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FROM PASSIVE AID TO PRAGMATISM: HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY IN THE ROHINGYA CRISIS

Abstract

The ideas espoused in ‘diplomacy’ inherently contradict what ‘humanitarianism’ entails, if one goes by the realist or neoliberal institutionalist schools in international relations. They contend that states, whose primary concerns are to maximize power or security in an anarchic international system, cannot have the indulgence to be humanitarian, theoretically speaking at the very least. Nonetheless, humanitarian diplomacy has been instrumental in resolving intractable conflicts and severe crises that states and the United Nations (UN) were unable to fix. This paper explores why the idea of humanitarian diplomacy has not caught on by focusing on its tension with state-centrism, legal weaknesses and the problem of politicization by powerful states. An evolving and thriving praxis of humanitarianism is, then, discussed as the international community strives to ameliorate human sufferings. Despite tensions arising mostly out of how humanitarian diplomacy has been (ab) used by powerful states, the paper traces new trends where states are shifting their focus from passive aid to pragmatism. Based on a case study of humanitarian diplomacy in the Rohingya crisis, the paper offers some evidence on how states utilize humanitarian diplomatic instruments.

Keywords: Humanitarianism, Diplomacy, Rohingya Crisis, Humanitarian Diplomacy

1. Introduction

It is fashionable these days to use the word ‘diplomacy’ in association with other nouns. One frequently comes across public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, climate diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and so forth. Some of these applications may be local or regional; consider cricket diplomacy, ping-pong diplomacy, shuttle diplomacy, etc. These uses involve some acts of what professional diplomats and foreign policy practitioners perform as their daily activities. However, humanitarian diplomacy is perhaps the most unlikely of these combinations. The reason is that unlike other compound nouns involving diplomacy, it implies ‘intent’ of the actor rather than an ‘area’ of diplomatic activity. But scholars have questioned the appropriateness of this

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particular combination. Hazel Smith of School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) puts forward arguments that capture the definitional complexities of humanitarian diplomacy. She contends that humanitarian diplomacy is an oxymoron and, as such, the most unlikely combination of diplomacy.¹ The essence of the argument is that ideas espoused in 'diplomacy' inherently contradict what 'humanitarianism' entails, if one were to go by the realist and neoliberal institutionalist schools in international relations. States whose primary concerns are to maximize power or security in an anarchic international system cannot have the indulgence to be humanitarian, theoretically speaking at the very least.

Humanitarianism was, therefore, championed mostly by individuals and philanthropies. When Henry Dunant, a Swiss national and founder of the Red Cross Movement, witnessed human sufferings in the Austro-Italian war in 1859, he was extremely moved by the casualty of war. His experience ultimately led him to convince global leaders of his time to agree on what came to be known as the Geneva Conventions. Thus, the codification of international humanitarian law was a result of a movement of an individual.² Since then, humanitarianism has played a significant role in ameliorating agonies of war victims and natural calamities alike. Red Cross (or Red Crescent in Muslim-majority countries) founded by Dunant now operates in almost all countries of the world. Other organizations like Doctors without Borders (MSF), inspired by his idea, joined the bandwagon of humanitarian assistance and relief.

The domain of humanitarianism of this kind has been mostly dominated by non-state actors. It was indeed required to be an apolitical cause because it is 'neutrality' that allowed humanitarians much-needed access to work in the crisis zones. When conflicts occur, nations can seldom choose sides ignoring their own national interests and other similar considerations. This is why humanitarian efforts by the likes of Red Cross enjoyed widespread approval. The process that involves diplomacy *per se* is less obvious when humanitarians respond to natural disasters. But during conflict outbreaks, the UN Organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP) all had their own apparatus to discuss and negotiate with conflicting parties to provide access to food and emergency healthcare to the victims.

There are justifiable grounds for realist school to argue that states cannot practice humanitarianism in true sense. As far as praxis of humanitarianism is concerned, it has been mostly a prerogative of the resourceful and powerful states. The dominant actors have the leverage to pursue it with their power, capability and

¹ Hazel Smith, "Humanitarian Diplomacy: Theory and Practice", in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds.), *Humanitarian Diplomacy: Practitioners and Their Craft*, India: United Nations University, 2007, p. 38.

² Craig Calhoun, "The Imperative to Reduce Suffering: Charity, Progress, and Emergencies in the Field of Humanitarian Action", in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 81.

influence. Humanitarian intervention sans UN authorization also leaves scope that can potentially be exploited by some. This is why some states deem responsibility to protect (R2P) as “a more sophisticated way of conceptualizing and hence legitimizing humanitarian intervention”³ It is likely that the justification for solely state-led humanitarian diplomacy will be frowned upon. But this line of argument does not adequately explain an emerging trend of state actors’ involvement in humanitarian diplomacy—if entirely not state-led, but humanitarian diplomacy where states play an important role. States with comparatively limited diplomatic clout and capacity are also gradually engaging in humanitarian diplomacy. Turkey, for example, does not hesitate to call some of its activities humanitarian diplomacy based on a “balance between conscience and interest”⁴ To illustrate this claim, the paper explores humanitarian diplomacy as new academic domain and its application in the Rohingya crisis especially focusing on the role played by Bangladesh. How Bangladesh has creatively engaged state and non-state actors in the Rohingya issue to expedite resolution of the problem is explored in the paper.

The Rohingyas have a history as old as the history of Arakan (present day Rakhine State). A set of divisive state policies of Myanmar especially the announcement of a discriminatory 1982 Citizenship Law precipitated a long crisis. The draconian laws stripped the Rohingyas of their citizenship accompanied by persecution and torture by the military junta.⁵ This has led to internment influx of Rohingya population into Bangladesh. Bangladesh has sheltered the displaced Myanmar nationals since the earliest large-scale influx in 1978. Since then, there have been two UN-mediated repatriation agreements between Bangladesh and Myanmar in 1978 and 1992. Nevertheless, the Rohingya escaped yet another and by far the deadliest persecution in Myanmar since August 2017. The recent exodus outnumbered previous mass displacements of the ethnic group and outweighed the degree of human anguish caused by forced displacement. Currently, the number of Myanmar’s Rohingya nationals sheltered by Bangladesh is over a million,⁶ creating one of the major humanitarian disasters in recent decades. This time around, Bangladesh has not only allowed the displaced Rohingya population, but also stepped up its diplomatic endeavour.

