**CHAPTER : INTERNAL SECURITY THREATS - MANIFESTATIONS OF EXTREMISM AND FANNING COMMUNAL SCHISM**

The ethnic and religious interlinkages with the region, particularly the Muslim population in Bangladesh and India, have implications in domestic concerns and cross regional aspects. Besides managing the humanitarian crisis, it creates security implication as **Muslim Rohingyas in refugee camps are extremely vulnerable and ripe for indoctrination and radicalisation efforts of numerous terrorist and jihadist** group, as witnessed in Africa where poverty and deprivation, combined with state abuse of power, drive youth towards Boko Haram, al Shabab and Islamic State. The fanning of religious fundamentalism can have serious repercussions for Bangladesh with a **spillover into India through the porous borders**. The area has long faced illegal immigration from Bangladesh affecting **internal security, threatening social harmony as a result of demographic imbalances**. The European arena, facing a refugee crisis emanating from Syria and it’s fallout, can offer a comparative framework to offer measures to mitigate adverse consequences.

**A Mixture of State Action, Depravation and Poverty – Breeding Grounds for Extremism**. A study commissioned by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in 2016, ‘Journey To Extremism In Africa’, across six African countries that have been directly affected by violent extremism – Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Somalia and Uganda, found that **poverty, deprivation and state abuse of power are driving young Africans to join violent extremist groups**, such as Boko Haram, al-Shabab and Islamic State.[[1]](#footnote-1) Quoting Mohamed Yahya, lead author and UNDP Africa Regional Program Coordinator, “The report finds the road to extremism in Africa is paved with deprivation,” and 71 percent of recruits interviewed attributed government action as the “tipping point” that triggered their decision to join an extremist group while 83 percent believe that government only looks after “the interests of a few.” The report pointed out that half of the respondents cited religious reasons for joining extremist groups, but 57 percent admitted that they understood “little to nothing of the religious texts or interpretations” and indicated that frustration about their economic condition played a larger role than religious ideology.[[2]](#footnote-2) The **findings are an ominous indicator** when juxtaposed with the Rohingya crisis. The **‘state action’ and resultant state of poverty and depravation as refugees, provides the ripe conditions to be exploited to ferment extremism** and urgent measures to prevent conflagration are in everybody’s interests - “Nothing can justify violent extremism. But we must also acknowledge that it does not arise in a vacuum.”[[3]](#footnote-3) K. Yhome, in his paper ‘Examining India’s stance on the Rohingya crisis’, analyses that the civil-military struggle for power in Myanmar, with an overly nationalistic bias, disadvantages the Rohingyas, regarded as ‘illegal immigrants’, at multiple levels.[[4]](#footnote-4) He brings out that the acrimonious relationship between the Rakhine ethnic group (also Buddhists) and the politically dominant Bamar-Buddhist majority meant that the Rohingyas are unlikely to be favoured by the central government at the cost of the Rakhines and the **general negative sentiment against Muslims make them an easy targets of vitriolic attacks from ultra-nationalist Buddhist forces**. He concludes that the cumulative effect of a Buddhist majority community not coming to terms with the multiracial, multilingual and multireligious nature of it’s society presents numerous disadvantage for the Rohingya Muslims. Tom Malinowski, Obama’s assistant Secretary of State for democracy, human rights and labor, is quoted as having warned Suu Kyi that “extremist groups will eventually provoke a confrontation as a means of recruiting fighters for violent attacks” and, when they eventually do, “Burma has no defense against groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.”[[5]](#footnote-5) He is quoted as predicting that the Burmese military “will willingly fall for that trap [of responding with force against civilian populations], because it can use the ensuing confrontation to rally Buddhists to its side, and thus preserve its authority.”

**Genocidal Humanitarian Crisis OR Extremism - Opposing Narrative**. In a harsh inditement by the UNHRC, the crisis has been termed as the gravest crime against under international law against the Rohingya Muslim minority, leading to their exodus to Bangladesh. The report called for investigation of genocide against the Army, expressing deep condemnation. The special UN fact-finding mission assigned by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) delivered its final report on September 17, 2018. While acts of brutality by the security forces cannot be condoned, the opposing narrative too should not be overlooked. In his paper, **‘Myanmar: The Dark Side of the Rohingya Muslim Minority’, Col (Res.) Dr. Raphael G. Bouchnik-Chen** argues that a detailed special report prepared by Amnesty International entitled “Myanmar: New evidence reveals Rohingya armed group massacred scores in Rakhine State” (May 22, 2018) has been ignored.[[6]](#footnote-6) The report highlights the **human rights abuse** and sowing of fear with brutal attacks against Hindus and other ethnic minorities, **undertaken by the ARSA**. Linkages with terrorist organisations, though not established unambiguously, are not unchallengeable. The clean chit is based on ARSAs self-assertions and rejection of links to al-Qaeda, ISIS, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and all other transnational terrorist groups citing “the ill-equipped nature of ARSA lends credibility to those claims, and the Mission has seen no information that would suggest such links.” The **evidence to the contrary, though not fully corroborated, must not be overlooked**. An article in The Guardian,[[7]](#footnote-7) reports that according to the International Crisis Group, a committee of Rohingya emigres with experience in guerrilla warfare oversees the militants from Mecca. It’s leader Attaullah Abu Ammar Jununi was born in Pakistan and raised in Saudi Arabia. Muslim militants started to secretly train in guerrilla warfare after ethnic riots in 2012 killed hundreds of Rohingya. Interception of long-distance calls between Hafez Tohar, the chief of ARSA’s military wing, on August 23 and 24, 2017, just prior to the large-scale Rohingya militants’ multiple attacks on Myanmar’s military outposts and a call from an Iraq number initiated by someone introducing himself as “al-Amin of Daesh” in which ISIS wished ARSA the best in its jihad against Burmese colonialists, Buddhists, and Hindu fanatics, also need to be considered in proper light.[[8]](#footnote-8) Rohingya linkages to Saudi Arabia and a Bangladesh-based terror organization, Jamaat al-Mujahideen (JMB), being deeply involved in the radicalization of Rohingya refugees in India has been referred to in the paper.[[9]](#footnote-9) A JSTOR assessment in May 2015 entitled “Myanmar at the Crossroads: The Shadow of Jihadist Extremism,” alerts against religious extremist and terrorist activities, including the probability that these groups might attempt to link up with jihadist terrorist groups like ISIS. Thus, the destabilising role of the ARSA cannot be overlooked, including it’s resort to violence and intimidation of Buddhist civil population. It’s activities are certainly not without jihadist and radicalised influences and while the **Tatmadaw does bear responsibilities for it’s actions, so too does the ARSA**. The Tatmadaw, acting as the instrument of the state to restore order in the troubled region, cannot be absolved of atrocities, but that must not allow the **ARSA and similar ideologies to exploit and manipulate mass migration as a weapon to exert pressure on governments for political ends**.[[10]](#footnote-10) The intent of the attacks on military outposts, has been attributed to eliciting a brutal response by the Tatmadaw and making the world see the suffering of the Rohingyas. The paper argues that such formulations are common to terrorist organisations in the garb of “freedom movements”. Col (Res.) Dr. Raphael G. Bouchnik-Chen draws an **analogy with the January 2009 UNHRC’s “Goldstone Committee”** report charging Israel with serious war crimes and breaching humanitarian law after Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip. He points out that Goldstone’s later renunciation of the report bearing his name passed virtually unnoticed by the international community. The debate highlights the impact of such reports in contributing to **demonization of States**. A balanced outlook, to atrocities and motivations on both sides, should not be compromised upon.

**Extremism in North East India - Ramification of the Rohingya Crisis**

**Illegal Immigration as a Primary Causal of Insurgency**. The aspirations of the tribal people of Northeast India and the fears of the loss of their unique identity was recognised at the time of India’s independence, resulting in the setting up of a sub-committee headed by Gopinath Bordoloi and recommendations incorporated, with some amendments, into the Constitution as the Sixth Schedule which protected tribal laws, customs and land rights with sufficient autonomy.[[11]](#footnote-11) India’s Northeast, comprising eight states and sharing international borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Nepal and Bhutan is connected to India’s heartland through a narrow ‘Siliguri Corridor’ or the chicken neck, merely 22 kilometres wide, resulting from the Radcliff line, drawn by the British. It has been plagued, since independence, by volatile insurgencies and terrorism of various hues with demands ranging from autonomy to preserving ethnic identities to complete secession with contributory causes emanating from history, economic structures, development and identity alienation:[[12]](#footnote-12)

“The **backdrop to many of the Northeast’s conflicts is immigration from rest of the sub-continent and the resultant fear of minoritization by many of the region’s indigenous ethnic groups**. The flow of population from densely populated East Bengal began in 1920’s. The steady population flow from mainland India particularly from Bengal into the plains of Assam and Tripura accentuated the ethnic and religious diversity and introduced a nativist – outsider dichotomy to the simmering conflict. The Partition of India intensified the migration pressure on Assam and Tripura since Hindu refugees now joined the flow. Tripura’s demography changed within two decades as Bengalis became a powerful majority. The fear that other North-eastern states would go the Tripura way weighed heavily on indigenous people and early settlers throughout the Northeast and provoked more militants to take up arms. After the Partition, Assam was pressurized to accept more than six lakhs refugees by 1961…… Assam’s middle class and rural masses were immensely resentful of the state’s changing demography and land lost to Bengali migrants and colonial exploitation by the Indian state.”

**Manifestations of Insurgencies**. The attendant violence and impact on socio-economic development has resulted in substantial hardships for the common man and **impacts the national security of India, both internally and externally**. An **unresolved border dispute with China**, allows an under-developed and geographically vulnerable region, to be exploited by inimical elements. The **state of Tripura**, surrounded by Bangladesh except for a small stretch of the border which it shares with Mizoram and Assam, witnessed migration of Hindus from East Pakistan at the time of independence, reducing the indigenous tribal to a minority which resulted in a violent backlash in 1970.[[13]](#footnote-13) The resultant clash of interest between the tribal and the immigrants is the root cause of insurgency in the state.[[14]](#footnote-14) The **origins of insurgency in Assam** can be traced to the Assam Movement started by the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) along with the All Assam Students Union (AASU) in 1979. An **agitation against the “foreigners” and the demographic changes** that had occurred due to the **large influx of migrants**, resulting in The Assam Accord of August 1985 which brought the AASU into power, but the violent means encouraged another militant organisation – the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) to continue the struggle **demanding deportation of illegal migrants**.[[15]](#footnote-15) A multitude of such groups sprung up in the region which necessitated a **multi-pronged approach to tackling the security concerns ranging from military measures combined with developmental and political initiatives**. Some initiatives resulted in resolving the problems eg. The Mizo Peace Accord of 1986 with the Mizoram National Front while numerous initiatives, though undertaken, have not yet provided a final resolution eg. Shillong Accord in 1975 in Nagaland, 1988 agreement with Tripura National Volunteers in Tripura, Bodoland Autonomous Council Agreement of 1993 in Assam.[[16]](#footnote-16) The 2003 Bodo Accord too has not been able to restore peace in the region.

