

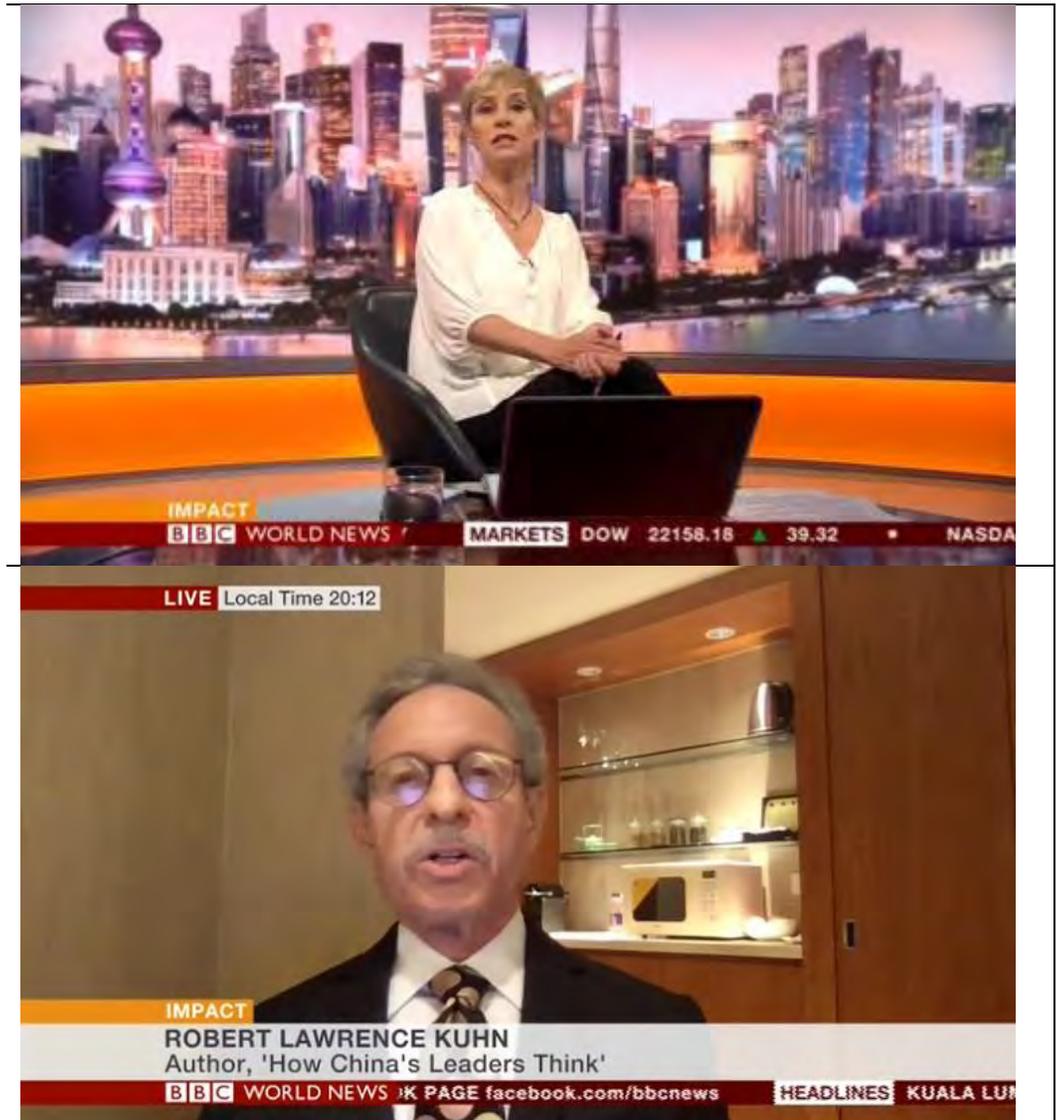


BBC World News – Robert Lawrence Kuhn – September 14, 2017

Host: Why is the mass exodus of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar continuing. Today on Impact we bring you different perspectives, and one comes from Myanmar's state media which claims the military has China's backing for what it calls an "Anti-Terror Operation." It claims the Chinese ambassador told high-level officials that the operation should be treated as an internal affair. Let's get insight from Beijing where we're joined by Dr. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, a long-term advisor to the Chinese government and the author of *How China's Leaders Think*. Robert, thank you for joining us here on impact, and what do you think is the Chinese interest here?

RLK: China's foreign policy is clear historically, but it has been changing under President Xi Jinping. President Xi has a grand vision to create an international community of common destiny, as he calls it, via a new kind of global governance. So, in this situation, what is China's position? Historically, of course, China's cardinal principle has been non-interference across international boundaries. But there's much more here to the story. First of all, China will always skew to supporting the existing government - especially in cases of minority issues because China of course has its own minorities and would not want some new general principle of "responsibility to protect" to be used in an exaggerated way, because it could be applied to China's situation in Xinjiang or elsewhere.

RLK: But there's more complexity with Myanmar because Myanmar an ASEAN country and China has great political interest in ASEAN, particularly in the South China Sea where Vietnam, potentially Indonesia, Philippines (for a time), were all claimants against China, and China needs support in that



area. In addition, Myanmar is in a critical geographic position for China's economic concerns. President Xi has the Belt and Road Initiative, this far reaching strategy to build infrastructure across Asia and into Africa and even Eastern Europe. And Myanmar plays a critical position potentially for an oil or energy pipeline that would allow China to get resources from the Middle East and avoid the bottleneck in the Straits of Malacca. For all of these reasons, China would support the Myanmar government.

Host: Robert, is China's support strengthened by opposition from Washington where President Trump's administration is calling for Rohingya refugees to return to safe zones?

RLK: I don't think that's a big motivation for China. Far more important are local geopolitics, the Belt and Road Initiative, the potential energy pipeline. I don't think China considers opposing Washington a major motivator for their strategy. U.S. comments seem normal for these situations, but are fairly ineffectual – look at Crimea or other places in the world where similar situations have occurred.

RLK: Refugee crises are great tragedies for the world and it seems like we have more of them. There's more of a desire for individual groups of people to assert their own independence. We see it in the Kurds, South Sudan, many places in the world. Perhaps it's our interconnected world of 24-hour-a-day internet, which allows similar people to congregate together and take up their own personal interests. So it's a very complex situation. China is dealing with it - for the reasons I said - for what it believes to be in its own interests.

Host: Robert Lawrence Kuhn, thank you very much for joining us from Beijing. We appreciate your insights.

