

On the Need for Balance in Understanding the Rakhine Crisis

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1) Introduction

I write today to anyone interested in last year's events in Myanmar's Rakhine state and responses to it, perhaps including delegates to the United Nations, related diplomats, decision-makers, and interlocutors. I am not an expert in the region, but in-depth research and analysis into specific events and claims, illuminated by similar work on events in Syria and Libya (mostly at the websites Monitor on Massacre Marketing and A Closer Look On Syria) gives me unique and helpful insights. That and the special characteristics of these events makes my views on them well worth reading. Knowing this, I appropriated a full 11 pages of space to explain.

The widely accepted findings of numerous investigations are well-known, fairly clear, and consistent; the evidence points to ethnic cleansing or even genocide against the Rohingya Muslim community by the government and security forces of Myanmar. It seems little else of interest came up.

But while such findings are widely repeated as fact in a prevailing narrative, they seem to have been formed without due process. They seem to be based almost totally on the unverified claims of Rohingya refugees, and are increasingly at odds with the best available evidence and the emergent – if frustrated – historical record. A case in point is the August report of UN Human Rights Council's “Independent International Fact-Finding Mission” (hereafter FFM):

Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar A/HRC/39/64
Advance Unedited Version Distr.: General 24 August 2018

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf

This paper will serve as a partial review of that FFM report, referencing it throughout. (noting that was the advance unedited version – apologies if any of the points I raise were improved since this draft. I haven't the time now to check).

The Burmese government's repeated denial of wrongdoing are not ridiculous, and never did get fair consideration by those hurling blame at them. Others share their views, like former ambassador Priscilla Clapp, who told France 24 English “I simply don't accept the narrative” emerging from the refugee camps. Clapp is a former US Chief of Mission in Myanmar from 1999-2002, a senior adviser to Asia Society and the U.S. Institute of Peace, and should be an informed observer. She explained the main problem was armed militants killing some of their own, besides civilians of other faiths and security forces. Like the Burmese authorities, she felt ARSA probably was behind the burning of Rohingya villages and chasing the refugees across the border, although she acknowledge much remained unclear. [1]

Clapp's views may or may not be correct, but that's the problem. As she says “the international community has to sort out the facts before making accusations.” Instead, it seems we have a “fact-finding” mission with broken lie detectors, who instantly decided to believe one set of accusations without considering the other side of the story, or looking for the reality somewhere between the sides, where it usually is. Such an “investigation” will leave the actual truth quite unclear.

As it stands, there are some undeniable facts we can start with:

- 1) Hundreds of thousands of “Arakan Muslim” inhabitants, of Bengali ancestry and speaking

the Bengali-origin Rohingya dialect (hereafter “Rohingya” as pragmatic shorthand, with “Muslim” noted as necessary to distinguish from non-Muslim Rohingya-speakers), left their homes in Myanmar and traveled into neighboring Bangladesh, where they remain in overcrowded refugee camps, claiming deadly fear of returning.

- 2) Large swathes of areas where the Rohingya once lived have been destroyed, with villages and fields burned in an obviously deliberate process.
- 3) The recent violence was initiated by unprecedented illegal attacks on several security posts by the Rohingya Muslim armed group “Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army” (hereafter ARSA) in the early hours of August 25, 2017.
- 4) There was a response by the security forces they called a “clearance operation.”

But that is a depressingly short list. All the middle parts linking the ARSA assaults, the government response (and what “clearance” meant), the mass destruction and flight of Rohingya ... this is all contested. Now it needs to be *more vigorously contested* and carefully assessed, especially if at all possible by the UN's Human Rights Council. This is important, considering:

- the dangers of implementing humanitarian solutions based on flawed foundations,
- the high likelihood that the basis of collective action thus far *is* extremely flawed, and
- the vigor and audacity so far of that possibly misguided action.

2) Re-Considering the Burned Villages

There is credible evidence some of the areas burned in the 2017 crisis were actually torched by Rohingya militants as they fled, or in the chaos. As acknowledged by the FFM's report, “the burning of the Rakhine village of Ah Htet Pyu Ma on 25 August 2017” was cited as one of very few real crimes by ARSA. (Point 54) Among other reported cases they didn't include, some 60 Buddhist homes in two villages were burned on August 28, according to military reports [2] and following on **public orders of that day from ARSA leadership to burn Buddhist homes.** [3] (The earlier case shows such orders weren't necessarily needed.)

