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Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State

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Executive Summary

The deadly attacks on Border Guard Police (BGP) bases in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State on 9 October 2016 and the days following, and a serious escalation on 12 November when a senior army officer was killed, signify the emergence of a new Muslim insurgency there. The current violence is qualitatively different from anything in recent decades, seriously threatens the prospects of stability and development in the state and has serious implications for Myanmar as a whole. The government faces a huge challenge in calibrating and integrating its political, policy and security responses to ensure that violence does not escalate and intercommunal tensions are kept under control. It requires also taking due account of the grievances and fears of Rakhine Buddhists.

Failure to get this right would carry enormous risks. While the government has a clear duty to maintain security and take action against the attackers, it needs, if its response is to be effective, to make more judicious use of force and focus on a political and policy approach that addresses the sense of hopelessness and despair underlying the anger of many Muslims in Rakhine State. Complicating this is that Aung San Suu Kyi has some influence, but under the constitution no direct control over the military.

The insurgent group, which refers to itself as Harakah al-Yaqin (Faith Movement, HaY), is led by a committee of Rohingya émigrés in Saudi Arabia and is commanded on the ground by Rohingya with international training and experience in modern guerrilla war tactics. It benefits from the legitimacy provided by local and international *fatwas* (religious judicial opinions) in support of its cause and enjoys considerable sympathy and backing from Muslims in northern Rakhine State, including several hundred locally trained recruits.

The emergence of this well-organised, apparently well-funded group is a game-changer in the Myanmar government's efforts to address the complex challenges in Rakhine State, which include longstanding discrimination against its Muslim population, denial of rights and lack of citizenship. The current use of disproportionate military force in response to the attacks, which fails to adequately distinguish militants from civilians, together with denial of humanitarian assistance to an extremely vulnerable population and the lack of an overarching political strategy that would offer them some hope for the future, is unlikely to dislodge the group and risks generating a spiral of violence and potential mass displacement.

HaY would not have been able to establish itself and make detailed preparations without the buy-in of some local leaders and communities. Yet, this has never been a radicalised population, and the majority of the community, its elders and religious leaders have previously eschewed violence as counterproductive. The fact that more people are now embracing violence reflects deep policy failures over many years rather than any sort of inevitability.

It is important for the government's response to start from an appreciation of why a violent reaction from some Muslims in Rakhine State has emerged. The population has seen its rights progressively eroded, its gradual marginalisation from social and political life, and rights abuses. This has become particularly acute since the 2012 anti-Muslim violence in Rakhine. Disenfranchisement prior to the 2015

elections severed the last link with politics and means of influence. At the same time, the disruption of maritime migration routes to Malaysia closed a vital escape valve, particularly for young men whose only tangible hope for the future was dashed. An increasing sense of despair has driven more people to consider a violent response, but it is not too late for the government to reverse the trend.

It requires recognising first that these people have lived in the area for generations and will continue to do so. Ways must be found to give them a place in the nation's life. A heavy-handed security response that fails to respect fundamental principles of proportionality and distinction is not only in violation of international norms; it is also deeply counterproductive. It will likely create further despair and animosity, increasing support for HaY and further entrenching violence. International experience strongly suggests that an aggressive military response, particularly if not embedded in a broader policy framework, will be ineffective against the armed group and has the potential to considerably aggravate matters.

So far, though there are indications of some training and solidarity, HaY does not appear to have a transnational jihadist or terrorist agenda. But there are risks that if the government mishandles the situation, including by continued use of disproportionate force that has driven tens of thousands from their homes or across the border to Bangladesh, it could create conditions for further radicalising sections of the Rohingya population that transnational jihadists could exploit to pursue their own agendas in the country. To avoid that requires subordinating the security response and integrating it into a well-crafted, overarching political strategy – building stronger, more positive relations between Muslim communities and the Myanmar state and closer cooperation and intelligence sharing with regional countries.

Yangon/Brussels, 15 December 2016

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Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State

I. Introduction

This report examines the emergence of a new form of organised violent resistance in the Muslim-majority northern parts of Myanmar's Rakhine State.[1] It follows up Crisis Group's detailed examination in 2014 of Rakhine politics, which should be referred to for a broader analysis of the dynamics in the state as a whole. It is important to know and acknowledge the perspectives of Rakhine Buddhists and their strongly-felt grievances.[2] The current violence, however, is qualitatively different from anything in recent decades and has fundamental implications for the situation in the troubled state and potentially for Myanmar's transition as a whole.

The report looks at the establishment of a new armed group, its objectives and international links; the response of the government and security forces; and the implications for the people of Rakhine State and the country. It is based on extensive research and interviews in Yangon; interviews with several members of the armed group in northern Rakhine State and villagers and key sources in the area; interviews with other sources connected to the group living outside Myanmar; interviews with members of the Rohingya diaspora, including in the Middle East; interviews with recent arrivals in Bangladesh who have fled Rakhine; and analysis of conversations on messaging applications such as WhatsApp over the last six months. Much research has been done by experienced personnel fluent in the local dialect spoken by Muslims in northern Rakhine State. In cases of particularly sensitive information and to protect the identities of interviewees and researchers, details of locations and dates have been withheld, replaced by a general description of the sourcing for a paragraph or section.

The term "Rohingya" is highly contested within Myanmar, because it is perceived as a claim of indigenous ethnic status by a community most Rakhine Buddhists, indeed most people in Myanmar, regard as immigrants from Bangladesh, and whom they therefore prefer to refer to as "Bengali".[3] The government has asked its officials and the international community to refrain from either term. "Rohingya" is used in this report not to imply endorsement of any particular historical narrative or political claim but because it is the term that community overwhelmingly refers to itself by, and because other terms such as "Muslims from Rakhine State" are less precise: several Muslim communities in the state do not identify as "Rohingya", including

[1] For recent Crisis Group reporting on Myanmar, see Asia Briefings N°s 147, *The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications*, 9 December 2015; 146, *Myanmar's Peace Process: A Nationwide Ceasefire Remains Elusive*, 16 September 2015; 144, *Counting the Costs: Myanmar's Problematic Census*, 15 May 2014; 143, *Myanmar's Military: Back to the Barracks?*, 22 April 2014; also Asia Reports N°s 282, *Myanmar's New Government: Finding Its Feet?*, 29 July 2016; 266, *Myanmar's Electoral Landscape*, 28 April 2015; and 261, *Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State*, 22 October 2014.

[2] Crisis Group Report, *Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State*, op. cit.

[3] Ibid, Section V.C, including for more detailed discussion of the term's sensitivity.

(but not only) the Kaman, a recognised indigenous Muslim group. It is Muslims in the northern parts of Rakhine State that most strongly identify as "Rohingya"; those in the diaspora who so identify are overwhelmingly from this area, rather than central or southern parts of the state.[4]

[4] For detailed discussion of Muslim communities in Rakhine State, see ibid.

II. Previous Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State

During the Second World War, Rakhine was the front line between the Japanese invaders and allied forces. Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists were on opposing sides; most of the former remained pro-British, while the latter supported the Japanese until a last-minute switch enabled the eventual allied reoccupation of Rakhine. Both communities formed armed units and attacked the other, with accounts of massacres on both sides in 1942-1943. Muslims fled to the north, where they were the majority, and Rakhine Buddhists moved south.[5]

A mujahidin rebellion erupted in April 1948, a few months after independence. The rebels initially explored the possibility of annexing northern Rakhine State to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), but Pakistan rejected this. They then sought the right of the population to live as full citizens in an autonomous Muslim area in the north of the state and an end to what they saw as discrimination by the Rakhine Buddhist officials who replaced the colonial administrators. The immigration authorities placed restrictions on the movement of Muslims from northern Rakhine to Sittwe, the state capital. Some 13,000 Muslims who fled during the war and were living in refugee camps in India and East Pakistan were not permitted to return; those who did were considered illegal immigrants.[6]

The rebels targeted Rakhine Buddhist interests as well as the government, quickly seizing control of large parts of the north and expelling many Buddhist villagers. Law and order almost completely broke down, with two communist insurgencies (Red Flag and White Flag) in addition to the mujahidin, as well as Rakhine nationalist groups, including the (Marxist) Arakan People's Liberation Party, in the south of the state.[7] An embattled Burmese army, facing ethnic insurgencies across the country, controlled little of Rakhine other than Sittwe. In the violence and chaos, relations between Buddhist and Muslim communities deteriorated further. Many moderate Rakhine Muslim leaders rejected the mujahidin insurgency, even vainly asking the government for arms to fight back.

It was not until 1954 that the army launched a massive offensive, Operation Monsoon, that captured most of the mujahidin mountain strongholds on the East Pakistan border. The rebellion was eventually ended through ceasefires in 1961 and defeat of remaining groups, leaving only small-scale armed resistance and banditry. Partly in response to mujahidin demands, partly for electoral reasons, in 1961 the government established a Mayu Frontier Administration in northern Rakhine, administered by army officers rather than Rakhine officials.[8] But the 1962 military coup led to a more hardline stance toward minorities, and the Mayu Frontier Administration was dissolved. This prompted attempts to re-form the mujahidin movement that failed to gain significant local support.

