (McPherson, Paul, & Naing, 2020).

Conflict resolution diplomacy by China: Where it stands now

Between 2018 and 2020, China managed to arrange three meetings between Myanmar and Bangladesh and it remains positive about the Rohingya repatriation process (McPherson, Paul, & Naing, 2020). However, efforts by China keep failing, and as frustration grows, the Bangladeshi government has approached Russia to launch a similar trilateral initiative between the three countries. Russia may fare better than China as the country shares goodwill with the Myanmar junta, in addition to friendly ties with the Bangladeshi government, which is evident from its investment in the country's first nuclear power plant in Rooppur. By starting a trilateral process of diplomacy with Russia and Myanmar, Bangladesh may be striving to amicably resolve the Rohingya refugee crisis (Kumar, 2021).

Even though Bangladesh has tried to engage with Myanmar bilaterally since the exodus, it has not managed to make any significant progress. Yet again, in 2019, A.K. Abdul Momen sat for a meeting with his counterparts from Myanmar and China (The Daily Star, 2019). Following the meeting, Momen developed a plan for a tripartite agreement, which led to the formation of a working group comprising the three countries (China, Bangladesh, and Myanmar). The group was formed by jointly evaluating and pushing forward the repatriation process. Similarly, in 2021, China established a tripartite framework and initiated a 90-minute virtual dialogue between Bangladesh and Myanmar, expressing its support in favour of the two nations forming a durable and quick solution to the

Rohingya crisis. No concrete result has come of this group, and voluntary repatriation has stalled (Dock, 2020). The working group was supposed to meet on February 4, 2021, but its plans were disrupted following the Myanmar military coup on February 1 (Mostofa, 2022). The repeated failure to engage in fruitful discussions with Myanmar indicates that China either mishandled the diplomatic developments between Myanmar and Bangladesh or that Myanmar does not heed China's instructions.

Considering China's role in the Rohingya repatriation process, a government official commented,

*"I worked in the field and was present during the first attempt of the Rohingya repatriation process, and in this regard, China played no role whatsoever in hastening the repatriation process or helping Bangladesh. They did not even make a significant contribution in terms of charity. In fact, USA and Turkey were the two biggest donors."*²

In 2021, referring to the recently held tripartite dialogue between Bangladesh, Myanmar and China, a senior Bangladeshi politician, Abdul Moyeen Khan said, "I do not believe that even after Chinese mediation the citizenships and rights issues of Rohingya will be ensured." (Kamruzzaman, 2021)

Moreover, China's approach as a mediator seems to be flawed given that the Rohingya refugees were excluded from the negotiation table and based on how quick China has been to defend Myanmar. For instance, despite the 2021 coup leading to socio-political chaos resulting in a civil war and a sudden surge in COVID-19 cases across Myanmar (Kurlantzik, 2022), China blocked the UN Security Council from issuing a statement of concern over violence across Myanmar and the failure to implement the Five-point Consensus issued by the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) group. Though the

² Interview with former government official of the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Bangladesh.

Five-point Consensus called for reasonable action to end violence, the appointment of a special envoy for the mediation and facilitation of a constructive dialogue among all parties, and the immediate halt of violent activities across Myanmar, China vouched for a slower process as opposed to immediate action (South China Morning Post, 2022). Evidently, China wants to ease pressure on Myanmar from the international community to secure its vested economic interests (ICG, 2018).

With the junta in power, Myanmar may have initially wanted to reduce its dependency on China, as the country has been suspicious of China's involvement in supplying arms to militant groups (Gupta, 2020). However, the military coup has led to pro-democracy protests within the country as well as added pressure from Western countries.

The US and European countries have already sanctioned Myanmar, placing restrictions on the import of military equipment by the latter. They further tightened sanctions in 2022 following the coup in February 2021. Given the current situation in Myanmar, the junta is uninterested in pro-democratic political alliances and are seemingly unfazed by the West. The neighbouring Southeast Asian countries seem inclined toward avoiding any involvement in the situation to prevent political and economic spill-overs.

