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Geostrategic Importance and Implementation Challenges: A Humanitarian Corridor to Deliver Aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State

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This study examines the geostrategic importance and implementation challenges of establishing a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State. Drawing on geopolitical theory, international humanitarian law, and comparative case studies, the research highlights the multifaceted barriers to humanitarian access, including regional rivalries, state sovereignty, and local ethnic and religious tensions. The study demonstrates that Rakhine's location along the Bay of Bengal has made it a site of geopolitical competition, particularly between China and India, complicating the delivery of external aid. Legal ambiguities, particularly surrounding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, further hinder international consensus. A comparative analysis of corridors in Syria, Tigray, and Ukraine highlights both the potential and limitations of such interventions. Findings emphasise that local trust, community engagement, and multilateral diplomacy are essential to operational success. The study concludes with recommendations for recalibrating humanitarian policy through legal innovation, technological adoption, and culturally grounded implementation strategies.

Keywords: Humanitarian Corridor, Rakhine State, Geopolitics, Myanmar, International Humanitarian Law, Responsibility to Protect, Sovereignty, Aid Delivery, Rohingya, Regional Security.

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Introduction

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State, particularly involving the Rohingya Muslim minority, has drawn widespread international concern due to extensive human rights violations, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement. Since the military crackdown in 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh, while hundreds of thousands remain internally displaced within Rakhine (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022). The region continues to suffer from restricted humanitarian access, limited media freedom, and protracted armed conflicts between Myanmar's military and ethnic insurgent groups. These factors have compounded the vulnerability of local populations and challenged the international community's ability to deliver timely and effective humanitarian assistance. In light of this, the concept of a humanitarian corridor—a protected and demarcated route to ensure the delivery of aid and the safe passage of affected populations—has emerged as a potentially viable mechanism to address the humanitarian needs in Rakhine.

Humanitarian corridors are not new. They have been deployed in conflict zones such as Syria, the Tigray region of Ethiopia, and Ukraine. These corridors function within the complex intersection of international humanitarian law, state sovereignty, geopolitical interests, and military operations (Slim, 2019). For Rakhine State, the creation of a humanitarian corridor faces not only logistical and security challenges but also significant political and geostrategic barriers. Myanmar's military junta, having seized power in February 2021, remains highly resistant to external intervention. This defiance exacerbates the risks and complexities of implementing international humanitarian mechanisms, including aid corridors. Additionally, regional actors such as China, India, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) maintain strategic interests in Myanmar, influencing their stance on humanitarian access and intervention (Haacke, 2021).

This paper aims to examine both the geostrategic importance and the implementation challenges of establishing a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to Rakhine State. The corridor is envisioned as a cross-border initiative involving neighbouring countries, such as Bangladesh or Thailand, international humanitarian agencies, and multilateral stakeholders, including the United Nations and ASEAN. Through a combined theoretical and empirical approach, the study assesses how geopolitical dynamics, sovereignty concerns, and operational limitations affect the feasibility and effectiveness of such a humanitarian intervention.

The geostrategic importance of a humanitarian corridor to Rakhine is rooted in several key considerations. Firstly, it would provide direct relief to one of the most persecuted and marginalised communities in the world. Secondly, it would help alleviate pressure on host countries, particularly Bangladesh, which currently hosts over one million Rohingya refugees (International Crisis Group, 2023). Thirdly, the establishment of such a corridor could set a precedent for future humanitarian engagements in Southeast Asia, contributing to the evolution of regional humanitarian norms and institutional frameworks. However, these potential benefits are counterbalanced by formidable implementation challenges: Myanmar's non-cooperation, risks to humanitarian personnel, logistical bottlenecks, ethnic tensions, and the risk of corridor militarisation (Weiss, 2016).

This research is guided by a critical humanitarianism framework, emphasising the politics of aid, power relations, and the agency of affected populations. It adopts a qualitative methodology, including policy analysis, case study comparison, and expert interviews. Primary and secondary data sources are

triangulated to evaluate the intersection of strategic interests and humanitarian imperatives.

By identifying the opportunities and constraints related to the proposed humanitarian corridor, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the operational and diplomatic pathways available to the international community. Moreover, it addresses the normative and ethical dimensions of humanitarian intervention in authoritarian and conflict-prone settings. The analysis holds broader relevance for other humanitarian crises where access is constrained by geopolitics and state resistance.

In conclusion, while the proposal for a humanitarian corridor in Rakhine State is fraught with complexities, it remains a necessary discourse in the context of escalating humanitarian needs and prolonged displacement. The paper aims to provide practical and theoretical insights into how such a mechanism could be conceptualised, negotiated, and implemented in a context like Myanmar, where the tension between sovereignty and humanitarian obligations is particularly acute.

