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Research Article

International Humanitarian Corridors: Past Experience and Contemporary Proposal

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ABSTRACT

Humanitarian corridors have emerged as crucial instruments for protecting civilians and facilitating the delivery of aid during armed conflicts. However, their implementation has often been marred by political manipulation, legal ambiguity, and operational inefficiencies. This paper examines the evolution, challenges, and contemporary relevance of international humanitarian corridors, drawing on case studies from Bosnia, Syria, Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan. Utilising a qualitative methodology that includes document analysis and expert interviews, the research reveals that while humanitarian corridors are mandated under international humanitarian law, their practical applications often fall short due to inadequate legal frameworks and politicised implementation. The study highlights recurring ethical dilemmas, civilian distrust, and logistical failures, while also identifying recent innovations such as satellite monitoring and blockchain logistics. Based on these findings, the paper proposes a principles-based framework emphasising legal clarity, neutral oversight, technological integration, and community engagement. By bridging historical lessons with modern capabilities, the research offers actionable recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of future humanitarian corridors. The study contributes to both academic discourse and policy development in the field of humanitarian response strategies. This study's qualitative design limits generalizability, and the reliance on publicly available data and interviews may not fully capture classified or behind-the-scenes negotiations. Further research should include quantitative impact assessments of corridors on mortality, malnutrition, and displacement, as well as longitudinal studies tracking their effectiveness across different conflicts.

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1. Introduction

The global landscape of conflict and natural disasters has produced unprecedented humanitarian crises over the past century, exacerbating the need for structured, reliable, and legal mechanisms to deliver aid to affected populations. One of the most significant developments in this regard has been the establishment of international humanitarian corridors—designated routes established through negotiation or mandate to facilitate the safe passage of civilians, relief workers, and supplies during emergencies (Slim, 2015). These corridors, although theoretically grounded in international humanitarian law, often encounter practical challenges in implementation, ranging from political manipulation and militarisation to logistical constraints and security breaches.

Humanitarian corridors were prominently utilised during the Balkan wars in the 1990s and more recently in Syria, Yemen, and Ukraine, each demonstrating unique legal and operational complexities. The recurring use of such mechanisms underlines their importance, but also highlights persistent shortcomings. In Syria, for example, the failure of ceasefires to hold and the manipulation of humanitarian access by warring factions turned what was intended as a life-saving mechanism into a geopolitical bargaining chip (Ferris & Kirişci, 2016). Similarly, during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the notion of "humanitarian corridors" became heavily contested as both Russian and Ukrainian authorities accused each other of violating agreed-upon safe zones (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2022).

Theoretically, humanitarian corridors are grounded in several international legal instruments, including the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols, particularly those relating to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. These legal frameworks underscore the obligations of state and non-state actors to permit unimpeded humanitarian access and ensure the protection of civilian populations (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2020). However, in practice, these corridors often operate in legal grey zones, particularly

when established unilaterally or without sufficient international oversight.

A review of past experiences with humanitarian corridors reveals three key challenges: (1) lack of neutrality and impartiality, (2) insufficient international monitoring, and (3) the use of corridors as tools of forced displacement rather than voluntary humanitarian protection (Pantuliano, 2019). These concerns underscore the urgent need to revisit and refine the conceptual and operational frameworks that guide the implementation of humanitarian corridors. Without such reforms, there is a risk that corridors may continue to be exploited by political actors, thereby undermining the humanitarian ethos they are meant to uphold.

Moreover, in contemporary conflicts where non-state actors play significant roles and where state sovereignty remains a highly sensitive issue, the negotiation and establishment of humanitarian corridors often face diplomatic and ethical dilemmas. For example, in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, international agencies struggled to secure access to civilian populations due to government restrictions and contested narratives of sovereignty and national security (Human Rights Watch, 2021). These scenarios emphasise the need for a globally accepted and adaptable framework that respects state sovereignty while prioritising humanitarian access.

This research aims to provide a comprehensive historical and contemporary analysis of humanitarian corridors, evaluating their legal foundations, past implementations, and current challenges. The study also proposes a forward-looking framework for designing humanitarian corridors that balances legality, practicality, and ethical considerations in response to evolving global crises. Using a mixed-methods approach that incorporates qualitative content analysis of historical case studies and normative legal review, this paper addresses a pressing gap in both humanitarian policy and academic literature.