The plans being developed by China and Myanmar for the construction of the CMEC are mutually beneficial in terms of being a potentially profitable commercial venture for Myanmar and a vital point of access to the Indian Ocean for China. This implies that both nations have far more to gain as an alliance than otherwise (Bremmer, 2021). Additionally, according to Chinese experts at the United States Institute of Peace, China's support of the military junta is motivated by the following: first, limiting Western influences in the borderlands; second, preserving the stability of the China–Myanmar borderlands; and third, protecting the strategic economic corridor linking the Indian Ocean to China's southwestern provinces (Tower, 2021).

At present, the plight of the Rohingya crisis is beginning to lose recognition in the international arena due to the recent return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine. The Rohingya crisis has been ongoing for nearly five years. With no progress in sight, the international community's sympathy has started to wane, and the plight of the refugees does not dominate headlines anymore. The hospitality of the local population toward refugees sheltered in densely populated camps is starting to fade as well. With no signs of repatriation on the horizon, Bangladesh is in a tough spot as pressure is building on already burdened resources and climate degradation is setting in.

In this context, China has not been honest in its role as a mediator. It has enabled the Myanmar junta to prevent the return of the Rohingya. To sum up, the following timeline lists some of China's geopolitical involvement in the Rohingya crisis.

Timeline: China's mediation role between Myanmar and Bangladesh

2017

- **March 27: China disassociates from the consensus on the draft resolution at the UNHRC**
In the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), China disassociates from the consensus on the draft resolution entitled "Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar" to dispatch an independent international fact-finding mission to Myanmar. China expresses that the international community must respect Myanmar's sovereignty and create a favourable environment for parties to resolve differences through dialogue (UNHRC, 2017a).
- **September 21: Wang Yi meets with U Thaung Tun during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session in New York**
In his meeting with Myanmar's National Security Advisor U Thaung Tun, State

Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi conveys China's support for Myanmar in actively seeking dialogue with Bangladesh. He calls on the international community to treat the Rakhine State situation impartially and encourages both countries to seek a solution through friendly consultations (FMPRC, 2017a).

- **September 29: Chinese envoy commends Bangladesh's efforts to improve the humanitarian situation for Rohingya refugees**

At the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Chinese envoy Wu Haitao calls for the international community to encourage dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh to address the refugee crisis. As a friendly neighbour to both countries, China has been actively engaging with Myanmar and Bangladesh to influence them positively to address the issue through dialogue and consultation, he says (*Xinhua*, 2017a).

- **October 5: Bangladesh military personnel build relief tents supplied by China for Rohingya refugees**

China sends a second consignment of relief material for refugees in Chittagong, including 2,000 tents and 3,000 blankets. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to personally distribute the Chinese relief blankets on her visit to the Rohingya camps (*Xinhua*, 2017b).

- **November 16: China votes against the draft resolution in the UNGA**

In the UNGA, China votes against the draft resolution entitled, "Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar." The draft resolution is adopted by a recorded vote of 135 to 10, with 26 abstentions (UNGA, 2017).

- **November 18: Wang Yi meets with Sheikh Hasina and Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali in Bangladesh**

In his talks with Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, Wang Yi notes that the Rohingya issue should be resolved by Bangladesh and Myanmar through dialogue and consultation (FMPRC, 2017b). He welcomes the signing

of an agreement on the repatriation of refugees and expresses China's willingness to assist in the settlement of the issue (FMPRC, 2017c).

- **Wang Yi introduces China's position on the Rohingya issue**

In a press interview in Bangladesh, Wang Yi expresses China's willingness to play a role in resolving the Rohingya issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar. To this end, China has repeatedly advised the latter to achieve a ceasefire at the earliest in order to prevent more locals from entering Bangladesh, and to work with Bangladesh to find an acceptable solution, he says (FMPRC, 2017d).

- **November 19: China proposes a three-phase plan to address the Rakhine State issue**

In his meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw, Wang Yi outlines a three-phase plan to ease the crisis: first, to have a ceasefire and restore order; second, for Myanmar and Bangladesh to solve the issue through friendly consultation and sign and implement the repatriation agreement at the earliest; third, for the international community to help develop Rakhine State to achieve stability (FMPRC, 2017e). President U Htin Kyaw expresses Myanmar's willingness to negotiate with Bangladesh to solve the problem as per China's proposed three-phase solution (*Xinhua*, 2017c).