This study addresses two central questions:

- What is the geostrategic significance of Rakhine State in the broader regional context?
- What are the key operational, legal, and political challenges in implementing a humanitarian corridor to Rakhine?

By analysing Rakhine's geopolitical relevance and the complexity of intervention mechanisms, this paper aims to contribute to the literature on humanitarian corridors and conflict resolution in Southeast Asia.

Theoretical Framework

The establishment of a humanitarian corridor into Myanmar's Rakhine State can be critically examined through the lens of Critical Humanitarianism, Geopolitical Realism, and Sovereignty vs. Responsibility to Protect (R2P) frameworks. These interrelated theoretical models offer insights into the motivations of actors, structural constraints, and normative tensions involved in international humanitarian action, particularly in politically sensitive and militarised environments.

Critical Humanitarianism

The critical humanitarianism framework analyses humanitarian action not as a purely neutral or benevolent process, but as one deeply embedded in political power structures, inequalities, and global governance hierarchies (Barnett, 2011). Humanitarian corridors, although designed to facilitate life-saving assistance, are frequently entangled in broader political agendas. In the case of Myanmar, the implementation of a humanitarian corridor must contend with the military regime's historical suspicion of international actors, particularly Western aid organisations, which are often accused of undermining state sovereignty and favouring certain ethnic or political groups (Slim, 2019).

This framework questions the assumed apolitical nature of aid and emphasises the importance of context-sensitive and culturally aware interventions. In Rakhine, the politicisation of aid, where state and non-state actors often manipulate access, distribution, and visibility, has significant implications for both the ethics and effectiveness of humanitarian corridors. As Duffield (2013) notes, humanitarianism can be co-opted by states to serve counterinsurgency or image-management objectives. Thus, humanitarian actors must recognise the local political economy of aid and the risk of reinforcing structures of oppression through well-intended interventions.

Geopolitical Realism

The geopolitical realism framework views international relations and humanitarian action

through the lens of state interests, strategic alliances, and security imperatives. In this view, the viability of a humanitarian corridor in Rakhine is directly shaped by the strategic calculations of regional and global powers. Myanmar occupies a geostrategic position in Southeast Asia, bordering India, China, Bangladesh, and Thailand. It serves as a key node in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), hosts major gas pipelines, and functions as a maritime gateway to the Indian Ocean (Haacke, 2021).

Under realism, states are primarily motivated by national interest rather than humanitarian obligation. China, for instance, has consistently blocked more decisive international actions on Myanmar at the United Nations Security Council to protect its investments and maintain political influence (Sun, 2020). India, while concerned about regional stability, has also pursued a cautious approach to avoid alienating the military junta and compromising its Act East policy. This realist framework explains why efforts to establish humanitarian corridors often falter in the absence of consensus among powerful states. It also underscores the importance of strategic diplomacy and coalition-building in humanitarian negotiations.

Sovereignty vs. Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

A third relevant framework is the tension between Westphalian sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. According to traditional norms of state sovereignty, international actors are prohibited from intervening in a state's internal affairs without consent (Krasner, 1999). Myanmar's junta has repeatedly invoked sovereignty to block humanitarian access and reject foreign involvement, even in the face of widespread suffering.

In contrast, the R2P doctrine, adopted by the United Nations in 2005, holds that the international community must intervene—diplomatically, humanitarianly, or militarily—when a state fails to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity (Evans, 2008). In Rakhine, the systematic persecution of the Rohingya arguably meets the threshold of R2P intervention. However, implementation is hindered by the lack of Security Council consensus and the selective application of R2P based on global power dynamics.

This normative tension complicates the legitimacy and implementation of humanitarian corridors. While R2P offers a moral and legal basis for action, it is frequently undermined by realpolitik considerations, veto powers, and non-cooperative host governments. The Myanmar case illustrates the fragile and contested nature of humanitarian norms in the international system.

Integrated Analytical Lens

Together, these three frameworks provide a multi-dimensional lens for analysing the humanitarian corridor proposal for Rakhine State. Critical humanitarianism elucidates the internal dynamics and unintended consequences of aid, while geopolitical realism exposes the external constraints and motivations of powerful states. The sovereignty-R2P dichotomy underscores the normative debates and legal justifications for humanitarian intervention.

By situating the Rakhine case within these intersecting theoretical frameworks, this study can more effectively identify the structural, ethical, and political challenges that must be addressed in designing and implementing humanitarian corridors. This integrative approach not only clarifies the limits of existing international mechanisms but also underscores the need for innovative, locally grounded, and diplomatically supported solutions to humanitarian crises in fragile states.