The arguments are presented in four sections. After the introduction, the paper attempts to clarify why it is problematic to put together ‘humanitarianism’ and ‘diplomacy’ in the second section. It offers a critical assessment of the notion of

³ Alex J. Bellamy, “The Responsibility to Protect and the Problem of Military Intervention”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, 2008, p. 616.

⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Humanitarian Diplomacy: Objectives, Challenges and Prospects”, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, Vol. 41, No. 6, 2013, pp. 865-870; Pinar Akpınar, “Turkey’s Peacebuilding in Somalia: The Limits of Humanitarian Diplomacy”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2013, p. 735.

⁵ AKM Ahsan Ullah, “Rohingya Refugees to Bangladesh: Historical Exclusions and Contemporary Marginalization”, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2011, pp. 139–161.

⁶ Rushanara Ali, “One year on, a million Rohingya refugees still fear for their lives”, *The Guardian*, 16 August 2018.

humanitarian diplomacy, its definition and why it contradicts many of the highly-regarded assumptions of state-centrism as well as how states navigate around this. In an effort to define the idea, the paper questions the concept itself, pertaining to the issues of neutrality and legitimacy. The modern praxis of humanitarian diplomacy and their various manifestations, discussed in the third section, cast more light as to how state-sponsored humanitarian diplomacy affects the domain of humanitarian work. The arguments discussed in the previous section are explored with their real world ramifications. In the fourth section, the paper discusses how states with limited diplomatic clout and capacity can exercise humanitarianism-inspired diplomacy. The Bangladesh case is illustrative of a state-led humanitarianism because it has recently been adversely affected by the Rohingya influx, although it itself is not a party to the conflict.

Admittedly, the subsequent discussion gives a disproportionately greater emphasis on humanitarian diplomacy involving man-made conflicts, although theoretically, it applies to, and is more visible in, diplomacy involving natural disasters. The paper justifies this approach on two grounds: the act of diplomacy *per se* is more obvious when a third-party state involvement is required and when the stakes are higher in conflicts. Humanitarian diplomacy following a natural disaster involves more inter-agency and inter-governmental coordination than negotiation. Moreover, the case at hand, i.e., the Rohingya crisis, relates to not a natural disaster-induced humanitarian situation. Therefore, the discussion in this paper has been selective in providing supporting evidence.

2. Towards a Conceptual Clarity

No matter how soothing humanitarian diplomacy sounds, as a concept, it is highly contested. The following discussion attempts to decipher what constitutes humanitarian diplomacy by questioning some of its basic tenets, juxtaposing it with diplomacy of the conventional sort and contrasting it with its close cousins, namely humanitarian relief/aid and humanitarian intervention in order to understand the concept by exploring the caveats and their nuances. It does not readily accept the existing definitions because they are too broad, making them practically unproductive.

Humanitarian diplomacy has remained a practitioner-dominated world. Its long history notwithstanding, there has been little rigorous academic study. The first book dedicated to the subject exclusively titled, *Humanitarian Diplomacy: Practitioners and Their Craft* appeared as recently as 2007.⁷ Much of the current literature is contributed by practitioners with considerable knowledge and understanding of the

⁷ Philippe Régnier, "The Emerging Concept of Humanitarian Diplomacy: Identification of a Community of Practice and Prospects for International Recognition", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 93, No. 884, 2011, p. 1212.

issue, but these 'grey literature' lacks academic rigour. While their wisdom is invaluable both for understanding and extending current knowledge, they do not connect the field of study with the larger body of scholarly discussion. The first step to fill in the gap is to operationalize the terminologies. An agreement on what constitutes 'humanitarian diplomacy' is imperative if scholars were to analyze its applicability as a foreign policy tool by states. In this section, the paper begins by questioning the concept, analyzing existing definitions of humanitarian diplomacy, involvements of different actors, issues of legality and neutrality, to show what is problematic about them.

Humanitarian diplomacy is more than humanitarianism. There has to be some form of diplomatic manoeuvre, in the form of negotiation and mediation for it to be considered humanitarian diplomacy. This is what distinguishes humanitarian diplomacy from humanitarian aid. One of the best ways to explain an idea is to understand it in contrast to its opposite. That is why, humanitarian diplomacy is best explained in comparison to 'coercive diplomacy' that uses some form of intimidation, or does not rule out 'carrot and stick'. It also negates the possibility of using force, which would then fall into the category of humanitarian intervention.

This reinforces the case for appropriate actors and institutions that engage in the humanitarian diplomatic activity. The answer to this question is relatively straight forward when humanitarian diplomacy involves only response to natural disasters and political issues that is unlikely to stir controversy. Nobody would object to a country sending relief in the wake of a natural disaster. The international community came forward in aid of Haiti and Nepal following devastating earthquakes and as they stood by the Maldives and Sri Lanka during the Tsunami. But problems arise when there is a question of taking sides in conflicts. Who decides who gets the aid? There are two major concerns when it comes to humanitarian diplomacy: legitimacy and neutrality. If one means 'mediation' by humanitarian diplomacy, then few actors have more legitimacy than the UN to engage. The UN is best placed to practice and render the services of humanitarianism. Why, then, would states or international organizations require to fill in? After all, no organization in the world has more legitimacy than the UN to intervene in a crisis situation. Its answer lies in the willingness, capacity and viability of UN effort for humanitarian actions.

There were instances when the UN failed or was unwilling to render the services of humanitarian diplomacy. Despite its unparalleled legitimacy and implementation mechanism, there were cases where the UN could not protect human lives. States were lackadaisical in resolving crisis. This indecision and failure to act, as Jan Egeland puts it, "is measured in human lives"⁸ The wide-ranging efforts of the UN to forestall

⁸Jan Egeland, "Humanitarian Diplomacy", in Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine and Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 353.

violence in Rwanda in 1994 failed due to a lack of connection among the various attempts at conflict resolution, the lack of coherent strategy for managing spoilers in the peace process and weak international support.⁹ United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) failed in protecting the defenseless people because of the lack of intelligence and information gathering.¹⁰ The root causes of the UN peace-enforcement failure in Somalia have been identified as unpreparedness of the UN diplomats and the weaknesses of the UN appeasement diplomacy.¹¹ The failure of the UN involvement in Somalia in the mid-1990s resulted in its withdrawal, which brought the mechanisms and effectiveness of the UN humanitarian efforts under strong criticism. From the financial scandal of Iraq’s oil for food programme to the cases of sexual harassment by the UN forces in the Congo, Cambodia, Bosnia, Haiti, the idea of the UN as the sole legitimate authority for maintaining global peace and stability is being seriously questioned. This is where humanitarian diplomacy outside of the UN framework comes in. Its purpose is not to challenge the UN apparatus for mediation and resolution of international crisis situations. Rather, previous experience suggests that in some crisis situations, the bureaucracy of and bickering at the UN can get in the way of peaceful resolution.