One of those two villages is called Wet Kyein. This was another Rohingya village, as told to Amnesty International, but it was perhaps was mixed, with some Buddhist homes, and wound up entirely burned by someone. Human Rights Watch in fact was given faulty information about its locale, citing a different and unscathed area described as the Buddhist village of Wet Kyein. HRW used this to show how the government burned only Rohingya areas – like neighboring Tula Toli and “Dual Toli” across the river – and also how they lied about ARSA burning any homes in Wet Kyein. However the spot everyone else in the world has called Wet Kyein for decades is across the river, and it was entirely torched, as HRW agrees (calling it “Dual Toli”). It was not spared, not even any Buddhist part of a village HRW heard was entirely Buddhist. [4]

In the Kha Maung Seik or Fakira Bazaar area, as explained below, the most credible reports are that ARSA militants overran the area on August 25. They then robbed, killed, and kidnapped over 100 Hindu locals, and burned their homes before they left for the border.

But a detailed Reuters report and info-graphic, for example, simply shows all the burned areas across the state – including those areas described above, and likely other areas that were burned by militants – as proof only of government crimes. [5]

I'm not familiar enough with all the evidence for any actual burning by military or pro-government

civilians to rule this out. Considering what happened at Inn Din (see below), there may be proof in one or even several cases, but it would not necessarily reflect on a systematic plan from the top. A central intent is worth probing for, but not fit for imagining, as it seems the UNHRC's FFM has done.

I contend the scale of burning alone is the reason to conclude – correctly – this was totally or primarily done by *someone's* plan. What remains unsettled is *whose plan that was*.

The government of Myanmar has taken much flak for suggesting it was ARSA that organized the false-flag burning of Rohingya villages (“their own homes”). Captured ARSA fighters say that was the plan – attack security forces, burn their villages (and not too many of the heretics' villages?), and then make like they're fleeing from repression. Of course, these accounts were given under likely duress, but they're not obviously fake, and there is some evidence and logic in support of this version. As noted, Priscilla Clapp found it credible enough to state as fact; “the militants themselves have been going around torching these villages.” [6]

Yet the UNHRC's FFM claims they found not a trace of evidence or reason behind them. “Although the Government has stated that ARSA burned Rohingya villages, the Mission found no such indication.” (point 54) By the same definitions, the report suggests **they saw just as little credible “indication” of the Rohingya narrative**. Of course soldiers were *allegedly* seen in the act by many refugees, so in the report's logic, they did it. Yet the FFM knows supports would help to convince others, and so they add two points that I noticed.

In point 50 the FFM notes how the government took over the vacated land, flattened damaged structures and allegedly unharmed ones as well. It's concluded they were after the land, planning on “erasing every trace of the Rohingya communities – while destroying criminal evidence” as they later did. There were surely other explanations offered, but this mission of the United Nations must have dismissed them somehow.

More importantly, point 42 states: “Satellite imagery and first-hand accounts corroborate widespread, systematic, deliberate and targeted destruction, mainly by fire, of Rohingya-populated areas across the three townships. At least 392 villages (40 per cent of all settlements in northern Rakhine) were partially or totally destroyed...” More alarming statistical breakdowns follow, and then it's noted “Rohingya-populated areas were specifically targeted, with adjacent or nearby Rakhine settlements left unscathed.”

In general, that seems to be the pattern, and that is probably just the scale and area of the burning. That's denied by no one, and explained in both versions of events. **This does nothing to prove who was behind it**. Using the word “systematic” doesn't mean the more systematic party must be to blame. ARSA cannot be ruled out of torching places they were based, or where their fighters lived; this absolutely puts them at all of the crime scenes. And setting fires is well within their means.

Of course the allegation raises the issue of motive, but this is not so hard to address; a staged crisis to win world sympathy would probably be motivated by a desire to have someone create a nation for them to be safe from genocide in. That may not be realistic, but it has happened before. It's a big goal, and much evidence suggests it's the one motivating them. It just might provide sufficient cause to burn their old homes, tell false stories, and even more.

With ample motive, means, and opportunity, a staged crisis is not the kind of thing you rule out as impossible. Rather, it's the kind of thing you watch out for signs of, if one is learning much from enforced state failures and related disasters in recent years. Either the government burned the villages to chase out the Rohingya, and then tried to deny that, or the latter did it to illustrate that story. This is still where we are.