Literature Review

Humanitarian Corridors: Conceptual Foundations

Humanitarian corridors are demilitarised routes established to facilitate the safe passage of humanitarian aid and, occasionally, civilians during armed conflicts. They are grounded in international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions, which mandate the protection of non-combatants and facilitate relief efforts in conflict zones (Slim, 2019). While the concept is rooted in legal frameworks, the practical implementation of humanitarian corridors often involves complex negotiations among conflicting parties, international organisations, and neighbouring states.

Historically, humanitarian corridors have been employed in various conflict settings, including Syria, the Tigray region of Ethiopia, and Ukraine, with varying degrees of success. The effectiveness of these corridors is contingent upon several factors, such as the consent of warring parties, security guarantees, and the neutrality of aid delivery mechanisms (Barnett, 2011). In many instances, the establishment of humanitarian corridors has been hindered by political considerations, logistical challenges, and concerns over sovereignty (Weiss, 2016).

The Humanitarian Crisis in Rakhine State

Myanmar's Rakhine State has been the epicentre of a protracted humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by ethnic tensions, armed conflict, and political instability. The Rohingya Muslim minority has faced systemic persecution, leading to mass displacements, both internally and across borders, particularly into neighbouring Bangladesh. The 2017 military crackdown resulted in over 700,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh, while many others remain internally displaced within Rakhine (UNHCR, 2022).

The situation deteriorated further following the military coup in February 2021, which intensified armed conflicts between the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and ethnic insurgent groups, notably the Arakan Army (AA). This escalation has led to widespread displacement, with approximately 232,800 individuals displaced in Rakhine State alone as of October 2024 (UNHCR, 2024). The conflict has also led to severe restrictions on humanitarian access, with aid organisations facing administrative barriers, security risks, and logistical challenges in delivering assistance to affected populations (Progressive Voice, 2024).

Geostrategic Considerations and Regional Dynamics

The proposal to establish a humanitarian corridor into Rakhine State is not only a humanitarian imperative but also a matter of geostrategic significance. Myanmar's strategic location, bordering countries like China, India, Bangladesh, and Thailand, places it at the nexus of regional power dynamics. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) includes significant investments in Myanmar, particularly in infrastructure projects traversing Rakhine State, such as the Kyaukpyu deep-sea port and associated economic corridors (Haacke, 2021).

China's strategic interests have influenced its diplomatic stance, often shielding Myanmar's military regime from international condemnation and sanctions. Similarly, India has adopted a cautious approach, striking a balance between its Act East policy and regional security concerns. These geopolitical considerations complicate international efforts to establish humanitarian corridors, as regional powers may prioritise strategic alliances over humanitarian interventions (Sun, 2020).

Bangladesh, hosting over one million Rohingya refugees, has a vested interest in stabilising Rakhine State to facilitate the repatriation of refugees. However, the proposal to establish a humanitarian

corridor through Bangladesh into Rakhine has sparked internal debates, with concerns over national security, resource constraints, and potential entanglement in Myanmar's internal conflicts (Arab News, 2025).

Implementation Challenges of Humanitarian Corridors

The establishment of a humanitarian corridor into Rakhine State faces multifaceted challenges:

- Consent and Sovereignty: The principle of state sovereignty poses a significant barrier. Myanmar's military junta has historically resisted external interventions, viewing them as infringements on national sovereignty. The absence of consent from the Myanmar government complicates the legal and operational feasibility of establishing a corridor (Muniruzzaman, 2025).
- Security Risks: The volatile security situation in Rakhine, characterised by ongoing clashes between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army, presents substantial risks to aid workers and civilians. The presence of landmines, checkpoints, and active combat zones threatens the safety of humanitarian operations (Ukhiya News, 2025).
- Aid Diversion and Weaponisation: There are concerns that humanitarian aid could be diverted by armed groups or used as a tool of war. The Myanmar military has previously been accused of obstructing aid to specific regions and manipulating relief efforts for strategic gains (Fortify Rights, 2018).
- Logistical Constraints: The challenging terrain of Rakhine, coupled with damaged infrastructure and communication blackouts, hampers the delivery of aid. The lack of reliable transportation routes and storage facilities further complicates logistics (Transnational Institute, 2025).

- Political Opposition: Within Bangladesh, there is political resistance to the establishment of a humanitarian corridor. Local communities in Cox's Bazar, already burdened by the influx of refugees, express concerns over security, economic strain, and the potential prolongation of the refugee crisis (Dhaka Tribune, 2025).