This discussion also relates to diverging worldviews and theoretical standpoints of political leaders and decision makers. Realist scholars in International Relations, convinced by state-centrism in an anarchic world, would outright reject that there could be any other reason for states to engage in humanitarian diplomacy than legitimizing hidden agenda of promoting national interest. This is captured by Hazel Smith’s ‘oxymoron’ analogy discussed earlier.¹² But those who argue that diplomacy cannot be inspired by ‘morality’, because every state is motivated by self-interest and there are hidden motives for such actions, often overlook the tremendous amount of humanitarian work the military of some countries is contributing.¹³

Hence, neo-liberal institutionalists are convinced that states are internationally adoptive which give them the ability to mitigate ‘anarchy’ by creating institutions that promote harmony.¹⁴ The advent of globalization has further necessitated and deepened cooperation between states. And, because of this mutual interdependence among states, neo-liberalists contend that states have ‘responsibilities beyond their

⁹ Michael N. Barnett, “The UN Security Council, Indifference, and Genocide in Rwanda”, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1997, p. 551.

¹⁰ Nick Grono, “Briefing Darfur: The International Community’s Failure to Protect”, *African Affairs*, Vol. 105, No. 421, 2006, p. 621–631.

¹¹ Othman O. Mahmood, *The Root-causes of the United Nations’ Failure in Somalia: The Role of Neighboring Countries in the Somali Crisis*, Bloomington: Indiana, 2011, pp. 50–61.

¹² Hazel Smith, op. cit.

¹³ John King, “The Military and Humanitarian Action”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2002, pp. 212–216.

¹⁴ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, New York: Longman, 1989, pp. 20–28.

borders'.¹⁵ In the era of global interdependence on trade and global supply of goods and services, crises can seriously undermine international effort. For example, a crisis in the Middle East would not only slow down economic growth of the countries involved, it will also harm far-off nations dependent on Middle Eastern oil. For interdependence' sake, states strive to resolve crisis motivated by the 'moral' logic which realists undersell. An obvious example of this 'responsibility beyond borders' is the framing of global initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 'humanitarian' motivations behind both the MDGs and SDGs should not be undersold.

Unlike the realists, the constructivists argue that anarchy is not a given condition of international system; rather it is socially constructed and "anarchy is what states make of it".¹⁶ This social construction is not a phenomenon, rather a process which is formulated by inter-subjective ideas.¹⁷ Thus, international norms and principles become predominant due to its relational nature with the global actors, which compel them to abide by the established structure. The Tsunami of 2004 was a huge catastrophe encircling and affecting Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar and some countries of Africa. At that point of time, the United States of America (USA) had the full potential to address this crisis within the arena of humanitarianism. It responded positively as it was expected, with the announcement of overwhelming support and assistance towards the distressed humanity; including the use of transport aircrafts, marine expeditionary units and aircraft carrier in the affected areas.¹⁸ At the same time, it also announced the formation of a core regional group with Australia, Japan and India to facilitate the process of humanitarian assistance. The ongoing relief initiatives by the donor governments and the international agencies encountered a stalemate situation, being confused whether to continue their work or wait for the regional bloc to respond. Thus, instead of facilitating the humanitarian efforts under the purview of international norms, it created ambiguity for a short period of time.

Here, a distinction has to be made between political and humanitarian diplomacy. Diplomacy is not an end in itself, it is as merely a point in a continuum; where end of conflict, restoration of ties and prevalence of peace lie on the other end of the spectrum. Also, there are humanitarian repercussions for politically-created crisis. As such, we cannot perpetually separate the two. If this is the case, peacebuilding should be the next logical step ensuing humanitarian diplomacy in a conflict situation. If

¹⁵ Michael Barnett, "Duties beyond Borders", in Amelia Hadfield, Steve Smith and Tim Dunne (eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, 2nd Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 226-228.

¹⁶ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1992, pp. 391-425.

¹⁷ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 139.

¹⁸ Jan Egeland, op. cit., pp. 355-356.

political diplomacy is an extended process, humanitarian diplomacy addresses the immediate need of a populace. Former UN relief coordinator Jan Egeland has rightly called humanitarian diplomacy “a temporary band-aid”.¹⁹

But when do state-sponsored peace making and mediation become humanitarian diplomacy? To be more concrete, how do we distinguish humanitarian diplomacy from this third-party, state-led mediation attempt? This is where questions of international human rights and human security come into play. Humanitarian diplomacy embodies immediacy owing to exacerbating human sufferings and evokes human rights. Peacemaking and mediation may not call to action human security as such. One might wonder if there is also a ‘spatial factor’ related to humanitarianism, as far as its practical usage is concerned. People do not readily use humanitarian relief when they help their own countrymen affected by crises.²⁰ Humanitarianism is brought to the fore usually when nations help strangers going beyond their territorial boundaries.

Based on this discussion, it can be argued that humanitarian diplomacy is often precipitated by a crisis situation which requires diplomatic activity beyond regular state affairs with some external help in terms of meditation, without recourse to force, in order to protect human rights in line with international laws, with the primary purpose of ameliorating human sufferings. As the practice goes, it has been more commonly used by non-state actors but an increasing number of state actors are engaging in this sort of diplomacy either as their moral obligation as responsible members of the international community or as an instrument to further enhance their international image.

3. An Emerging Praxis

Conceptual and theoretical differences apart, the praxis of humanitarian diplomacy is not identical to conventional diplomacy, although they share many commonalities. It is argued here why too much of state involvement can jeopardize the cause of humanitarianism. This is why humanitarian diplomacy has been dominated by non-state actors and inter-governmental organizations. In this section, the paper tries to explore some practices to humanitarian diplomacy to show the commonalities and distinctiveness of it with the conventional diplomacy.

Some have claimed, it is a matter of ‘common sense’ that humanitarian actors will be involved in some sort of diplomatic activities as part of their job to ensure access to conflict-prone territories and mobilization of relief materials from national

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 353.