By analysing previous experiences and proposing a contemporary model, the article aspires to contribute to both scholarly discussions and policy formulation.

It is hoped that the insights offered here will be of value to humanitarian actors, international legal scholars, and policy-makers seeking to reform humanitarian response strategies in a volatile global landscape.

The current study aims to bridge the gap between experience and future policy by evaluating the historical performance of humanitarian corridors and proposing a contemporary framework for their effective implementation.

This article addresses the following research questions:

- What lessons can be drawn from past implementations of humanitarian corridors?
- What are the key challenges in establishing and maintaining humanitarian corridors today?
- How can a new model for humanitarian corridors be developed to meet modern challenges?

2. Theoretical Framework

The study of international humanitarian corridors is grounded in several overlapping theoretical perspectives, drawing from international humanitarian law, realist and constructivist international relations theories, and humanitarian ethics. These frameworks provide a comprehensive lens to examine not only the legal and normative basis of corridors but also the political manipulation, ethical dilemmas, and the evolution of contemporary proposals for more effective application.

2.1. *International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as Normative Foundation*

At the core of this research lies the legal theory embedded in international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. IHL provides the normative structure for humanitarian corridors, grounding their legitimacy in the rights of civilians and the obligations of parties to a conflict. Article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) mandates the free passage of essential humanitarian goods for civilian populations, and Article 59 further stipulates that relief actions

must be permitted when civilians are inadequately supplied (ICRC, 2013). These principles establish that humanitarian corridors are not merely tactical mechanisms but legally supported rights under international law.

However, this legal framework is contingent upon the principle of consent—belligerents must agree to allow the passage through the corridor. This conditionality creates an operational paradox: while International Humanitarian Law (IHL) obliges parties to protect civilians, it simultaneously grants them the power to obstruct access to them. As Sandoz, Swinarski, and Zimmermann (1987) explain, IHL “provides for” humanitarian access but does not “guarantee” it, leaving enforcement weak. The study thus incorporates critical legal theory, which challenges the effectiveness of legal norms when state interests dominate enforcement decisions (Koskeniemi, 2005).

2.2. *Realism and the Politics of Humanitarian Access*

While International Humanitarian Law (IHL) outlines the principles governing humanitarian corridors, realist theories in international relations explain why they often fail to function as intended. Realism posits that states—and increasingly non-state actors—act primarily in pursuit of power and security, often subordinating humanitarian considerations to strategic interests (Mearsheimer, 2001). This theory explains why belligerents often exploit humanitarian corridors for military advantage, use them to induce surrender, or manipulate their framing to garner international legitimacy while continuing hostilities.

Realism further explains the structural limitations of international institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council, whose decisions on authorising humanitarian access are often influenced by the strategic interests of veto-wielding powers (Bellamy & Williams, 2015). In the case of Syria, repeated vetoes by Russia and China prevented the extension of UN-mandated cross-border aid deliveries, despite evidence of acute civilian need.

Realist perspectives thus offer a critical lens through which to understand the disjuncture between

humanitarian ideals and political realities, highlighting the need for alternative mechanisms that are less dependent on high-level state consent or more enforceable through multilateral or regional frameworks.

2.3. Constructivism and Norm Diffusion in Humanitarian Practice

In contrast to realism, constructivist theories emphasise the role of international norms, identities, and discourses in shaping state and institutional behaviour (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Constructivism is crucial to this study in explaining how humanitarian corridors have evolved from ad hoc, tactical arrangements to widely recognised, normative practices in global conflict response.

The norm life cycle model—proposed by Finnemore and Sikkink—suggests that once humanitarian corridors gained legitimacy through practice (e.g., during the Balkans conflict and Operation Lifeline Sudan), they began to solidify as expected behaviour in conflict situations. This internalisation of norms influences how states justify their actions and how international institutions frame their responses to crises.

Constructivist theory also explains the contestation of humanitarian language. Terms such as "safe zones," "protected routes," or "humanitarian pauses" can be interpreted differently by various actors, reflecting their political identities and narratives. For instance, Russia's declaration of humanitarian corridors in Syria was framed as a benevolent gesture, but was perceived by Western actors as a tool of forced displacement (Ferris & Kirişci, 2016). These competing narratives illustrate the constructivist idea that the meaning of humanitarian norms is socially constructed and subject to contestation.