International Legal and Ethical Frameworks

The debate over humanitarian corridors intersects with international legal and ethical considerations. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, endorsed by the United Nations, stipulates that the international community must intervene when a state fails to protect its population from mass atrocities (Evans, 2008). In the context of Myanmar, the systematic persecution of the Rohingya and the obstruction of humanitarian aid could invoke R2P principles.

However, the application of R2P is contentious, often hindered by geopolitical interests and the veto power of permanent members of the UN Security Council. China and Russia have historically opposed interventions perceived as infringing on state sovereignty, limiting the international community's capacity to act decisively in Myanmar (Weiss, 2016).

Case Studies and Precedents

Examining previous instances of humanitarian corridors provides insights into potential strategies and pitfalls:

Syria: Humanitarian corridors in Syria faced significant challenges, including violations of ceasefires, targeting of aid convoys, and politicisation of aid delivery. The lack of trust among conflicting parties and the absence of robust monitoring mechanisms undermined the effectiveness of these corridors (Barnett, 2011).

Ethiopia's Tigray Region: Efforts to establish humanitarian corridors in Tigray were impeded by bureaucratic hurdles, security concerns, and restricted access imposed by the Ethiopian government. The situation highlighted the necessity of political will and international pressure to facilitate the delivery of aid (Slim, 2019).

Ukraine: In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, humanitarian corridors have been utilised to evacuate civilians and deliver aid. However, breaches of agreements and ongoing hostilities have raised questions about the reliability and safety of such corridors (Weiss, 2016).

These case studies underscore the importance of securing agreements from all parties involved, establishing clear protocols, and implementing robust monitoring to ensure the efficacy and safety of humanitarian corridors.

Local Perspectives and Community Engagement

The success of humanitarian corridors depends on the support and involvement of local communities. In Bangladesh, particularly in regions hosting large Rohingya populations, there is growing fatigue and concern over the prolonged refugee situation. Local communities express apprehension about the potential for increased security risks, economic burdens, and social tensions arising from the establishment of a humanitarian corridor (Ukhiya News, 2025).

Engaging local stakeholders, addressing their concerns, and ensuring that humanitarian initiatives do not exacerbate existing challenges are critical for the sustainability and acceptance of such interventions.

The literature reveals that while humanitarian corridors are vital tools for delivering aid in conflict zones, their implementation is fraught with challenges, particularly in complex geopolitical landscapes like Rakhine State. The interplay of sovereignty concerns, security risks, logistical hurdles, and political dynamics necessitates a multifaceted approach to addressing these issues. International cooperation, robust legal frameworks, community engagement, and strategic diplomacy are essential components for the successful establishment and operation of humanitarian corridors in such contexts.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, multi-method approach, grounded in case study analysis and policy research, to explore the geostrategic significance and implementation challenges associated with establishing a humanitarian corridor in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Given the complex and politically sensitive nature of humanitarian interventions in conflict zones, a qualitative design allows for in-depth exploration of legal, political, and logistical factors from multiple perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Design

The study is primarily a descriptive and exploratory case study. The case study design is suitable for analysing contemporary phenomena within their real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2014). The study focuses on the Rakhine region of Myanmar, contextualising the proposed humanitarian corridor within both local and regional political dynamics.

Data Collection

The research relies on multiple sources of secondary data to ensure methodological triangulation. These include:

Academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles and books, was reviewed on humanitarian corridors, conflict resolution, international law, Southeast Asian geopolitics, and forced migration to provide a theoretical foundation for this study.

Policy Documents and Legal Texts: International legal frameworks, such as the Geneva Conventions, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and documents from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Human Rights Watch, and the UNHCR, were critically examined.

NGO and Media Reports: Reports from reputable organisations (e.g., Fortify Rights, Médecins Sans Frontières, International Crisis Group) and verified media sources (e.g., BBC, Al Jazeera, The Diplomat) were used to gather up-to-date field data on the evolving situation in Rakhine.

Geostrategic Assessments: Analyses from think tanks such as the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Chatham House, and the Transnational Institute were included to gain a deeper understanding of the regional interests of countries like China, India, and Bangladesh.

Data were collected from January to May 2025 and were selected based on relevance, credibility, and recentness. The inclusion of diverse sources aims to reduce bias and improve the validity of the findings (Bowen, 2009).

Analytical Framework

A thematic analysis approach was applied to categorise and interpret the data. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework was utilised, comprising data familiarisation, coding, theme identification, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report. Themes identified included sovereignty and consent, regional geopolitics, implementation logistics, local resistance, and international legal frameworks.