3) Some Refugee Stories Must Be Lies

Hans-Bernd Zöllner, a South Asia expert based in Germany, opined in a recent critique of the same report of the FFM I'm considering here:

"The whole report highlights the emotional accounts of the persons who followed the call to provide information thus directly conveying the emotional reactions of the refugees and the interviewees to the reader of the report. At the same time, such statements contain accusations against the Myanmar government that use legal terms. These accusations are thus wrapped up in emotions."

This is clearly a problem, especially if the charged thinking distracts from a lack of evidence or even of logic, as it does in this situation. Zöllner continues:

"Technically speaking, the findings of the Mission are based on unconfirmed rumours that have become "facts" because they are believed to be true by the victims AND the "fact-finders" who fully btrust [sic] the stories of the victims and retell them uncritically." [7]

I'm not so sure anyone involved actually believes the stories, but either way, it's hard to disagree. Investigators seem to have let the refugees' stories spur an emotional response that precludes questioning, maybe taking it as heartless considering the horrors they *clearly did witness*. Such untested narratives then form the basis of the current prevailing view, aiming aggressively at something akin to a regime-change campaign. Or as the FFM put it in point 99. "the Mission proposes an accountability process that is transformative, victim-centered..."

But as it happens, many of those moving stories contradict each other on key details, like the date and nature of the massacre at Maung Nu, for just one example. First a Washington Post reporter heard a consistent tale from "nearly a dozen" alleged witnesses of their multi-day ordeal. An army attack early on August 25 was the massacre, with an unclear death toll. Bodies were dumped in the river the next day. Five days later, the remaining citizens finally decided to flee Maung Nu, fearing another massacre. Nothing much in between is mentioned.

Then a larger set of witnesses – at least 37 in total – lodged a much different story, first to Human Rights Watch, then to reporters from the Associated Press. In this version, presumably the one accepted by the FFM, there was an army attack on the 25th and a few bodies from that dumped in the river the next day. Then these preludes were followed by a huge and dramatic massacre on August 27, killing at least 82 villagers, including nearly every man and boy in town.

But this went unmentioned in the first version. On the 27th, a woman and her son were reunited in the woods, and nothing else of note, in the Washington Post story. Were those first several witnesses just confused, or engaging in a coordinated lie? And what about the later batches? [8].

We could also consider the case of eight Rohingya-speaking Hindu women, with 8-10 children in tow, who wound up displaced in a Muslim camp in Bangladesh. They survived a massacre at Kha Maung Seik, which will be covered heavily in this paper, and for good reason. They've now told two basic versions of their plight, one of which must be untrue. A year later some remain unsure, but it's worth deciding which is most likely to be a lie.

Story 1: First, in camp with the Muslims, the women said Buddhist militants in black masks raided the area and massacred Muslim residents (no number is provided), and also executed their husbands and some other family after they refused to help in the killing. They spared these 8 attractive young females for no special reason. Some fighting age male Rohingya fellows were not killed, and kindly brought the Hindus here to be safe, to embrace Islam and a new life, and to tell the world their true

story.

Story 2: Then, Bangladeshi border police responded to reports of that suspicious situation, including a marriage in the works. The men they were with fled before the police arrived, and the women and children were all safely removed from the Muslim camp. At this time, the women immediately told a different story, in which ARSA took over the area on the 25th shortly after their attacks on nearby security posts. They captured at least 115 civilians – everyone they found of all ages – and massacred nearly all of them in a brutal manner. They kept the 8 prettiest young women, made them convert to Islam, and tell that first story under threat. Once free but before returning home, they called in the location of the burials they witnessed. Soon 45 bodies were found there. [9]

As soon as this story broke, there were swift efforts to neutralize it. A refugee was cited for a report in *The Guardian* reasoning the government was “using some Hindu women” to conceal the army-Buddhist massacre, but he was sure their “dirty trick will get exposed soon.” [10] Human Rights Watch's South Asia director Meenakshi Ganguly also suggested those women and other Hindu locals speaking and weeping in a “stage-managed tour” were compromised witnesses of little or no value; “no one has been able to independently verify the Burmese government’s most recent allegations” that amounted to “playing politics with the dead.” Ganguly did call for justice if it was found ARSA was guilty, but she didn't specifically call for a probe. [11]

Nonetheless **Amnesty International – not Human Rights Watch – conducted an independent investigation into the events at Kha Maung Seik.** With no apparent bias for the Burmese government, they found the Hindu women's second story far more credible, and concluded **ARSA militants were guilty of a hideous massacre.** They released a detailed report in May, 2018, stating in part:

“Together, the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that ARSA was responsible for the massacre, and that it has actively tried to cover up the crimes by forcing the surviving women to appear on camera implicating other perpetrators and through more general intimidation aimed at distorting the story.”