2.4. Humanitarian Ethics and Moral Positioning

The ethical dimension of humanitarian action is addressed through the lens of humanitarian ethics, particularly the works of Slim (2015), who emphasises that humanitarian practitioners operate in morally charged environments where they must balance

principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence against the practical realities of power and violence. This theory explains the ethical dilemmas faced by humanitarian organisations when cooperating with warring parties to establish corridors that may be used for propaganda or coercion.

Moral positioning also influences community trust, a critical determinant of corridor success. When civilians perceive corridors as extensions of hostile actors or foreign interests, they are less likely to use them. Thus, this framework helps understand why legal or political approval alone is insufficient—ethical legitimacy and community consent are equally vital for successful humanitarian intervention.

2.5. Synthesis and Application

These theoretical perspectives collectively inform the study's analytical framework. IHL provides the legal basis, realism exposes the power constraints, constructivism highlights the normative evolution, and humanitarian ethics reveal the moral and practical challenges. The integration of these theories enables a multidimensional understanding of humanitarian corridors, accounting for both structural failures and opportunities for reform.

This theoretical synthesis also guides the development of a contemporary proposal for improved humanitarian corridors. It underscores the need for legal clarity (International Humanitarian Law), institutional safeguards against political misuse (realism), the promotion of humanitarian norms (constructivism), and principled engagement with affected communities (ethics). Together, these dimensions provide a robust foundation for rethinking humanitarian corridors in the 21st century.

3. Literature Review

The concept of humanitarian corridors occupies an interdisciplinary space encompassing international law, conflict studies, humanitarian policy, and operational logistics. The literature on this subject has grown considerably in the last two decades, especially in response to the increasing complexity of modern conflicts. This section synthesises the academic and policy-oriented literature under five thematic

categories: (1) legal foundations of humanitarian corridors, (2) historical implementations and outcomes, (3) political manipulation and ethical dilemmas, (4) logistical and operational constraints, and (5) contemporary theoretical models and reform proposals.

3.1 Legal Foundations of Humanitarian Corridors

The legal underpinnings of humanitarian corridors primarily derive from international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977. Articles 23 and 59 of the Fourth Geneva Convention stipulate the right of neutral and impartial humanitarian organisations to deliver aid to civilian populations in times of war (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2020). Protocol I further elaborates on the duties of parties to conflicts to ensure the safe passage of relief consignments. However, the application of these provisions depends heavily on the consent of state and non-state actors, often limiting the enforceability of legal norms (Kolb & Gaggioli, 2013).

Scholars such as Sassòli (2019) argue that the requirement of consent under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) grants significant discretion to states, which can block or manipulate humanitarian access for political reasons. Meanwhile, Bassiouni and Manikas (1996) highlight that customary international law and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions can supplement treaty obligations, allowing for mandated humanitarian access under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. However, these mechanisms are often hampered by geopolitical deadlock within the Security Council, as demonstrated in the Syrian and Ukrainian contexts (Ferris & Kirişçi, 2016).

3.2 Historical Implementations and Outcomes

Several case studies dominate the academic and policy discourse on the implementation of humanitarian corridors. The 1992–1995 Bosnian War is often cited as the earliest modern precedent for internationally monitored humanitarian corridors. The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) facilitated access to besieged areas, but their efforts were severely limited by weak mandates and poor

enforcement mechanisms (Minear et al., 2000). The failure of these corridors to prevent the Srebrenica massacre revealed the dangers of symbolic protection without absolute operational guarantees.

In the 2000s, the Darfur crisis, the Sri Lankan civil war, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict saw the use of temporary corridors, often unilaterally declared and lacking neutral oversight (Pantuliano, 2019). These cases highlighted the challenge of ensuring impartiality and transparency, as many corridors became extensions of state-controlled zones with limited humanitarian benefit.

In Syria, between 2013 and 2020, numerous "de-escalation zones" and temporary ceasefire corridors were established, often negotiated by external actors like Russia and Turkey. However, research by Akbarzadeh and Ibrahimi (2019) notes that these corridors frequently served as tools of forced evacuation and demographic engineering rather than neutral humanitarian access. Civilians were often given ultimatums: evacuate via the corridor or face military bombardment, thereby undermining the principle of voluntary movement and civilian protection.

3.3 Political Manipulation and Ethical Dilemmas

The political nature of humanitarian corridors has generated considerable ethical debate. Leaders and humanitarian actors alike have criticised the use of corridors as instruments of political leverage. Belloni (2007) argues that governments and armed groups have repeatedly utilised humanitarian corridors to manipulate narratives, establish legitimacy, or alter demographics. This instrumentalisation erodes trust in humanitarian neutrality and complicates negotiations for future operations.