- **Wang Yi meets with Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw**

In the meeting, Myanmar's military chief, Min Aung Hlaing, thanks Wang Yi for his shuttle mediation between Myanmar and Bangladesh and agrees with China's three-phase solution (FMPRC, 2017f).

- **Consensus reached by China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh**

In a joint press meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, Wang Yi announces that China's proposal of addressing the Rakhine issue through three phases was received positively by both countries. "I just concluded my visit to Bangladesh and the country clearly expressed its willingness to continue the

bilateral consultations with Myanmar and Myanmar took the same stand,” he says (FMPRC, 2017g).

- **November 24: China seeks role in Myanmar's peace process**
In a meeting with Min Aung Hlaing, President Xi Jinping expresses China's willingness to play a greater role in Myanmar's domestic peace process and in safeguarding the stability of the border region (Baijie, 2017).
- **December 5: China votes against a resolution in the UNHRC**
In the UNHRC, China votes against the draft resolution entitled, “Situation of Human Rights of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar.” The resolution is adopted by a recorded vote of 33 to 3, with 9 abstentions (UNHRC, 2017b).
- **December 21: Wang Yi meets with Ye Aung**
In his meeting with Myanmar's Minister for Border Affairs Ye Aung, Wang Yi expresses that China is willing to play a constructive role in resolving the Rakhine State issue between Myanmar and Bangladesh through bilateral consultation. Both sides also exchange views to develop Rakhine State through the CMEC (FMPRC, 2017h).

2018

- **March 23: China votes against a resolution in the UNHRC**
In the UNHRC, China votes against the draft resolution entitled, “Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar.” The draft resolution is adopted by a recorded vote of 32 to 5, with 10 abstentions (UNHRC, 2018b).
- **April 22: Wang Yi meets with former Myanmar President U Thein Sein in Beijing**
In the meeting, Wang Yi conveys China's support for bilateral negotiations between Myanmar and Bangladesh to settle the issue of the displaced people fleeing from Rakhine State. China also expresses hope that repatriation will be implemented at an early date (FMPRC, 2018b).
- **May 14: Chinese envoy expresses hope that both countries resolve issues through bilateral dialogue**
At a meeting in the UNSC to brief members on the visit of the Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar, Chinese envoy Ma Zhaoxu makes a statement recognising the efforts of both countries in addressing key issues. He calls for the international community to increase humanitarian assistance to both countries (UN, 2018a).
- **June 28: Wang Yi meets with U Kyaw Tint Swe in Beijing**
Wang Yi meets with Myanmar's minister for the office of the state counsellor, U Kyaw Tint Swe, and notes that China supports friendly negotiations between Myanmar and Bangladesh to resolve the Rakhine issue and will continue to provide necessary assistance (FMPRC, 2018c).
- **June 29: Wang Yi holds talks with Abul Hassan Mahmud Ali in Beijing**
The Chinese side states that due to the joint efforts of Bangladesh and Myanmar, the conditions for initiating the repatriation of refugees have been met and that China hopes that the first batch of repatriation work will be implemented at the earliest (FMPRC, 2018d).
- **September 27: China votes against a resolution in the UNHRC**
In the UNHRC, China votes against the resolution entitled, “Situation of Human Rights of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar.” The resolution is adopted by a recorded vote of 35 to 3, with 7 abstentions (UNHRC, 2018c).
- **Trilateral informal meeting between Wang Yi, U Kyaw Tint Swe, and Abul Hassan Mahmud Ali at the UN headquarters**
At an unofficial meeting at the UN headquarters, China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh reach a three-point consensus to resolve the Rakhine issue. The countries agree to first resolve the issue through friendly consultations; second, repatriate the first group of refugees; and third, hold a joint working group meeting to draft

a roadmap and timeline for repatriation (FMPRC, 2018e).