²⁰ Michael Barnett, “Humanitarianism as a Scholarly Vocation”, in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), op. cit.

governments. This is what international civil servants e.g., those employed by the UN organizations perform on a daily basis. Much like professional diplomats of states, they also carry 'red' *laissez-passer* or UN passports, which entitle them to diplomatic privileges and immunities. In addition to UN staff members, diplomatic passports are also issued to high officials of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank. As per this argument, there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel' by associating diplomacy with humanitarianism; since they are already recognized as diplomats.

Regardless, as for practice, humanitarian diplomacy is not the same as state diplomacy. To a great extent, these differences emanate from types of actors—state and non-state—who perform such diplomacy. The first distinction stems from their legal status and its associated ramifications. Diplomatic actions are guided by internationally-agreed upon principles of the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations of 1961. As states are legal entities, they can be subjected to international laws, norms and customs. Violations and breach of such diplomatic privileges are punishable under international legal frameworks. This also implies that traditional diplomatic actions have more accountability. Professional diplomats can be declared *persona non grata*, if their actions are deemed out of line. Conversely, most humanitarian workers do not represent any particular state. Contrary to *laissez-passer* argument mentioned earlier, staff of international humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and MSF do not hold diplomatic privileges, but nonetheless, often find themselves negotiating in humanitarian situations.

The second character relates to one of the cardinal features of diplomacy—bargaining chip. Effective diplomacy relies on an efficient use of 'carrot and stick' and a combination of compromises and trade-offs. If it is assumed that humanitarian diplomacy often involves a third-party, such as inter-governmental organizations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), their capacity to offer concessions is limited considering that they are not a direct party to the conflict. Indeed, the trade-off which a third-party mediator/negotiator can offer, other than 'bribing', is limited.

Major activities that traditional diplomats and their humanitarian counterparts perform also vary. Diplomatic and consular staffs are stationed in different countries as representatives of their respective states. They protect national interests, gather information and pass them on as 'diplomatic cable' to their governments (but which does not necessarily amount to espionage), promote trade and finally negotiate agreements.²¹ Humanitarian diplomats, on the other hand, also negotiate with

²¹ Philippe Régnier, op. cit., p. 1214.

governments and other parties for their access to vulnerable population, mobilization of scattered resources both in terms of financial support and public opinion. This often involves persuasion and advocacy. These two are, perhaps, the strongest of instruments available to humanitarian diplomats which will be discussed in the next section.

Because of this tension between national interests versus humanitarianism, state-sponsored humanitarianism often comes under scrutiny. This irreconcilability between politics and piety often, if not always, results in states exploiting humanitarianism. The US humanitarian-inspired diplomacy often translates into 'humanitarian intervention' under the pretext of R2P. Nothing has stained the image of humanitarian cause more than the US humanitarian intervention based on fabricated intelligence gathering. Despite this, there are new state actors who are foraying into the realm of humanitarianism, such as Turkey, Norway and Qatar. Turkey engaged in humanitarian diplomacy in Somalia and dispatched a Turkish flotilla to embattled Gaza; the latter received international attention after they were intercepted by the Israeli forces. *The Economist* called former foreign minister of Turkey Ahmet Davutoglu's success in 'freelance diplomacy' the 'Davutoglu effect'. If not purely motivated by political interests, Turkey's case was motivated, at the very least, by its own version of the 'US Monroe Doctrine' whereby it decided to no longer ignore its backyard.²² In other places such as Somalia, Turkish interest may have been to promote business and secure the votes of smaller states for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council.²³

Though the state-sponsored humanitarian diplomatic efforts undergo substantial scrutinies in recent times, it is not at all a new phenomenon in the international system. Rather, there were state donors and sponsors of humanitarianism; such as the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, etc.,²⁴ who promoted the concept from time to time in different crisis situations. When Norway facilitated the peace agreement between Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2002, it was termed as 'niche diplomacy'.²⁵ These state initiatives of humanitarian negotiations were also conducted keeping in mind the factors of geopolitical realities, national interests, international law and humanitarian norms. The only difference was the absence of implication of the term 'humanitarian diplomacy'. The recent trend of merging humanitarian diplomacy along with the foreign policy initiatives by the state actors have thus only diversified and deepened the process.

The recent inclusion of humanitarian diplomacy in the strategic foreign policy goals of Turkey, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has definitely given the

²² "The Davutoglu Effect", *The Economist*, 21 October 2010.

²³ Pinar Akpınar, op. cit., p. 748.

²⁴ Antonio De Lauri, "Humanitarian Diplomacy: A New Research Agenda", *CMI Brief*, No. 4, 2018, p. 3.

²⁵ Hemantha Dayaratne, "An Appraisal of Norway's Role in Sri Lanka", *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, 03 February 2011.

term a recognizable ground.²⁶ To what extent their humanitarian diplomatic efforts have prioritized and facilitated the humanities in distress is questionable, but it has undoubtedly opened up their engagement with new foreign policy actors. The UAE developed its soft power strategy keeping humanitarian diplomacy as the first pillar, which enriched its foreign policy and security objectives. Through Somalia and Syria, Turkey has diversified its humanitarian diplomacy agenda as a part of its development strategy and security assistance initiatives. Moreover, its pillar of humanitarian diplomacy includes peacebuilding and mediation for the long-term solution of a crisis situation.

4. Humanitarian Diplomacy in the Rohingya Crisis

Beyond realists' skepticism over states' 'motives' of humanitarianism amid pervasive state-centrism, there is an emerging trend in state-led humanitarian diplomacy. The unfolding Rohingya crisis following the forced displacement of a million of mostly-Muslim ethnic minority from Rakhine State of Myanmar triggered a mass exodus into neighbouring Bangladesh. Their arrival *en masse* since August 2017 has put Bangladesh in an uneasy situation. On top of existing hundreds of thousands Rohingyas living inside Bangladesh from previous intermittent influxes, an additional 718,493 Rohingya crossed over to the country between August to December in 2017.²⁷ Providing shelters to one million displaced people was an immense challenge for an already-overpopulated Bangladesh. The fact that the exodus poured seven hundred thousand Rohingyas within a few months further complicated response to the crisis. It required not only immediate humanitarian assistance but also diplomatic efforts internationally both to collect aid and create awareness for a peaceful resolution to the problem.