**Continuing Illegal Immigration**. **Further illegal migration from Bangladesh threatens the demographic balance of Assam and West Bengal** and the situation getting compounded by external linkages of **various insurgent groups operating along the borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh** acting in concert with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan for spreading terrorism in India.[[17]](#footnote-17) As per estimates, the number of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh have touched approximately 20 million. A statement in Parliament on 14 July 2004 by Sriprakash Jaiswal, then Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, conceded 12 million illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators living in India and Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State for Home Affairs in the NDA government has put the figure at around 20 million.[[18]](#footnote-18) The situation and continued illegal immigration has reportedly been exacerbated due to narrow political gains for securing electoral gains.[[19]](#footnote-19) The 1991 census reflected patterns of abnormally high growth rate of Muslims in the border states Assam and West Bengal, compared to the local Hindu population even after adjusting for the usual higher growth rate of Muslims observed throughout the country.[[20]](#footnote-20) The **concerns of illegal immigration has repeatedly sparked violence in the border states and have even manifested in the State of Kerala in South India**, approximately 2000 kilometres away. The **magnitude of the problem** can be gauged by the **judgements of the Supreme Court of India in 2005** when a bench ruled Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act (IMDT) as unconstitutional and that the **impact of the "aggression" represented by large-scale illegal migration from Bangladesh had made the life of the people of Assam "wholly insecure and the panic generated thereby had created fear psychosis" in other north-eastern States**.[[21]](#footnote-21) In **August 2008, the Delhi High Court**, while dismissing a petition by a Bangladeshi national against her deportation, ruled that the **illegal Bangladeshi immigrants "pose a danger to India's internal security"**.[[22]](#footnote-22) The **resultant demographic changes creates a simmering tension with the locals feeling overwhelmed by the outsider**. A study by Professor J Das of Dispur College, India and D. Talukdar identified numerous social and political consequences of illegal immigration.[[23]](#footnote-23) The influx created **serious identity crisis amongst the indigenous population, threatening cultural, political and economic opportunities. It places widespread stress on forest land which gets encroached upon by the immigrants. The linguistic similarities make identification of illegal immigrants from indigenous population difficult and often results in communal tension. The increased financial burden and competition for resources as well as employment results in conflict, leading to political agitation and ethnic violence. The illegal registration as voters’ results in political patronage, further exacerbating the local sentiment against them.**

The mass movement of the Rohingyas into Bangladesh has caused a massive strain on Bangladesh’s already stressed economy. India shares porous borders with Bangladesh and its spill over into India is a natural fallout. The states of West Bengal and Assam, which share borders with Bangladesh have long faced illegal immigration from Bangladesh affecting internal security and threat to social harmony resulting from the demographic imbalances. Violent insurgencies and ethno-communal clashes have often erupted in these regions. Injection of a new source of instability results in a serious threat to India’s national security.

**Imperative of Indo-Myanmar Security Cooperation*.*** Brig (Retd) Rumel Dahiya, Deputy Director General at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi points out to a deterioration of the security situation as indicative from the loss of 18 soldiers due to an ambush on a military convoy on June 4, 2015, claimed by an umbrella organisation called United National Liberation Front of West South East Asia (UNLFW), comprising of a number of insurgent groups, including the National Socialist Council of Nagaland [Khaplang] (NSCN[K]) operating from Myanmar.[[24]](#footnote-24) The subsequent **coordination with Myanmar resulted in a successful raid on the terrorist camps along the Indo-Myanmar border**. Underscoring the criticality of cooperation by Myanmar, Brigadier Dhaiya recounts of a **similar action in 1995**, of which he was a part, **failing in it’s endeavour of eliminating a major group** of approximately 200 insurgents due to **lack of support of the Myanmar Army** in the **backdrop** of the **Indian government conferring** the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding on **pro-democracy Aung San Suu Kyi**, causing disconcertion in the then ruling military regime.[[25]](#footnote-25) Thus, deterioration in security cooperation as a result of strained relations over the Rohingya issue can potentially impact the security situation in North East India adversely. Besides the **instability and negative effects on development** in the region, it **adversely impacts the realisation of India’s Act East Policy** due to inordinate **delays in road and rail projects** caused as a result of militant actions.

**Internal Security Dimensions**

**Security Implications**. The **bomb blasts in 2014 at Bodh Gaya, the spiritual centre of Buddhism**, were allegedly **retaliation against Buddhists** due to the atrocities against Rohingya. Though primary evidence to substantiate any direct involvement of Rohingya refugees has not emerged, the perception remains a **potential flashpoint**. However, reports of linkages of Rohingya groups to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan’s ISI have emerged.[[26]](#footnote-26) The Government of India, on September 18, 2017, had **filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court of India** spelling out the **serious security concerns posed by the Rohingya refugees**, which have been reported by India Today as follows:[[27]](#footnote-27)

Due to an already existing large influx of illegal immigrants from the neighbouring countries, the **demographic profile of some of the bordering states has already undergone a serious change** which is already causing the far-reaching complications in various contexts and is taking its toll and has a direct **detrimental effect on the fundamental and basic human rights of country's own citizens**.

So far as the Rohingyas are concerned, they claim to have entered into (admittedly without any valid travel document and illegally) from Myanmar using porous border between India and Myanmar. The **total number of such illegal immigrants** into our country would be more than **40,000 approximately** as on date.

The Central Government obviously takes into consideration various factors inter alia, broad facts referred above. It is submitted that **continuance of Rohingyas' illegal immigration into India and their continued stay in India**, apart from being **absolutely illegal**, is found to be **having serious national security ramifications and has serious security threats**.

Illegal influx of Rohingyas, in significant numbers, have started into the territory of India since 2012-13 and the **Central Government has contemporaneous from security agencies inputs and other authentic material indicating linkages of some of the unauthorised Rohingya immigrants with Pakistan based terror organisations and similar organisations operating in other countries.**

Over and above the said serious security concern already in existence, more disturbing part is that there is an organised influx of illegal immigrants from Myanmar through agents and touts facilitating illegal immigrants Rohingyas into India via Benapole-Haridaspur (West Bengal), Hilli (West Bengal) and Sonamora (Tripura), Kolkata and Guwahati. **This situation is seriously harming the national security of the country.**

It is observed by the Central Government that some **Rohingyas are indulging in illegal/anti-national activities** i.e. mobilization of funds through hundi/hawala channels, procuring fake/fabricated Indian identity documents for other Rohingyas and also indulging in human trafficking. They are also using their illegal network for illegal entry of others in the India. Many of them have managed to acquire fake/fraudulently obtained Indian identity documents i.e. PAN Card and voter cards.

It is also found by the Central Government that many of the **Rohingyas figure in the suspected sinister designs of ISI/ISIS and other extremist groups who want to achieve their ulterior motives in India including that of flaring up communal and sectarian violence in sensitive areas of the country**.

There is also a **serious potential and possibility of eruption of violence against the Buddhists** who are Indian citizens who stay on Indian soil, by the **radicalized Rohingyas**.

 Some of the Rohingyas with militant background are also found to be very active in Jammu, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mewat, and have been identified as having a very serious and potential threat to the internal / national security of India. India is a country with large population, surplus labour force, and has its complex social/cultural/economical infrastructure. **Providing facilities/ privileges to illegal immigrants out of the existing national resources, apart from above referred direct threat to national security, would also have a direct adverse impact upon Indian citizens as it would deprive the Indian citizens of their legitimate share in the employment sector, subsidized housing, medical and educational facilities and would thereby culminate in hostility towards immigrants resulting into an inevitable social tension and law and order problems**. The fundamental rights of Indian citizens would, therefore, be seriously violated.

**Settlements in Jammu and Kashmir**. According to the UNHRC, approximately **40,000 Rohingya refugees are living in various parts of India**. The area of concern and focus lately, has been the **region of Jammu in the troubled state of Jammu and Kashmir bordering Pakistan**. The local political party and prominent office bearers in the ruling coalition dispensation in the State raised slogans of ‘Rohingya Go Back’, igniting **emotional fervour**. The central government too has declared it’s intention to deport the Rohingya refugees on grounds of national security and demographic imbalance in the sensitive border areas. In response to a question in Parliament, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju stated that Rohingyas are illegal migrants with no basis to stay.[[28]](#footnote-28) Opposing groups sought a more humanitarian approach, pleading their retention and grant of refugee. It opened a **nationalistic debate** and the matter has been referred to the Supreme Court of India for hearing and decision on the matter of deportation.

**Deportation**. The Supreme Court of India cleared the way for deportation of seven Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar, upholding the government’s stance and concerns on October 05, 2018.[[29]](#footnote-29) However, it needs to be noted that the repatriation was on the basis of an undertaking by the Government of Myanmar and also the consent of the deportees, as given in an official statement by the MEA on 04 October 2018:[[30]](#footnote-30)

In accordance with established procedures and previous precedent, and with the assistance of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Embassy of the Union of Myanmar was able to establish the identity of these individuals as residents of that country. The Government of Myanmar issued Certificates of Identity to facilitate the travel of these individuals to their hometowns in Rakhine State. In parallel, the individuals also requested in 2016 that the Embassy of the Union of Myanmar should issue them relevant travel documents to facilitate their return to their own country.

Upon reconfirming their willingness to be repatriated (on October 3, 2018), and with the full concurrence of the Government of Myanmar, in accordance with established procedures and laws, the Government of Assam has arranged for the repatriation of these seven individuals to Myanmar. "

**Deportation and Implication for North East India**. The aspect of illegal immigration from Bangladesh into India’s North Eastern states, particularly Assam, has been a major security concern. The problem of identifying illegal immigrants was taken up by the Supreme Court of India, based on a petition by a private citizen Mr Abhijeet Sharma on July 20, 2009, and the Court ordered the Government in 2014 to complete the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam.[[31]](#footnote-31) The first draft of the NRC was published on July 30, 2018 and has identified 40,07,077 not meeting the criteria of citizenship and thus stand to be disenfranchised.[[32]](#footnote-32) The process allows for appeal to prove residence in Assam before March 25, 1971 which is the date when large scale migration from East Pakistan commenced in the wake of atrocities by the Pakistan Army. The recent move by the state government to undertake the **NRC in identification and deportation of illegal immigrant has seen a highly polarised response**. Similarly, proposals and moves to undertake **deportation of Rohingyas, particularly from the state of Jammu and Kashmir on national security grounds** will have a **fallout** on the contentious and sensitive issue of **deportation of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants**. The repatriation or deportation will make the situation worse in **Northeast where anti Bangladeshi feeling** is prevalent. This has **potential for flaring up of ethno-religious tensions** as also **impact Indo-Bangladesh relations**, having **domestic implications in poll bound Bangladesh**. The process being unduly politicised with religious undertones does not bode well.

**Exploitation of Religious Faultline**. The International Crisis Group’s findings within Myanmar “Country-wide anti-Muslim sentiment makes it politically difficult for the government to take steps seen as supportive of Muslim rights”, amplifies the strong religious faultline, making it a sensitive issue with **religious overtones**.[[33]](#footnote-33) The Indian government’s anti-Rohingya stance, though without bias and with primary national security considerations utmost, has the **ingredients of being exploited by inimical elements with vested interests in fuelling religious animosity**. A **large Muslim population in India is prone and susceptible to adverse effects of fanning of hatred and exploitation of religious faultlines**. The potential of **terrorist groups claiming the ‘Rohingya Cause’** and carrying out acts of violence, which can further widen the split remains a very live concern for the Indian polity. Moreover, the stance adopted is being criticised in some quarters and attribute it to an anti-Muslim BJP bias, emanating from the proposed 2016 Citizenship Amendment Bill that recognises “non-Muslim refugees” in India as “citizens” of the country[[34]](#footnote-34) and the fact that Christian and Buddhist refugees fleeing violence in Myanmar were allowed entry to the north-eastern state of Manipur.[[35]](#footnote-35) The **lines between security considerations and religious conflict get blurred in the polarised debate** and does **not bode well for national interests**.

**Counter Measures**

 The chapter has brought out the potential of exudations of extremism being fermented and it’s manifestation as direct actions of terrorism, exacerbation ongoing insurgencies in NE India and even fanning of communal and religious discord. Tackling the manifestations are not merely limited in the military domain but requires a comprehensive socio-political-economic and military approach as an integrated strategy. The intent is not formulation of a comprehensive strategy, which would entail a separate study altogether, but to broadly understand the various measures necessary in countering the adverse implications in various domains. Some of these are as enumerated below:

(a) **Tackling Radicalisation**. Religious extremism and communal radicalisation needs to be tackled by addressing deficiencies in education, employment, justice, poverty eradication and governance.

