



RCAS Commentary

Bangladesh Faces Uncertainty Amid Trump's Global Aid Reductions

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RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

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The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th president ushered in seismic changes felt globally. Trump swiftly overturned dozens of executive orders under Biden while implementing over two hundred new directives. Chief among the reversals was the curtailing of humanitarian assistance worldwide. This policy shift imperils nations hosting vast numbers of refugees, most acutely Bangladesh, sheltering over a million Rohingya. Bangladesh has offered sanctuary to Rohingya fleeing horrific persecution since 2017's exodus, though resources prove scarce.



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Previously, generous international support coordinated by the U.S. sustained the refugee population through necessary provisions. However, Trump's "America First" agenda portends dwindling donations, jeopardizing efforts to meet basic needs and exacerbating suffering. As the crisis' top benefactor, a significant American retreat would cripple life-saving interventions for trapped Rohingya and overload Bangladesh's already overburdened infrastructure.

Since the violent expulsion of 2017, Bangladesh has served as a haven for over one million stateless Rohingya escaping ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. Refugee camps remain precariously dependent on foreign funding for supplying food, medical care, schooling, and shelter. As the crisis' most significant contributor, diminishing U.S. commitment endangers assistance on which Rohingya subsist.

Trump's sudden announcement to slash worldwide humanitarian aid could drastically diminish funds available for such efforts. This would not only impact the displaced people but additionally burden Bangladesh's already limited resources.

The reduction in support would likely cause decreased food supplies, insufficient medical care, and inadequate educational resources for the Rohingya. Many of these refugees live in precarious circumstances, and any decrease in assistance could exacerbate their suffering, resulting in increased malnutrition, disease outbreaks, and heightened vulnerability to exploitation.

Though Bangladesh has shown remarkable generosity in hosting the Rohingya, it has come at a significant economic cost. Diminishing aid would impose extra monetary hardships on the country, obligating it to allocate more provisions to refugee care, potentially at the expense of addressing its developmental needs.

The prolonged presence of a vast refugee population without proper support can lead to social tensions and political instability. Local communities in Cox's Bazar, where the refugee camps are found, have already voiced concerns about the economic and social consequences of the crisis. Reduced global backing might exacerbate these strains, amplifying friction between displaced people and host communities.

The reduction in support would undoubtedly exacerbate the suffering of the Rohingya people. Decreased funding risks shortages in life's necessities like nourishment, healthcare, and educational opportunities for the refugee population, potentially generating anguish and unrest. Already hosting over one million refugees has impacted Bangladesh's economy significantly. Diminished international aid would necessarily place an even heavier financial duty on the Bangladeshi administration, diverting monies from other crucial developmental ventures and negatively influencing the nation's overall economic fitness.

The Rohingya crisis is not simply a local matter but a regional one. Insufficient backing risks destabilizing refugee camps, including heightened migration pressures on neighbouring countries, increased regional tensions, and probable security issues. Lesser aid could strain Bangladesh-U.S. relations meaningfully. Bangladesh has substantially relied on its partnership with the U.S. for economic and humanitarian backing. A perceived abandonment may compel Bangladesh to pursue different alliances with countries similar to China, which could offer aid but with strategic and political strings attached.

Reducing aid at this pivotal juncture conveys a worrying message about the global dedication to humanitarian principles. The Rohingya crisis serves as a stark reminder of the world's ongoing refugee challenges, necessitating a concerted and sustained

campaign to manage such issues. The withdrawal of U.S. assistance under Trump's policies could motivate other nations to follow suit, resulting in a cascading impact that weakens the global reaction to crises.

International and domestic campaigns must highlight the severe humanitarian and geopolitical impacts if aid is reduced to the Rohingya crisis. Expressing these implications can compel the Trump administration to rethink its position. Bangladesh should cultivate support from multiple worldwide allies by engaging global institutions like the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to diversify international aid sources.

Southeast Asian neighbours should share responsibility through cooperative efforts that boost stability and collective problem-solving, decreasing reliance solely on Western help. Long-term plans to develop Rohingya vocational abilities, such as skill-building programs and livelihood opportunities, can curb external dependency and foster tenacity.

Trump's policy aligns with prioritizing national concerns over global commitments, his "America First" philosophy. While resonating with supporters, withdrawing leadership in aid risks undermining America's humanitarian role. Historically, America has critically addressed crises worldwide, so the absence of leadership endangers global stability and aid. Aiding refugees and Bangladesh's socioeconomy, aid reductions significantly imperil well-being.

As the world struggles with this emerging crisis, strengthening diverse, collaborative responses becomes increasingly pressing. Maintaining aid and cooperation regionally and self-reliance are key to mitigating policy shifts' adverse effects. The international community must recognize sustaining aid's critical importance to prevent undoing progress made addressing this crisis.

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