

**Myanmar's Rohingya insurgency reported to have links to Saudi, Pakistan
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A security personnel stands guard after catching Rohingya Muslims illegally crossing at a border check point in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh November 21, 2016.

YANGON, Dec 16 — A group of Rohingya Muslims that attacked Myanmar border guards in October is headed by people with links to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, the International Crisis Group (ICG) said yesterday, citing members of the group.

The coordinated attacks on Oct 9 killed nine policemen and sparked a crackdown by security forces in the Muslim-majority northern sector of Rakhine State in the country's northwest.

At least 86 people have been killed, according to state media, and the United Nations has estimated 27,000 members of the largely stateless Rohingya minority have fled across the border to Bangladesh.

Predominantly Buddhist Myanmar's government, led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, blamed Rohingyas supported by foreign militants for the Oct 9 attacks, but has issued scant additional information about the assailants it called "terrorists."

A group calling itself Harakah al-Yakin claimed responsibility for the attacks in video statements and the Brussels-based ICG said it had interviewed four members of the group in Rakhine State and two outside Myanmar, as well as individuals in contact with members via messaging apps.

The Harakah al-Yakin, or Faith Movement, was formed after communal violence in 2012 in which more than 100 people were killed and about 140,000 displaced in Rakhine State, most of them Rohingya, the group said.

Rohingya who have fought in other conflicts, as well as Pakistanis or Afghans, gave clandestine training to villagers in northern Rakhine over two years ahead of the attacks, it said.

"It included weapons use, guerrilla tactics and, HaY members and trainees report, a particular focus on explosives and IEDs," the group said, referring to improvised explosive devices.

It identified Harakah al-Yakin's leader, who has appeared prominently in a series of nine videos posted online, as Ata Ullah, born in Karachi, Pakistan, to a Rohingya migrant father before moving as a child to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

"Though not confirmed, there are indications he went to Pakistan and possibly elsewhere, and that he received practical training in modern guerrilla warfare," the group said. It noted that Ata Ullah was one of 20 Rohingya from Saudi Arabia leading the group's operations in Rakhine State.

Separately, a committee of 20 senior Rohingya emigres oversees the group, which has headquarters in Mecca, the ICG said.

US State Department spokesman John Kirby said in a news briefing yesterday that the United States was aware of the report and reviewing it, but declined to comment further.

Groups like Islamic State and al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent have referred to the plight of the Rohingya in their material, and the battlefield experience of at least some of the Rohingya fighters implied links to international militants, the ICG said.

However, ICG said the group has notably not engaged in attacks on the civilian Buddhist population in Rakhine. Harakah al-Yakin's statements to date indicate its main goals are to end the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar and secure the minority's citizenship status.

“It is possible, however, that its objectives could evolve, given its appeals to religious legitimacy and links to international jihadist groups, so it is essential that government efforts do not focus only or primarily on military approaches, but also address underlying community grievances and suffering,” the ICG said. — Reuters

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