(b) **Internal Governance**. Key to addressing grievances, within the framework of the constitution, is robust internal governance in mitigating the breeding grounds for fermentation and exploitation of radicalisation. Grassroot politics and outreach provides the necessary tools of implementation.

(c) **Socio-Political Measures**. Restoring credibility of governance is a key challenge in integrating disgruntled elements into the mainstream. Speedy justice and promoting harmony amongst the communities make the grounds for addressing grievances. Measures to de-radicalise sections entails social empowerment.

(i) Prevent places of worship like mosques and madrassas being exploited to fan radicalisation by co-opting religious leaders and members of the community in shunning inimical activities.

(ii) Developmental activities focussing on infrastructure development, employment generation, health care, education, and social development to be accelerated to integrate the population and disgruntled elements politically, socially, economically and psychologically.

(iii) Efforts on winning hearts and minds of the population.

(iv) Socio-economic development to weaken the external support to insurgency by neighbouring countries.

(d) **Military Measures**. The aim of the military component is to create a secure and stable environment for the political process to fructify with socio-economic measures being implemented. A multi-pronged comprehensive military strategy seeks to create a conducive environment for the political process to take shape. The multipronged approach, executed at the operational level, seeks minimizing cross border infiltration and effective counter terrorist operations within the hinterland, with minimum collateral damage, alongwith measures to win the hearts and mind of the population. Simultaneously, it must

(i) **Trans-Border Operations**. To ensure adequate cooperation in border management and coordination of activities on both sides of the border with Bangladesh and Myanmar to not allow terror groups from operating with impunity and prevent cross border infiltration.

(ii) Put in place a strong intelligence network to check the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in India, encompassing superior technology, electronic surveillance and satellite-based capabilities in the cyber, communication and optico-electronic domain in conjunction with low-tech and human resources.

(iii) Adequacy of resources for operational missions and intelligence gathering like surveillance devices, UAVs, drones etc.

(iv) Creating a robust Anti-Infiltration Obstacle System (AIOS) along the borders/enhance border management posture and bilateral engagements with the neighbouring countries for controlling illegal immigration, drug trafficking and smuggling across the borders. The AIOS should draw from the expediencies in J&K and Israeli expertise.

(v) Advanced computing for data analysis.

(vi) Integration of human, structural and technological capabilities to deter infiltration and freedom of movement to terrorists.

(vii) Operations by Special Forces and specialised counter insurgency forces akin to Rashtriya Rifles and Assam Rifles.

(viii) Ensure a suitable legal framework to allow adequate operational freedom to security forces, while upholding human rights.

(e) **Counter Funding Operations**. A key element of tackling extremism and radicalisation is to stifle funding to such organisations, both within the country and from beyond the borders.

(f) **Information Campaign**. A comprehensive campaign to tackle inimical propaganda to mobilise radicalisation and ensuring that the message is communicated in a receptive manner is an imperative.

(l) **Synergised Approach**. Command and control at the apex level, bringing together the civil-military machinery together under political direction should provide the overarching umbrella.

**Chapter Summation**

 This chapter has sought to chart the potential of extremism being fermented as a result of State action and conditions of poverty and deprivation of the Rohingyas making them extremely vulnerable and ripe for indoctrination and radicalisation efforts of numerous terrorist and jihadist group, as witnessed in Africa where poverty and deprivation, combined with state abuse of power drive youth towards Boko Haram, al Shabab and Islamic State. The findings have been derived from a UNDP Study ‘Journey To Extremism In Africa’. The underlying causes and historical context have been charted previously. It is evident that the situation arising from the anti-Muslim sentiment of a Buddhist majority establishment, serves to exacerbate the deep-rooted acrimonious relationship and a target of vitriolic attacks from ultra nationalist Buddhists. While the Tatmadaw and ruling establishment cannot be absolved of their responsibilities for extreme actions, nor can the destabilising role of the ARSA, which seeks to provoke harsh responses by indulging in militant attacks against the State, be condoned. The ARSA, if allowed to instigate events leading to mass migration and seeking to exploit them as weapons to exert political pressure, bear equal responsibility. Thus, a balanced approach to condemn and exert pressure, equally on both parties, is important. One-sided condemnation will only encourage the other party to continue deviant behaviour.

 Having established the adverse potential of radicalisation and extremism manifesting, the chapter has gone on to draw the linkage of a fallout on the internal security of India, particularly in the North-eastern states. It points out how illegal migration, particularly from Bangladesh (previously East Pakistan till 1971) and the resultant demographic imbalance generates a fear of minoritisation, which has been the primary causal of numerous insurgencies. An anti-foreigner agitation against the large influx of illegal migrants and demands for their deportation have been at the heart of internal security instability. The concerns have been vindicated in various rulings and judgements of the Supreme Court and Delhi High Court, relating to deportation of illegal immigrants, eluded to in the chapter.

 The chapter goes on to reflect on how a ripple effect of instability in Bangladesh and the economic stress generated from the Rohingya crisis, has the potential of triggering a fresh wave of illegal migration, leading to a deterioration of the security situation in North East India. The management of internal security gets further complicated as a result of various insurgent groups operating from Myanmar, making security cooperation an imperative in ensuring coordinating efforts in operating against such groups. Measures recommended to tackle the scourge of insurgency and prevent cross border infiltration needing consideration are amicable resolution of issues of insurgent groups bilaterally, developing infrastructure for socio-economic development to weaken the external support to insurgency by neighbouring countries, a strong intelligence network to check the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in India, fencing the borders/enhance border management posture and bilateral engagements with the neighbouring countries for controlling illegal immigration, drug trafficking and smuggling across the borders.

 The influx of Rohingyas, and the resultant security concerns enumerated are not limited to the north-eastern states alone. The chapter brought out the consequences across India, including in the sensitive border state of J&K, where the Rohingyas have also settled. The direct linkage of Rohingyas and the ARSA with terrorist and radical organisations has been eluded to, even if not conclusively established. The security concerns and the stance of the Government of India, relating to national security concerns, withstood judicial scrutiny of law in the Supreme Court, with the October 05, 2018 judgement upholding deportation of Rohingyas.

 At the heart of the government’s stand rest major security concerns. The chapter brought out how the stance of the deportation of Rohingyas seeks to create the grounds for future deportation of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants being identified under the NRC. This is a matter which necessitates tremendous political maturity to guard against national security concerns being hijacked by communal forces with vested political interests. The chapter has sought to address the politicisation and exploitation of the religious divide complicating the cauldron of instability. It discussed how the government’s stance being projected as having religious bias has the potential of the large Indian Muslim population being exploited by fanning religious discord based on religious affinity. The Indian government’s anti-Rohingya stance, on purely national security considerations, being manipulated by inimical elements in fanning communal faultlines, by giving it a purely anti-Muslim colour, will not bode well and needs to be guarded against.

 In summary, the chapter in addition to the manifestation of extremism within the Rohingyas, has enumerated implications of direct threats emanating from the already settled and future Rohingya influx into India, a ripple effect triggering illegal immigration of Bangladeshis into the north-eastern states and the entire episode assuming religious overtones rather than security considerations. Tackling the manifestations are not merely limited in the military domain but requires a comprehensive socio-political-economic and military approach as an integrated strategy. The intent is not formulation of a comprehensive strategy, which would entail a separate study altogether, but to broadly understand the various measures necessary in countering the adverse implications in various domains.

 It highlighted measures such as addressing deficiencies in education, employment, justice, poverty eradication and governance. Robust internal governance mitigates the breeding grounds of radicalisation, with grassroot politics and outreach providing the necessary tools of implementation. Speedy justice and promoting harmony amongst the communities make the grounds for addressing grievances. Measures to de-radicalise sections entails social empowerment. Preventing places of worship like mosques and madrassas being exploited to fan radicalisation by co-opting religious leaders and members of the community in shunning inimical activities. Developmental activities focussing on infrastructure development, employment generation, health care, education, and social development need to be accelerated to integrate the population and disgruntled elements politically, socially, economically and psychologically. Efforts on winning hearts and minds of the population and socio-economic development weakens external support to insurgency. The aim of the military component is to create a secure and stable environment for the political process to fructify with socio-economic measures being implemented. A multi-pronged comprehensive military strategy seeks to create a conducive environment for the political process to take shape. The multipronged approach, executed at the operational level, seeks minimizing cross border infiltration and effective counter terrorist operations within the hinterland, with minimum collateral damage, alongwith measures to win the hearts and mind of the population. Simultaneously, it must ensure adequate cooperation in border management and coordination of activities on both sides of the border with Bangladesh and Myanmar to not allow terror groups from operating with impunity and prevent cross border infiltration. A strong intelligence network needs encompassing superior technology, electronic surveillance and satellite-based capabilities in the cyber, communication and optico-electronic domain in conjunction with low-tech and human resources. A robust Anti-Infiltration Obstacle System (AIOS) along the borders for controlling illegal immigration, drug trafficking and smuggling across the borders should draw from the expediencies in J&K and Israeli expertise. Advanced computing for data analysis and integration of human, structural and technological capabilities to deter infiltration and freedom of movement to terrorists, are required for operations by Special Forces and specialised counter insurgency forces akin to Rashtriya Rifles and Assam Rifles. A suitable legal framework allows adequate operational freedom to security forces, while upholding human rights. A key element of tackling extremism and radicalisation is to stifle funding to such organisations, both within the country and from beyond the borders. A comprehensive campaign to tackle inimical propaganda to mobilise radicalisation and ensuring that the message is communicated in a receptive manner is an imperative. And finally, a synergised approach with command and control at the apex level, bringing together the civil-military machinery together under political direction should provide the overarching umbrella.

**CHAPTER: GROWING CHINESE THREAT & IMPLICATION OF THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS**

Chinese influence in Myanmar dates back to the late 1980s, when faced with global isolation it received Chinese support. On August 6, 1988, both countries signed an agreement establishing official trade across the common hitherto isolated border. **China became the closest partner of the military junta of Burma in 1988 when it was facing international isolation and ostracization for violent suppression of pro-democracy activities**.[[36]](#footnote-36) This was Myanmar's first such agreement with a neighbour and, thus, became a springboard for Chinese political power in the region. The Chinese provided support for upgrading of Myanmar's naval facilities and electronic listening posts along the Bay of Bengal and in the Andaman Sea: Man-aung, Hainggyi, Zadetkyi island and the strategically important Coco Islands just north of India's Andaman Islands along with a Chinese-built radar station on Saganthit island near Mergui in south-eastern Myanmar.[[37]](#footnote-37) In August 1993, Indian coastguards caught three boats 'fishing' close to the Andamans, flying the Myanmar flag, but the crew of 55 was Chinese with no fishing equipment on board and only radio-communication and depth-sounding equipment.

**India**, on the other hand, had a **hesitant relationship with Southeast Asian nations and particularly Myanmar to show solidarity with pro-democracy activities,** which only served to push Yangon closer to Beijing. The closeness and Sino-Myanmar alliance alarmed India and it adopted a shift in its strategy, cementing ties with the junta and offering favourable trade relations and cooperation against ethnic insurgents. In 1991, the P.V.Narshima Rao government unveiled it’s “Look East” policy along with economic liberalisation, marking a fundamental shift from Cold war era paradigms and which was continued by the Vajpayee government of 1998.[[38]](#footnote-38) Concerned over growing Chinese influence, India shed it’s inhibitions and developed relationships with the military regime in Myanmar in 1993.[[39]](#footnote-39) India sought to establish close physical and economic links with Myanmar acting as a natural land bridge linking South and Southeast Asia. The importance of the relationship and Indian interests with Myanmar have been enumerated in Chapter##. The strategic competition between India and China is visible in the ever-expanding footprint in the region, cultivating close ties with Asian nations in India’s neighbourhood. The growth of China, as a regional force and a global power are having deep impact on the national security of India, both directly and indirectly. India has to be mindful of Chinese efforts at gaining inroads into Myanmar, besides the security implications in the porous border it shares with Myanmar. India’s interests in Myanmar are ensconced in it’s Act East Policy, enunciated in 2014 and which replaced her over two decade-old Look East Policy, emphasizing a more proactive role for itself in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, making it an arena of conflicting interests with China for regional status.