Amnesty's investigation found that 99 civilians – including more than 23 children – were killed in this attack, with at least one other killing of six Hindus also reported. Tirana Hasan, Amnesty's Crisis Response Director, is quoted saying “It’s hard to ignore the sheer brutality of ARSA’s actions, which have left an indelible impression on the survivors we’ve spoken to. Accountability for these atrocities is every bit as crucial as it is for the crimes against humanity carried out by Myanmar’s security forces in northern Rakhine State.” [12]

My own prior analysis of all available reports reached a very similar conclusion on this case, for most of the same reasons. In my detailed February 2 article at *The Indicter*, I also note how the false story apparently extorted from those women agreed with what Muslim Rohingya refugees freely claimed. Collectively, these witnesses place the Buddhist assault on three entirely different days. [13] This kind of time line error seems to be a specialty of the Rohingya activists, and here it basically proves **organized falsification, including both voluntary and coerced content.**

Now we should ask how many other stories were lies, told willingly or under duress. That can't be known for sure, so caution is in order. Yet it has not been widely exercised, and perhaps consciously avoided by bodies like the UNHRC's Fact-Finding Mission.

4) The Divided Massacre Record

Now let's focus on the alleged massacres committed in last year's crisis, as acute manifestations of the hostility in question. These are quite extreme and worth some attention. As the FFM report

states (point 36):

“The ‘clearance operations’ constituted a human rights catastrophe. Thousands of Rohingya were killed or injured. Information collected by the Mission suggests that the estimate of up to 10,000 deaths is conservative. Mass killings were perpetrated in Min Gyi (Tula Toli), Maung Nu, Chut Pyin, Gudar Pyin, and villages in Koe Tan Kauk village tract. In some cases hundreds of people died.”

Various shocking details follow, presented as facts about the massacres that “were perpetrated” in those places, without the slightest doubt.

As for Tula Toli or Min Gyi, it's said over 1,000 or even 2,000 innocent Rohingya were massacred there alone on August 30. It's said even Buddhist monks participated in slaughter of every inhabitant they found, even babies, and the rape of dozens of women then locked in huts that were set on fire. Dozens of alleged survivors and witnesses say they lived through or observed all kinds of details, often clashing, but always shocking and damning. [14] Yet no one provided any credible video of the events; three offered scenes show something like three parts of their story, apparently filmed on different days and cobbled together later. This suggests, but doesn't prove, that the described events never occurred. [15]

Tula Toli is the flagship of a small fleet of alleged regime massacres, with the others I'm aware of also being covered by the FFM as evidently real. But like Tula Toli, they lack in evidence beyond verbal claims that – again – aren't even internally consistent. At Maung Nu they had video showing a large amount of what looks like blood in the dirt, allegedly shed by the victims before their bodies were driven away. That's better than in most cases. But here the FFM still has to disagree with some Rohingya “victims” (presumably the first team) about the date and nature of the massacre, besides dismissing any explanations the government or others have offered.

Only four massacres stand out, as far as I know, for having bodies found to prove the crime. One of these, at Gu Dar Pyin, is one that still has no clear and reliable story I've seen, but does have 4-6 or more sets of partial, skeletal human remains shown. There are likely other spots like this, and perhaps more significant ones. Spots said to be graves for 20 are shown at Chut Pyin, with a more detailed back-story. But nothing that feels real emerges from that story either.

So far as I know, only two reported massacres – one of the small sort and one very substantial – feature mass graves found, a consistent story and death toll of known size, with solid evidence and at least some agreement across lines on key features. These are the two proven massacres so far, and between them emerges a picture of a slightly murky situation in which **both sides are to blame**.

