

The irony of the Rohingya crisis is that a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing”, in the words of UN High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, has no textbook-prescribed cure (Nebehay). When confronted with the modern-day banality of evil, the Washington consensus seems almost as banal in its inaction. It more or less accepted Aung San Suu Kyi’s claims at the International Court of Justice that accusations of genocide are “an incomplete and misleading factual picture of the situation” (Bowcott). Pompeo refused to even use the word “genocide” to describe the crisis (Toosi). His successor at Foggy Bottom, Secretary Blinken, has remained equally cautious, launching a glacially-paced “interagency review” and spurning opportunities to enact swift change after the 2021 *coup d’etat* (Strangio).

A historical comparison that immediately comes to mind is the Rwandan genocide. Despite intelligence that a genocide against the Tutsi was imminent, and the option to intervene in favor of Uwilingiyimana’s democratic moderate Hutu faction, Clinton refused to act, fearing “a Somalia all over again” (Cran). The price of inaction was staggering: over a million deaths by even the most conservative estimates (Guichaoua). After the Habyarimana-era dictatorship, however, Rwanda has made mighty strides towards reconciliation under Kagame’s burgeoning democracy, with a deep commitment for “a post-ethnic national identity”, proving the power of democracy to heal trauma (Okello).

It is tempting to apply this to Myanmar, and pursue an interventionist approach to liberate it from violent dictators and help peaceful democrats rule instead. Nevertheless, complications arise from the thornier entanglement of the Rohingya crisis with Myanmar’s democratization question. While Aung San Suu Kyi has borne the brunt of international criticism, the people of Myanmar seem in no rush to strip her of her Nobel Peace Prize (Tunc). Indeed, in 2020 they

gave her an overwhelming vote of confidence in an election defined by the Rohingya crisis, and in 2021 they braved the Tatmadaw's bullets to protest its coup against her (McLaughlin).

It must be concluded that the Rohingya crisis is not damaging Aung San Suu Kyi's domestic popularity, and truly carrying out "the will of the people" would preserve the status quo. In nationstates crystallized around colonial-era divisions, such paradoxes are not uncommon, and other messy partitions have resulted in the ceaseless India-Pakistan and Israel-Palestine conflicts. In each country, even democratic leaders regularly pad their majorities by appealing to violent prejudices against the enemy (Greenberg). Regrettably, Myanmar must be counted in their company.

The Rwandan narrative of interventionist democratization healing a genocide cannot be universally applied; the Rohingya crisis and Myanmar's democratic question cannot be resolved with a single stroke. Instead, the more precise historical lesson is a more uncomfortable one: that democrats can become as unflinchingly capable of committing atrocities as dictators, and genocide can become politically popular. Therein lies the deeper problem of the Rohingya crisis; it cannot be solved by solely addressing the democracy questions of the 21st century, but must foremost be addressed through the colonialism questions of the 19th and partition questions of the 20th.

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