**Chinese Aspirations**. Bradley A. Thayer and John M. Friend, in an article in The Diplomat, have elucidated the full scope and strategic direction of China’s ambitions as the greatest economic and political force with global presence. The vision of “One World, One Dream,” the modern oftianxia, or “all under heaven”, is the foundation of China’s imperial ideology based on a single powerful monarch, the Chinese emperor (“Son of Heaven”), ruling the entire civilized world so that disorder and chaos may be avoided, and reason and just rule may triumph.[[40]](#footnote-40) They explain the underlying historical significance of its relationship with neighbouring countries, based on a hierarchical tribute system, which provided China with vast amounts of power, influence, and prestige which the modern resurgent China is seeking to revive. They argue that the “China Model” offers subsidized development to developing countries with no strings attached and is “value neutral,” as it does not require governments to adopt democratic principles or uphold basic human rights.[[41]](#footnote-41)

China has been pursuing an aggressive global path of creating colonies as part of it’s Belt Road Initiative (BRI), which is a network of sea and rail infrastructure. A fallout of the initiative is the Chinese policy of seeking to encircle India through maintaining strategic bases around her, in order to confine India to the subcontinent and limiting her influence amongst the neighbours. China has undertaken an aggressive strategy in developing bases in Pakistan, Maldives and Myanmar, which are of strategic concern to India. The **concerns of a double encirclement along the northern Himalayas and the southern maritime flank is a cause of serious concern**. Chinese growing nationalism, improved military capabilities and increasing sphere of influence brings it into conflict with India on a regional level and the US-Pacific allies at a global level, for dominant power status. China’s growing economic initiatives, challenging the international order in regaining lost glory is making it tread a path of confrontation. Border disputes, presence of the Dalai Lama on Indian soil, India’s stance on Tibet are underlying causes of tension, bringing both neighbours on a path of competition and confrontation. China’s repeated and unhesitant resort to force, combined with rising nationalism are a clear indication of future clash. The shared history of mistrust, exacerbated by China’s relationship with Pakistan, adds to the growing Indian concerns over the BRI. A divergence of military security and economic concerns impact national interests.

India is not alone in facing the growing Chinese strategic threat, with a similar scenario underway in the Pacific, creating a disproportionate risk along the Australia - US link. Strategic leverage accruing in Male (Velana International Airport), China showing interest in the island of Manus (part of Papua New Guinea) and other projects under the BRI are raising hackles in Australia - being recognised as “win for China, which not only gets access to local resources and new markets, and forward presence, but can coerce the recipient state to pay a ‘tribute’ to Beijing by ceding local assets when it can’t pay back its debts,” as noted by Dr Malcolm Davis of Australian Strategic Policy Institute’s.[[42]](#footnote-42) Chinese ambitions aspire for complete domination, including the Arctic, where China is building a platform to support its scientific and commercial interests, with plans for a Polar Silk Road incorporating the Arctic region into China’s BRI framework as a potential “silk road on ice, enumerated in the Arctic White Paper published in January this year.[[43]](#footnote-43) It would appear that Chinese ambitions and BRI strategy pervade both Sir Halford J.Mackinder’s 1904 ‘Heartland’ and Professor Nicholas John Spykman’s ‘Rimland’, aspiring to create an unmatched power base. The examples of manifestation of the BRI serve to highlight the strategic significance of Chinese policy, which can only be overlooked in India’s immediate neighbourhood only at it’s peril.

**Sri Lanka – Harbinger of Chinese Domination**. The Sri Lankan model of Chinese ingress should set alarm bells ringing. China became indispensable to Sri Lanka during the final years of the civil war, providing military hardware, defended the Rajapaksa government from censure on war crimes at international human rights forums and has played a major role in post-war Sri Lanka’s infrastructure development.[[44]](#footnote-44) The Hambantota port was handed over to the Chinese in 2017 due to the Sri Lankan government’s inability to repay the loan. This, potentially allows the port to be exploited for Chinese military activities, despite Sri Lankan government assurances to not allow the same (a Chinese submarine docked twice in 2014 in Colombo port). The Chinese footprint in the Island nation has expanded northwards into the Tamil dominated northern provinces, traditionally a region of Indian influence. In April 2018, the state-run China Railway Beijing Engineering Group Co. Ltd. winning a $300 million house building contract in Jaffna, which suffered extensive damage during Sri Lanka’s 26-year-long civil war, and expanding into rubber, tea, and coconut plantations of the central highlands does not bode well.[[45]](#footnote-45) A **similar scenario is being seen played out in Myanmar, much to the detriment of Indian interests**. In both cases, regime behaviour and ethics were the least considered factors in Chinese moves. Moreover, the economic and financial viability of the projects and the ability of the government to service Chinese debt have been questioned by Amara Thiha, a Senior Research Manager at Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) and a non-resident fellow at the Stimson Center, raises concerns of instability along the routes, flagging the potential of the debt trap being sprung.[[46]](#footnote-46) The concerns are not unfounded and Dr. James M. Dorsey, in a BESA Center Perspectives Paper dated October 3, 2018, brings the spotlight on similar situations wherein China has written off an undisclosed amount of Tajik debt in exchange for its ceding control of some 1,158 square kilometres of disputed territory close to the Central Asian nation’s border with China’s troubled north-western province of Xinjiang and Zambia, like Sri Lanka, was left with no choice but to hand over control of its international airport as well as a state power company.[[47]](#footnote-47)

**Chinese Inroads into Myanmar**

Recent developments and the growing proximity of Myanmar is a cause of deep concern for India. The Chinese government signed numerous Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Myanmar for construction of the $2 billion China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), from Kunming, the capital of China’s Yunnan Province, for 1,700-kilometers through Myanmar’s major economic hubs, ending at Myanmar’s deep-sea port in Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State on the Bay of Bengal, leading to the Indian Ocean.[[48]](#footnote-48) “The corridor connects Yunnan and three important economic centres in Myanmar… and aims to promote the economic integration of the region,” says China’s state-run Global Times.[[49]](#footnote-49) Recent developments include Pathein Industrial City, signing a deal the China Textile City Network to build garment factories in Pathein, as one of the largest foreign direct investments in the Ayeyarwady delta area in decades, a green light to survey the Kyaukpyu-Kumming high-speed railway, the contract for the Yangon elevated highway under consideration with six Chinese companies shortlisted with the likelihood of the project being financed as part of CMEC.[[50]](#footnote-50) The CMEC brings Myanmar even closer to China, going beyond trade and infrastructure development. It has given space for China to take a central role in the series of negotiations between the Northern Alliance, groups not represented in Myanmar’s national ceasefire, and representatives from Myanmar. Yunnan province’s Communist Party secretary, Chen Hao, met Aung San Suu Kyi on December 3, 2018 and the Myanmar Peace Commission on December 5, 2018 to give shape to a possible ceasefire, which will give China an unassailable say in Myanmar.

The CMEC, in conjunction with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) connecting Xinjiang province in northwest China through Pakistan to the Gwadar port in the Indian ocean, provide China the strategic alternate to over-reliance on the chokepoint of the Malacca straits and its vulnerability to American domination – a key Chinese concern given the recent trade war unfolding. CMEC is central to its energy security, with crude deliveries through a 771-km China Myanmar oil pipeline from Kyaukpyu to Kunming, capital of China’s Yunnan Province, having begun in 2017 and a parallel natural gas pipeline from Myanmar also terminating in Yunnan. The Chinese strategy assumes a larger dimension in view of a direct military confrontation with India along the Northern Borders. China’s intrusive presence along the southern flank, facilitated by the CEPC and CMEC raises serious concerns. The North-South Belt & Road strategic feeders like the CPEC and CMEC, give China access to the Indian Ocean through the North Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. These when combined with China’s Maritime Silk Road blueprint, poses a larger strategic challenge to Indo Pacific Security.[[51]](#footnote-51) It impacts freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and South China Sea, challenging global powers. While it seeks to deter growing Indian presence and manifestation of India’s ‘Look East Policy’ graduating to an ‘Act East Policy’, it simultaneously seeks to counter the American ‘Strategic Pivot to Asia Pacific’ strategy, assuming global dimensions. The IOR is an area of strategic convergence on the manifesting threat from China. India finds growing cooperation and support from the US, Japan, Australia and even European powers in preventing Chinese naval dominance, though Russia appears to be acquiescing to Chinese military adventurism as a ‘No Cost Low Risk’ opportunity against the United States.[[52]](#footnote-52)

**Debt Trap Implications**. The project, ostensibly, will provide job opportunities along the corridor due to massive construction activities and the possibility of shifting of Chinese industry to exploit the relatively cheaper labour, but serves to boost Chinese industry with access to Myanmar markets and further to the larger global markets, besides creating a ‘debt trap’ for Myanmar. The debt provided is required to pay Chinese companies and workers, and hence ploughed back to China, keeping the principle amount to be repaid intact. Thus, it becomes a double loan, which the weak economy may find difficult to repay and leave Myanmar at the mercy of China. The recent manifestation of Sri Lanka’s inability to service the debt taken for the development of Hambantota port resulting in forfeiture of land and infrastructure around the base to the Chinese, is reminiscent of the colonial era of the European powers. Dr Dorsey brings out the pushback to the ‘high cost’ of Chinese debt taking roots with Nepal withdrawing from dam projects because of China’s commercial terms and Malaysian PM, Mahathir Muhammad, having suspended or cancelled US$26 billion in Chinese-funded projects. Similarly, Myanmar is re-negotiating a significant scaling back of a Chinese-funded port project from US$7.3 billion to US$1.3 billion, in a bid to avoid shouldering an unsustainable debt.

**Sanctions Contributing to Strengthening Chinese Hegemony**. Myanmar’s weak economy and growing isolation as a fallout of the Rohingya crisis is setting the stage for the Chinese to establish their writ, which directly undermines India’s interests. Atul Aneja, in an article in The Hindu, referred to Global Times quoting Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences professor Zhu Zhenming, “Domestically, the Myanmarese economy is growing very slowly because of the lack of investment. Globally, there has been talk of sanctions against Myanmar over the Rohingya issue. So more than ever, the country needs China”.[[53]](#footnote-53) Myanmar’s lack of transparency resulting in determining it’s creditworthiness and inability to obtain funding from global institutions, made even more difficult as a result of American and Australian sanctions in response to atrocities against the Rohingya’s, is being exploited by China in cementing it’s position in Myanmar. Thus, ensuring that economically vulnerable states like Myanmar do not fall prey to Chinese overtures and exploitation and provide it the springboard for implementation of it’s larger design is an imperative.

Shared concerns of US, Japan and Australia in the region need to converge towards greater cooperation in countering Chinese initiatives such as the BRI and String of Pearls. Enhanced economic and trade cooperation would serve common interests in countering growing Chinese influence and belligerence. Military ties and cooperation in areas of counter-terrorism and non-proliferation provide the common grounds for enhanced ties. Of course, it entails substantial effort on part of all parties in overcoming a legacy of mistrust and areas of divergence. Economic cooperation entails creating arrangements which encourage manufacturing and services from India as alternatives to Chinese economic capabilities. These will need to be undertaken at a mutually cooperative level and also engage with regional blocs like the ASEAN in weaning them away from Chinese influence and economic engagement. Greater military cooperation in the form of joint exercises, defence trade, joint R&D etc. would contribute substantially in countering the Chinese threat. The recently signed Communication Compatibility and Security Arrangement (COMCASA) in 2018 after the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US, are steps in creating the necessary framework of collaborating in jointly countering Chinese influence. Backing such cooperative arrangements with enhanced social and cultural exchanges and people-to-people contact, provides greater depth in making it a meaningful relationship. A long term strategy to counter Chinese influence politically, socially, economically and militarily needs to be formulated and must engage with other like minded nations sharing common threats. Geopolitical, military and economic responses by the United States, India, Japan and Australia as part of the Quadrilateral Initiative to counter growing Chinese domination may need become a cornerstone of foreign policy.

