

The Rohingya Crisis and Regional Security in South and Southeast Asia: Trafficking, Radicalization, and State Fragility as a Multidimensional Threat Nexus

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Abstract:

The long-term displacement of the Rohingya from Myanmar's Rakhine State has moved from a humanitarian emergency to one of the most serious non-traditional security issues facing South and Southeast Asia. This paper argues that the Rohingya crisis should be seen not as one problem, but as a security network in which five connected factors — instability along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, human trafficking by sea, smuggling of drugs, militancy and radicalization in refugee camps, and the financial and population pressure on host countries — support each other and spread across the wider Bay of Bengal region. Using recent field reports, UN data, and regional policy analysis, the paper shows how the Arakan Army's control in Rakhine State from 2024 to 2025 has blocked the possibility of returning, increased the methamphetamine trade into Bangladesh, and sent more Rohingya onto smugglers' boats heading to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. It also looks at the revival of armed groups like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) inside Bangladeshi camps, India's more secure deportation policies, and the lack of effective institutions from SAARC, BIMSTEC, and ASEAN in dealing with displacement as a shared security challenge. The paper ends with a proposal for a Bay of Bengal Regional Displacement and Security Compact — a middle ground between purely humanitarian action and purely security-focused measures — and suggests practical actions for shared responsibilities, intelligence sharing, and safe and respectful repatriation that would be in the interest of Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Thailand, Malaysia, and the broader ASEAN-South Asia region.

Keywords:

Rohingya crisis, regional security, human trafficking, narco-trafficking, radicalization, Arakan Army, Bangladesh, Thailand, BIMSTEC, forced migration.