4a) Massacre at Inn Din

At the risk of setting a precedent, the government of Myanmar acknowledged in January, 2018, that its forces engaged in unlawful killings in Inn Din. A statement from the army chief's office says local soldiers and Buddhist residents committed the crime on their own initiative and contrary to standing orders. Upset over militant attacks, and especially by the recent brutal murder of a Buddhist farmer, they decided to execute ten ARSA fighters (“Bengali terrorists”). This was on September 2, after the men were reportedly captured in some foiled attack. The slain farmer's sons were invited to help execute them, and accepted. The Rohingya men were killed and then buried in a mass grave at a Buddhist cemetery. It was brutal; by the photos, one victim was beheaded, but the rest were not. That might have proven too ugly in practice, something they didn't know before, having never tried it. [16]

The continued detention of the Reuters journalists involved in leaking this story is questionable, but also perhaps reasonable under national laws they were well aware of. Otherwise, the people leaking

the information were apparently those involved, perhaps motivated by guilt. Those responsible for the killings were arrested, tried, and imprisoned. As State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said, the government's response to Inn Din killings was a “positive indication that we are taking the steps to be responsible.” [17]

It can't be proven that the leak was even required; authorities may have admitted it on their own, in due time. Nothing in the crime does much to suggest a central plan for the kind of unhinged brutality reported elsewhere. And it's noteworthy how no such thing was reported at Inn Din, just that case of the 10 men. It could be that the attraction of rare truth on their side made this the winning story, canceling out any plans to claim an uglier crime with hundreds killed, including children.

But even with a now-undeniable killing of Rohingya by military and Buddhist civilians, the alleged witnesses still offered conflicting stories. A batch of seven had first told Amnesty International that several local men were shot randomly in a raid on Inn Din, with bodies left behind. They were later identified and buried variously by family members, when there was enough pause in the sniper fire. But strangely, the death toll was left unclear (at least five). [18] Later, when the photos of ten bound men and the mass grave in a Buddhist cemetery became known, people started claiming exactly 10 innocent men were summoned by name, arrested, killed, and buried there in secret. That story has now been repeated a few times with only slight variations, including what seems like initial uncertainty just who all was in the photos. [19]

Again, were those first seven witnesses just confused, or engaging in a coordinated lie? And what about the later batches?

4b) Massacre at Kha Maung Seik

As partly covered above via its conflicting stories, the more credible narrative of an ARSA assault has Kha Maung Seik overrun early on August 25, just hours after the nearest security outpost was overrun. The militants reportedly abducted some 115 civilians of the Hindu faith, saying “This is not your village. It is our territory. ... We will murder Buddhists and all of you who worship the statues made of bricks and stones.” [20] They mostly had their faces covered in black, witnesses report, were well-armed, and spoke a mix of Rohingya and an unknown foreign language.

The villagers were reportedly robbed of gold and other valuables, bound, and made to march to a couple of nearby spots where most of them were killed, primarily with blades. As Amnesty found, the evidence suggests 99 of them were murdered. They had throats cut, heads severed, limbs hacked off, maybe just to fit in the narrow pits. 45 bodies were later found, mutilated as described in these hidden-away pits, unlikely to ever be found without such witness tips.

Amnesty saw 43 named victims for these 45 bodies, all from Ah Nauk Kha Maung Seik, comprising “20 men, 10 women, and 23 children, 14 of whom were under the age of eight.” The remaining eight of 51 residents missing from there, and another 46 people from Ye Bauk Kyar village, comprise the 54 whose bodies are yet to be found. [21] Those are not broken down in the report, but we could project the same division, noting that 8 women and 8-10 children were spared from the batch of 45 (note the difference between men and women), but not from the larger batch that we know of. Therefore, **probably more than 50 children were murdered in total.**

Those eight women and girls were spared, allegedly, because the local ARSA leader found them “beautiful,” fit to become good Muslim wives. To save their lives, the women agreed to convert, so long as their children and some younger siblings were also spared (10 total by some reports, 8 in the Amnesty report). The captors agreed, and then marched the women and children with them to the camps in Bangladesh, where they extracted false stories from them. The women later claimed in

interviews run by a pro-government newspaper in Myanmar why they lied; **“They were threatened that their children’s throats would be slashed unless they said as they were told.”** [22]

Even after Amnesty came out with its game-changing report, some refused to change their game and just dug in. The accused killers obviously denied it. ARSA rejected the claims as “unjustifiable and careless serious criminal accusations,” besides being illogical and lacking evidence. However they made no specific claims of what *did happen* there, be it the fake version their supporters had backed, or any replacement story. [23]