[5] Mary Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca, 2003), chapter 2; Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: A Study of a Minority Group* (Wiesbaden, 1972).
[6] Yegar, op. cit. On the eve of independence some Rakhine intellectuals led by barrister Hla Tun Pru were demanding an independent "Arakanistan" for the Rakhine people. See Aye Chan, "The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan State of Burma (Myanmar)", *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2005), p. 410.
[7] Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 2nd ed. (London, 1999), p. 28.
[8] Martin Smith, "The Muslim 'Rohingya' of Burma", unpublished article, 1995. Yegar, op. cit.

In 1974, inspired by the rise of pan-Islamist movements in the world, the Rohingya Patriotic Front armed group was formed from remnants of earlier failures. It split into several factions, one of the more radical of which became the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) armed group in 1982. The RSO split in 1986, giving rise to the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) splinter; in 1998, the two groups formed a loose alliance, the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the RSO had small bases in remote parts of Bangladesh near the Myanmar border but was not thought to have any inside Myanmar. In its highest-profile attack, in April 1994, several dozen fighters entered Maungdaw from Bangladesh, including a group landed by boat in Myin Hlut village-tract, south Maungdaw. On 28 April, bombs they planted in Maungdaw town caused damage and several civilian injuries, and fighters followed up with attacks on the town's outskirts. The group did not receive strong local support, and security forces, alerted by informants, quickly defeated them.[9]

Regional security analysts viewed the RSO as essentially defunct as an armed group by the end of the 1990s, though it kept an organisational structure in Bangladesh and did training and occasional small attacks on Myanmar security forces into the early 2000s. A Myanmar military intelligence report, cited in a U.S. diplomatic cable in 2002, made the "generally plausible" claim that 90 RSO/ARIF members attended a guerrilla war course, and thirteen also participated in explosives and heavy weapons courses in Libya and Afghanistan in August 2001. Also in the early 2000s, the RSO had an active weapons and explosives training exchange with the militant group Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh.[10]

More recently, the authorities have continued to blame the RSO for occasional attacks on security forces in northern Rakhine State, for example deadly attacks on Border Guard Police (BGP) patrols in northern Maungdaw in February and May 2014, including one on 17 May that killed four officers.[11] However, there is no evidence that it retained operational capability after the early-2000s, and armed criminal gangs operate on the border, smuggling drugs and other contraband. The RSO has also become something of a Rohingya militant brand that anyone can use, regardless of connections to the original organisation.

[9] Smith, "The Muslim 'Rohingya' of Burma", op. cit.; Crisis Group interview, researcher, Yangon, November 2016.

[10] Crisis Group interviews, regional security analysts, Dhaka, July-August 2014, November 2016. "Arakan Rohingya National Organization contacts with Al Qaeda and with Burmese insurgent groups on the Thai border", U.S. embassy Rangoon cable, 10 October 2002, as made public by WikiLeaks (https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/02RANGOON1310_a.html). Crisis Group Asia Report N°187, *The Threat from Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh*, 1 March 2010.

[11] Internal UN security management team note, Bangladesh, June 2014. See also, "All not quiet on the Burmese front", Probe Weekly, 6 June 2014.

III. Deepening Despair

The anti-Muslim violence in Rakhine State in June and October 2012, though it did not primarily affect the north of the state, seriously strained intercommunal relations.[12] It generated feelings of insecurity in Buddhist and Muslim communities but had the biggest impact on the latter. It also hardened anti-Muslim sentiment and led to increases in Buddhist nationalist hate speech. There were multiple cases of serious anti-Muslim violence across Myanmar the following year, as well as nationalist lobbying for a package of "protection of race and religion" laws widely seen as targeting Muslims.[13]

These were in addition to longstanding restrictions on access to citizenship for most Muslims in Rakhine State. This has led to serious discrimination against these communities, particularly the Rohingya. Permission to marry must be obtained from the authorities, and there are also severe restrictions on freedom of movement outside the village-tract or between townships, limiting work opportunities and access to government services.[14]

In the lead-up to the 2015 elections, the Muslim population in Rakhine State without citizenship cards – nearly all other than some Kaman – was disenfranchised, severing its last connection to politics and peaceful influence. Even those without citizenship cards had voted in previous elections. Crisis Group warned in advance that this risked organised violence.[15]

Compounding the sense among many Rohingya that politics had failed them was that Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) did not take a strong stand on minority religious rights in general or the Rohingya's specific plight in the campaign. After coming to power, she did make it a top government priority, chairing a committee on Rakhine State and appointing former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to head an advisory commission, but some Rohingya had already concluded there was little hope the new administration would address their demands.[16]

In May 2015, a maritime migration crisis escalated in the Andaman Sea, after a Thai crackdown disrupted people smuggling networks, causing smugglers and crew to abandon boats laden with migrants from Myanmar (mostly Rohingya) and Bangladesh; hundreds were feared to have died. This shut down smuggling routes to Malaysia. When these routes had not reopened by the start of the post-monsoon sailing season in September, it meant a critical escape valve for Rohingya had closed and caused despair among young men who saw migration as their only chance of a better future.[17]

[12] For analysis, see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°s 238, *Myanmar: Storm Clouds on the Horizon*, 12 November 2012; and 251, *The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar*, 1 October 2013.
[13] Crisis Group Report, *The Dark Side of Transition*, op. cit.
[14] Crisis Group Report, *The Politics of Rakhine State*, op. cit.
[15] Ibid.
[16] "Myanmar election: Aung San Suu Kyi campaigns in contentious Rakhine state", *The Guardian*, 16 October 2015; "Burma elections: Aung San Suu Kyi steers clear of 'stateless' minority the Rohingya", *The Independent*, 17 October 2015; "After Myanmar election, few signs of a better life for Muslims", *The New York Times*, 18 November 2015; "Aung San Suu Kyi aide: Rohingya are not our priority", *The Telegraph*, 19 November 2015. Crisis Group interviews, analysts specialising on Rakhine State, Yangon, November-December 2015.
[17] "Mixed maritime movements, April-June 2015", UN High Commissioner for Refugees Regional Office for South-East Asia. Crisis Group interviews, analysts, Yangon, Bangladesh, November 2016.

IV. Emergence of a New Organised Violent Resistance

A. *The 9 October Attacks*

In the early hours of 9 October, several hundred local Muslim men, armed mostly with knives and slingshots and about 30 firearms, launched simultaneous attacks on three BGP posts in Maungdaw and Rathedaung townships near the north-western border with Bangladesh. According to the authorities, nine police were killed; and the attackers, eight of whom were killed and two captured, made off with 62 firearms and more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition.[18]

One of the targets was BGP headquarters, a major installation in Kyee Kan Pyin (just north of Maungdaw town) that was overrun in a multi-phase attack, and from where the majority of weapons were looted. In another indication of the preparation level, the group planted an improvised explosive device (IED) and set an ambush on the approach road to the headquarters, delaying reinforcements and damaging vehicles. The two other targets were a BGP sector headquarters at Nga Khu Ya in north Maungdaw and a BGP outpost at Koe Dan Kauk in Rathedaung, just south of Maungdaw township. The government estimated the total attackers at 400.[19] Several further clashes occurred 10-12 October, including one on 11 October in which four soldiers were killed.[20] Two attacks on 3 November that state media reported as linked to the attackers are more uncertain.[21]

The attacks marked a major escalation of violence in Rakhine and reflected an unprecedented level of planning in a conflict that had seen little organised violent resistance from the Muslim population. They caused widespread fear in both communities, particularly among Buddhist Rakhine villagers, who are the minority in the northern part of the state; some 3,000 of them fled to towns.[22]

B. *Response from Government and Security Forces*

The military and BGP launched a major operation aimed at recovering the looted weapons, capturing those involved and arresting their helpers. Its intensity likely reflected both the exigencies of the security situation and that the initial attacks and subsequent deadly clashes were seen as a major affront to security forces' dignity.

[18] Government press conference, Naypyitaw, 9 October, reported in *Global New Light of Myanmar* (*GNLM*), 10 October 2016, pp. 1, 3.

[19] Ibid; Crisis Group interview, individual briefed on the attacks, Yangon, October 2016. See also "Operation Backdoor", Yehtun Blog (http://yehtunblog.blogspot.com), 20 October 2010.

[20] "Troops fight back violent armed attackers, kill four", *GNLM*, 11 October 2016, p. 1; "Tatmadaw attacked by 300 armed men, four soldiers killed", *GNLM*, 12 October 2016, p. 1; "Troops kill 10 violent armed attackers in area clearance operation in Maungdaw tsp" and "Armed men violently attack Kyikanpyin border outpost, set fire to 25 houses in Warpaik Village", *GNLM*, 13 October 2016, p. 3.

[21] As reported in *GNLM*, 5 November 2016, p. 2, the incidents occurred in south rather than north Maungdaw where the other attacks and subsequent clashes took place. One was the burning down of a disused BGP post, the other allegedly on a BGP base. There are competing narratives about the latter incident: village sources said it was a shooting between two police officers, not an attack. Crisis Group interviews, November 2016, and information from a non-government source with contacts in the area.