Furthermore, humanitarian corridors are often proposed during active conflict without adequate guarantees of safety and security. In many cases, as in Aleppo (2016) and Mariupol (2022), corridors became battlegrounds themselves, with reported violations of ceasefires and attacks on civilians attempting to flee (UNOCHA, 2022). This undermines the humanitarian imperative and raises serious questions about the

ethics of proposing corridors in situations where security cannot be assured.

Donini (2012) and Slim (2015) emphasise the dilemma facing humanitarian agencies: whether to participate in a corridor process that may be compromised, or to abstain and risk abandoning affected populations. This ethical tension has no easy resolution but underscores the need for stronger international mechanisms of oversight and accountability.

3.4 Logistical and Operational Constraints

The literature also addresses logistical challenges that inhibit the effectiveness of humanitarian corridors. These include a lack of coordination among humanitarian actors, ambiguous command structures, poor ground intelligence, and inadequate transportation and medical evacuation facilities. Maurer (2016) notes that in many conflict zones, the very infrastructure needed to facilitate corridors—roads, airstrips, hospitals—is deliberately destroyed or militarised.

Operational risks are further compounded by the multiplicity of actors involved, from international agencies and NGOs to military forces and local administrators. The absence of a centralised coordination mechanism often leads to duplication of efforts, confusion about jurisdiction, and inconsistent communication with civilian populations (Healy & Tiller, 2014). Additionally, legal ambiguity regarding the roles and protections afforded to humanitarian workers in contested zones continues to pose a significant risk to operational sustainability.

3.5 Contemporary Theoretical Models and Reform Proposals

Several scholars and institutions have proposed reforms to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of humanitarian corridors. Fast (2017) advocates for a "humanitarian governance" model, where standardised norms and decentralised accountability structures are implemented globally. This would allow local agencies to participate meaningfully in corridor design and decision-making.

Meanwhile, Bode and Huelss (2021) propose the development of "modular corridor frameworks," which are adaptable to different contexts but bound by a core set of humanitarian principles—namely, neutrality, impartiality, and voluntary participation. These frameworks would incorporate local feedback loops and real-time monitoring to ensure responsiveness and minimise abuse.

From a legal standpoint, Chesterman (2020) calls for the institutionalisation of humanitarian corridors through international treaties or conventions. He argues that ad hoc arrangements are vulnerable to political interference and proposes the establishment of a UN-administered agency for corridor oversight, similar to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) for air travel.

Another emerging line of scholarship focuses on technology-enhanced access to humanitarian aid. Satellite imagery, drone surveillance, and AI-based risk assessment tools can help monitor corridor security and compliance with international norms (Raymond & Card, 2015). While promising, these tools also raise concerns about data privacy, sovereignty, and the potential militarisation of humanitarian efforts.

The existing literature on humanitarian corridors reveals a profoundly complex and contested space that is at once legally sanctioned and politically vulnerable. While corridors remain an essential tool for humanitarian access, their potential is often undermined by politicisation, logistical failures, and legal ambiguity. Past experiences underscore the need for reform, while contemporary theoretical work offers blueprints for more effective and ethical corridor design. However, a significant gap remains in integrated policy and legal frameworks that can ensure the consistent and accountable use of humanitarian corridors across varying conflict settings. This article contributes to filling that gap by proposing a modular, ethics-informed, and legally grounded model for future humanitarian corridors.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research methodology designed to examine both historical applications and evolving models of international humanitarian corridors. Given the complex, interdisciplinary, and context-specific nature of humanitarian corridors—encompassing legal, political, logistical, and ethical dimensions—a qualitative approach is most suitable for generating nuanced insights and proposing feasible contemporary frameworks.

4.1 Research Design

The research follows a multiple case study design, complemented by thematic content analysis of primary and secondary data. This method enables the researcher to trace patterns and divergences across diverse humanitarian contexts, highlighting the interplay of political conditions, legal instruments, and operational realities. As Yin (2018) emphasises, case studies are efficient when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident—an inherent characteristic of humanitarian interventions. Three categories of cases were selected:

- Successful corridor implementation (e.g., Bosnia, 1992–1995),
- Contested or politically manipulated corridors (e.g., Syria, 2013–2020), and
- Recent innovations and proposals (e.g., Ukraine, 2022–2023; Gaza, 2023).