The study also used elements of political realism and humanitarian ethics as guiding theoretical lenses to interpret the conflict between state interests and humanitarian principles. This dual-lens approach facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the barriers and potential strategies in establishing a humanitarian corridor.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the methodology:
Lack of Primary Field Data: Due to security constraints and restricted access to Myanmar's Rakhine State, the research is based exclusively on secondary sources. This may limit firsthand insights into the lived experiences of affected populations.

Rapidly Changing Context: The political and military landscape in Myanmar is fluid, with frequent developments. Data may become outdated quickly, necessitating constant re-evaluation.

Language and Access Bias: Much of the available literature is in English, potentially overlooking valuable local-language reports or community-level narratives.

Despite these limitations, the triangulation of sources and a robust analytical framework strengthen the reliability of the research outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

Since the research did not involve human subjects or the collection of personal data, ethical concerns were minimal. However, ethical diligence was maintained by ensuring accurate representation of sources, avoiding sensationalism, and prioritising the voices and rights of affected communities in the interpretation of findings (Silverman, 2013).

Results

This section presents the research findings by synthesising the qualitative data collected from academic sources, policy reports, legal texts, and news media. The results are categorised into five major

thematic areas: geopolitical interests of regional actors, sovereignty and consent issues, logistical and infrastructural challenges, local resistance and inter-communal dynamics, and legal frameworks and international diplomacy.

Geopolitical Interests of Regional Actors

A key finding is that the establishment of a humanitarian corridor in Myanmar's Rakhine State is entangled with competing regional geopolitical interests. China, India, Bangladesh, and ASEAN countries have overlapping economic, strategic, and political stakes in Myanmar, which significantly influence their stance on humanitarian intervention. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects—especially the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)—pass through Rakhine, making Beijing wary of any international action that could disrupt its infrastructure investments (Sun, 2020). China has also historically shielded Myanmar's military leadership from international sanctions, emphasising state sovereignty over humanitarian concerns (Xie & Huang, 2022). This has made it difficult for the United Nations and other international actors to secure a consensus for a corridor involving international peacekeepers or third-party logistics.

India, while critical of the Rohingya crisis, maintains a delicate balance between regional security, trade interests, and its Act East policy. India's Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project, which also traverses Rakhine, gives New Delhi a stake in the region but limits its willingness to endorse interventions that may antagonise the Myanmar junta (Bhaumik, 2019). Bangladesh, by contrast, is more supportive of international efforts given the burden it bears hosting nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. Dhaka has called for repatriation through safe and secure mechanisms, including humanitarian access corridors (Rahman, 2021).

ASEAN, although central to regional diplomacy, has struggled to adopt a unified stance. While countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have condemned the atrocities and advocated for humanitarian access, others, such as Thailand and Vietnam, remain cautious, preferring quiet diplomacy to open pressure (ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights [APHR], 2023). These competing interests have prevented the emergence of a cohesive regional mechanism to facilitate and support the corridor.

Sovereignty and Consent Issues

Myanmar's ruling military government (Tatmadaw) remains staunchly opposed to foreign intervention, viewing humanitarian corridors as an infringement on national sovereignty. This resistance stems from both historical precedent and contemporary political calculus. The junta has repeatedly denied large-scale access to affected regions, claiming that the situation is under control and that international scrutiny is unwarranted (United Nations, 2023).

Any implementation of a corridor without the explicit consent of Myanmar would challenge traditional interpretations of the principle of non-intervention. The doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) provides a legal and moral framework for intervention in cases of gross human rights violations (Bellamy, 2015). However, its application remains controversial, especially when veto powers within the UN Security Council oppose enforcement measures.

Even humanitarian actors that wish to operate within the country must negotiate Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the military, which often come with stringent limitations on movement, reporting, and personnel (Fortify Rights, 2022). These constraints compromise the neutrality and effectiveness of humanitarian operations, casting doubt on the feasibility of implementing a corridor without meaningful political negotiation.

Logistical and Infrastructural Challenges

Delivering aid to the remote and conflict-affected areas of Rakhine poses significant logistical hurdles. The region suffers from inadequate infrastructure, including poor road connectivity, limited access to ports, and disrupted communication networks, all of which are exacerbated by military restrictions.