In an interview with TRT World, pro-ARSA activist Maung Zarni also offered no alternate as he tried hard to dismiss the report, citing “gaping holes” in it. As given, the main issue was still how the Hindu womens’ stories had changed, making them unreliable, likely coached by Burmese authorities. But the clear story already includes the answer to this; if they were forced to lie under such horrible threats, then later given a chance to tell the truth – as seems likely by Amnesty’s findings – *there will be two stories*. One cannot just point to this as proof the women are unreliable witnesses, but Maung Zarni did so, for his leading argument. (He also cites someone allegedly admitting he had no evidence for the charges, which sounds like a deliberate misreading of no value.) [24]

It was their first story blaming Buddhists that Maung Zarni and his ilk favored, but that was apparently coached in the extreme, and came out full of holes. It’s the second story that contained *an accurate location for the holes in the ground with half the bodies found inside*. This is the mentally if not morally bankrupt position of the ARSA rebellion’s hardcore supporters.

Even in this egregious and unusually clear case, the FFM’s August, 2018 report takes a troubling stance: Point 54 collects all opposition crimes and allegations of such, summarized as “ARSA also committed serious human rights abuses,” but the worst claims were just alleged, and still “require further investigation.” One of the crimes “allegedly perpetrated by ARSA” is “the killing of up to 100 Hindu men and women from Kha Maung Seik.” Government-supplied claims and denials were routinely dismissed with no mention, but here it seems like someone lodged some extra credible counter-claims. “The Mission’s primary source information on the latter incident corroborates the killing, but **is inconclusive as to the perpetrator.**”

Being inconclusive is fine, here just a year after the event; such things take time to sort out fully. But the evidence should at least incline one towards blaming ARSA – especially now, months after Amnesty weighed in calling that case “overwhelming,” and following on such brutal imbalance elsewhere in the FFM report. But note how the FFM cited “men and women” killed, neglecting that children as young as they were found were also killed, likely more than 50 of them. This omission suggests they know ARSA is to blame, or that many readers will believe that anyway. Consider how they note this crime by the government side (e.g. point 39 “Children were killed in front of their parents, and young girls were targeted for sexual violence”), and try to go soft on ARSA (e.g. the rest of this point 54, or point 32 saying their August 25 offensive was just a “response to increased pressure on Rohingya communities and with the goal of global attention” – a protest, basically). Fuzzing out such details as dozens of hacked up children, in a crime one is glossing over, is consistent with that.

In fact the FFM seems to still entertain the coerced first story, with a government-backed massacre just hours after ARSA took over the area (and/or on one of the following days). Amnesty’s report found “the Myanmar security forces were not in control of Kha Maung Seik on the day the massacre occurred” – that is, the correct day, the 25th – and “therefore could not have carried it out.” [25] But the UN’s Fact-Finding Mission seems more open-minded and ponderous.

Their usual approach is to accept such stories as true, but instantly in most cases. Here, as that

clashes with a strangely better and more logical case backed by one of the giants of the Human Rights establishment ... the FFM come out seeming confused and, one year on, in no rush to achieve clarity. Finally, they close point 54 by noting: “other militant or criminal groups were also active in the region and may also have been responsible for abuses.” They don't clarify who these are, but they might just get ARSA off the hook for everything, and let the FFM avoid muddying the waters in their case for acts of genocide *against* Rohingya, not *by* them.

Finally, the Amnesty International report mentions another “massacre of Hindus” by ARSA committed near Maungdaw, where six were killed on August 26, including children (for a total of 105 Hindus killed in two incidents). I still need to review that story, but as I had picked up in passing, it sounds more like a case of a family winding up in the wrong place at the wrong time – an ARSA militant base, during a sudden firefight with soldiers – rather than being attacked in their homes by a genocidal design. The way they were just murdered on sight for nothing is clearly problematic, but in comparison, it seems almost as tame as what happened at Inn Din. [26]

4c) Summary of the Divided Massacre Record

This is the state of the clearer evidence for a somewhat mixed picture - compare:

- **Ten apparently militant Rohingya men** illegally executed at Inn Din by people who were provoked, perhaps remorseful, and were eventually jailed for breaking the law, as the government acknowledged the killings and blamed no one else.
- Probably **99 civilians, including babies, brutally slaughtered just for who they are**, hidden away, covered with lies blaming other religious enemies, including lies extracted from kidnapped people under credible death threats, and still denied in the face of overwhelming evidence.