However, India needs to be cognisant of it’s own weakness in securing interests. The opportunity provided by India’s lukewarm response to the previously proposed Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor is being exploited by China. “The CMEC was proposed during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visit to Myanmar last November, because India has not been acting on the BCIM sub regional cooperation proposal. So it is better for China to go for bilateral cooperation with Myanmar and simultaneously wait for India’s participation,” says Professor Long, Associate Professor of China’s West Normal University, in a conversation with The Hindu.[[54]](#footnote-54) It provides China the opportunity to wrest the initiative by the possibility of the CMEC being integrated with a much larger connectivity network including the BCIM or the Kunming to Kolkata corridor, as well as the India proposed Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative — a major plank of New Delhi’s Act East Policy. Thus, India need to guard against it’s longer term strategic goals being usurped and integrated with the Chinese vision, acceding the dominant status.

China, with its policy of string of pearls and Belt Road Initiative has spread its influence and is slowly encircling India in a bid to seek a competitive edge. Development of ports and undertaking massive infrastructure development in India’s neighbourhood is shifting the balance of power in a region which India considered its own backyard. China has obtained strategic interests in Myanmar by developing the Sittwe### port to gain access to the Indian Ocean, bypassing the Straits of Malacca, a strategic vulnerability capable of choking majority energy supplies. The Rohingya crisis saw unambiguous Chinese support for the ruling establishment, aligning itself in order to further its influence. India and China are in a contest to safeguard their economic and security interests and engaged in containing the influence of the other within Myanmar. Rakhine is important with its natural resources and coastal location and as China is not directly affected by the refugee crisis it has less to lose than others in standing by Aung San Suu Kyi and her government. India is nearing completion of the Bay of Bengal to North East India connectivity project and views Myanmar as an important market for its regional ambitions. Substantial inroads have been made by China, both in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Balancing of ties to ensure that Indian interests are not sacrificed or harmed in favour of China remains a critical challenge for foreign policy makers.

**Chapter Summation**

Having evaluated the implications of the crisis for internal security and fermenting extremism, this chapter sought to assess the geopolitical dimension. The implication of the growing Chinese footprint and domination as part of the BRI framework, resulting in strategic encirclement of India and seeking global dominance has been amplified. The chapter brought out the contours of the BRI and the potential threat it poses in securing control of strategic bases, as witnessed in the case of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka. Substantial inroads have been made by China into Myanmar. The chapter points to the concern of Myanmar falling prey to a debt trap and ceding control of strategic infrastructure to China, which could result in Indian interests being compromised and sacrificed in favour of China. The chapter, brings out the pitfalls of overt condemnation and the western sanctions regime potentially pushing Myanmar into China’s clutches. India and China, have both, supported Myanmar’s establishment in pursuit of their economic and strategic interests. Both are vying for influence in Myanmar, seeking to contain the other. There is no direct impact of the refugee crisis on China and hence it’s policy is lesser constrained in promoting it’s interests. A weakened economy unable to service Chinese debt and China acting as a buffer in shielding Myanmar from international scrutiny could inextricably push Myanmar into Chinese sphere of influence, leaving little space for India to manouver and safeguard it’s interests. It also brought out the need for India to guard against it’s own lethargy in pursuing initiatives to their logical conclusions, lest it cedes space and compromises regional power status.

The chapter brought out the imperatives for convergence of the Quadrilateral in securing it’s geo-political interests vis-à-vis China and highlighted the need to be cognisant of the perils of pushing Myanmar too far. Shared concerns of US, Japan and Australia in the region need to converge towards greater cooperation in countering Chinese initiatives such as the BRI and String of Pearls. Enhanced economic and trade cooperation would serve common interests in countering growing Chinese influence and belligerence. Economic cooperation entails creating arrangements which encourage manufacturing and services from India as alternatives to Chinese economic capabilities. Engaging with regional blocs like the ASEAN in weaning them away from Chinese influence and economic engagement, needs to be dovetailed. Military ties and cooperation in areas of counter-terrorism and non-proliferation, joint exercises, defence trade, joint R&D etc. would contribute substantially in countering the Chinese threat. The recently signed Communication Compatibility and Security Arrangement (COMCASA) in 2018 after the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US, are steps in creating the necessary framework of collaborating in jointly countering Chinese influence. Backing such cooperative arrangements with enhanced social and cultural exchanges and people-to-people contact, provides greater depth in making it a meaningful relationship. A long-term strategy to counter Chinese influence politically, socially, economically and militarily needs to be formulated and must engage with other like-minded nations sharing common threats.

**CHAPTER : CRISIS REPSONSE – SECURING INDIA’S NATIONAL INTERESTS**

 **Global Response to the Crisis**

The outrage in the international community has been varied with Western response largely seeking condemnation and isolation of Myanmar. Closer home, the regional response is mixed, ranging from outright support to the military junta by China to non-interference by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The strongest voice against the Myanmar government is from Bangladesh, directly bearing the brunt of the exodus. Countries with large Muslim populations ie. Pakistan, India, Thailand and Indonesia have been witness to large scale internal protests to condemn the atrocities against the Rohingyas, with Bangladesh’s foreign minister condemning the Rakhine violence as “genocide” in September 2017 and Indonesia and Malaysia calling on the Myanmar authorities to halt their campaign and bring an end to the violence.[[55]](#footnote-55) Advocacy groups including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Arakan Project and Fortify Rights continue to appeal for international pressure on Myanmar’s government with The International Criminal Court’s (ICC) chief prosecutor, in April 2018, seeking jurisdiction over alleged war crimes that forced the exodus of Rohingya to Bangladesh.[[56]](#footnote-56) The US had lifted previously imposed sanctions against Myanmar in December 2016, but reimposed them in the wake of the 2017 military crackdown with the international community, including Canada, Norway and South Korea, enhancing humanitarian assistance and an emergency response team of UK medics to help stem the spread of disease in camps.[[57]](#footnote-57) The Pope visited South Asia in December 2017, with a view to focus on rehabilitation and reconciliation efforts.

Suhasini Haider, reporting on the crisis, brings out that various efforts by the international community. She points out to the visits by Rex Tillerson, US Secretary of State, Singapore’s Foreign Minister in exploring a role for ASEAN countries to help in the crisis, Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister, Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, taking the European Union’s Foreign Affairs High Representative along with the German, Swedish and Japanese Foreign Ministers for a survey of the refugee camps, amongst other efforts.[[58]](#footnote-58) The ASEAN does not have a coordinated response, largely because of it’s principle of non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, with Eleanor Albert’s report quoting Council on Foreign Relation’s Joshua Kurlantzick “They aren’t going to take collective action on Myanmar, with Myanmar as one of its members.” Moreover, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand—all ASEAN members—have yet to ratify the UN Refugee Convention or its protocol.[[59]](#footnote-59) In a development worrisome for India, China is seeking and assuming a mediatory role. As per reports, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, went to Dhaka to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on November 18, 2017 and then to Naypyidaw to meet President Htin Kyaw, which resulted on an agreement for repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Rakhine, which was followed up with visits by Myanmar Army Chief Min, Aung Hlaing, and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to China.[[60]](#footnote-60)

**The Role of Aung San Suu Kyi**. The unfolding of events also needs to be seen through the prism of actions by Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s civilian head of government and de facto President. A Nobel Peace Prize laureate, imprisoned for over 15 years in her 21 years struggle for human rights and democracy, has drawn severe criticism for her response, and lack of condemnation, of the military actions against the Rohingyas. International condemnation, including stripping of honorary Canadian citizenship and Malaysian withdrawal of support, followed jailing of two Reuters journalists who exposed a massacre of Rohingya civilians by the military, and her government’s failure to respond to international demands for investigations into allegations of ethnic cleansing and genocide.[[61]](#footnote-61) Commenting on the ethical dimension Vikram J. Singh, a senior advisor for national security, democracy, and technology at the Center for American Progress and Deputy Assistant Secretary of defense for South and Southeast Asia from 2012 to 2014, emphasises the importance of peace with ethnic and religious communities within it’s borders as imperative for it’s own success:[[62]](#footnote-62)

As Aung San Suu Kyi herself said in her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, “Burma is a country of many ethnic nationalities, and faith in its future can be founded only on a true spirit of union.” She may now walk an impossible tightrope in Myanmar as a civilian leader with no constitutional authority over the military….Allowing the kinds of atrocities perpetrated since 2017 to go unnoticed will not help Myanmar thrive and will not help Aung San Suu Kyi live up to the expectations she embodies for so many in her country and around the world. It also will not help the Tatmadaw eventually develop into a modern and respected national military.

**Suu Kyi has consistently defended the military action against the Rohingya, attributing a lack of understanding of complexities of the situation to the international community.** The limitations of her powers vis-à-vis the military could be responsible for her muted condemnation, but that would be so uncharacteristic for a person of her stature and track record of taking the military junta head on and achieving a return to a semblance of a democratic path of her nation. Suu Kyi has the difficult task of negotiating with the Buddhist majority to potentially seek a humanitarian alternative and, thus, needs to be cognisant of their apprehensions. Loss of legitimacy with them, would potentially close future negotiations on the Rohingya and the entire process of building Myanmar’s democracy will be undermined.[[63]](#footnote-63) Thus, the **events must not be seen from a unidimensional prism, but also needs to consider domestic realities and complexities**. This, of course, does not absolve her of drawing upon her moral authority to committing to universal human rights and offering full cooperation with the ICC investigations of serious allegations of ethnic cleansing and undertake efforts for reconciliation. Repatriation and security assurances, with inclusive development, are essential to prevent Myanmar from being ostracised and isolated as a pariah state. It has the potential of anti-Buddhist protests across South and South East Asia, acting as a lightning rod to fuel underlying tensions, exploited by inimical elements.

**International Sanctions**. The Americans consider that besides the violence perpetuated on the Rohingyas, the resultant stress on Bangladesh **poses a threat to international peace and stability**. The U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), on August 17, 2018 imposed sanctions on four Burmese military and Border Guard Police (BGP) commanders and two Burmese military units for their involvement in ethnic cleansing in Burma’s Rakhine State and other widespread human rights abuses in Burma’s Kachin and Shan States.[[64]](#footnote-64) The **sanctions appear targeted against the military leadership at the operational level**, overlooking the top government at this stage, and are a **likely initial step to apply pressure**. These do not directly curtail all engagements, but **convey a significant indication of future measures**. The American administration appears **cognisant of the risks of hard measures interpreted as directed against Suu Kyi and potentially push Myanmar towards China** and, at this stage, has chosen to adopt measures with limited effectiveness as the entities sanctioned do not have a large exposure to the American system.[[65]](#footnote-65)

**Indian Response**

**Shifting Sands**. India’s response to the crisis has undergone considerable shift from **2012,** when during the outbreak of violence, the then External Affairs Minister **(EAM)**, Salman Khurshid, visited Rakhine State and announced a **USD 1 million relief assistance package** for Myanmar[[66]](#footnote-66) and, simultaneously, **Rohingya refugees were permitted entry into the country**. The then UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, visited India on December 19, 2012 and expressed “high appreciation for India’s age-old tradition of tolerance and understanding which manifested itself in its current policy of protecting and assisting refugees” and its “strict adherence to the principle of non-refoulement and voluntary repatriation.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Non-refoulement is a principle in international law that stops a country from returning a person to a place where they would be at risk of persecution. The situation, however, changed with a new government in Delhi and **recurrence of a crisis in 2015** when Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia all turned away overcrowded boats carrying Rohingyas attempting to land on their shores.[[68]](#footnote-68) **Refuge was sought in India, but denied**.[[69]](#footnote-69) The policy underwent **further realignment in mid-2017** with the government announcing **plans to deport the Rohingyas** already settled in the country being “illegal immigrants” as was stated by India’s Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju, while answering a question in Parliament on August 9, 2017.[[70]](#footnote-70) During the Prime Minister’s visit to Myanmar in September 2017, there was no reference to the Rohingya’s and only to the terror strike by the ARSA. The reference to the refugees came only a couple of days later in a Foreign Ministry statement under pressure from Bangladesh, two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi for her handling of the challenge:[[71]](#footnote-71)

"India remains deeply concerned about the situation in Rakhine state in Myanmar and the outflow of refugees from that region….We would urge that the situation in Rakhine state be handled with restraint and maturity, focusing on the welfare of the civilian population alongside those of the security forces. It is imperative that violence is ended and normalcy in the state is restored expeditiously."