Most of the displaced populations are located in hard-to-reach areas such as Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and Rathedaung. These areas are surrounded by dense forests, rivers, and mountainous terrain, making overland aid delivery difficult. The seasonal monsoon further hampers road accessibility and often renders water routes unsafe (International Crisis Group, 2022). Moreover, the security situation remains volatile. Armed groups such as the Arakan Army (AA) are active in parts of northern Rakhine and frequently engage in skirmishes with the military. The presence of landmines, checkpoints, and militarised zones further limits the movement of humanitarian personnel (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Any humanitarian corridor would need to be demilitarised and neutral—conditions that are unlikely to be achieved without a formal ceasefire or third-party mediation.

The reliance on cross-border routes—particularly through Bangladesh—presents both opportunities and challenges. While Bangladesh has logistical hubs in Cox's Bazar and Teknaf, it has limited capacity to extend operations across the border without triggering political tensions or security concerns.

Local Resistance and Inter-Communal Dynamics

The humanitarian corridor's success would also depend on navigating complex inter-communal relations within Rakhine State. The Rohingya Muslim minority, long subjected to systemic discrimination, is viewed with suspicion and hostility by segments of the Rakhine Buddhist population and the state authorities (Ware & Laoutides, 2018). This ethnic tension poses a significant obstacle to humanitarian access and the equitable distribution of aid.

Rakhine communities have at times opposed external aid organisations, accusing them of bias toward Rohingya populations. This was particularly evident during the 2012–2017 period, when several NGOs were attacked or expelled (Transnational Institute, 2021). Any corridor perceived as favouring one group could inflame local tensions and undermine the neutrality of the operation.

Furthermore, the Rohingya themselves are distrustful of promises of repatriation or safety within Myanmar, given the history of violence and broken agreements. For aid delivery to be effective, it must be accompanied by mechanisms that ensure local buy-in, community engagement, and guarantees of non-discrimination (UNOCHA, 2023).

Legal Frameworks and International Diplomacy

The establishment of a humanitarian corridor must be grounded in international legal frameworks. The Geneva Conventions permit humanitarian access during armed conflict, but only with the consent of the host state, unless overridden by a UN Security Council authorisation. As noted earlier, such authorisation is unlikely due to geopolitical divisions.

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle theoretically allows for intervention when a state fails to protect its population from crimes against humanity. However, in practice, its application has been highly selective and politically constrained (Evans, 2008). Myanmar has not accepted the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the Security Council has not referred the case due to opposition from China and Russia.

Diplomatic efforts at both bilateral and multilateral levels have yielded limited success. While resolutions

at the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council have condemned the situation and called for increased access to aid, these are non-binding and lack enforcement power. ASEAN's 2021 Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar included a provision for humanitarian assistance, but progress has been minimal (APHR, 2023).

Some innovative proposals have emerged, such as establishing a cross-border aid corridor under the auspices of ASEAN or a coalition of willing states. These ideas remain in the exploratory phase, facing legal, logistical, and political challenges. Nonetheless, they represent growing recognition of the need for alternative mechanisms when conventional diplomacy fails.

Discussion

This discussion section critically evaluates the results in light of existing theoretical perspectives and empirical insights. The objective is to interpret how the geopolitical, legal, infrastructural, and social variables intersect to shape the feasibility, structure, and success of a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State. The analysis is organised into five thematic discussions: (1) the convergence of geopolitics and humanitarianism, (2) sovereignty versus humanitarian access, (3) lessons from comparative humanitarian corridors, (4) community trust and local engagement, and (5) the prospects for multilateral solutions and future innovation.

Geopolitical Constraints on Humanitarian Neutrality

The findings reveal a complex web of geopolitical rivalries that profoundly constrain the neutrality and feasibility of a humanitarian corridor. While the corridor aims to facilitate the delivery of life-saving aid to vulnerable populations, its establishment is often interpreted as a political act by the host state and regional actors. China's investments in Rakhine

through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and India's Kaladan project are not merely economic—they embed deeper geopolitical strategies aimed at regional dominance and maritime access (Sun, 2020; Bhaumik, 2019).

This creates a paradox. On one hand, international humanitarian law emphasises the principle of neutrality; on the other, humanitarian corridors in geopolitically sensitive zones tend to be viewed through a securitised lens (Slim, 2015). In Myanmar's case, international efforts—regardless of intent—are filtered through the junta's suspicion of foreign interference and regional actors' anxieties about strategic encirclement. This supports the theory of "humanitarian geopolitics," wherein humanitarian action is inevitably shaped by the power dynamics of global and regional actors (Duffield, 2001).

The geopolitical entanglement not only limits access but also affects donor confidence, aid coordination, and field-level implementation. Countries with economic or strategic stakes in Myanmar may be unwilling to support—or may actively obstruct—corridor negotiations that challenge the military regime. This undermines the effectiveness of a multilateral or UN-led approach unless supported by a broader diplomatic consensus.