Humanitarian diplomacy on the Rohingya issue was essentially multi-level and multilateral diplomacy, while at the same time negotiating the *modus operandi* of repatriation bilaterally with Naypyidaw. There were bilateral negotiations commensurate with international diplomacy to work out the details with Myanmar. Critical situation aroused when due to the post-October 2016 attack about 65,000 Rohingyas²⁸ had a forced entry into Bangladesh.²⁹ Its vulnerability was addressed by the visit of a Myanmar delegation to Bangladesh on 11 January 2017.³⁰ The situation further

²⁶ Antonio De Lauri, op. cit., p. 2.

²⁷ According to the UNHCR, 901,185 Rohingyas are now (as of November 2018) living in Bangladesh and 80 per cent of them arrived since August 2017. Since the beginning of 2018, a total of 14,922 people arrived. See, UNHCR, "Bangladesh Refugee Emergency: Population factsheet", 15 December 2018, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67285>, accessed on 20 December 2018.

²⁸ Simon Lewis and Serajul Quadir, "Myanmar, Bangladesh agree to start talks on Rohingya refugees", *Reuters*, 12 January 2017.

²⁹ "Myanmar says nine police killed by insurgents on Bangladesh border", *The Guardian*, 10 October 2016.

³⁰ "Myanmar sends envoy to Bangladesh as Rohingya crisis deepens", *The Guardian*, 11 January 2017.

intensified after the August 2017 influx, on which Myanmar agreed for bilateral talks when its special envoy Thaung Tun, Myanmar's national security adviser, had a meeting with Bangladesh's Foreign Minister on 23 September 2017.³¹ A ten-point proposal was presented and full implementation of the report of the Kofi Anan Commission was suggested when Bangladesh's Home Minister paid a visit to Myanmar on 24 October 2017. Both agreed to take concrete measures to repatriate the Rohingyas and to restore normalcy in the Rakhine State. The urgency of immediate response to the Rohingya issue was highlighted by the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh at the 13th Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) of Foreign Ministers held in Myanmar on 20 November 2017, where Bangladesh delegation had an informal briefing on Rakhine State.³²

A non-binding repatriation agreement was signed bilaterally between Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor of Myanmar Kyaw Tint Swe and the then Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali in Naypyidaw on 23 November 2017.³³ However, the breakthrough at the bilateral negotiation was the formation of a Joint Working Group (JWG) on 19 December 2017 to make decisions on the repatriation procedure of the Rohingyas.³⁴ It had its first meeting on 15 January 2018 in Naypyidaw where an agreement on "physical arrangement" to initiate the repatriation process was finalized.³⁵ At the bilateral home ministerial meeting on 15 February 2018, which focused on border security and cooperation, a list of 8,032 Rohingyas was handed over to Myanmar for further assessment.³⁶ The second JWG meeting took place on 17 May 2018, where the technical aspects on the identification and verification of the Rohingyas were discussed.³⁷ Bangladesh's Foreign Minister along with the members of JWG paid a visit to Myanmar on 11 August 2018 to observe the progress of the accommodation for Rohingyas in the Rakhine State.³⁸ The decision to start repatriation from mid-November 2018 was taken at the third JWG meeting on 30 October 2018.³⁹

Bangladesh undertook drastic diplomatic efforts to stop the atrocities in Rakhine State, worked closely with international organizations to provide food

³¹ Zulfiqer Russell, "Rohingya crisis: Myanmar proposes meeting Bangladesh", *Dhaka Tribune*, 23 September 2017.

³² "ASEM participants agree on broad points of Rohingya issue", *Dhaka Tribune*, 20 November 2017.

³³ "Myanmar signs pact with Bangladesh over Rohingya repatriation", *The Guardian*, 23 November 2017.

³⁴ Sheikh Shahariar Zaman, "Rohingya repatriation: Joint working group formed, repatriation process to begin by January 23", *Dhaka Tribune*, 20 December 2017.

³⁵ "Joint Working Group meets in Naypyitaw", *The Daily Star*, 15 January 2018.

³⁶ "Myanmar-Bangladesh hold Ministers of Home Affairs meeting", *Global New Light of Myanmar*, 18 February 2018.

³⁷ "Myanmar Delegation attends the Second Joint Working Group Meeting on the Repatriation of Verified Displaced Persons from Bangladesh", *Reliefweb*, 17 May 2018.

³⁸ "Rohingya Repatriation: Progress quite insignificant: Diplomats say after Bangladesh delegation visits Maungdaw", *The Daily Star*, 12 August 2018.

³⁹ "Repatriation to begin in mid-Nov: Says foreign secy after meeting of JWG on Rohingya return", *The Daily Star*, 31 October 2018.

and relief and ensure safe return of the Rohingyas. Several government ministries and departments collaborated with the foreign donor agencies. The Ministry of the Disaster Management and Relief of the Government of Bangladesh responded to immediate needs of the displaced. A ministerial-level pledging conference was held in Geneva on 23 October 2017. It was co-hosted by the European Union and the Government of Kuwait and co-organized by the UNHCR, the IOM and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It was aimed at raising the necessary resources to enable the humanitarian community to meet the most urgent needs of the Rohingyas.⁴⁰ The Rohingya issue featured almost regularly in Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's foreign visits posterior to the influx. At the 73rd United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting in 2018, she proposed three recommendations to address the crisis which summarize both the root and triggering causes of the problem. She argued that the present humanitarian crisis stems from discriminatory laws that stripped the Rohingyas of their citizenship. Second, the repatriation will be viable if inter-communal trust is restored and 'safe zones' are provided to the returnees. Third, to prevent further atrocities, justice and accountability need to be ensured in line with the recommendations of the Fact-Finding Mission of the UN Human Rights Council.⁴¹

The foreign office brought up the issue of consultations with third party countries, such as Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) Lithuania in 2018. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and foreign missions of Bangladesh made an effort to invite diplomats to visit Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh High Commission in India invited and accompanied the diplomats of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Georgia, Greece, Mauritius, Portugal, Slovenia, Ukraine, Zambia, Nigeria, Czech Republic, Austria, Ghana, New Zealand, Kenya and Fiji to the largest Kutupalong-Balukhali camp in December 2017.⁴² Bangladesh also invited Myanmar's civil society organizations such as the Myanmar Interfaith Dialogue Group to visit Rohingya camps.⁴³ The Rohingya camps were visited by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres and the World Bank President Jim Yong Kim on 02 July 2018, where they urged to pressurize Myanmar for fast solution of the crisis.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ A total of 36 pledges for Bangladesh and Myanmar were made and US\$ 434 million was sought, of which US\$ 344 million was committed.