[22] "Myanmar - New displacement in Rakhine State", European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Daily Flash, 21 October 2016.

The BGP commander, Police Brigadier-General Maung Maung Khaing, was removed for "poor performance", probably due to both intelligence failures (see Section IV.C) and losing his headquarters and its armoury during the attacks; his replacement is a brigadier-general transferred from the regular police.[23]

The Myanmar authorities have consistently referred to "joint operations", usually indicating that the military is supporting BGP operations. This language began to be used in particular following a "special meeting on national defence and security" on 14 October that brought together the president, Aung San Suu Kyi, the commander-in-chief and others. The normal constitutional mechanism for activating military involvement in such a situation would be declaration of a state of emergency by the president, with National Defence and Security Council approval, as happened three times under the Thein Sein administration. However, Aung San Suu Kyi appears to regard the Council as politically illegitimate, and it has not met under her government, so no state of emergency can be declared.[24] In practice, though joint BGP-army patrols take place, the army has authority over the security response, under its western commander.[25]

The military has indicated it is conducting "area clearance operations" across a section of northern Maungdaw township, which it has sealed off. On the basis of reports from the authorities and non-government sources, it appears to be using something akin to its standard counter-insurgency "four cuts" strategy developed in the 1960s to cut off rebel forces from their four main support sources (food, funds, intelligence, recruits) and largely unchanged since. It involves cordoning off territory for concentrated operations, a "calculated policy of terror" to force populations to move, destruction of villages in sensitive areas and confiscation or destruction of food stocks that could support insurgents.[26]

Operations in the sealed-off area bear many hallmarks of that strategy. After the 9 October attacks, there were multiple reports of suspects shot on sight, burning of many houses, looting of property and seizure or destruction of food stocks – as well as of women and girls raped.[27] Humanitarian agencies have been denied access to some 30,000 people in the sealed-off area, displaced as a result of the attacks and their aftermath, as well as 130,000 previously receiving life-saving aid, with the exception of a one-time food delivery to four villages (6,500 people) on 6 November and the following days by the World Food Programme (WFP); and a food delivery by

[23] Government press conference, 17 October, reported in *GNLM*, 18 October 2016, p. 2.
[24] Ibid; see also "Special meeting on national defence and security", *GNLM*, 15 October 2016, p. 1. Under Section 413(a) of the constitution, a state of emergency in a state/region empowers local civilian authorities and civil service bodies to obtain military help in carrying out their duties. The reason for Suu Kyi's view is that the military has the majority of the Council's eleven seats (five uniformed officers plus the military-nominated vice president, a retired senior officer), so can outvote civilian government representatives. She may also have protocol concerns: it is chaired by the president; her membership is as foreign minister, not state counsellor.
[25] Crisis Group interview, individual briefed on the response, Yangon, November 2016.
[26] For details, see Smith, *Insurgency*, op. cit. p. 288 ff.; Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces* (Norwalk, 2001), pp. 91-91; and Maung Aung Myoe, "Military Doctrine and Strategy in Myanmar" Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, working paper 339, 1999, p. 10.
[27] Crisis Group telephone interviews, villagers and community leaders in the operations area, October 2016. Also, Arakan Project, internal notes nos. 1 and 2, October and November 2016.

the government on 18 November to an IDP camp that had formed spontaneously in Thu U Lar village-tract.[28]

Another common element of counter-insurgency operations in other parts of Myanmar is army establishment of local militias. Rakhine nationalists and Buddhist villagers in the north have long urged the government to arm the villagers, particularly since the 2012 violence, as they are greatly outnumbered by Muslims and fear for their security. This is particularly serious in the current context, because arming Buddhist villagers could lead the Muslim armed group, which has avoided attacking Buddhist civilians, to view them as combatant targets.

That would be a major escalation. Worryingly, the security forces have been contemplating the initiative. They have recruited some 120 local non-Muslims in what was initially presented to the Rakhine community and so likely interpreted by local Muslims as raising a BGP militia. The government has clarified that it is an accelerated BGP training program with loosened admission criteria, and trainees will be deployed as regular BGP.[29] But a significant risk remains of blurring lines between civilian villagers and security personnel, even if only in perception. One Rakhine armed group, the Arakan Liberation Army, has been attempting to increase its armed strength in the area to counter a perceived Muslim threat.[30]

The government denies allegations of human rights violations.[31] Lack of media and other independent access makes verification hard, but blanket denials, even of factual claims based on satellite imagery or international media reports from the ground of flight to Bangladesh, are not plausible and undermine the credibility of its other claims.[32] Some counter-narratives clash with satellite data, for example that local Muslim villagers are torching their own homes to get international sympathy or that it is the armed group's arson. Analysis of that data shows destruction of at least 1,500 buildings.[33]

[28] "Situation in northern Rakhine State", WFP, Situation Report no. 3, November 2016; "Asia and the Pacific: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot", UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 12 December 2016; Crisis Group interview, Arakan Project researcher, Yangon, December 2016; "Food provided to residents of Maungtaw", *GNLM*, 21 November 2016, p. 3. Government permission for WFP to deliver a two-week supply of rations was granted following a government-led visit to the affected area by the UN Resident Coordinator and nine ambassadors on 2-3 November.

[29] "Militia call a shot in the arm for Rakhine armies", *Myanmar Times*, 12 May 2014. "Myanmar police to arm and train non-Muslims in conflict-torn Rakhine region", Reuters, 3 November 2016. "Myanmar's training for non-Muslim police stokes fear in Rakhine", Reuters, 18 November 2016.

[30] "Authorities seize cache of weapons and ammunition in Hpa-an bust", The Irrawaddy, 12 December 2016.

[31] See, for example, "False allegations on violating human rights exposed to the world", *GNLM*, 3 November 2016, p. 1; "Local residents' accounts differ from fabricated media stories", *GNLM*, 7 November 2016, p. 1; "Military's information team refutes fabrication about massive destruction in Rakhine", *GNLM*, 15 November 2016, p. 3; "Government refutes rights group report on Rakhine", *GNLM*, 17 November 2016, p. 1; "Reports of hundreds fleeing Myanmar being pushed back by Bangladesh said to be false" and "Sender of fake news in Rakhine linked to int'l extremist groups", *GNLM*, 19 November 2016, p. 1.

[32] Credible evidence that has been denied includes: "Satellite-based damage assessment of affected villages in Maungdaw District", Human Rights Watch, 10 November 2016; an updated damage assessment, 18 November 2016; and "Hundreds of Rohingya flee Myanmar army crackdown to Bangladesh – sources", Reuters, 18 November 2016.

[33] "Burma: Military burned villages in Rakhine State", Human Rights Watch, 13 December 2016.

Some villages were systematically destroyed over days, rather than isolated, geographically dispersed events as would be expected from individuals or small-group hit-and-run attacks. Moreover, much arson took place during military operations when many troops were present – not only at the time of attacks, but also over subsequent days. Troops also have security motivation (denial of access to villages in insecure areas is a standard counter-insurgency tactic, often achieved in the past in other parts of Myanmar by burning villages), while the armed group is reliant on at least some local civilian support.[34]

Journalists questioning the official narrative have been accused in the state media of working "hand in glove" with the attackers. The government reportedly interceded with the *Myanmar Times* when one of its experienced foreign journalists reported on allegations of rapes by military personnel. She was fired shortly thereafter, and the paper's owner put a moratorium on reporting on the Rakhine State conflict. An opinion piece in state media called the reporting "an act of gross unethical journalism" but added that "credit should be given to the media group for … immediately firing that journalist".[35] Such intimidation has a chilling effect on reporting by other journalists and publications. For example, a reporter from a prominent local English-language publication interviewed a member of the BGP who admitted burning down Muslim homes in the operations area but self-censored the account.[36]

Potentially even more serious is that the repeated blanket government denials, widely disseminated via the state media in English and Burmese, reinforce a climate of impunity for troops that is particularly dangerous in a context of widespread negative sentiments toward the Muslim population at all levels of the military and in society as a whole. The state media has published disturbing opinion pieces, for example one that referred to the Rakhine State situation as caused by "detestable human fleas" that "we greatly loathe for their stench".[37]

C. *A Spiral of Violence*

A further serious escalation on 12 November made clear that the attacks on security forces were not one-off and that the armed group was still operational despite a month of intensive military operations.