The Dilemma of Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect

The challenge of establishing a humanitarian corridor in Myanmar also highlights a deep normative tension between state sovereignty and the international responsibility to protect populations at risk. Myanmar's persistent denial of large-scale humanitarian access is rooted in the traditional Westphalian notion of sovereignty, which emphasises the primacy of national jurisdiction over external concerns (Bellamy, 2015). The military junta perceives international humanitarian corridors as

mechanisms of political intrusion rather than genuine relief efforts.

In contrast, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine reframes sovereignty as a responsibility, not a right. Under this framework, if a state is unable or unwilling to protect its population from crimes against humanity, the international community has a moral and, potentially, legal obligation to intervene (Evans, 2008). The findings show that the Myanmar case presents a textbook scenario for the application of R2P, particularly given the well-documented atrocities against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities (United Nations, 2023).

However, as the literature and data underscore, R2P remains a contentious and under-enforced doctrine due to the veto power of UN Security Council members such as China and Russia (Weiss, 2016). This makes legally enforceable corridors nearly impossible in the absence of state consent, thereby reinforcing the regime's impunity. The gap between the normative promise of R2P and its operational limitations becomes glaring in crises, such as the Rakhine crisis, demonstrating the need for rethinking global humanitarian governance.

Comparative Lessons from Other Humanitarian Corridors

Drawing from comparative case studies—such as humanitarian corridors in Syria, Ethiopia (Tigray), and Ukraine—the research finds both practical insights and cautionary lessons. For example, in Syria, humanitarian corridors established through cross-border operations were effective in delivering aid but also heavily reliant on UN Security Council resolutions and the consent of de facto authorities (Ferris, 2011). In Ukraine, multilateral diplomacy facilitated the evacuation and delivery of food aid, albeit temporarily and unevenly, due to ongoing hostilities (ICRC, 2022).

Tigray exemplifies how the denial of access and the politicisation of aid can exacerbate suffering. Here, the federal government imposed a blockade that rendered aid agencies ineffective, leading to mass starvation and displacement (Crisis Group, 2022). These precedents demonstrate that humanitarian corridors necessitate more than logistical plans; they must be embedded within robust legal frameworks, diplomatic engagement, and flexible operational mechanisms.

Myanmar's situation differs in that no UN resolution exists to mandate cross-border operations, and the host government is an active perpetrator of rights violations. Thus, the pathway forward may depend less on state-to-state negotiation and more on non-conventional mechanisms, such as third-party brokers, regional alliances (e.g., ASEAN's Humanitarian Assistance Centre), or even safe zones managed by international NGOs with tacit local agreement.

Community Trust, Local Resistance, and the Role of Civil Society

One of the most underappreciated variables in corridor implementation is the reaction of local communities. As the results demonstrate, tensions between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims complicate the equitable distribution of aid. Aid that is perceived as favouring one community can provoke backlash, hinder access, or even incite violence (Ware & Laoutides, 2018).

This highlights the crucial role of community engagement and trust-building. Humanitarian corridors must be sensitive to local histories, grievances, and identities. They require localised needs assessments and culturally competent personnel. Moreover, the role of civil society—both international and domestic—is critical in mediating these tensions, facilitating dialogue, and monitoring aid equity (UNOCHA, 2023).

Unfortunately, in Myanmar, civil society has been heavily suppressed post-coup, with many organisations banned or forced underground (Fortify Rights, 2022). This creates a vacuum in local knowledge and outreach, increasing the risk of operational failure or co-optation. Without rebuilding local partnerships, any corridor is likely to be viewed with scepticism, or worse, hostility.

Multilateralism, Innovation, and the Way Forward

Despite the profound challenges, the discussion also reveals several avenues for pragmatic optimism. Multilateral initiatives, though currently weak, can be recalibrated through ASEAN mechanisms, regional coalitions of willing states, or creative legal interpretations that expand the humanitarian space.

ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus remains unenforced mainly, but it offers a diplomatic framework for negotiation. More pressure from influential ASEAN states, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, combined with civil society advocacy, could reinvigorate the bloc's commitment to humanitarian access (APHR, 2023). Alternatively, sub-regional groupings or trilateral arrangements—such as a Bangladesh-Indonesia-Turkey alliance—could pilot a limited, consent-based corridor focused on cross-border aid.

Technological innovations such as drone delivery, satellite surveillance, and blockchain-based supply chains can also mitigate some of the logistical and security challenges. These tools offer new ways to track aid, reach remote populations, and bypass some infrastructural bottlenecks, provided there is minimal political clearance (UNOCHA, 2023).