The subtle shift in position, emanates from the need for accommodating **Bangladesh’s concerns** articulated by the High Commissioner, Syed Muazzem Ali, to foreign secretary S. Jaishankar, **highlighting the country's growing challenges in absorbing Rohingya refugees and seeking Indian pressure on Myanmar to do more** in the crisis. Lack of adequate mention was being construed as reticence from a firm stand. However, External Affair’s Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj’s statement that it wants the “safe, secure sustainable” return of the Rohingya refugees, during her visit to Myanmar on May 10 and 11, 2018 has **brought back the balance in the narrative** as reticence was eroding India’s leadership position in the region.[[72]](#footnote-72) India’s position, or lack of it, had been perceived negatively in Bangladesh, given the expectations emanating from it’s stature. The report brings out that the statement assumes importance given that it was made during her state visit to Myanmar and raised with her meetings with Myanmar’s Foreign Minister and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. It **echoes Bangladesh’s concerns but at the same time balance has been maintained with offers of support to Myanmar in resolving the issue**, help in implementing the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission, an initiative by Suu Kyi and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and a December 2017 agreement in undertaking prefabricated shelter construction for displaced persons.[[73]](#footnote-73) Faced with a **two-fold dilemma, the Indian government** on one level is trying to **balance it’s influence in Myanmar, careful not to be over critical of the administration to prevent China from exploiting a vacuum that may ensue in deteriorating relations** and on the other, it’s **moral and ethical credentials are under scrutiny as a result of a muted position** that has been adopted. Kumari Anupama, a Ph.D Scholar at Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University, maintains that the position adopted by India is conceded as one of pragmatism to preserve it’s interests relating to security, economic burden of handling refugees within India’s borders and far reaching adverse implications which could jeopardise numerous projects being undertaken in Myanmar by India.[[74]](#footnote-74)

**Refugees Policy and International Obligations – A Critique**. The fact that India does not have a comprehensive national policy framework for refugees, has a bearing on handling of the issue. However, an article entitled “India’s traditional refugee policy shows why it’s unlikely to give Rohingyas sanctuary” by Dhruva Jaishankar and Tushita Saraf in The Print on September 30, 2017, shows that a certain ambiguity exists in it’s refugee policy which accords a discretionary element in designating refugees and asylum seekers.[[75]](#footnote-75) This works to it’s advantage, including when coordinating with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), allowing designation on a case-to-case basis. The article cites examples of refugees from Myanmar, Afghanistan and Somalia being treated as “foreign nationals” and Iraqi and Palestinian applicants seeking to reside in India temporarily, until they can be resettled in third countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia. However, approximately 110,000 Tibetans and 102,000 Sri Lankans have been given refugee status. The Tibetan refugees, fleeing persecution from the Chinese forces accompanied HH The Dalai Lama in 1959 when he fled to India, have been aided with freedom of movement and access to residence and work permits. The Sri Lankan refugees, in the aftermath of the 1983 civil war by the Tamil separatists, were provided shelter, food, and allowances in designated camps with permission for informal labour but their freedom of movement and employment opportunities are limited. Since 2012, they have been given long term visas but some have chosen voluntary repatriation. On the other hand, groups fleeing from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in the wake of a genocide in Bangladesh which began on 26 March 1971 with the launch of Operation Searchlight,[[76]](#footnote-76) as West Pakistan military crackdown on the Eastern wing of the nation, to suppress Bengali calls for self-determination rights, were provided with all aid and assistance but never formally granted refugee status. This allowed their repatriation, at the end of the 1971 Indo-Pak War which resulted in the liberation and independence of Bangladesh.[[77]](#footnote-77) **India is not a signatory to either the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention or the 1967 UN Protocol on Refugees** and deals with **refugees under the Foreigner’s Act of 1946, which defines foreigners vaguely as “who is not a citizen of India”**, without differentiating the spectrum of tourists to refugees, and allows restrictions on movements into India and also within the country. There, thus, exists a **wide spectrum of categorisation when formulating a response to the dilemmas posed by a humanitarian crisis**. It allows India to **not be stymied by international law in dealing with a situation, which has larger geo-political ramifications and are not necessarily a unidimensional humanitarian crisis**. Thus, India is **not in breach or violation of law**, settling the legality of the matter. In fact, the **Supreme Court of India**, when hearing the matter relating to **deportation of Rohingya’s, upheld the government’s legal viewpoint and justification of ‘security considerations’ and ordered the deportation of seven Rohingyas on October 05, 2018**.[[78]](#footnote-78) Of course, it **does not absolve or allow abrogation of it’s commitment to providing aid and assistance, consistent with it’s traditions of benevolence**. However, it would appear that **not granting refugee status**, as in the case of most asylum seekers other than Tibetans and Sri Lankans, while **meeting it’s humanitarian obligations of assistance** creates a disincentive for them to permanently stay in India. This balanced policy seems to be in the **best interests in India**.

**National Security and Realpolitik at Forefront of Political Agenda**. The **shift in policy can be attributed** to concerns of instability in the region taking care **to not antagonise the Myanmar regime, causing disruption of the growing security cooperation between the two countries,** particularly in tackling cross-border insurgency along their shared border. India’s approach was further **aligned to realpolitik** when **China took the initiative** and offered a solution and **assumed a mediating role, undermining India’s position**. **India** realised that it **needed to restore the loss of leverage** which would be a **detriment to it’s geopolitical interest’s**. India’s Foreign Secretary, S. Jaishankhar, visited Myanmar on December 20, 2017 and signed an MoU aimed at “socio-economic development and livelihood initiatives in Rakhine State” that included “a project to build prefabricated housing in Rakhine State to meet the immediate needs of returning people,” and pledging USD 25 million for a five-year development project in Rakhine State.[[79]](#footnote-79) Subsequently, in May 2018, India, alongwith China, Laos, and Thailand visited Myanmar as part of the UNSC delegation.[[80]](#footnote-80) India undertook **“Operation Insaniyat”** to provide relief **assistance for the refugee camps in Bangladesh** on September 14, 2017.[[81]](#footnote-81) The move was primarily to **disincentivise Rohingya refugees entering India** and growing security concerns with a need for **diplomatic balancing between Bangladesh and Myanmar**, assuming prominence in the narrative.[[82]](#footnote-82) K. Yhome identifies three points that became the basis to drive India’s Rohingya approach:[[83]](#footnote-83)

(a) Assessment that restoring “normalcy” can happen “only with the return of the displaced persons to Rakhine state.” This position implied that the return of Rohingyas to Myanmar from Bangladesh and elsewhere would also mean the return of Rohingyas from India.

(b) The second relates to an assessment that socio-economic development in Rakhine State is “the only long-term solution”, prioritising support and mobilising resources for development in coordination with the international community to assist development efforts in Rakhine.

(c) The third point relates to Delhi’s stand that it would maintain constructive engagement with both Myanmar and Bangladesh, and that the international community needs “to handle the situation with restraint, keeping in mind the welfare of the population.”

The crisis and policy shift has brought about a **convergence of national security and the nationalistic political agenda** of the Bharatiya Janta Party’s (BJP), the ruling dispensation, on the contentious matter of the “illegal immigrant” problem which has plagued the North-eastern region of India. The party’s 2014 election manifesto promise to “address the issue of infiltration and illegal immigrants in the Northeast region on a priority basis”[[84]](#footnote-84), resonates with the Rohingya issue, bringing it to the forefront of the political agenda. The crisis is being utilised as an **opportunity to not only reverse the influx in 2012 but also signal it’s future intent to Bangladesh with respect to the illegal Bangladeshi immigration.**

**Chapter Summation**

Having mapped the genesis of the crisis and it’s implications in the geo-political domain as well as the impact on potentially fermenting extremism across the region and particularly in India, this chapter has sought to review the response of the various players. It can be seen that the West, in particular, has been vocal in it’s condemnation of the actions of the ruling military establishment and Aung San Suu Kyi, the champion of democracy. The ICC has gone to the extent of declaring genocide and war crimes, seeking trial of the perpetrators by International Law. The US, while condemning and imposing international sanctions, has been measured in it’s response. Realizing the potential of the crisis for Bangladesh, but careful not to push Myanmar into the folds of China, the nature of the sanctions has been more symbolic than effective, indicative of future pressure that can be brought to bear.

 India has much to lose from deteriorating relations with Myanmar – security cooperation in combating insurgency in NE India, disruption of it’s ‘Act East Policy’ along the gateway to SE Asia for regional and economic integration with ASEAN, slowing down of multi-modal connectivity of NE India with the Bay of Bengal. India is clearly seeking to preserve it’s interests, mindful of the potential loss of leverage with Myanmar in the event of overpressure and isolation, which would tilt the balance of influence, already in favour of China, further. This gains greater prominence since China has unambiguously thrown it’s weight behind the ruling establishment, making humanitarian considerations as peripheral. The driving motivation is that Indian interests should not be sacrificed on the altar in favour of China. Thus, pragmatism seems to trump ethical concerns. However, substantial assistance to Bangladesh in managing the humanitarian and resultant economic stress, restores a balance with commitment towards international obligations being upheld, in consonance with it’s position and aspirations in the comity of nations.

Deportation of Rohingya’s, upheld by the Supreme Court, following due process of law, opens up a new vista with respect to the approach of dealing with the vexed issue of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh into the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal and resolving a long standing national security threat. The government’s stance, in the face of harsh criticism, gives a clear indication of the direction it intends to follow when it comes to deporting illegal immigrants, identified by the NRC, to Bangladesh. The grounds for future policy are being prepared. A pragmatic approach, balancing humanitarian considerations and juggling various geopolitical considerations, has a distinct realist signature in seeking to preserve India’s national security interests. Of course, the government will have to ensure that it carefully manages the balancing act to ensure that nationals interests do not become hostage to domestic compulsions of religious affinity and communalism being exploited. The next chapter will proceed in summarising recommendations and policy direction.

**CHAPTER : RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY DIRECTION**

**India’s Stance and Policy Options**

The policy framework needs to consider various dimensions of the crisis which is essentially an ethno-religious conflict with socio-political and domestic concerns intertwined with India’s foreign policy. It can have a domino effect, impacting internal stability and needs careful balancing. India needs to constantly review its national security strategy for relevance and effectiveness. The various factors, including diplomatic, domestic political compulsions, humanitarian, security and geopolitical considerations need deft handling and balancing to ensure that national security interests are not compromised and adverse implications are mitigated to the extent feasible. The policy measures to be undertaken have been covered under the broad headings of Orientation of Approach; Molarity, Humanism and Guarding Polarisation; Internal Security and Extremism; Geopolitical Balancing; and International Cooperation.

**Orientation of Approach**

**Constructive Engagement versus Isolation**. India, and the global community at large, will need to ensure that their actions do not violate the boundaries of sovereignty of Myanmar, as it will most certainly result in further isolation and gravitation towards the Chinese umbrella which can provide a shield against global pressure. Moreover, the event could potentially create a convergence of ideologically similar authoritarian regimes and cementing of growing closeness. Constructive engagement can hedge against pushing Myanmar into the Chinese sphere of influence, and ensure that the ability to influence further behaviour does not go out of reach for India, regional groupings or even Western powers and global institutions.