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, "Press Release: PM makes 3 proposals for resolving Rohingya crisis", 24 September 2018, available at https://mofa.gov.bd/site/press_release/16450e39-cff8-4ad8-a8a2-e25b5399aba7, accessed on 30 September 2018.

⁴² Abdul Aziz, "19 foreign diplomats visit Cox's Bazar Rohingya camps," *Dhaka Tribune*, 17 December 2017, available at <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2017/12/17/diplomats-coxs-bazar-rohingya-camps>, accessed on 20 September 2018.

⁴³ Aung Kyaw Min, "Bangladesh Foreign Minister Ali invites interfaith group," *Myanmar Times*, 15 August 2018.

⁴⁴ Tanjir Rahman and Abdul Aziz, "Guterres calls for more pressure on Myanmar after visiting Rohingya camps," *Dhaka Tribune*, 02 July 2018.

JWG Meetings between the Foreign Secretaries of Bangladesh and Myanmar discussed repatriation but it was delayed due to concerns over the safety of their return. According to Dhaka Tribune (15 October 2018), Myanmar has pledged for the repatriation of 718,493 Rohingyas and completed verification of 8,000 among them. But new concerns emerged due to the conditions stipulated in the repatriation deal. Most of the Rohingyas do not possess identity documents because Myanmar state policies deprive them.

'Comparative Advantage' in Humanitarian Diplomacy

Alongside Bangladesh government, some intra-governmental and non-governmental organizations are working with the Rohingyas, notably UNHCR and IOM. But any uncharted territory of multilateral governance is prone to occasional hiccups. A Switzerland-based news agency, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), which specializes in reliable reporting on humanitarian affairs, points to an inter-agency tension over the leading role in coordination of the Rohingya affairs.⁴⁵ A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh on the repatriation of the displaced Rohingyas in May 1993. From that time onwards, UNHCR has been working at the ground level of the crisis.⁴⁶ It has claimed of not being officially informed about the process⁴⁷ and has also expressed concern about the stability of the Rakhine State, which is still not favourable for the Rohingya repatriation.

The national level policy of Bangladesh towards the Rohingya crisis avoided the supremacy of a single organization, rather focused on coordinated approach among them. Since it was not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, a National Task Force (NTF) was formed under the National Strategy on Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals of 2013. It was chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and composed of 22 Ministries and entities.⁴⁸ To provide strategic guidance and engagement with the government at the national level, a Strategic Executive Group (SEG) worked for the humanitarian agencies. Both IOM and UNHCR are currently working under the Strategic Executive Group, which is co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and the country representatives of both the agencies.

⁴⁵ IRIN was originally based in Nairobi and was born out of a project of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). See, Ben Parker, "Bangladesh resists greater UNHCR role in Rohingya Crisis", IRIN, 23 October 2017, available at <https://www.irinnews.org/news/2017/10/23/bangladesh-resists-greater-unhcr-role-rohingya-crisis>, accessed on 30 October 2018.

⁴⁶ NPM-ACAPS Analysis Hub, *Review: Rohingya Influx since 1978*, Thematic Report, December 2017.

⁴⁷ "UN deplores Myanmar, Bangladesh deal on Rohingyas", *Prothom Alo*, 01 November 2018.

⁴⁸ "Situation Report Rohingya Refugee Crisis", Inter Sector Coordination Group, 05 September 2018, available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/iscg_situation_report_05_september_2018.pdf, accessed on 10 November 2018.

Besides working jointly, IOM and UNHCR are also contributing individually for fast solution to the crisis. UNHCR urged the ministers of 26 countries in Bali, Indonesia at the Seventh Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process for expressing their solidarity with Bangladesh.⁴⁹ It also launched the joint verification exercise with the Government of Bangladesh since July 2018 for preparing a unified database of the Rohingyas.⁵⁰ On the other hand, to assist over a million displaced Rohingyas, IOM has appealed for US\$ 182.1 million, which is the part of the overall US\$ 951 million UN Joint Response Plan that began in March 2018.⁵¹ UNHCR has achieved significant success in areas of health, education, hygiene and shelter; whereas IOM's mandate on assisted voluntary return and reintegration under the department of migration management is quite strong. While assessing the comparative advantage of specific humanitarian agency in a given crisis, their areas of specialization and organizational capacities are also crucial factors. Bangladesh made an unorthodox move by leveraging the contribution of both IOM and UNHCR, which has provided a combined and synchronized journey towards the solution of the crisis.

'Necessary Evil' of Over-politicization

The third argument of Hazel Smith (the other two being 'oxymoron' and 'common sense' as discussed earlier) relating to humanitarian diplomacy is 'necessary evil'.⁵² She argues that humanitarian diplomacy suffers from a lack of enforcement capacity and is further handicapped by little or no room for bargaining. Sometimes, this is translated into a need for over-politicization of an issue at the international level to create awareness and thereby compelling international community into action. In the absence of ability to flex muscle, some actors must rely on the mobilization of public opinion by exaggerating an issue out of proportion. The instances of humanitarian diplomacy that resulted in successful resolution are often an outcome of intense efforts at the international level. While it is clear why Smith calls this necessary evil, nevertheless, given the degree of sufferings endured by the Rohingyas and multiplied by the number of people displaced within a short span of time, the resultant humanitarian disaster can never be adequately politicized through words. That said, the current level of international awareness on Rohingya crisis owes its success to two factors — 'the CNN effect' and 'celebrity vogue'.

In a captivating book, Piers Robinson of the University of Liverpool has argued how the 'CNN effect' compels the Western powers to take actions in a crisis situation.⁵³ The real-time communication technology and continuous media coverage of crisis

⁴⁹ "Rohingya Crisis: UNHCR head asks Asia-Pacific leaders to show solidarity with Bangladesh, offers support and protection to refugees", *First Post*, 08 August 2018.

⁵⁰ "Joint Bangladesh/UNHCR verification of Rohingya refugees gets underway", *UNHCR*, 06 July 2018.

⁵¹ "IOM appeals for US\$ 182m to help Rohingyas, local communities", *Dhaka Tribune*, 19 March 2018.