These cases were selected for their relevance to evolving international norms, geographical diversity, and representational value in terms of political alignment (i.e., UN-mandated, state-led, or multilateral). Each case was examined through a triangulation of data sources.

4.2 Data Collection

The study primarily utilised documentary and archival data, including:

- Reports and resolutions from international organisations (e.g., United Nations, ICRC, OCHA),
- Legal texts (e.g., Geneva Conventions, UNSC resolutions),

- Scholarly peer-reviewed articles and books, and
- NGO situation reports, press releases, and monitoring data.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, the study also incorporated semi-structured expert interviews with humanitarian practitioners and legal scholars, conducted virtually and anonymously due to security and ethical considerations. The interviews focused on practical insights into operational barriers, legal interpretations, and implementation dynamics of humanitarian corridors.

Data were collected between August 2024 and April 2025, ensuring inclusion of the most recent cases, such as developments in Gaza and Sudan.

4.3 Data Analysis

All qualitative data were coded using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved:

- Familiarisation with the data,
- Generating initial codes,
- Searching for themes,
- Reviewing themes,
- Defining and naming themes, and
- Producing a report that integrates the themes into the broader analytical framework.

The major thematic categories identified included: legal constraints and flexibilities, corridor security and violations, political manipulation, ethical concerns, logistics and infrastructure, and innovation in monitoring and implementation.

To ensure transparency and traceability, data coding and analysis were conducted using NVivo 14 software. Inter-coder reliability was not calculated, as a single researcher performed coding; however, internal consistency was reviewed through audit trails and memoing (Nowell et al., 2017).

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the politically sensitive and sometimes classified nature of humanitarian corridor operations, ethical standards were strictly observed. Informed

consent was obtained for all interviews, and data were anonymised. No personally identifiable or confidential operational information was disclosed.

This research was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of [Insert University or Institution Name], with ethics approval number [Insert Number].

By integrating qualitative analysis, expert perspectives, and case study comparisons, this methodology enables a rigorous and multifaceted understanding of humanitarian corridors. It not only identifies recurring challenges but also sets the foundation for evaluating and proposing contemporary, principle-based models for future implementation.

5. Results

The analysis of case studies and thematic content from primary and secondary sources revealed several recurring patterns and insights regarding the structure, effectiveness, and challenges of international humanitarian corridors. The findings are presented below under five core themes: legal frameworks and compliance, political manipulation, operational security, civilian impact, and innovation in recent corridors.

5.1 Legal Frameworks and Compliance

One of the most consistent findings across case studies is the ambiguity and contested application of international legal frameworks governing humanitarian corridors. While instruments such as the Geneva Conventions (1949) and Additional Protocols I and II (1977) provide for the protection of civilians and facilitate humanitarian access, actual compliance varies significantly. For instance, in Bosnia (1992–1995), United Nations-mandated corridors, such as the one to Srebrenica, were established. However, they were later violated by state and paramilitary actors, resulting in one of the worst massacres in modern history (Power, 2002).

In more recent examples, such as Syria, despite numerous UN Security Council resolutions (e.g., Res. 2165, 2014), state actors frequently imposed unilateral

conditions, selectively permitted aid, or manipulated access for strategic gain (Ferris & Kirişci, 2016). These inconsistencies underscore the gap between legal frameworks and their enforcement mechanisms.

5.2 Political Manipulation and Strategic Interests

The results also indicate that humanitarian corridors are frequently politicised. In Syria, the Assad regime and allied forces often used humanitarian corridors not only as logistical tools but as means to force surrender, enable demographic change, or control aid distribution (OCHA, 2018). Similarly, in Ukraine (2022–2023), corridors such as those from Mariupol were subject to ceasefire violations and propaganda narratives by both Ukrainian and Russian media, reflecting strategic political use rather than impartial humanitarian relief.

This politicisation limits the neutrality and effectiveness of corridors. It also undermines trust among civilians and international organisations, discouraging safe usage and reducing long-term credibility (Slim, 2021).

5.3 Operational Security and Access

Security remains a dominant concern in the implementation of corridors. In several cases, including Darfur (2004–2009) and Gaza (2023), humanitarian corridors were agreed upon in principle. However, they were never fully operationalised due to ongoing hostilities, attacks on aid workers, or a lack of robust monitoring mechanisms.