**Balanced Liberalism and Realism**. A liberalist foreign policy, akin to the Nehruvian-Gandhi principles adopted, would suggest a principled stand in leveraging India’s influence to pressurise the Government of Myanmar to resolve the matter, including seeking accountability on the humanitarian plane. This would allow preservation of polarisation or domestic unrest within the large Muslim community, within India and elsewhere. The realist based foreign policy seeks to prioritise geopolitical interests, which necessitates a favourable alignment of Myanmar to hedge against growing Chinese influence in the region and particularly within Myanmar. Failure to do so can potentially create a long-term adverse scenario which then could be exploited to destabilise the North-eastern region of India.

**Sustainable Peace**. The **essence of India’s role**, besides safeguarding it’s interests, will need to incorporate **measures to help prevent recurrence** of such incidents emanating from ethnic strife, **facilitate safe return of the refugees and their safe rehabilitation, long term integration of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar’s society** and ensuring that any **potential terror related manifestations are nipped in the bud and not allowed to proliferate**. India needs to **play a proactive role** in the matter to **regain it’s leadership role** in the region and **align it’s action, to the extent feasible, in consonance with it’s core values in adherence to principles of ethical and humanitarian considerations** which it has traditionally followed. This requires delicate balancing vis-à-vis national interests.

**Morality, Humanism and Guarding Polarisation**

**Ethical Dimension and Humanitarian Considerations**. The first and foremost is the matter relating to the refugees which has a moral and ethical dimension. Thus, the position adopted by India will need to be consistent with it’s traditional viewpoint of upholding human rights. Therefore, it will need to translate into direct action in ameliorating the hardships of the Rohingya’s in refugee camps within India as also Bangladesh. Commitment in this quarter, if found wanting, opens up criticism of India’s leadership role in the region. Besides, it has the dangerous potential of being interpreted as having a religious bias when compared to assistance forthcoming for refugees of other religious denominations ie. earthquake in Nepal, Hindus and Christians from Myanmar itself, Tamils from Sri Lanka, Buddhists from Tibet etc. This is a very slippery slope and needs careful negotiation and requires adequacy of resource allocation, commensurate to it’s stature. Socio-economic development of the Rakhine state is an essential prerequisite for ensuring that grievances emanating from poverty and disparity do not remain unaddressed, acting as breeding ground for future alienation to be exploited.

**Internal Refugee Management**. The Government of India must ensure that till such time the **refugees are housed on Indian soil**, without prejudice to the final outcome of their status, **appropriate accommodation and facilities are extended in accordance with humanitarian considerations**. Besides the obligations, it needs to be kept in mind that **poor conditions in refugee camps are fertile breeding grounds to exploit latent animosity**, which are definitely **not in the best interests of the nation**.

**Rehabilitation of the Rohingya’s within Myanmar**. A cooperative framework for rehabilitation of the Rohingya’s is fundamental to the resolution and long-term stability of the region, facilitating return of displaced persons. Towards this end, the November 2017 MoU on Rakhine State Development Programme, signed between India and Myanmar, is a step in the right direction as seen from the MEA official statement given on December 20, 2017:[[85]](#footnote-85)

Foreign Secretary of India and Myanmar Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Soe Aung signed a bilateral MoU on Rakhine State Development Programme. This MoU is the first Government to Government agreement signed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar with a cooperation partner focussed on socio-economic development and livelihood initiatives in Rakhine State. This is **intended to help the Government of Myanmar achieve its objective of restoration of normalcy in Rakhine State and enable the return of displaced persons**. Under this MoU, Government of India proposes to take up, among others, a project to build prefabricated housing in Rakhine State so as to meet the immediate needs of returning people.

**Deportation**. The Supreme Court of India’s clearance for deportation of seven Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar on October 05, 2018, uphold the government’s stance and concerns. It is evident that the Government of India would have negotiated the safety concerns of the deportees, reflected in their own willingness to return, besides a positive development with regard to recognition of citizenship, a highly contentious matter. The fact that Certificate of Identity and travel documents will be issued by the Union of Myanmar could possibly be the first step towards recognising and resolving the matter of citizenship which has been the elusive factor in the discord that prevails. Moreover, the fact that the deportation is being undertaken on the basis of the acceptance of their identity by the Union of Myanmar is a step in the positive direction towards resolving the core grievance of citizenship. To what extent that translates to parity in rights will remain a matter for Myanmar’s authorities to resolve. However, India will need to closely monitor the developments and attempt to draw a **balance between overreach of intervention in the internal affairs or overt criticism**, which pressures the government to **withdraw from Indian influence**, and the **need to avert deterioration of the situation within Myanmar**, due to a Buddhist or government backlash against Rohingya Muslims, **resulting in renewed conflagration**. The point in debate is the **distance to which pressure or criticism of the authorities in Myanmar is advisable**. The final outcome cannot be forecasted, but nevertheless is a **first step towards reconciliation**. It is highly likely to have been the **result of Indian intervention, in conjunction with international pressure**. This is a very positive outcome and the thrust must be maintained to ensure that such a move **shapes the environment for future deportation of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from NE India.**

**Hedging Deportation from Acquiring a Communal Tinge**. The next step on the ladder is the matter of continued residency of the refugees within the country. The stance on this matter has already been clarified in the Supreme Court of India and deportation of the first seven Rohingyas already cleared. The position with respect to the necessity of deportation due to security considerations is completely unambiguous and realist. However, care will need to be taken to **guard against polarisation, resulting in domestic unrest, by being exploited as an anti-Muslim bias** of the dispensation given their right-wing ideological identity. This is the most delicate matter which has tremendous national security implications, both for internal security and amongst the Muslim population in the border regions which could be exploited for inimical activities due to religious affinity. The **fallout of radicalisation** of not only the **Rohingyas** but amongst a **larger section of Indian society**, possibly with a larger **regional footprint**, is **not in anyone’s interest**.

**Internal Security and Extremism**

**Security Considerations, Domestic Politics and Religious Harmony**. The **location of the refugees from 2012 (the previous UPA government era) has come under serious criticism** and gives an opportunity for **politicisation, besides the security hazard** it generates. Unfortunately, the Rohingya’s were permitted to settle in the **Jammu region of the sensitive border state** of J&K with **camps springing up in the vicinity of sensitive military installations**. This has been a highly contentious issue as the legal framework operative in the State does not permit settling of non-indigenous population. The aspect of settling in a **region almost two thousand miles from the Myanmar/ Bangladesh border,** **as a result of religious affinity to the Muslim majority** in the state, even in the absence of concrete evidence, provides enough ammunition for **political exploitation and is a cause for serious concern**. The **February 2018 terrorist attack on an army camp at Sanjuwan**, in the city of Jammu, sparked off a controversy with the BJP raising security concerns about the presence of **Rohingyas in the sensitive border belt.** The concerns were not unfounded but even security considerations assumed a **religious hue and polarised the debate**.[[86]](#footnote-86) This aspect has serious **ramifications for religious harmony** and can be exploited by either side. The right of addressing security concerns rests with the government and it is it’s prerogative to deal and handle appropriately. However, **exploitation of the matter in and exacerbating religious schisms does not serve national interests**. K.Yhome points out the concerns expressed regarding the form the debate is assuming - “is not that it is placing security over humanitarian… [But] that it is doing so in a way that is imprudent and likely to be self-defeating.”[[87]](#footnote-87)

**Security Cooperation with Myanmar**. The relationship with the Government of Myanmar has resulted in close cooperation in the security domain **in helping India combat the various groups** in the north-eastern region of India which **operate from areas along the borders**. The June 2015 operations along the borders against insurgent groups, in **retaliation to a deadly ambush** which had resulted in the deaths of 18 Indian soldiers, is indicative of the substantial nature of cooperation besides **military training exercises**. The **defence relationship** between both countries is an essential component of India’s broader foreign policy objective, with interactions very high levels. **Cooperation to check activities of insurgent groups along the border,** arms smuggling, intelligence sharing among security agencies, checking wildlife smuggling and issues relating to border management including joint inspection and construction of border pillars underscores the nature and scope. **Chinese assistance to the North-eastern groups can destabilise the region** further to undo whatever success in counterinsurgency operations have accrued due to the cooperation extended by Bangladesh and Myanmar. Thus, the **strategic relationship with Myanmar becomes extremely important**.

**Counter Measures for Tackling Extremism/ Insurgency**. Tackling the manifestations are not merely limited in the military domain but requires a comprehensive socio-political-economic and military approach as an integrated strategy. The intent is not formulation of a comprehensive strategy, which would entail a separate study altogether, but to broadly understand the various measures necessary in countering the adverse implications in various domains. Some of these are as enumerated below:

(a) **Tackling Radicalisation**. Religious extremism and communal radicalisation needs to be tackled by addressing deficiencies in education, employment, justice, poverty eradication and governance.

(b) **Internal Governance**. Robust internal governance mitigates the breeding grounds of radicalisation, with grassroot politics and outreach providing the necessary tools of implementation.

(c) **Socio-Political Measures**. Speedy justice and promoting harmony amongst the communities make the grounds for addressing grievances. Measures to de-radicalise sections entails social empowerment.

(i) Preventing places of worship like mosques and madrassas being exploited to fan radicalisation by co-opting religious leaders and members of the community in shunning inimical activities.

(ii) Developmental activities focussing on infrastructure development, employment generation, health care, education, and social development need to be accelerated to integrate the population and disgruntled elements politically, socially, economically and psychologically.

(iii) Efforts on winning hearts and minds of the population and socio-economic development weakens external support to insurgency.

(d) **Military Measures**. The aim of the military component is to create a secure and stable environment for the political process to fructify with socio-economic measures being implemented. A multi-pronged comprehensive military strategy seeks to create a conducive environment for the political process to take shape. The multipronged approach, executed at the operational level, seeks minimizing cross border infiltration and effective counter terrorist operations within the hinterland, with minimum collateral damage, alongwith measures to win the hearts and mind of the population. Simultaneously, it must

(i) **Trans-Border Operations**. Adequate cooperation in border management and coordination of activities on both sides of the border with Bangladesh and Myanmar to not allow terror groups from operating with impunity and prevent cross border infiltration.

(ii) A strong intelligence network needs encompassing superior technology, electronic surveillance and satellite-based capabilities in the cyber, communication and optico-electronic domain in conjunction with low-tech and human resources.

(iii) Adequacy of resources for operational missions and intelligence gathering like surveillance devices, UAVs, drones etc.

(iv) A robust Anti-Infiltration Obstacle System (AIOS) along the borders for controlling illegal immigration, drug trafficking and smuggling across the borders should draw from the expediencies in J&K and Israeli expertise.

(v) Advanced computing for data analysis.

(vi) Integration of human, structural and technological capabilities to deter infiltration and freedom of movement to terrorists.

(vii) Operations by Special Forces and specialised counter insurgency forces akin to Rashtriya Rifles and Assam Rifles.

(viii) Ensure a suitable legal framework to allow adequate operational freedom to security forces, while upholding human rights.

(e) **Counter Funding Operations**. A key element of tackling extremism and radicalisation is to stifle funding to such organisations, both within the country and from beyond the borders.

(f) **Information Campaign**. A comprehensive campaign to tackle inimical propaganda to mobilise radicalisation and ensuring that the message is communicated in a receptive manner is an imperative.

(g) **Synergised Approach**. Command and control at the apex level, bringing together the civil-military machinery together under political direction should provide the overarching umbrella.