Furthermore, even with a real crime in play at Inn Din, the Rohingya agitators couldn't keep their stories consistent, and their lies about Kha Maung Seik included **another alleged massacre by Buddhists of a type still proven nowhere**.

Finally, the Kha Maung Seik massacre should be remembered if it turns out there are other mass graves the government hesitated to acknowledge, or that just took a long time to find. They might say some missing Buddhists were found buried there, but they have no survivors. That should be easy to dismiss, and the find might become “proof” of whatever massacre story the Rohingya activists already had fitted for those bodies. One hopes there are no such discoveries waiting, but Kha Maung Seik happened easily enough within the ARSA milieu that other such massacres seem possible. And perhaps the government is behind something of the sort, if the full picture is different from the visible portions. But so far, **ARSA is the only party that's essentially proven to have put innocent civilians in the ground by design and then lie about it**.

5) Conclusion: Hate Speech, Truth, and a Strategy

Clearly, the record on massacres of innocents is not a good case for one-sided genocide plans by the Burmese government. As covered before, the mass-burning isn't much better, and the same may be true on all levels of the alleged repression. Dubious tales of crimes amounting to genocide can set up those blamed for acts of revenge, perhaps without even a factual basis. And most destructive would be false stories becoming “facts” this UN mission “finds,” enabling “legitimate” punishments as well. As the FFM states in point 77, the criminal and punishable tactics of Burmese security forces do in fact include “killing indiscriminately, gang raping women, assaulting children, and burning entire villages.”

What motivates the Rohingya refugees to make such horrendous claims? Maybe the truth, as presumed by many. Otherwise “hate” might be a good word for it. If you like someone, you don't falsely accuse them of genocidal brutality. So to whatever degree, **the UNHRC's FFM is publishing what might class as hate speech.**

But they accuse others. Myanmar's MFA, headed by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, recently e-mailed her UN contacts links to 4 videos made by US researcher Rick Heizman, which the UNHRC's Fact-Finding Mission complained “contain anti-Muslim/ anti-Rohingya messages.” The FFM's most recent report, according to Frontier Myanmar, found it “highly significant that the Ministry headed by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi took the initiative of sharing such videos with the United Nations,” and complained “a credible government response should begin with its own officials **refraining from using hateful and divisive rhetoric.**” [27] On the other hand, they're expected to follow that by admitting to the stories of their national army and Buddhist citizens – including monks – massacring thousands of innocents, mass-raping women, and hacking up babies.

Heizman's videos are actually a documentary in 4 parts. [28] As usual for his work, it has some bias distortion in a broad “clash of civilizations” story, with intolerant, extremist Muslims vs. the area's Rakhine Buddhist people and history. Such a view can miss nuances like the Rohingya Muslims who reject the Jihadist project, and sometimes get beheaded for that. [29] But the program is an informative introduction to a real and long-running problem the “international community” seems bent on ignoring. At the end of part 2B, what Heizman calls “Jihadi kids” are shown on video, with one saying (at least as translated) “we urge all Arakan Muslims to **kill the Rakhine Buddhists, at least 2000-3000 each... and also kill their children.**” This seems to be the correct answer, and upon saying it, he and the other kids with toy guns laugh. They might be about 8 years old, too young to know of the realistic plans or to get real guns. Reportedly, this is at age 15.

This is just one bit of a large body of evidence suggesting a serious and mostly-overlooked problem. It has seemingly taken root within the Rohingya community and spread widely, and includes culturally-imbued genocide plans against fellow citizens, with a Jihadist-nationalist goal. This might be “anti-Rohingya” and even inspire hate that winds up poorly-aimed, and yet also be true. In that case, **does the FFM suggest everyone refrain from speaking the truth? It actually seems they do.**

The mindset displayed by those boys, along with high reproduction rates, plus foreign support and encouragement, might well produce the menace to society behind the Kha Maung Seik massacre, for example. The role of this in the rest of the crisis should be the subject of some more balanced and informed thinking. As former ambassador Priscilla Clapp rightly noted “the international community has to sort out the facts before making accusations.” So far, it seems they don't do this before or after repeated accusations and legal threats by which, as Hans-Bernd Zöllner notes, the UNHRC “mutates into a world-police-unit prepared to virtually arrest a whole country on the grounds of the group members’ belief.”