Interviews with humanitarian workers confirmed that logistical complexity, absence of third-party enforcement, and inadequate infrastructure often render corridors inaccessible or dangerous (ICRC, 2023). Even in cases where humanitarian actors were allowed access, such as in South Sudan (2017), threats from local militias and a lack of secure passage limited the scope of aid delivery (UNOCHA, 2018).

5.4 Civilian Impact and Perceptions

Despite the challenges, evidence shows that when well-implemented, humanitarian corridors can save lives and restore dignity to affected populations. In the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict (2021–2022), temporary

corridors facilitated by the African Union and supported by the UN enabled the delivery of food, medical supplies, and the evacuation of the wounded. Surveys conducted by Médecins Sans Frontières and corroborated in this study suggest that even limited access can dramatically reduce mortality rates (MSF, 2022).

However, the results also reflect scepticism among civilians toward state-sponsored or militarily enforced corridors. Many fear being targeted, relocated, or detained once they enter the designated routes (UNHCR, 2022). This perception is powerful in areas where state forces or proxy militias have committed previous abuses.

5.5 Emerging Innovations and Monitoring

Recent corridors have demonstrated promising innovations, particularly in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip. The use of satellite surveillance (e.g., by UNOSAT), real-time GPS mapping, and blockchain-based food tracking has been piloted to enhance transparency and ensure that aid reaches its intended recipients (WFP, 2023). In Ukraine, humanitarian corridors coordinated through WhatsApp and Telegram groups allowed some form of decentralised civilian coordination (IFRC, 2023).

Moreover, new proposals by multilateral bodies suggest deploying neutral corridor monitoring missions, potentially composed of non-aligned states or regional organisations such as the African Union or ASEAN, to reduce politicisation and enhance compliance.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the complexities, contradictions, and evolving dynamics of international humanitarian corridors in contemporary conflict zones. Drawing on historical experiences and recent innovations, this section interprets the significant results in light of existing literature, explores implications for international law and humanitarian practice, and introduces a contemporary proposal for a more effective, neutral, and technologically integrated humanitarian corridor model.

6.1 Revisiting the Humanitarian Purpose Amidst Political Realities

The tension between humanitarian intent and political manipulation emerges as a central theme. Humanitarian corridors are theoretically grounded in the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence (ICRC, 2013). However, in practice, they are often co-opted by state and non-state actors to serve military or strategic ends (Slim, 2021). For instance, the Syrian conflict revealed that corridor declarations could be used to pressure besieged populations into surrender or displacement, while maintaining international appearances of compliance with humanitarian norms (Ferris & Kirişçi, 2016).

This instrumentalisation poses a fundamental challenge: how can humanitarian corridors remain true to their core purpose when influential stakeholders treat them as political tools? One interpretation is that humanitarian action is never entirely immune to the political context but can navigate it through strategic neutrality and third-party mediation (Terry, 2002). Hence, enhancing the legal clarity and operational independence of corridors is essential to shield them from coercion.

6.2 Legal Ambiguity and Fragmented Enforcement

The results reaffirm the criticism that international humanitarian law (IHL), while foundational, is often vague or selectively interpreted in the context of corridors. Articles 23 and 59 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and Protocol I (1977) stipulate the obligation to facilitate relief actions; however, these provisions heavily depend on the consent and cooperation of belligerents (Sandoz et al., 1987). In Syria and Darfur, this requirement for state consent became a tool for obstruction rather than cooperation.

Furthermore, the absence of a binding enforcement mechanism under international humanitarian law (IHL) exacerbates this weakness. The Security Council may authorise humanitarian access (e.g., Resolution 2165 for Syria), but geopolitical deadlocks and veto power often paralyse timely action (Bellamy & Williams, 2015). The discussion thus confirms what Hathaway and Shapiro

(2017) termed “the enforcement gap” in modern humanitarian operations, where law exists but lacks coercive enforcement.

A contemporary solution may lie in strengthening regional legal mechanisms. For example, the African Union’s principles of non-indifference allow it to intervene in cases of mass atrocities, including obstruction of humanitarian access (Williams, 2007). Empowering such bodies with corridor enforcement mandates could decentralise authority and bypass the UN’s geopolitical gridlock.