**State Action, Deprivation and Poverty – Breeding Grounds for Extremism**. The potential of extremism being fermented as a result of State action and conditions of poverty and deprivation of the Rohingyas makes them extremely vulnerable and ripe for indoctrination and radicalisation efforts of numerous terrorist and jihadist group. The anti-Muslim sentiment of a Buddhist majority establishment, serves to exacerbate the deep-rooted acrimonious relationship and a target of vitriolic attacks from ultra nationalist Buddhists. Urgent measures to prevent conflagration are imperative for containing exudations of extremism from the ethnic strife.

**Balanced Criticism**. While the Tatmadaw and ruling establishment cannot be absolved of their responsibilities for extreme actions, nor can the destabilising role of the ARSA, which seeks to provoke harsh responses by indulging in militant attacks against the State, be condoned. The ARSA, if allowed to instigate events leading to mass migration and seeking to exploit them as weapons to exert political pressure, bear equal responsibility. Thus, a balanced approach to condemn and exert pressure, equally on both parties, is important. One-sided condemnation will only encourage the other party to continue deviant behaviour.

**Managing Spillover from Bangladesh – Illegal Immigration**. Illegal migration, particularly from Bangladesh (previously East Pakistan till 1971), and the resultant demographic imbalance in North East India generates a fear of minoritisation, which has been the primary causal of numerous insurgencies. An anti-foreigner agitation against the large influx of illegal migrants and demands for their deportation have been at the heart of internal security instability. Ripple effect of instability in Bangladesh and the economic stress generated from the Rohingya crisis, has the potential of triggering a fresh wave of illegal migration, leading to a deterioration of the security situation in North East India. Thus, measures for coordination with Bangladesh with respect to border management and infiltration assume importance.

**Guarding against Deterioration of Law and Order**. Providing facilities/ privileges to illegal immigrants out of the existing national resources, adversely impacts local population depriving them of their legitimate share in the employment sector and facilities, and would likely culminate in hostility towards immigrants resulting into an inevitable social tension and law and order problems. The **management of law and order deterioration exacerbated by illegal immigrants thus becomes an intrinsic imperative of internal security**.

**Linkages with Terror Organisations**. The consequences across India, including in the sensitive border state of J&K, where the Rohingyas have also settled needs careful handling. Though direct linkage of Rohingyas and the ARSA with terrorist and radical organisations have not been conclusively established, the security concerns withstood judicial scrutiny of law in the Supreme Court, with the October 05, 2018 judgement upholding deportation of Rohingyas. Thus, firm measures in guarding against threats from extremism emanating from such elements needs to be implemented.

**Security Concerns Hostage to Communalism**. The issue necessitates tremendous political maturity to guard against national security concerns being hijacked by communal forces with vested political interests. Politicisation and exploitation of the religious divide complicates the cauldron of instability. The government’s stance being projected as having religious bias has the potential of the large Indian Muslim population being exploited by fanning religious discord based on religious affinity. The issue merits response on purely national security considerations and allowing it to be manipulated by inimical elements in fanning communal faultlines, by giving it an anti-Muslim colour, will not bode well and needs to be guarded against.

Implications of direct threats emanating from the already settled and future Rohingya influx into India, a ripple effect triggering illegal immigration of Bangladeshis into the north-eastern states and the entire episode assuming religious overtones rather than security considerations, requires to be mitigated.

**Geopolitical Balancing**

**Countering Growing Chinese Influence.** There exists an imperative for convergence of the Quadrilateral in securing it’s geo-political interests vis-à-vis China. Shared concerns of US, Japan and Australia in the region need to converge towards greater cooperation in countering Chinese initiatives such as the BRI and String of Pearls. Enhanced economic and trade cooperation would serve common interests in countering growing Chinese influence and belligerence. A long-term strategy to counter Chinese influence politically, socially, economically and militarily needs to be formulated and must engage with other like-minded nations sharing common threats.

(a) Economic cooperation entails creating arrangements which encourage manufacturing and services from India as alternatives to Chinese economic capabilities.

(b) Engaging with regional blocs like the ASEAN in weaning them away from Chinese influence and economic engagement, needs to be dovetailed.

(c) Military ties and cooperation in areas of counter-terrorism and non-proliferation, joint exercises, defence trade, joint R&D etc. would contribute substantially in countering the Chinese threat. The recently signed Communication Compatibility and Security Arrangement (COMCASA) in 2018 after the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US, are steps in creating the necessary framework of collaborating in jointly countering Chinese influence.

(d) Enhanced social and cultural exchanges and people-to-people contact, provides greater depth in making it a meaningful relationship.

**Insulating Act East**. India is faced with the difficult choice of safeguarding national interest’s vis-a-vis its neighbours’ expectations. India shares borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh and the two countries are critical for the peace and stability of India’s conflict-prone northeast. Maintaining a friendly relationship with both Myanmar and Bangladesh is imperative for India, in consonance with and for the furtherance of its ‘Act East Policy’. India’s **Act East Policy** can only be successful if we develop **connectivity in the North-Eastern states and permit greater people-to-people contact with the people of the ASEAN,** and particularly with the people of Myanmar.[[88]](#footnote-88) Economic cooperation, cultural ties and developing strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region and enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region through trade, culture, people-to-people contacts, and physical infrastructure (road, airport, telecommunication, power, etc.) **hinge on major projects** such as the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Rhi-Tiddim Road Project, Border Haats, etc. which **in turn are dependent on peace and stability in the Northeast**.[[89]](#footnote-89) Thus, an interlinked chain rests on ensuring that **renewed illegal migration or instability arising out of the Rohingya crisis does not threaten realisation of India’s growth**. Thus, managing this instability is critical to securing the vehicle for India’s growth.

**Striking a Balance**. The **influx of refugees into Bangladesh is creating tensions with Myanmar and a bold stance in favour of either places the delicate balance at risk**. Though, India has offered **humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh** to help cope with the situation, but a **sense of aggrievement does exists**. Two MoU were signed with the objective of aiding **promote agricultural mechanisation in Rakhine and promote computer literacy among youth in the state, enabling youth for employment in the software sector**. In addition, an agreement on the **Rakhine State Development Programme was also concluded, under which India will provide $25 million in grant assistance over a period of five years**. The **impact of the geopolitical juggling** is reflected in report of recent decision of **Myanmar signing agreements with India for assistance in development of Rakhine state while asking China to scale down its presence in a mega dam project** in the state.[[90]](#footnote-90)

**Myanmar-Bangladesh Convergence**. The movement of refugees into Bangladesh and the stresses it creates for the resource strapped nation, has resulted in placing the two neighbours in direct confrontation. There is need for India to play a crucial role in resolving divergent concerns of both it’s neighbours. **India’s close relations with both is an opportunity for mediation**, but places India in an unenvious position where invariably a **zero-sum game will result in some aggrievement**. This has to be **carefully balanced with it’s interests**. Creating convergence on this complicated matter will certainly be a test for India’s diplomacy. However, India needs to ensure that **while Bangladesh is supported to the fullest extent in managing the refugees and does not place an inordinately high strain on it’s overstretched resources, India will have to simultaneously get Myanmar to create an environment wherein the return and rehabilitation of the Rohingyas is facilitated while at the same time preventing the international isolation and becoming the subject of overbearing criticism**. India **cannot be seen as being oblivious to the humanitarian aspects** but yet will need to ensure **subtle pressure makes Myanmar yield adequately** to sufficiently satisfy the Rohingyas of protection of their rights **balancing with it’s domestic considerations**. Inherent in the solution lies the **need for convergence of intent and action between Bangladesh and Myanmar** in taking measures to mitigate concerns to the satisfaction of both parties. Neither side can afford to overlook concerns of the other if a long-lasting resolution is to be forged.

**International Cooperation**

**Constructive Engagement**. India needs to ensure that it plays a lead role in acting as a bridge for the international community and **bringing Myanmar within it’s folds rather than pushing it into isolation**. Greater access to the troubled region and coordination on repatriation will help foster confidence in working towards a long-term lasting solution. A **constructive approach seeking engagement** with the Myanmar authorities, despite it’s dubious democratic credentials, **as opposed to the isolationist approach emanating from a sanctions regime needs to be carefully balanced**. There may be no evidence of the effectiveness of either, but the fact remains that participating in a **punitive sanction-based pressure strategy would result in loss of future leverage with Myanmar**. The fact that even Suu Kyi, the champion of democracy, has desisted from condemning the events is indicative of the domestic compass. A **behavioural change may be forced upon Myanmar**, but will be at the **determent of future influence**. India, therefore has to make **careful policy choices**.

**Utilisation of Regional Multilateral Fora**. Efforts at utilising sub-regional multilateral fora like BIMSTEC, ASEAN or SAARC need to be explored. They provide an opportunity in achieving close cooperation and assistance to all parties. It can be utilised to **share the burden emanating from the refugees** ie. either in the form of **financial and resource assistance** to Myanmar and Bangladesh in sharing the burden of refugee management or coming to a **quota arrangement, akin to the European Union, in hosting refugees** till final resolution of the crisis. However, given the stance adopted by Thailand and Indonesia towards the refugees, getting **consensus on hosting refugees is highly unlikely while resource sharing may work**. Most states in these regional frameworks are shying away from an active role, upholding the principle of ‘non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states. Thus, seeking to **incorporate the matter as an agenda may not find a positive response**. Moreover, experience of **bilateral issues** like India-Pakistan animosity becoming **stumbling blocks and impeding the functioning of the multilateral forum,** as in the case of SAARC, is likely to **discourage desire to utilise the framework for resolution** of this matter. It appears that **India will have to assume leadership role** in seeking to resolve the matters.

(a) A role in **humanitarian assistance and socio-economic development in Bangladesh and Myanmar may be the extent of participation** even though the **BIMSTEC-NSA mechanism** exists as it “recognised the need for urgent measures to counter and **prevent the spread of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization**” and further decided, “to take concrete measures to **enhance cooperation and coordination among their law enforcement, intelligence and security organisations and enhance capacity building**.”[[91]](#footnote-91) [xlvi]

(b) **ASEAN** is another regional grouping with far greater clout, particularly with Myanmar, and **could play a key role in resolution** of the crisis. The member states are inclined only towards **resource mobilisation for humanitarian relief, refraining from either a mediatory role or leveraging influence**. The complexity of the issue with cross-regional dimensions could benefit from a **‘bridging role’** of the organisation.[[92]](#footnote-92)

There is potential for improved coordination with the international community and the UN agencies.

(c) **Individual efforts could be coordinated by India as the lead** for a regional forum such as BIMSTEC or ASEAN to achieve **meaningful socio-economic development** of the troubled region and **facilitate repatriation and rehabilitation** of the Rohingya’s, within Myanmar, while ensuring safety considerations of the refugees. Adequate political pressure to ensure **assimilation and absorption, without fear of backlash, within the socio-political structure** of the State, is essential for long term resolution and stability.

(d) Speedy implementation of the **recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission**, an initiative by Suu Kyi and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, would ameliorate the exploitive circumstances, having perceptible tangible outcomes and need to be expedited.

(e) The fallout of instability is felt across the region, particularly by the **ASEAN bloc nations which have been recipients of large number of refugees and also face effects of radicalisation and terrorism within their boundaries**. A cross regional framework of **information sharing and efforts for coordinating anti-terror related activities needs to be considered to manage the fallout of exudation of extremism** emanating from ethnic strife.

**Leveraging Bilateral Influence**. A **multipronged regional and bilateral approach** is necessary, utilising the influence of some of the states within the region such as Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore.[[93]](#footnote-93) **Common borders and shared religious affinity of Buddhist majority provides Thailand with both a leverage and an incentive** to assist in resolution of the crisis due to its concerns from a spillover and past experience of Rohingya migration. **Indonesia, as the largest Muslim nation** in the world and in proximity could assist the ASEAN significantly. **Singapore, with a neutral viewpoint** and wielding considerable influence, would be in a position to shape ASEAN involvement. **India**, therefore, needs to forge **close coordination** in **bringing together resources as also political influence in managing the crisis and seeking an optimal solution**.

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