- **October 18: China objects to a security council briefing by the chairperson of the fact-finding mission on Myanmar**
In a written letter to the president of the Security Council, China expresses opposition to holding the UNSC briefing and cites that it is out of the mandate of the fact-finding mission to brief the UNSC (UNSC, 2018).
- **October 24: China criticises the credibility of the report by the fact-finding mission on Myanmar**
In his statement to the Security Council, Ma Zhaoxu also pays tribute to the assistance provided by Bangladesh to the refugees and states that through meetings with both countries facilitated by China, Myanmar has pledged to develop a timetable for the repatriation of refugees (UN, 2018b).
- **November 9: Wang Yi meets with Shahidul Haque in Beijing**
Wang Yi and Bangladesh's foreign secretary, Shahidul Haque, exchange views on the issue of repatriation of refugees. The Chinese side commends both countries for the progress made in handling the Rakhine issue. Haque thanks China for its support and assistance (FMPRC, 2018f).
- **November 16: China votes against a draft resolution in the UNGA**
In the UNGA, China votes against the draft resolution entitled, "Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar." The draft resolution is adopted by a recorded vote of 142 to 10, with 26 abstentions (UNGA, 2018). China's representative notes that Myanmar and Bangladesh had agreed to start the repatriation process and expresses China's support (UN, 2018c).
- **December 16: Wang Yi meets with U Kyaw Tin in Laos**
In his meeting with Myanmar's minister for international cooperation, U Kyaw Tin, Wang Yi conveys China's hopes that Myanmar maintains communication and cooperation with Bangladesh to realise the repatriation

of the first group of people as soon as possible. He expresses Chinese support and calls on relevant agencies of the UN to play a constructive role (FMPRC, 2018g).

2019

- **February 25–March 5: China's special envoy visits Myanmar and Bangladesh**
During both his visits, China's special envoy of Asian affairs, Sun Guoxiang, meets with Aung San Suu Kyi and Min Aung Hlaing in Myanmar as well as the state minister for foreign affairs, Mohamed Shahriar Alam and Shahidul Haque, in Bangladesh to encourage both countries to speed up the implementation of the repatriation agreement (FMPRC, 2019a).
- **March 22: China votes against a resolution in the UNHRC**
In the UNHRC, China votes against the draft resolution entitled, "Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar." The resolution is adopted by a vote of 37 to 3, with 7 abstentions (UNHRC, 2021).
- **July 5: Wang Yi meets with A.K. Abdul Momen in Beijing**
In his meeting with Bangladesh's foreign minister, A.K. Abdul Momen, Wang Yi underlines that China has followed closely the development of the Rakhine issue and is trying its utmost to mediate it. China encourages both countries to strengthen communication and integration and handle differences properly for early and smooth repatriation of the first batch of displaced persons. The Chinese side is willing to continue to offer necessary assistance (FMPRC, 2019b).
- **July 6: Joint statement by China and Bangladesh mentions the Rakhine issue**
On the occasion of Sheikh Hasina's official visit to China, both countries issue a joint statement and affirm that the solution to the Rakhine issue lies in the early return of the displaced people who have entered Bangladesh from the Rakhine State. China expresses that it will continue to host trilateral meetings between the three countries to provide a platform for dialogue to promote repatriation (FMPRC, 2019c).

- **August 27: Wang Yi holds talks with U Kyaw Tint Swe in Beijing**
Wang Yi expresses that China is actively communicating and mediating for the resolution of the Rakhine issue and praises Myanmar's practical measures for repatriation. China supports proper settlement through bilateral channels between Myanmar and Bangladesh and opposes the multilateralisation and politicisation of the issue (FMPRC, 2019d).
- **September 23: Trilateral meeting between Wang Yi, U Kyaw Tint Swe, and A.K. Abdul Momen at the UN headquarters**
The meeting produces three points of consensus on the Rakhine issue: first, to realise the repatriation as soon as possible; second, to establish a China–Myanmar–Bangladesh joint working group for the implementation of repatriation under the political guidance of the foreign ministers of the three countries; and third, to strengthen tripartite cooperation to develop Rakhine State and the border areas (*Xinhua*, 2019a).
- **September 26: China votes against a resolution in the UNHRC**
In the UNHRC, China votes against the resolution entitled, “Situation of Human Rights of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar.” The resolution is adopted by a recorded vote of 37 to 2, with 7 abstentions (UNHRC, 2019b).
- **December 7: Wang Yi meets with U Kyaw Tint Swe and other ministers in Naypyidaw**
Wang Yi conveys that China is willing to continue to assist Myanmar in carrying out the repatriation and resettlement of displaced people, promoting economic development, and improving livelihoods in Rakhine State. The meeting is also attended by U Thaung Tun, Minister of Construction Han Zaw, and Minister of International Cooperation Kyaw Tin (FMPRC, 2019e).
- **Wang Yi meets with Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw**
Wang Yi says that China is paying close attention to the Rakhine issue and is ready to provide assistance on repatriation-

related work and help promote economic development in Rakhine State (*Xinhua*, 2019b).