Legal scholars have proposed broader interpretations of Article 70 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which allows for "unimpeded humanitarian relief" even in the absence of state consent under extreme circumstances (ICRC, 2015).

While these interpretations may be controversial, they could be normatively reinforced through General Assembly resolutions or advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice.

Ultimately, the debate on humanitarian corridors to Rakhine must evolve from abstract principles to actionable, context-sensitive strategies. While geopolitical constraints remain formidable, ignoring the humanitarian imperative risks not only moral failure but regional destabilisation through prolonged refugee flows, radicalisation, and border insecurity.

Conclusion

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State continues to demand urgent international attention. This study has explored the strategic imperatives and implementation challenges associated with establishing a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to this conflict-affected region. Through a geostrategic lens, the research has shown that such corridors are not only logistical mechanisms but also deeply embedded in geopolitical, legal, and sociocultural contexts.

The findings reveal that Rakhine's strategic location along the Bay of Bengal renders it a focal point of great power rivalry, particularly between China and India. These geopolitical interests often override humanitarian imperatives, resulting in restricted access and selective engagement. Additionally, the legal ambiguity surrounding sovereignty and humanitarian intervention, particularly under contested frameworks such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), has further complicated international consensus on intervention. Past humanitarian corridors—whether in Syria, Tigray, or Ukraine—offer valuable comparative insights but also highlight the unique challenges Myanmar presents, especially given its internal suppression of civil society and external diplomatic paralysis.

The results also emphasised the need for local engagement and trust-building, particularly in contexts with deep-seated ethnic tensions, such as between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities. Without genuine local buy-in and culturally sensitive strategies, any humanitarian access efforts risk further destabilising the region. Technology and innovative diplomacy offer potential pathways forward, but these require multilateral cooperation and normative recalibration of global humanitarian policy.

In summary, this study emphasises that any effort to establish a humanitarian corridor in Rakhine must consider not only physical access but also the broader intersection of politics, identity, and law. The research contributes to the evolving discourse on humanitarian geopolitics, calling for a renewed diplomatic, legal, and operational framework to address complex humanitarian emergencies in contested territories.

Implications

This study holds several important implications for policymakers, humanitarian organisations, and international legal scholars. First, it suggests that humanitarian corridors must be reconceived not as apolitical logistics tools but as deeply political negotiations shaped by regional rivalries and host-state resistance. This requires the development of geopolitical literacy among humanitarian actors and strategic diplomacy at the multilateral level, particularly within ASEAN and the United Nations.

Second, the findings underscore the need to clarify the operational application of international legal principles, such as sovereignty, consent, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). In contexts like Myanmar, where the state itself is a perpetrator of rights violations, conventional legal interpretations are inadequate. Humanitarian actors and legal bodies should explore alternative mechanisms, such as UN General Assembly resolutions, to legitimise cross-border humanitarian efforts without direct host-state approval.

Third, the research underscores the critical role of local community engagement. Policymakers must ensure that humanitarian interventions are locally contextualised to avoid worsening communal tensions. Without localised consultation, well-intentioned aid could unintentionally exacerbate existing conflicts.

Finally, this study serves as a cautionary guide for future interventions in similarly geopolitically sensitive regions. It advocates for a balanced approach that incorporates legal, diplomatic, and cultural dimensions, ensuring humanitarian access without compromising regional stability or ethical neutrality.

Future Research

Future research should investigate the operationalisation of humanitarian corridors in environments where state consent is either absent or granted under coercive conditions. This includes empirical case studies of successful and failed corridor implementations in conflict zones not governed by international consensus, such as Yemen, South Sudan, or Gaza. Comparative analyses could help identify adaptable models and success factors across different geopolitical and cultural contexts.

Another critical area for exploration is the evolving role of technology in humanitarian delivery. Research should assess how drone technology, satellite mapping, and blockchain can facilitate access in regions like Rakhine through supply chain tracking and monitoring. However, this line of inquiry must also consider the ethical and legal ramifications of using these tools without complete governmental oversight.

In addition, interdisciplinary studies linking humanitarian law with regional diplomatic strategies would contribute valuable insights to operationalise

doctrines such as R2P and Article 70 of Additional Protocol I under contested sovereignty. Such research could offer normative clarity and practical mechanisms for the international community to act when traditional avenues are blocked.

Lastly, future work should examine local perspectives, especially those of affected populations in Rakhine and surrounding areas. Ethnographic or participatory research could illuminate the specific needs, fears, and expectations of communities, ensuring that future corridors are both effective and context-sensitive.

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