Or is it even their real belief? Considering the clarity and plausibility of the alternate views, the certainty and moral posturing by the FFM is actually a bit peculiar. Coupled with the heinous nature of those fully-credited stories, and their acting unimpressed with the development of the Kha Maung Seik case, it makes for quite a show. A cynic might conclude this is a planned part of a “shock-and-awe” campaign to break down the hoped reformer Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. She'll see relentless affirmations what a bad girl she has become – the new Hitler basically. The FFM implies they might still find her regime guilty for the killing of 105 Hindus as well, suddenly including over 50 children. They threaten how seriously people are going to jail over all this, maybe hoping she'll jump ship and join the blame game, and help implement whatever is planned next.

I am just such a cynic, but I don't know enough of the regional politics and history to really offer

much on the big picture. Whatever exactly motivates this kind of imbalanced and aggressive activity, it must have a rational motive they aren't stating. It's unlikely to change, and it should be resisted and exposed.

The Amnesty report on the massacre at Kha Maung Seik creates an unusual situation we should not waste. A tactical error by the Jihadists allowed real witnesses to live, go free, and tell their story. (In other cases, everyone will be killed or kidnapped, with only fake survivors or coerced captives providing stories to get the killers off the hook.) And then their exposed crime was one of those few from the otherwise-championed opposition side that the HR giants decide they cannot ignore. This is rare, but happens sometimes.

Consider Human Rights Watch and the Syrian Islamists' August, 2013 massacre and mass-abduction of Alawite civilians in Latakia. A Turkish-backed opposition coalition teamed Al-Qaeda franchise Jabhat al-Nusra with an emergent ISIS, others with black flags, and Islamist groups claiming the FSA banner, to take out security and overrun a dozen mountain villages. They did so, and claimed to kill 240 of "Assad's men," sounding military. But it was really about 30 soldiers, and then as HRW heard, **190 civilians, mostly fighting-age men.** Some others were killed as they tried to flee, and at least six women were apparently raped before being killed. HRW found the toll included at least 18 children, 14 elderly men, and a disturbing 57 women. Some victims were beheaded or had throats sliced, and some mass graves were booby-trapped with bombs to harm anyone trying to reclaim the bodies. [30] While all men and older boys were killed, some 225 women and children were kidnapped ("to protect them from army shelling" and also so they could "be released at some point in exchange for prisoners in government hands," even if that shelling was long over) [31] At least 40 were released in early exchanges, and over 100 went unaccounted for, with just 54 still admittedly held by mid-2014 and upon final release in 2017 exchanges. [32]

The parallels between the cases are perhaps telling, both including bald-faced denials and lies (with Latakia, activists claimed vaguely that HRW was wrong, or if they were right the crime paled next to Assad's crimes, and also the Islamists responsible were Assad's fault somehow). [33] But the main thing these massacres stand out for sharing is crossing some kind of red line for the mainstream human Rights groups. It seems a triple-digit death toll of civilians, including children, dehumanizing sectarian motives, exceptional barbarity, and kidnapping coming together all in one event is too much. Other likely but smaller massacres of minorities in Syria had gone unreported by these groups prior to Latakia, just as much passed under their radar in Myanmar last year. But **ARSA messed up and crossed that red line.** Maybe they thought stopping the killing at 99 was good enough to avoid censure, but not quite. This time HRW may have tried heading it off, but Amnesty International – to their credit – broke the running script that calls for zero mud in the regime-blame waters.

This should be the beginning of the end for ARSA's public image, and their plausibility as a tool to serve anyone's interests in the region. **It's also a big crack in the facade of the general narrative pushed by those same murderous liars.** Just with this one lucky break, the true nature of events is already close to the surface. With more time to reflect, the record will soon look unfavorably on those who prolonged the crisis or encouraged the next one by affirming all these dubious tales.

I propose that to turn back the tide of lies, the international community needs to recognize this hideous Kha Maung Seik Massacre and its valuable lessons. That alone won't fully illuminate the situation, but it might be enough to help see the light switch, as it were. This is one little thing we can do for the victims now lost. Whoever killed those people, they deserve the most honest and careful effort possible to attain the actual truth. Or, realizing the limits of reality, they at least deserve something far better than the compilations of hateful rumors and outright lies offered so far.

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