- **December 27: China votes against a resolution in the UNGA**
In the UNGA, China votes against the draft resolution entitled, “Situation of Human Rights of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar.” The draft resolution is adopted by a vote of 134 to 9, with 28 abstentions (UN Digital Library, 2019).

2020

- **April 7: Wang Yi holds a telephone conversation with A.K. Abdul Momen**
In the meeting, Momen conveys hopes of starting the repatriation work as soon as possible, and Wang Yi expresses China's willingness to continue to play a mediating role (FMPRC, 2020).
- **October 23: Wang Yi holds a telephone conversation with A.K. Abdul Momen**
Both sides agree to hold a meeting of the China–Myanmar–Bangladesh joint working group at an early date. China has been actively engaged in mediation and communication to find a proper solution, says Wang Yi (*Xinhua*, 2020).
- **December 31: China votes against a resolution in the UNGA**
In the UNGA, China votes against the draft resolution entitled, “Situation of Human Rights of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar.” The draft resolution is adopted by a vote of 130 to 9, with 26 abstentions (UN, 2020).

2021

- **January 10: MoU between China and Myanmar**
China and Myanmar sign an MoU to conduct a feasibility study of a railway linking Mandalay with Kyaukphyu, a major town in Rakhine State. The Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Chen Hai says that the railway will strengthen Myanmar's national reconciliation and peace process (*Xinhua*, 2021a).

- **January 11–12: Wang Yi visits Myanmar**
During the visit, Wang Yi conveys China's support for Myanmar in properly resolving the Rakhine State issue, encouraging talks between Myanmar and Bangladesh and the early repatriation of displaced people to Myanmar from Bangladesh (*Xinhua*, 2021b).
- **January 19: China–Myanmar–Bangladesh agree to maintain consultations at vice foreign minister level**
As a follow-up to implement the consensus reached during Wang Yi's earlier visit to Myanmar, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaohui hosts a video meeting with Myanmar's deputy minister of international cooperation, Hao Dusong, and Bangladesh's foreign secretary, Masud Bin Momen. China expresses its willingness to continue to actively mediate and support both countries to strengthen dialogue (FMPRC, 2021a).
- **February 26: Chinese envoy says that Myanmar and Bangladesh must resolve the Rakhine issue through bilateral dialogue**
Speaking at an informal meeting of the UNGA, Chinese envoy Zhang Jun refers to the Rohingya issue in light of the military coup in Myanmar, "We do not hope to see new difficulties in solving this problem due to the domestic situation in Myanmar" (*Xinhua*, 2021c).
- **May 21: Wang Yi holds a telephone conversation with A.K. Abdul Momen**
Over the phone conversation, Momen says Bangladesh wishes to resume dialogue to start repatriation as soon as possible.

Wang Yi conveys that China understands Bangladesh's legitimate concerns and supports addressing the issue through friendly consultations (FMPRC, 2021b).

- **July 15: Wang Yi meets with A.K. Abdul Momen in Tashkent**
In the meeting, Momen conveys that Bangladesh wishes China to continue playing a mediative and constructive role to resolve the Rakhine State issue (FMPRC, 2021c).

2022

- **April 27: Li Jiming visits settlement camps in Cox's Bazar**
Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh, Li Jiming, visits households of displaced people and repatriation centres in the camp area. China has been making efforts to improve conditions in the camps; in the future, China will continue serving as a bridge of communication between Bangladesh and Myanmar and will play a positive role in facilitating early repatriation, says Li (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2022a).
- **April 28: China gifts medical equipment to Sadar Hospital in Cox's Bazar**
In the handover ceremony, Li Jiming notes that China has played the role of mediator between Bangladesh and Myanmar and has been working with relevant stakeholders, including the UNHCR, to facilitate the early repatriation of the displaced people (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2022b).

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