Government accounts and Crisis Group interviews with villagers, other local sources and members of the armed group paint a broadly consistent picture.[38] At 6:45am, an army column clashed with some 60 members of the armed group in a valley near Pwint Hpyu Chaung village; one soldier died and several were wounded; six attackers were reportedly killed. There were several other skirmishes as the attackers retreated to Gwa Son village. When troops approached the village, the armed

[34] Crisis Group interview, senior Human Rights Watch staffer, November 2016. Selth, op. cit., p. 163.
[35] "Fourth estate must abide by 'code of ethics': minister for information", *Myanmar Times*, 9 November 2016. "Myanmar journalist says she was fired over story on military rape allegations", *The Guardian*, 4 November 2016; "Reporter's sacking followed MoI [Ministry of Information] phone call, sparking press freedom fears", *Frontier Myanmar*, 4 November 2016. "Myanmar press under pressure as paper bans Rakhine reports", Agence France-Presse, 8 November 2016. Khin Maung Myint, "Morality and ethics", *GNLM*, 24 November 2016, p. 8.
[36] Crisis Group interview, individual with direct knowledge of the incident, October 2016.
[37] "A flea cannot make a whirl of dust, but …", *GNLM*, 27 November 2016, p. 8.
[38] A government account is given in "One officer, one soldier dead, several injured [as] fighting continuously erupts in Rakhine", *GNLM*, 13 November 2016, p. 1.

group shot at them. Several hundred villagers, armed with whatever they had to hand (knives and farming implements), supported the attackers, seemingly spontaneously. A lieutenant-colonel was shot dead, and the troops retreated, calling in air support from two attack helicopters with mounted machine guns.[39] The helicopters allegedly fired indiscriminately, including at villagers fleeing across paddy fields; videos taken by villagers show several bodies in fields, including women and children.[40]

The same day, there were at least two IED attacks on government forces in the area. A BGP convoy was struck as it crossed a bridge, then came under attack by armed combatants; the authorities report the attackers were repelled and that there were no casualties. In the second incident, an army column was struck by an IED, reportedly damaging a vehicle but without casualties.[41] The authorities have reported several other IED incidents and said that explosives/IEDs were also used tactically in the initial attack on the BGP headquarters.[42]

Following the 12 November clashes, the military considerably stepped up its operations. In addition to using attack helicopters in areas with many civilian non-combatants, ground troops became much more aggressive. Troops entered Gwa Son and surrounding villages on 13 November, shooting at villagers who fled. Videos taken by villagers show several charred bodies discovered the next day in the remains of a house, in circumstances that remain unclear.[43] Many villages were also partially or completely destroyed by arson.

The impact of a "four cuts" operation on civilians is far greater in Maungdaw than in the mountains of the eastern border, where it has been used in the past. Those areas are sparsely populated, communities often have decades of conflict experience, well-developed coping mechanisms and generally better food security. Even there, the toll is heavy. But Maungdaw is densely populated predominantly lowland, communities have almost no experience of armed conflict, and there is pre-existing malnutrition and food insecurity well above critical emergency thresholds.[44] The population was already living on the edge; fear of conflict and abuses combined with a serious livelihoods shock – humanitarian support is almost completely blocked, and food imports from Bangladesh have been disrupted – have led many to flee across the border. At least 27,000 are known to have done so in recent weeks; it would not take much for this to become a mass exodus like 1978 (200,000) or 1991 (250,000).[45]

Violence and abuses are likely to boost support for the armed group. People pushed to desperation and anger, with no hope for the future, are more likely to embrace extremist responses, however counterproductive. With an armed militant group in place and ready to capitalise, the current security response is likely to drive

[39] "Government refutes rights group report on Rakhine", *GNLM*, 17 November 2016, p.1.
[40] Crisis Group interview, Arakan Project researcher, Yangon, November 2016.
[41] "Violent armed attackers ambush convoy of border guards and government staffs, explode a bridge in Rakhine", *GNLM*, 13 November 2016, p. 1. "Government troops attacked with improvised mines in Maungtaw", *GNLM*, 14 November 2016, p. 3.
[42] Crisis Group interview, analyst specialising on Rakhine State, Yangon, November 2016; also, for example, "IED discovered on village road in Maungtaw", *GNLM*, 17 November 2016, p. 1.
[43] Crisis Group interview, Arakan Project researcher, Yangon, November 2016.
[44] According to UN 2015 data, the global acute malnutrition rate (measured in children under five) in Maungdaw is 19 per cent, by far the worst in Myanmar and well above the World Health Organisation's emergency critical threshold of 15 per cent. See also "Myanmar aid curbs hit children in Muslim-majority region: U.N.", Reuters, 9 November 2016.
[45] "Asia and the Pacific: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot", UNOCHA, 12 December 2016.

a dangerous spiral of attacks, military responses and increased popular radicalisation. This would also seriously impact the Rakhine and Burman Buddhist communities' security and livelihoods in northern Rakhine State, where they have long felt themselves an embattled and fearful minority.

V. The Armed Group and its Motivations

A. *The Group and its Objectives*

Crisis Group has interviewed six persons linked to the armed group: four members in northern Maungdaw and two outside Myanmar. Separate discussions with them, as well as others involved in chat groups on secure messaging applications and analysis of videos released by the group have revealed a partial picture of its origins, structure and objectives.

The group refers to itself as Harakah al-Yaqin (HaY, "Faith Movement" in Arabic). The government calls it Aqa Mul Mujahidin, a generic Arabic phrase meaning "communities of fighters" that it gleaned from interrogations of suspects. Prior to the attacks, even members and supporters at village level were not aware of the real name and referred to it by this generic phrase (and perhaps also "RSO", which may be why the government claimed that old group's involvement). After the 9 October attacks, Rohingya communities in Saudi Arabia, other Middle Eastern countries and Malaysia began to ask who carried them out. According to HaY, people associated with the RSO began to falsely claim responsibility and to collect donations on this basis from the Rohingya diaspora and large private donors in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. This, they say, was what prompted the group to reveal its name, show some of its faces on camera and prove that it was on the ground.

The first video, circulated to Rohingya networks on 11 October and leaked on YouTube the next day, has the name Harakah al-Yaqin overlaid in Arabic script. In the second, uploaded to YouTube on 14 October, the group used this name and warned donors not to trust other groups claiming to be behind the attacks, saying that "some people tried to sell our movement and our community", a reference to the RSO. Further videos were subsequently released, showing their continued actions in north Maungdaw and stating their demands.[46]

HaY was established and is overseen by a committee of some twenty senior leaders headquartered in Mecca, with at least one member based in Medina. All are Rohingya émigrés or have Rohingya heritage. They are well connected in Bangladesh, Pakistan and possibly India. Some or all have visited Bangladesh and northern Rakhine State at different times in the last two years.

The main speaker in the videos is Ata Ullah (alias Ameer Abu Amar, and, within the armed group, Abu Amar Jununi, the name mentioned in a number of the videos); the government identifies him as Hafiz Tohar, presumably another alias. His father, a Muslim from northern Rakhine State, went to Karachi, where Ata Ullah was born. The family then moved to Saudi Arabia, and he grew up in Mecca, receiving a madrasa education. This is consistent with the fact that on the videos he shows fluent command of both the Bengali dialect spoken in northern Rakhine State and Peninsular Arabic. He disappeared from Saudi Arabia in 2012 shortly after violence erupted in Rakhine State. Though not confirmed, there are indications he went to Pakistan and possibly elsewhere, and that he received practical training in modern guerrilla

[46] The first video is "Islamic terrorist asked Rohingya to join them for jihad to Myanmar Burma Rakhine Arakan", video, YouTube, 12 October 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqTqCzLVeSs, an unofficial translation of the second's transcript: "Rohginya mujahideen call for weapons", video, YouTube, 14 October 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpCBPZlcBE0. There have been nine so far, the latest filmed after the 12 November escalation and uploaded to YouTube 20 November.

warfare.[47] Some twenty Rohingya from Saudi Arabia (separate from the leadership committee), including Ata Ullah, are leading operations on the ground. Like him, they are thought to have experience from other conflicts, possibly Afghanistan and Pakistan. Some Rohingya returned from the camps (official and informal) in Bangladesh before 9 October to join the group. A registered refugee from Nayapara camp in Bangladesh stood beside Ata Ullah in the first video; he disappeared from the camp the night of a 13 May attack on its guard post in which a commander was killed and eleven weapons stolen.[48] Since 9 October, several hundred young Rohingya men from Bangladesh have joined the fight. However, the main fighting force is made up of Muslim villagers in northern Rakhine State who have been given basic training and organised into village-level cells to limit risks of compromise. These are mostly led by young Islamic clerics (known as "Mullahs" or "Maulvis") or scholars ("Hafiz") from those villages.

Though it does not appear to have religious motivations, HaY has sought religious legitimacy for its attacks. At its prompting, senior Rohingya clerics and several foreign clerics have ruled that, given the persecution Muslim communities face in Rakhine State, the campaign against the security forces is legal in Islam, and anyone opposing it is in opposition to Islam. *Fatwas* (religious rulings) to this effect were apparently obtained shortly after 9 October in several countries with a significant Rohingya diaspora, including Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. These have significantly influenced many Muslim religious leaders in northern Rakhine State to endorse HaY despite earlier feeling violence to be counterproductive. The group also has a senior Islamic scholar with it in Maungdaw, a Rohingya from Saudi Arabia, Mufti Ziabur Rahman, who brings religious legitimacy to operations and has authority to issue *fatwas*.[49]

Information from members and analysis of its methods indicate that its approach and objective are not transnational jihadist terrorism.[50] It has only attacked security

[47] In Arabic, Abu Amar Jununi means "mad father of Amar", perhaps an indication his eldest son is named Amar. The government spells Hafiz Tohar as Havistoohar. It said he attended a six-month Taliban training course in Pakistan (government press release, Naypyitaw, 14 October 2016, reproduced in *GNLM*, 15 October 2016, pp. 1, 3); In Crisis Group interviews, HaY members suggested he went from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan and from there to other countries (possibly including Libya) for training, but no further details or confirmation were obtained.