⁵² Hazel Smith, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

⁵³ Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 17.

situations portraying the vulnerabilities of unarmed civilians affect public opinion and foreign policy decision. It stimulates the public opinion and activism of civil society organizations which influences the decision making of Western countries. Regarding humanitarian interventions in Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia, Somalia and Iraq, the contribution of 'the CNN effect' is conspicuous, their occasional controversy notwithstanding. It has been used both as a state tool to legitimize state involvement in crises and as a media tool to mobilize valuable public opinion. In the case of Rohingya crisis, media coverage was quite comprehensive portraying the mass influx and dreadful journey from Myanmar to Bangladesh both by land and waterways. In this case, CNN played remarkable role of unearthing the atrocities committed by the Myanmar military against the Rohingyas.⁵⁴ There were over 1.2 million tweets on the Rohingya crisis and there were numerous 'hashtags' and 'retweets' of the issue.⁵⁵ This was followed by the UN Fact Finding Mission report in September 2017 which urged Myanmar to face the genocide tribunal.⁵⁶ The power of media accomplished much to mount pressure on that country.

The vocation of humanitarian diplomacy has often been championed by celebrities and individuals. George Harrison and Ravi Shankar organized the 'Concert for Bangladesh' in 1971 during the country's Liberation War and raised US\$ 240,000 which was donated for the refugees through United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).⁵⁷ Since then, celebrity-led humanitarian diplomacy has become more common. In recent times, Hollywood actors George Clooney and his spouse Amal Alamuddin played an important role in the Darfur crisis. In 2007, George Clooney co-founded *Not on Our Watch* with Don Cheadle, Matt Damon, Brad Pitt and others to stop genocide in the Sudan. Angelina Jolie in Syria, Ben Affleck in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sean Penn in Iraq have been able to garner valuable public support in favour of humanitarian diplomacy.

International organizations also invited celebrities to create awareness and sensitization by visiting conflict zones and acting as especial ambassadors. They help to mobilize charities and represent international humanitarian organizations. In the context of Rohingya crisis so far, Michelle Yeoh, Cate Blanchett, Priyanka Chopra and Matt Dillon visited Rohingya camps and expressed their solidarity with the distressed Rohingyas.⁵⁸ They expressed concern at different public events and criticized

⁵⁴ Antonio Faccilongo and Kyle Almond, "A New Life for the Rohingya", *CNN*, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2017/10/world/rohingya-refugees-cnnphotos/>, accessed on 09 October 2018; Matthew Smith, "Rohingya Repatriation is Premature and Dangerous", *CNN*, 29 January 2018.

⁵⁵ Georgina Rannard, "What's behind these 1.2 million tweets?", *BBC News*, 05 September 2017.

⁵⁶ James Griffiths, "UN calls for genocide tribunal over Rohingya Crisis", *CNN*, 18 September 2018.

⁵⁷ Alex de Waal, "The Humanitarian Carnival: A Celebrity Vogue", *World Affairs*, Vol. 171, No. 2, 2008, pp. 43-56.

⁵⁸ Michelle Yeoh visited as a goodwill ambassador of UNDP, Cate Blanchett of UNHCR, Priyanka Chopra as of UNICEF, and Matt Dillon came responding to an appeal made by a Rohingya activist; "Michelle Yeoh calls Rohingya crisis 'Despicable'", *Gulf News*, 28 January 2018; "Cate Blanchett questions Aung San Suu Kyi's stance on Rohingya refugee crisis", *The New Daily*, 22 March 2018; Abdul Aziz, "Priyanka Chopra's Celebrity

Myanmar for inaction over the harrowing condition of the Rohingyas. This is bringing to fruition. A group of internet-celebrities from France targeted to raise fund worth US\$ 1 million for the displaced Rohingyas.⁵⁹ The Canadian government rescinded an honorary citizenship accorded to Aung San Suu Kyi. While most of these acts are not likely to impact Myanmar in a significant way, but the symbolism these responses embody will help mount moral pressure on Myanmar.

Internationalizing versus Localizing Humanitarianism

A dilemma was whether to pursue bilateral or multilateral diplomacy in the situation. Major regional powers including China and Russia overtly advised Bangladesh to deal with the issue bilaterally.⁶⁰ Both approaches have their merits and demerits. Despite Bangladesh's disappointment with the Myanmar's policy of pushing its population into Bangladesh territory, on the one hand, and dragging its feet to repatriate the displaced population on the other, Bangladesh is not a direct party *per se* to the Rohingya conflict and it is not an issue of contention between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

So far as international humanitarian actions are concerned, it has been dominated by the Western countries. The western capitals are the sources where most of aid and donation flows from. It affects the humanitarian domain in two ways. With a gradually shifting of global centre of power, other actors amass clout and influence. Furthermore, the second issue has to do with the places where conflicts occur, e.g., mostly in the non-western countries. The implications of this trend are more than simply the oft-incompatible western solutions to regional crisis. Neglecting the regional actors essentially implies missing out on important networks of and access to regional powers that matter to a permanent conflict resolution. This has been evident since the inception of the Rohingya catastrophe. Despite mounting international pressure on Myanmar, a UN resolution in November 2017 to formally condemn the gross violations of human rights in Rakhine State came as a disappointment because of the position of regional actors.⁶¹ This reinforces the fact that humanitarianism can barely ignore geopolitical interests of regional actors. Despite their mutual animosity, both China and India share a similar stance vis-à-vis the Rohingya crisis, dictated by

extends to Rohingya Camps", *Dhaka Tribune*, 24 May 2018; "Matt Dillon Puts Rare Celebrity Spotlight on Rohingya During Visit to Myanmar", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 01 January 2018.

⁵⁹ "French Internet Celebrities Raise funds for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, 03 December 2017.

⁶⁰ Serajul Quadir, "China wants Bangladesh, Myanmar to solve Rohingya crisis bilaterally", *Reuters*, 18 November 2017.

⁶¹ A total of 135 countries voted in favor of the UNGA resolution on 'The Human Rights Situation in Myanmar' in November 2017. However, it was the position of the regional countries that was frustrating—China, Russia, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines and Vietnam voted against the resolution, while India, Japan, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Thailand abstained from voting. See, Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan, "UNGA Voting on Rohingyas: Dhaka satisfied with outcome", *The Independent*, 18 November 2017.

their significant investments in Rakhine State. India is involved in the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan multi-modal project which aims to provide its landlocked northeastern states an access to Sittwe sea port.⁶² For China, Rakhine State is an integral part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) grand design. The proposed Kyaukpyu deep sea port in the Rakhine State will not only be another node in what the US State Department terms ‘string of pearls’ but it will provide an oil-gas pipeline and railroad link to landlocked Yunnan province of China.⁶³ As it turns out, the competition of the two rivals in securing strategic objectives gets in the way of a humanitarian cause. Permanent solutions for the protracted human-induced humanitarian crisis ought to include political diplomacy with regional actors. China has attempted to facilitate bilateral solution of the Rohingya issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar. The fact remains that despite the power of persuasion of non-governmental and intra-governmental organizations, without combining both the financial leverage of the Western governments and organizations as well as the political leverage of regional powers, localized humanitarian crisis cannot be effectively resolved.