6.3 Operational Constraints and the Importance of Local Engagement

Security risks, logistical fragility, and poor coordination often hinder corridor implementation. The results from South Sudan, Ukraine, and Gaza emphasise the need for multi-level coordination, from local actors to international agencies. Notably, humanitarian corridors are most effective when local civil society, neutral mediators, and community leaders are involved in both the design and implementation of corridor plans (ICRC, 2023).

This aligns with Slim’s (2015) framework of “moral positioning,” where successful humanitarian action involves negotiation with power-holders while maintaining a principled stance rooted in community consent. Without this trust and transparency, civilians may view corridors as dangerous or deceptive, limiting their effectiveness.

Moreover, monitoring tools such as GPS tracking, satellite imagery, and blockchain verification, as seen in Ukraine and Gaza, offer promising solutions to improve logistical oversight. However, technology cannot replace legitimacy; it must be embedded within a transparent, accountable, and community-sensitive corridor framework.

6.4 Ethical Dilemmas in Forced Displacement and Safe Passage

A troubling ethical dimension arises when corridors become conduits for forced displacement or demographic engineering. This was evident in Syria, where corridor agreements often coincided with

population transfers from opposition-held areas (Zyck & Muggah, 2017). Such practices violate the voluntary nature of humanitarian assistance and contradict the 1951 Refugee Convention and customary international law.

The discussion thus raises the need to distinguish between humanitarian evacuation (with civilian consent) and coerced relocation under the guise of safe passage. A contemporary policy proposal must therefore include independent verification of consent, protection against post-corridor retaliation, and integration with long-term resettlement or return strategies endorsed by international humanitarian agencies (UNHCR, 2022).

6.5 Toward a New Model: Principles for a Contemporary Proposal

Building on the above insights, the discussion proposes a revised model for humanitarian corridors based on the following principles:

Neutral Multilateral Coordination: Corridors should be designed and overseen by neutral international coalitions such as the ICRC, UN OCHA, and regional humanitarian bodies (e.g., ASEAN, AU), excluding direct control by parties to the conflict.

Transparent Legal Mandates: Mandates for corridors must be grounded in both International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and specific United Nations Security Council resolutions, with explicit protection clauses and established accountability mechanisms.

Technological Monitoring: Real-time satellite and blockchain systems should be employed to monitor aid flow and corridor usage, reducing theft, manipulation, and misreporting (WFP, 2023).

Community Consent and Participation: Local leaders and civil society actors must be part of corridor planning, ensuring cultural appropriateness, legitimacy, and awareness.

Enforcement and Accountability: Violations of corridor agreements must trigger international responses—legal, political, and economic—under

frameworks like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) or targeted sanctions.

Post-Corridor Integration: Corridors must be linked to long-term protection plans, such as resettlement assistance, trauma support, and eventual return mechanisms, aligning with UNHCR guidelines.

This proposed model reflects a synthesis of practical experience and normative evolution in humanitarian law and ethics. It seeks not only to protect civilians during emergencies but to uphold dignity, reduce exploitation, and enhance the credibility of the international humanitarian system.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of humanitarian corridors through historical and contemporary lenses reveals a complex interplay between humanitarian necessity, legal frameworks, and political realities. While the intention behind humanitarian corridors is to protect civilian populations and facilitate aid during armed conflicts, their actual implementation often reflects deep-rooted geopolitical interests, operational challenges, and ethical dilemmas. Historical examples such as Bosnia, Syria, and Darfur illustrate how poorly coordinated or politically manipulated corridors can fail catastrophically, sometimes exacerbating the very crises they aim to mitigate.

Recent experiences, particularly in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan, demonstrate both persistent challenges and emerging innovations. The use of digital technologies, third-party monitoring, and satellite surveillance has improved the monitoring of humanitarian access. However, without strong legal underpinnings and neutral oversight, these tools alone are insufficient to guarantee safety and humanitarian integrity. Civilian trust and engagement remain central to the success of any corridor; their perception of neutrality and voluntariness shapes participation and outcomes.

This study underscores the urgent need for a globally endorsed, principles-based framework for humanitarian corridors. Such a framework must emphasise legal clarity, impartial oversight,

technological integration, and meaningful community engagement. Only by addressing the legal and political deficiencies of past practices and incorporating contemporary innovations can humanitarian corridors evolve into reliable instruments of civilian protection and conflict mitigation. Future research should build on this foundation to quantify the impact of corridors, explore regional governance models, and enhance cross-sector collaboration.

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