[48] "Attackers kill guard at Bangladesh Rohingya refugee camp", Agence France-Presse, 13 May 2016.

[49] The foreign clerics are from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, among other places. The mufti is the main speaker in the third video and identifies himself: "Islamic terrorist Rohingya act like villagers", video, YouTube, 12 October 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=36tRKor-WDg.

[50] This report uses "international jihadist" to refer to groups such as al-Qaeda, Islamic State (IS) and their affiliates. The Arabic root of "jihad" refers to striving in God's service. Many Muslims find its use in the political violence context imprecise and offensive, reducing a complex religious concept, which over centuries has had many, often peaceful forms, to war-making. Even when used in the organised violence context, it can refer to insurgency and guerrilla war, not only terrorism. For the vast majority of Muslims, today's "jihadists" pervert Islam's tenets. But it is hard to escape the term. Groups such as al-Qaeda and IS self-identify as "jihadist"; and while jihad has long been an element of virtually all schools of Islam, a nascent "jihadist" ideology has emerged that is more than a reflection of this; ideologues borrow from other traditions and at times show frustration with Salafi doctrinal rigidity that could constrain fighting tactics. Though big differences exist, "jihadist" groups share some tenets: fighting to return society to a purer Islam; violence against rulers whose policies they deem in conflict with Islamic imperatives as they understand them; and belief in duty to use violence if Muslim rulers abandon those imperatives. This report's use of "jihadist" is not

forces (and perceived threats in its own community), not religious targets, Buddhist villagers or civilians and family members at the BGP bases it hit on 9 October. It has called for jihad in some videos, but there are no indications this means terrorism.[51] Unlike all previous such insurgent groups (see above) and for unclear reasons, it does not include "Rohingya" in its name. Its stated aim is not to impose Sharia (Islamic law), but rather to stop persecution of Rohingya and secure their rights and greater autonomy as Myanmar citizens, notwithstanding that its approach is likely to harden attitudes in the country and seriously set back those goals. It is possible, however, that its objectives could evolve, given its appeals to religious legitimacy and links to international jihadist groups, so it is essential that government efforts do not focus only or primarily on military approaches, but also address underlying community grievances and suffering.

HaY's modus operandi is similar to the now-defunct RSO as well as many ethnic armed groups in Myanmar – but it faces much greater hurdles than the latter given rejection of Rohingya identity by the government and most of the country. Though the government has claimed close links with RSO, it is a distinct group that is more a reaction to perceived RSO failures than an evolution of that group (see Section IV.C below) – hence Ata Ullah's RSO criticism in the second video. As the RSO has become something of a brand associated with Rohingya militancy by both Muslims and the authorities, it is not surprising that the government has identified the attackers as linked to it.[52] But institutional ties do not appear to exist, though there are some efforts to recruit around 200 Rohingya in Bangladesh trained since 2012 by an ex-RSO military commander, but never deployed due to lack of an organisational structure that HaY may potentially now offer.[53]

B. *Communications and Social Media Environment*

Much of HaY's communications and planning was over encrypted messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Viber, as well as WeChat (which does not have end-to-end encryption).[54] Use of these has become widespread across Myanmar over the last few years, as mobile voice and data connectivity have been rolled out along with $20 smartphones (people close to the border have had access to these opportunities for much longer, by connecting to Bangladeshi networks). Myanmar is one of the only

meant to add legitimacy to this interpretation or detract from efforts to promote alternative interpretations. It uses "terrorism" and "terrorist" only to describe non-state actors' attempt to use violence or intimidation, especially of civilians, to achieve political goals by manipulating fear. See Crisis Group Special Report N°1, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, 14 March 2016.

[51] Crisis Group interview, individual briefed on the attacks, Yangon, October 2016.

[52] Government press release, Naypyitaw, 14 October 2016, reproduced in *GNLM*, 15 October 2016, pp. 1, 3.

[53] There is also information that some former RSO members acting on their own have been providing very basic training to Rohingya refugees interested in joining HaY. This started only after the first attacks. All indications are it is not linked institutionally to either the RSO or HaY. Crisis Group interviews, Rohingya refugees, Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh), November 2016.

[54] Crisis Group observation of Rohingya WhatsApp groups, October-November 2016. On Viber use, see "Sender of fake news in Rakhine linked to int'l extremist groups", *GNLM*, 19 November 2016, pp. 1, 3. A Myanmar Muslim has been warning members of the diplomatic and aid communities about the use of WeChat to promote extremism in the country since the 9 October attacks. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Yangon, October 2016.

countries where Viber is the dominant messaging app: the company claims 25 million unique users as of October 2016, out of a 51.5 million population. Such tools have significantly lowered communication and organisation barriers for communities in northern Rakhine State, something that the draconian movement restrictions in place for decades can no longer prevent.[55]

The preferred messaging app among Rohingya is WhatsApp. This is probably due to its much greater popularity internationally and the fact that Rohingya use these apps to keep in touch with family overseas and the diaspora more generally. Crisis Group identified more than 50 WhatsApp groups in use in northern Rakhine State, each with as many as 250 members, and including diaspora Rohingya around the world. These are mainly used for social interaction and information sharing, not nefarious purposes. Some individuals are members of ten to twenty WhatsApp groups and can also easily share information from group chats with their individual contacts. In the wake of the 9 October attacks, these have been used to quickly disseminate information about security threats and other urgent issues. They are likely also an important source of HaY operational intelligence.

Since the Rohingya dialect of Bengali does not have a written form, much of the communication over these applications uses audio files or voice messages.

C. *Planning and Operational Strategy for the Attacks*

Crisis Group interviews with HaY members and other well-informed sources in Myanmar, Bangladesh and the Middle East, cross-referenced with additional information, including Myanmar government reports based on interrogations of captured HaY and from regional diplomats and security analysts, have revealed a fairly detailed picture of the planning and operational strategy behind the attacks.

HaY's formation and planning for operations were initiated in the wake of the 2012 violence. Active recruitment of local leaders began in 2013, then training of hundreds of villagers they recruited, mainly from Maungdaw township, since 2014, initially in Bangladesh and then more intensively in northern Rakhine State. Training was in small batches to avoid attention, a village at a time, so members would not know the identities of other trainees, and primarily in the hills of the Mayu range along the border of Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships, as well as possibly in the compounds of some large houses in villages. It included weapons use, guerrilla tactics and, HaY members and trainees report, a particular focus on explosives and IEDs. It was given by Rohingya veterans and Pakistanis or Afghans with experience of recent operations in those countries and possibly elsewhere and took more than two years to complete.[56]

[55] Buddhist nationalists also use messaging applications to organise and disseminate views; Viber has long been their preferred application, but recently WhatsApp has been gaining popularity. Crisis Group interview, technology industry source, Yangon, November 2016.

[56] For a map with village tracts in Maungdaw township, see "Village Tracts of Maungdaw Township, Rakhine State", Myanmar Information Management Unit, 22 November 2011, www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/VT%20Map_Maungdaw%20Tsp_Rakhine_MIMU250v01_22Nov11_A3.pdf. Some RSO veterans have explosives expertise, from training by Bangladeshi militants in the early 2000s in an exchange program. Crisis Group Report, The Threat from Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh, op. cit.

During this period, the group apparently killed several informers among the Muslim villages of north and south Maungdaw and others they feared might reveal their plans. It also paid significant hush money to potential informers. Following the training, two Saudi-based senior leaders spent a month in northern Rakhine State, around August 2016, selecting targets and determining how and when the attacks would take place.[57] Once they left, the intention was to obtain weapons and ammunition for the hundreds of trainees. Plans were also made to deploy at least four experienced doctors with medicines and supplies and to train locals as medics to assist them. From roughly late August, there was an increase in the killing of known informers within the Rohingya community.[58]

The claimed objective of the operation was to take complete control of Maungdaw township, cut off communications with Buthidaung to the east and establish military posts on the ridges of the Mayu range between Maungdaw and Buthidaung, creating a defendable liberated area in the same manner as the larger ethnic armed groups in Myanmar's eastern borderlands. After this, the intent was to attack the northern part of Buthidaung – a very ambitious plan that would give complete control of the Bangladesh border – as well as parts of Rathedaung.

This plan had to be changed. In early September, after the two senior leaders left, two informers in U Shey Kya village-tract, close to Nga Khu Ya where one of the 9 October attacks occurred, revealed the identities of eight local HaY members to the BGP, which arrested them on 12 September. They were interrogated and allegedly tortured (including electric shocks and denailing). HaY arranged a bribe to the BGP of 3 million kyat (about $2,300), and five were released on 16 September. The remaining three were freed on 28 September, after a bribe of more than 40 million kyat (over $30,000).[59] On 30 September, HaY reportedly killed the two informants, leading to BGP night raids and arrests in the area that prompted several families to flee to Bangladesh. The authorities subsequently began large payments to informers in north Maungdaw to draw up lists of villagers in their area engaged in illegal activity, some of whom fled.