Compromise is unthinkable in humanitarian crisis because doing so often endanger human lives. Yet, maintaining a ‘fidelity to principles’ i.e., sticking to unbending ideals of universal principles is harder than it seems in humanitarian diplomacy and often considered an ‘enemy of action’. There are abundant cases of international community compelled to bend rules to accommodate different factions to ensure that life-saving aid supplies are not cut off. In Somalia, aid workers were compelled to hire militiamen and their machine-gun-mounted pick-up trucks to disburse aid. Since it was not possible to disclose this breach of Western principles in official documents, they were passed off as ‘technical assistance’.⁶⁴ Donor agencies justified this on the ground that what was at stake, i.e., human lives, is much more important. The best alternative for humanitarianism is making a delicate pragmatic balance without jeopardizing the primary goals. In case of the Rohingya crisis, the word ‘Rohingya’ itself is highly politicized inside Myanmar and is often linked to the ethnic group’s secessionist aspirations. Myanmar’s denial is rooted in a false belief that the Rohingyas are Bengalis. Hence, the word itself is banned in Myanmar. Prior to the visit of Pope Francis to Rohingya camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar in November 2017, a Vatican Cardinal from Myanmar, Charles Maung Bo pleaded to the Pope to

⁶² Subir Bhaumik, “Why Do China, India Back Myanmar over the Rohingya Crisis?”, *South China Morning Post*, 18 October 2017; Martine van Mil, “Oil, gas and geopolitics: behind China’s three phase solution to the Rohingya crisis”, JASON Institute for Peace and Security Studies (Jong Atlantisch Samenwerkingsorgaan Nederland), The Netherlands, 17 December 2017, available at <https://www.stichtingjason.nl/oil-gas-and-geopolitics-behind-chinas-three-phase-solution-to-the-rohingya-crisis>, accessed on 30 January 2018.

⁶³ See, Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, New York: Random House, 2010.

⁶⁴ Karin von Hippel, “Blurring of mandates in Somalia”, in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds.), op. cit., pp. 305-319.

refrain from using the word Rohingya.⁶⁵ The impending possibility of Pope using ‘the R-word’ was deemed so politically charged that the leader of communal Buddhist organization ‘Ma Ba Tha’, Ashin Wirathu preempted by commenting that “There is no Rohingya ethnic group in our country, but the Pope believes they are originally from here. That’s false”.⁶⁶ The dilemma for Pope Francis was that if he did not use the Rohingya word, it may be considered as his failure to stand up for what was morally right. Pope used the word Rohingya during his visit to Bangladesh, but refrained from uttering it in Myanmar. Bangladesh also took a pragmatic approach in prioritizing the alleviation of Rohingya sufferings first over secondary namesake debates. In smart identity cards given out to the displaced population sheltered in Bangladesh, they were called ‘forcefully displaced Myanmar citizens’ instead of the Rohingya.⁶⁷

5. Conclusion

Whether it is diplomacy for purely a humanitarian purpose or diplomacy in the veil of humanitarianism largely depends on the actors practicing it. It has been a preferred tool for international organizations and large NGOs to provide emergency relief in time of crises. However, there are situations when only relief and aid is not enough to resolve the crisis; states need to move further from aid and pragmatically use conventional diplomatic apparatus. In spite of ambiguity of the concept, humanitarian diplomacy provides certain leverages both to the state and non-state practitioners. Notwithstanding the criticism of some scholars and instances of exploitation by powerful states under the pretext of humanitarian intervention, humanitarianism is finding a niche in emerging middle powers. This paper illustrates the case of humanitarian diplomacy in recent Rohingya crisis. Not only an active diplomatic effort by Bangladesh has enabled to avoid an imminent humanitarian catastrophe in the wake of the Rohingya exodus, but it has also signalled a shift from solely aid-based humanitarianism to pragmatism.

It would be worthwhile to revisit the theoretical debates discussed in the second section in light of state activism in the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. First,

⁶⁵ Jason Horowitz, “Pope Francis’ Dilemma in Myanmar: Whether to Say ‘Rohingya’”, *The New York Times*, 26 November 2017.

⁶⁶ ‘Ma Ba Tha’ and closely related ‘969 Movement’ spawned in the aftermath of the same changing social circumstances at the first of half of this decade. Alex Bookbinder notes that there is a cosmological explanation for the 969 Movement’s name. It is common in South Asia’s Islamic culture to represent the benediction “In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful” with the number 786, hence some businesses owned by Muslims in this region display this number in signboards outside their shops etc. The numbers 969, and the Movement named after it, is intended to provide a countervailing effect to the Muslim practice. The movement’s aim is to protect Buddhism against perceived threats from Islam. See, Alex Bookbinder, “969: The Strange Numerological Basis for Burma’s Religious Violence”, *The Atlantic*, 09 April 2013.

⁶⁷ Mohammad Nurul Islam, “Bangladesh faces refugee anger over term ‘Rohingya’, data collection”, *Reuters*, 26 November 2018.

Bangladesh's involvement was more of 'accidental humanitarianism'—reluctance to respond would have resulted in grave sufferings or peril for an already-wearied community who undertook a perilous journey to reach Bangladesh. Here, resorting to humanitarianism motivated by solely national interest is not the only scenario as realists would project. Second, Bangladesh's diplomatic activity in the Rohingya crisis does not contradict what realists would argue, because other non-state actors and international organizations were also involved in the crisis alongside Bangladesh. However, diplomacy in the Rohingya crisis also reveals a blurring line between humanitarian and political diplomacy. In pointing out one of the differences between the two, Lakhdar Brahimi noted that humanitarian diplomacy is often short-term as opposed to political diplomacy which is often long-term.⁶⁸ While international organizations and NGOs have shouldered the tasks of collecting funds and providing 'humanitarian assistance', Bangladesh government has been using its diplomatic tools to resolve the crisis.

⁶⁸ Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, "Foreword", in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xv.