Additionally, local people say, an IED that accidentally exploded in Ngar Sar Kyu village-tract around 7 October while it was being prepared drew the attention of the security forces. According to members of the group, HaY saw that the net was closing and decided that though its preparations were not yet complete, it had to make an emergency plan and launch its operation on 9 October, ahead of schedule.

Though done hastily, the attacks showed some sophistication, including diversionary tactics; blocking reinforcements with a complex attack (IEDs plus armed assault) on a convoy some distance away; and felling of trees across roads to halt military vehicles. It is unclear where the explosives came from, but a foreign expert described the IEDs as crude but not completely amateurish.[60]

The group was able to organise widely, pay numerous potential informers in northern Rakhine State prior to the attacks to keep them quiet and large bribes to the security forces to free detained militants. Now that it has established its legitimacy

[57] A different source claims that only one of the men was a Rohingya from Saudi Arabia, and the other was a foreigner.
[58] Crisis Group interview, human rights monitor, Bangladesh, November 2016.
[59] This is the highest known bribe ever paid to the BGP to release a detainee. Crisis Group interviews, local researcher, well-informed locals, Maungdaw, September-November 2016.
[60] Crisis Group interview, individual briefed on the matter, Yangon, November 2016.

and capability with attacks, it is unlikely to face funding constraints. It seems to be receiving funds from the Rohingya diaspora and major private donors in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.[61] It may also attract the attention of international groups interested in more than funding (see Section IV.E below).

D. *Level of Local Support*

It would not have been possible for HaY to establish itself and make detailed preparations without the buy-in of some local, particularly religious leaders and local communities in northern Rakhine State. Yet, this has never been a radicalised population; that some now embrace violence reflects deep policy failures over many years.

The community follows a conservative Islam, but not in general a radicalised one, and even as people saw their rights, livelihoods and hopes eroded, the vast majority of religious leaders and the population as a whole continued to eschew violence, which they considered likely to prompt further discrimination and undermine the objective of achieving recognition and rights within Myanmar. But in the wake of the 2012 violence, a segment of the population began more active consideration of organised violent responses. While a minority view, it was driven by influential individuals, including some of the younger generation of religious leaders in northern Rakhine State, who began to break with the views of community elders and older clerics. It was these people and their followers who started the organisational and training activities on the ground that were well under way by mid-2014.[62]

With the 9 October attacks, views began to shift. Initially, there were intense debates within the community, which played out on WhatsApp group chats. Some felt they were "dying slowly day by day", and that after years of desperation and hopelessness, someone was standing up for them.[63] But there was considerable criticism of the group in WhatsApp for not consulting or warning the community before the attacks and not considering the very serious consequences. It appears to have been the issuance of *fatwas* shortly after the attacks that was decisive in convincing many throughout Maungdaw to support HaY's approach.

HaY leaders also seem to have been effective in this regard. The local commanders, about twenty Rohingya from Saudi Arabia including Ata Ullah, had been working on the ground with the trainees and local leaders for a long time, living with local people unlike the leaders of Rohingya armed groups in the past.[64] Several village leaders who have observed the activities of HaY's leaders say they were impressed by their dedication, sincerity and strong commitment to their cause; as a result, they gained increasing trust and support from villagers. Following the success of the

[61] Crisis Group interviews, members of the group and sources in the Rohingya diaspora, October-November 2016.
[62] See Crisis Group report, *The Politics of Rakhine State*, op. cit., Section VI.A.
[63] The group chats were monitored by Crisis Group researchers since mid-2016. Crisis Group interview, villager in Maungdaw, October 2016.
[64] Crisis Group interviews, villagers in several villages in north and south Maungdaw, recent arrivals in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh) and observation of discussions on WhatsApp groups, October-November 2016. These are not the same twenty as the approximately twenty-member leadership committee based in Mecca, mentioned in Section IV.A above.

attacks, some youths take the view that the group has achieved what their fathers and grandfathers could not.

An important part of HaY's success, local community members say, is that these twenty or so leaders had good, secure lives in Saudi Arabia, the dream of many Rohingya, but were seen to have sacrificed comfort and prosperity to live beside impoverished villagers, without wearing shoes or good clothes and eating the same meagre food. That persons with so many other options were willing to take such risks convinced many locals the group was sincere and committed. This overcame doubts about joining or supporting an armed insurgency. Now, after two rounds of attacks and a brutal security response, it appears that a sizeable proportion of the area's Muslim population and the diaspora support or are sympathetic to HaY, even if the ferocity of the military's response causes some to flee.

At the same time, HaY also relied on threats and intimidation to ensure its survival. It has killed some suspected informers and drawn up a hit list of others. In addition to the killings in the lead up to the 9 October attacks, a Muslim man who used to work as a BGP cook was abducted by fellow villagers in Laungdon village-tract and found in a paddy field on 31 October with his throat cut; on 3 November, a former U Shey Kya village administrator was similarly found dead, as was a 100-household leader in south Maungdaw on 17 November.[65] These killings were done in the same gruesome way, presumably to inspire fear, while there have been no attacks on Buddhist civilians.

E. *Links with International Jihadist Groups*

There is some limited information on links between HaY and international jihadist groups. It is not surprising that such links exist, given the recruitment over several decades of vulnerable and marginalised Rohingya refugees and migrants by militant groups, initially mostly in Bangladesh, for deployment there and elsewhere.[66] However, HaY's public statements and modus operandi, as well as interviews with its members, all point to this being an insurgent group targeting Myanmar security forces and aiming – albeit in a way likely to be counterproductive – to obtain rights for the Rohingya in Myanmar, along the lines of previous mujahidin groups in Myanmar (see Section II above).

With that important caveat, the information on connections with international groups is as follows. First, members of HaY say Ata Ullah and the non-local fighters with him are well trained and experienced in guerrilla warfare; their tactics and operational success appear to confirm this, particularly their use of asymmetric methods and weapons such as IEDs, albeit crude ones. Such training and experience imply at least some links with international extremist groups. HaY members confirm that

[65] Arakan Project, internal note no. 2, op. cit.; "54-year old man found dead in Maungtaw", *GNLM*, 6 November 2016, p. 2; and "Elder village leader murdered in Maungtaw", *GNLM*, 19 November 2016, p. 2.

[66] For example, it is known that Muslims from Myanmar were fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan, 1999-2001, Crisis Group Report, *The Politics of Rakhine State*, op. cit., Section VI.A; that Rohingya fighters have been operating, and one was killed, in Indian Kashmir, "Killing of Burmese militant ups ante of intelligence agencies", *The Tribune*, 13 November 2015; and that there is information ISIS has been recruiting among the Rohingya diaspora for Iraq and Syria, "ISIS look to recruit Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar", *Newsweek*, 6 February 2015.

their leaders are well connected in Bangladesh, Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, India; the Myanmar government says its interrogations reveal that training was provided in Bangladesh and Pakistan. HaY recruits have also been instructed in Rakhine State by both Rohingya and Pakistani or Afghan trainers, according to members of the group and local people.[67]

Secondly, the Rohingya cause has been used propagandistically by international jihadist groups for several years. Examples include threats against Myanmar by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (2012); calls by an Indonesian extremist leader for Muslims to wage jihad in Myanmar (2013); threats by the IS leader to take revenge on Myanmar and several other countries for abuses against their Muslims; promises to rescue Muslims in Myanmar and elsewhere from "injustice and oppression" in the formation announcement of "al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent"; frequent citations in speeches as recently as 2015 by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, head of Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba militants, to the "atrocities on Rohingya Muslims" and calls for revenge; offers of resources and training facilities by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in June 2015 to help Myanmar Muslims "take up the sword"; and a call in the April 2016 issue of IS's *Dabiq* magazine by Bangladeshi militant Abu Ibrahim to help oppressed Muslims in Myanmar in every possible way, but stating that it was not a current operational focus.[68]

Beyond these statements of solidarity and calls for support, there has been little evidence that Myanmar is an operational priority for such groups. There appear to be some other forms of cooperation or assistance, including training (discussed above) and funding, as well, potentially, as provision of weapons and explosives, which HaY currently seeks in Bangladesh. According to security analysts, small arms and military-grade explosives are available there, and procuring them should not be too difficult if the group has connections with regional arms traffickers or Bangladeshi or

[67] Crisis Group interviews and Myanmar government press release, 14 October 2016, op. cit. There are unconfirmed indications that the group may have a leader in Syria. Based on the profiles of other leaders and their connections, if this is true it might be a Rohingya fighter with a jihadist group rather than implying non-Rohingya leadership. Others have noted the raised index finger gesture, commonly associated with IS, displayed by Ata Ullah and some other fighters in several videos; however, this is a common gesture in South Asia and does not in itself imply any such links. See Jasminder Singh and Muhammad Haziq Jani, "Myanmar's Rohingya Conflict: Foreign Jihadi Brewing", RSIS Commentary no. 259, 18 October 2016.

[68] "Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan threaten Myanmar over Rohingya", Agence France-Presse, 26 July 2012; a 23 April 2013 call by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir from his prison cell in Indonesia, mentioned in Crisis Group interview, security analyst, Jakarta, July 2014; "ISIS leader calls on Muslims to 'build Islamic state'", BBC, 1 July 2014; "Pakistani terror group active on Myanmar-Bangladesh border", *Mizzima News*, 28 July 2015; "Pakistani Taliban attempts to recruit Rohingyas to kill Myanmar's rulers", Agence France-Presse, 9 June 2015; and *Dabiq* Magazine (English edition), issue 14, April 2016, p. 62.

regional militant entities.[69] There are no indications of any significant presence of non-Rohingya fighters.[70]

Such links appear driven by *umma* (Islamic community) solidarity and do not imply convergence between HaY and international jihadist groups on ideology, strategy or tactics. HaY's objectives and tactics and its focus on security targets suggest that it is Rohingya rather than transnationally focused. It is necessary to be careful not to over-interpret the significance of the international links noted above or leave unchallenged efforts by some Myanmar officials, politicians and other leaders to portray HaY as part of the global jihadist movement. Nevertheless, the longer violence continues, the greater the risks become of such links deepening and potentially becoming operational.

Recent minor explosions in Yangon do not appear directly linked to Rakhine State. Crude homemade devices were set off on 17, 20, 24 and 26 November at two shopping centres and two immigration offices, one inside the fairly secure regional government office. There were no casualties, only minor damage. The location of the devices in bins and toilets and the timing of blasts (after work hours or on public holidays) appeared designed to avoid casualties. Police arrested several suspects said to be Muslims on 26 November, but no further details have been released.[71] Targeting of immigration offices, which are also responsible for citizenship verification, suggests a possible link to the Rakhine situation. If so, however, it more plausibly was an unsolicited expression of solidarity or anger at the security response than a direct attack, which might be expected to have been more dramatic. However, it does perhaps indicate existence of individuals with an intent and capability to access (semi-)secure locations that potentially could be utilised by those with the technical expertise and materials for a major attack.

[69] Crisis Group interviews, HaY members, November 2016; security analysts, Yangon, Dhaka, November 2016. Illegal shipments of small arms are regularly intercepted in Bangladesh; their use in domestic crimes has increased markedly in recent years. "Use of illegal firearms on rise", *Dhaka Tribune*, 13 November 2016; and "New JMB planned big attack for Dhaka", *Dhaka Tribune*, 15 November 2016.

[70] There is unconfirmed information from a credible source that about a dozen Patani Malays went to Maungdaw before 9 October to fight with HaY, apparently in solidarity and on their own initiative. Crisis Group correspondence, analyst, December 2016.

[71] "Mayangone bomb intended to scare, not hurt, say police", *Frontier Myanmar*, 21 November 2016; "Myanmar police arrest Muslims over Yangon bombings", Agence France-Presse, 28 November 2016.

VI. How Should the Government Respond?

Emergence of a new Muslim armed group in Rakhine State is a serious threat to prospects for stability and development there. The government faces a big challenge in calibrating its political, policy and security responses to ensure that violence does not escalate and intercommunal tensions are not inflamed. It also requires taking due account of the grievances and fears of Rakhine Buddhists.[72]

Failure to get this right carries enormous risks, so it is important that any response starts from an appreciation of why a violent reaction from some in the Muslim population of Rakhine State has emerged now. For many years, this population has seen its rights eroded and its progressive marginalisation from social and political life. This became particularly acute at the time of the 2012 anti-Muslim violence in Rakhine. In the wake of that violence, and seeing no likelihood of improvement, some Rohingya in northern Rakhine State and the diaspora began contemplating taking up arms and made initial preparations to launch a new insurgency (see Section IV.C above). A leader of this initiative with whom Crisis Group met in Bangladesh in 2014 described the group's plans and made clear the objective was for the community to live as Myanmar citizens with rights respected by the state, and was not separatist, anti-Buddhist or transnational jihadist.[73]

Three key developments in 2015 are likely to have cemented the group's resolve to launch an insurgency and created a much more fertile recruiting ground for it: disenfranchisement of Muslim voters, lack of hope of a political solution and the shutting down of migration routes to Malaysia (see Section III above). The authorities have a responsibility to respond to the deadly attacks on BGP bases. At the same time, an effective security response must be set within an overarching policy that addresses the sense of hopelessness of Muslims in Rakhine State. This is not yet a radicalised population; community members, elders and religious leaders have previously eschewed violence as counterproductive. While increasing despair has driven more to consider violence, it is not too late for the government to reverse this if it recognises that the population has lived in the area for generations and will continue to do so and resolves to give them a place in the nation's life.

All indications are that HaY is preparing further attacks on security forces and retains the capability to do so. Heavy-handed security measures would directly contradict the above objectives, likely creating more despair and animosity among local Muslims, increasing support for HaY and provoking a deepening cycle of violence. There is likewise a very real prospect of even larger population displacements to Bangladesh. In this respect, it is also vital to open up the conflict-affected part of north Maungdaw for aid workers and independent media.

[72] Crisis Group Report, *The Politics of Rakhine State*, op. cit., Section IV. See also Aung San Suu Kyi's comments in "Focus on resolving difficulties in Rakhine rather than exaggerating them, says Suu Kyi", Channel NewsAsia, 2 December 2016. As regards the risk of intercommunal violence, monitors report a significant increase in hate speech posts after 9 October and their spread to pages and networks where that had not previously been observed. Crisis Group interview, Yangon, November 2016.

[73] Crisis Group Report, *The Politics of Rakhine State*, op. cit., Section VI.A. At the time, he described the group as a "new RSO", with a generation of younger leaders based in Rakhine State. It is now clear that he was describing HaY.

Experience from other countries strongly suggests an aggressive military response not embedded in a broader policy framework would also be ineffective against the armed group and risk greater attention from international jihadist groups.[74] The presence of a well-organised, effective, internationally connected insurgency in Rakhine State could then provide channels that did not previously exist for terrorism. This does not appear to be the HaY's objective, but the situation could give international jihadists opportunities to insert their own agendas, for example by recruiting Rohingya (particularly in Bangladesh) to carry out such actions on Myanmar soil, or attracting foreign fighters, particularly those from the Indian subcontinent who could blend in easily, to do so.

It is also possible that the spotlight on the Rohingya's plight might prompt foreign groups unconnected with HaY to conduct a terrorist attack; there has been a foiled attempt to bomb Myanmar's Jakarta embassy, and the individual who carried out the recent attack at Ohio State University in the U.S. claimed to have been inspired at least in part by oppression of the Rohingya.[75] To mitigate these risks requires political, not military responses: building stronger, more positive ties between Muslim communities and the Myanmar state and improving cooperation and intelligence sharing with regional countries.

Such cooperation is essential to ensure security and effectively address potential transnational jihadist threats. On the western border in particular, arms, narcotics and human smuggling networks are intertwined and could be used by insurgent and jihadist groups to transport weapons, materiel and personnel. The current security operation has strained relations with countries that have large Muslim populations and with which there are practical needs for close ties. There have been big protest demonstrations in Bangladesh (including by Islamist parties) as well as in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand and Indonesia. Deep concerns have been expressed by the Bangladeshi and Malaysian governments. Western countries are also alarmed at the Rakhine State situation and the lacklustre government response.[76]

In the Malaysian case, this became a public spat after Prime Minister Najib Razak indicated he would join a major protest in Kuala Lumpur. Myanmar accused him of violating ASEAN non-interference principles and using the issue for domestic politics; Malaysia retorted that Myanmar was pursuing "ethnic cleansing" and destabilising South East Asia. At the 4 December demonstration, Najib called for interna-

[74] For experiences elsewhere, see, for example, Crisis Group Europe & Central Asia Briefing N°77, *A Sisyphean Task? Resuming Turkey-PKK Peace Talks*, 17 December 2015; Middle East & North Africa Report N°86, *Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb*, 27 May 2009; and Special Report, *Exploiting Disorder*, op. cit., Section V.A.

[75] See "Indonesia foil plan to attack embassy", Agence France-Presse, 27 November 2016; "'I can't take it anymore': Ohio State attacker said abuses of Burma's Muslims led to 'boiling point'", *The Washington Post*, 29 November 2016.

[76] "Malaysia to summon Burmese ambassador as protests mount over treatment of Rohingya", Reuters, 25 November 2016; "Myanmar's Rohingya crisis stirs regional protests", *Nikkei Asian Review*, 26 November 2016; "Malaysia says Myanmar violence against Muslim Rohingya 'ethnic cleansing'", Reuters, 2 December 2016; "Myanmar's Rohingya issue a 'humanitarian crisis': Malaysia", Channel NewsAsia, 3 December 2016; "Malaysian PM urges intervention to stop 'genocide' of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims" Reuters, 4 December 2016. Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Yangon, December 2016. "Regional criticism of Myanmar's Rohingya policy risks ASEAN split", *Nikkei Asian Review*, 7 December 2016.

tional intervention to stop "genocide", directly criticised Suu Kyi and said "enough is enough".

While this was seen in many quarters as having a primarily domestic political objective for Najib, the anger against Myanmar in much of the Muslim world is real. ASEAN, in particular Indonesia, has a potentially important role in helping to de-escalate the situation. This would be of great benefit to Myanmar; it would also be in the interests of ASEAN, which has long carried the burden of large numbers of Rohingya refugees and migrants, a flow that will increase if the violence continues and lead to radicalisation risks for the region. There is also fear that the issue could be destabilising for ASEAN as a whole.[77] In response to regional concerns, Myanmar has called a special retreat for ASEAN foreign ministers in Yangon on 19 December, so Aung San Suu Kyi can brief them on the situation.[78] Myanmar should use this opportunity to set out a credible political strategy for addressing the violence.

Suu Kyi's flagship initiative for addressing the situation, the Kofi Annan-led advisory commission established in August, faces major further challenges after the 9 October attacks.[79] Political space has considerably narrowed for policy responses to the underlying issues of discrimination, citizenship and freedom of movement of Muslims in Rakhine State. The commission lacks the composition, expert staff and mandate to address the current crisis. On 1 December, the government announced another (national) commission to investigate the attacks and security forces' response and consider measures to prevent new incidents. It is chaired by the military's pick for vice president, Myint Swe, a retired army lieutenant-general and former military intelligence chief, widely regarded as a hardliner. That its membership is mainly serving or retired government officials suggests it is unlikely to challenge or contradict government and military narratives.[80] How it will work or liaise with the Annan commission is unclear.

[77] Surin Pitsuwan, "Asia's moral duty to the Rohingya", *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 December 2016.
[78] Kavi Chongkittavorn, "Myanmar to brief ASEAN amid alarm over Rakhine", *Nikkei Asian Review*, 12 December 2016.
[79] Press release, Office of the State Counsellor, reproduced in *GNLM*, 24 August 2016, pp. 1, 3.
[80] "Formation of Investigation Commission", President's Office, notification 89/2016, 1 December 2016. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and observers, Yangon, December 2016.

VII. **Conclusion**

The violent attacks on BGP bases on 9 October 2016, and further clashes in the next days and on 12 November, when a senior army officer was killed, represent the emergence of a new Muslim insurgency in northern Rakhine State. The HaY group is led by a committee of Rohingya émigrés in Saudi Arabia and commanded on the ground by other Rohingya, who have international training and experience in modern guerrilla tactics, the legitimacy of supportive local and international *fatwas* and considerable sympathy and backing from the local Muslim population, including several hundred locally trained recruits.

The emergence of this organised, well-funded group is a game changer in the Myanmar government's efforts to address Rakhine State's complex challenges, including longstanding discrimination against its Muslim population, with denial of rights and citizenship status. The government's response to the attacks – injudicious use of military force that fails to adequately distinguish militants from civilians, denial of humanitarian aid to an extremely vulnerable population and lack of an overarching political strategy that offers it some hope – is unlikely to dislodge the group and risks generating a spiral of violence.

Though there are indications of some training and support links, HaY does not appear to have a transnational jihadist or terrorist agenda. If the government mishandles the situation, however, including by continued use of disproportionate military force that has driven thousands across the border to Bangladesh, it could create conditions for radicalising sections of the Rohingya population that jihadist groups might exploit for their own agendas. To avoid that risk requires a moderated military response, well-crafted political strategy and closer cooperation and intelligence sharing with Myanmar's neighbours and the ASEAN bloc.

Yangon/Brussels, 15 December 2016

Appendix A: Map of Myanmar

International Crisis Group/KO/Dec 2015. Based on UN map no. 4168 Rev. 3 (June 2012).

Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013. Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in nine other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington DC. It also has staff representation in the following locations: Bangkok, Beijing, Beirut, Caracas, Delhi, Dubai, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Kabul, Kiev, Mexico City, Rabat, Sydney, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Irish Aid, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and U.S. Agency for International Development.

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December 2016

Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2013

As of 1 October 2013, Central Asia publications are listed under the Europe and Central Asia program.

Special Reports

Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Special Report, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic).

Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

North East Asia

China's Central Asia Problem, Asia Report N°244, 27 February 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks, Asia Report N°245, 8 April 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close, Asia Report N°254, 9 December 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Old Scores and New Grudges: Evolving Sino-Japanese Tensions, Asia Report N°258, 24 July 2014 (also available in Chinese).

Risks of Intelligence Pathologies in South Korea, Asia Report N°259, 5 August 2014.

Stirring up the South China Sea (III): A Fleeting Opportunity for Calm, Asia Report N°267, 7 May 2015 (also available in Chinese).

North Korea: Beyond the Six-Party Talks, Asia Report N°269, 16 June 2015.

Stirring up the South China Sea (IV): Oil in Troubled Waters, Asia Report N°275, 26 January 2016 (also available in Chinese).

East China Sea: Preventing Clashes from Becoming Crises, Asia Report N°280, 30 June 2016.

South Asia

Pakistan: Countering Militancy in PATA, Asia Report N°242, 15 January 2013.

Sri Lanka's Authoritarian Turn: The Need for International Action, Asia Report N°243, 20 February 2013.

Drones: Myths and Reality in Pakistan, Asia Report N°247, 21 May 2013.

Afghanistan's Parties in Transition, Asia Briefing N°141, 26 June 2013.

Parliament's Role in Pakistan's Democratic Transition, Asia Report N°249, 18 September 2013.

Women and Conflict in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°252, 14 October 2013.

Sri Lanka's Potemkin Peace: Democracy under Fire, Asia Report N°253, 13 November 2013.

Policing Urban Violence in Pakistan, Asia Report N°255, 23 January 2014.

Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, Asia Report N°256, 12 May 2014.

Education Reform in Pakistan, Asia Report N°257, 23 June 2014.

Afghanistan's Political Transition, Asia Report N°260, 16 October 2014.

Resetting Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan, Asia Report N°262, 28 October 2014.

Sri Lanka's Presidential Election: Risks and Opportunities, Asia Briefing N°145, 9 December 2014.

Mapping Bangladesh's Political Crisis, Asia Report N°264, 9 February 2015.

Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan, Asia Report, N°265, 8 April 2015.

The Future of the Afghan Local Police, Asia Report N°268, 4 June 2015.

Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls, Asia Report N°271, 22 July 2015.

Sri Lanka Between Elections, Asia Report N°272, 12 August 2015.

Winning the War on Polio in Pakistan, Asia Report N°273, 23 October 2015.

Nepal's Divisive New Constitution: An Existential Crisis, Asia Report N°276, 4 April 2016.

Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh, Asia Report N°277, 11 April 2016.

Sri Lanka: Jumpstarting the Reform Process, Asia Report N°278, 18 May 2016.

Pakistan's Jihadist Heartland: Southern Punjab, Asia Report N°279, 30 May 2016.

South East Asia

Indonesia: Tensions Over Aceh's Flag, Asia Briefing N°139, 7 May 2013.

Timor-Leste: Stability At What Cost?, Asia Report N°246, 8 May 2013.

A Tentative Peace in Myanmar's Kachin Conflict, Asia Briefing N°140, 12 June 2013 (also available in Burmese and Chinese).

The Philippines: Dismantling Rebel Groups, Asia Report N°248, 19 June 2013.

The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar, Asia Report N°251, 1 October 2013 (also available in Burmese and Chinese).

Not a Rubber Stamp: Myanmar's Legislature in a Time of Transition, Asia Briefing N°142, 13 December 2013 (also available in Burmese and Chinese).

Myanmar's Military: Back to the Barracks?, Asia Briefing N°143, 22 April 2014 (also available in Burmese).

Counting the Costs: Myanmar's Problematic Census, Asia Briefing N°144, 15 May 2014 (also available in Burmese).

Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State, Asia Report N°261, 22 October 2014 (also available in Burmese).

A Coup Ordained? Thailand's Prospects for Stability, Asia Report N°263, 3 December 2014.

Myanmar's Electoral Landscape, Asia Report N°266, 28 April 2015 (also available in Burmese).

Southern Thailand: Dialogue in Doubt, Asia Report N°270, 8 July 2015.

Myanmar's Peace Process: A Nationwide Ceasefire Remains Elusive, Asia Briefing N°146, 16 September 2015 (also available in Burmese).

The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications, Asia Briefing N°147, 9 December 2015 (also available in Burmese).

Thailand's Lengthening Roadmap to Elections, Asia Report N°274, 10 December 2015.

The Philippines: Renewing Prospects for Peace in Mindanao, Asia Report N°281, 6 July 2016.

Myanmar's New Government: Finding Its Feet?, Asia Report N°282, 29 July 2016 (also available in Burmese).

Southern Thailand's Peace Dialogue: No Traction, Asia Briefing N°148, 21 September 2016.

Myanmar's Peace Process: Getting to a Political Dialogue, Asia Briefing N°149, 19 October 2016 (also available in Burmese).

Appendix D: International Crisis Group Board of Trustees