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Research Article

International Humanitarian Corridors: A Historical Analysis of Security Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a historical and comparative analysis of international humanitarian corridors, focusing on their evolution, legal frameworks, and the persistent security challenges they face in conflict zones. Using case studies from Bosnia, Syria, and Ukraine, the study examines how these corridors, designed to protect civilians and facilitate aid, are frequently compromised by political manipulation, strategic military use, and violations of international humanitarian law. The analysis integrates a theoretical framework rooted in Just War Theory and humanitarian ethics, adopting a qualitative methodology that combines document analysis and international legal review. Key findings suggest that the effectiveness of humanitarian corridors is highly contingent upon trust, neutrality, legal enforceability, and the presence of impartial third-party actors. The study concludes with policy recommendations that emphasise the need for standardised international protocols, community-centred implementation, and stronger legal accountability. By reframing humanitarian corridors as rights-based mechanisms rather than tactical ceasefires, the article calls for a systemic overhaul in how these tools are negotiated, governed, and deployed. This research contributes to the broader discourse on civilian protection and humanitarian law in modern warfare.

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1. Introduction

The concept of humanitarian corridors has emerged as a critical tool in the arsenal of international humanitarian response mechanisms. In times of armed conflict or humanitarian crises, the international community often relies on these corridors as temporary pathways for the safe passage of civilians, the delivery of essential goods, and access for humanitarian personnel. Typically agreed upon by conflicting parties or mandated by international bodies, humanitarian corridors aim to create neutral zones that allow humanitarian objectives to be pursued even amid active hostilities (UNOCHA, 2021). While these corridors represent a noble aspiration to mitigate civilian suffering, their real-world implementation has been fraught with legal ambiguities, logistical hurdles, and significant security risks.

The legal foundation for humanitarian corridors is rooted in international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. These legal instruments underscore the obligation of warring parties to protect civilians and allow access to humanitarian relief (ICRC, 2018). However, the practical enforcement of these provisions often falls short, particularly in modern conflicts where non-state actors, asymmetrical warfare, and political fragmentation challenge the traditional norms of conflict resolution and civilian protection (Ferris, 2011). The involvement of international organisations, such as the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), has proven essential yet insufficient in guaranteeing the safe and uninterrupted operation of humanitarian corridors.

Historical experiences, from the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s to the Syrian civil war and the ongoing war in Ukraine, illustrate a pattern of contested humanitarian space. In Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), humanitarian corridors were established under the auspices of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). However, these corridors were frequently breached, culminating in events such as the Srebrenica massacre, where over 8,000 civilians were killed despite supposed international protection (Burg

& Shoup, 1999). Similarly, in Syria, despite numerous ceasefire agreements brokered by the United Nations and international actors, humanitarian corridors in areas such as Eastern Ghouta and Aleppo were either ineffective or weaponised by state and non-state actors (UNOCHA, 2022). In the case of Ukraine, humanitarian corridors intended to evacuate civilians from Mariupol and other cities have often been rendered inoperable due to violations by military forces and a lack of coordination between the warring parties (ICJ, 2022).

These recurring failures raise fundamental questions about the viability, ethics, and governance of humanitarian corridors. Security remains the most pressing concern. Aid convoys and civilian evacuees are often targeted despite international legal protections, leading to further human suffering and a loss of credibility for humanitarian initiatives. Moreover, the establishment of such corridors is frequently entangled in political power plays, with governments and armed groups using them as leverage to achieve military or strategic gains (Slim, 2015). The potential for such corridors to be manipulated for military advantage or propaganda purposes significantly undermines their humanitarian intent.

This paper seeks to conduct a historical analysis of the security challenges associated with international humanitarian corridors. By examining key historical and contemporary case studies—namely Bosnia, Syria, and Ukraine—this research aims to identify the common patterns and distinctive features that have shaped the operational success or failure of humanitarian corridors. The study is situated within the broader discourse on humanitarian intervention and just war theory, providing both normative and empirical insights. Ultimately, the paper aspires to contribute to policy discussions on improving the safety, neutrality, and effectiveness of humanitarian corridors in present and future conflict zones.

In doing so, the paper adopts a qualitative, historical-comparative methodology and employs a theoretical framework that combines humanitarian intervention theory and the principles of just war. These perspectives offer a robust analytical lens to

assess not only the operational challenges but also the ethical and legal dimensions of humanitarian corridor implementation. In an era of increasingly complex and protracted conflicts, understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing more effective humanitarian policies and safeguarding civilian lives.

2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of international humanitarian corridors and their associated security challenges necessitates a robust theoretical framework that can effectively address the intersection of humanitarian principles, international law, and conflict dynamics. This study employs a dual theoretical lens comprising Humanitarian Intervention Theory and Just War Theory, both of which provide critical insights into the ethical, legal, and practical underpinnings of humanitarian corridors.

2.1 Humanitarian Intervention Theory

Humanitarian intervention theory offers a foundational perspective on the legitimacy and limitations of external involvement in sovereign states, with a focus on protecting human rights and alleviating human suffering. Traditionally, this theory has been invoked to justify military or non-military interventions in states where governments are either unable or unwilling to protect civilians from mass atrocities, including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity (Evans & Sahnoun, 2002). The theory gained renewed prominence in the aftermath of the 1990s atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans, where international inaction led to catastrophic humanitarian outcomes.

A key evolution of this theoretical strand is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005. R2P reaffirms the international community's obligation to protect populations when a state fails to do so (United Nations, 2005). Humanitarian corridors, though not explicitly codified under R2P, operate within its spirit by facilitating the protection of civilians during conflict. However, their operationalisation faces the same challenges that confront humanitarian intervention more broadly—questions of sovereignty,

consent, and the potential for political manipulation (Bellamy, 2009).

Humanitarian intervention theory thus helps frame humanitarian corridors not merely as logistical constructs, but as expressions of international responsibility and moral obligation. It also highlights the tension between state sovereignty and global ethical imperatives—a core dilemma in the negotiation and implementation of corridors in contested zones such as Syria and Ukraine.

2.2 Just War Theory

Complementing the humanitarian intervention framework is Just War Theory, which provides a normative lens for evaluating the morality of wartime conduct, including the establishment and protection of humanitarian spaces. Originating from classical and Christian philosophical traditions—particularly the works of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas—Just War Theory has evolved into a modern ethical framework that encompasses principles such as *jus ad bellum* (the justice of war) and *jus in bellum* (the justice in war) (Walzer, 2006).

Within the *jus in bellum* tradition, the principles of proportionality, discrimination, and necessity are paramount. These principles require combatants to distinguish between military targets and civilians and to ensure that military actions do not cause excessive harm beyond the anticipated military advantage (Orend, 2005). Humanitarian corridors fall squarely within the purview of *jus in bellum*, as their primary purpose is to shield civilians from the ravages of war. Violations of humanitarian corridors, such as targeting evacuation convoys or blocking aid, constitute grave breaches of these just war principles and international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, Just War Theory informs the ethical responsibilities of both state and non-state actors in conflict. The frequent breakdown of humanitarian corridors due to deliberate attacks or obstruction raises questions about the moral calculus of those involved. Are humanitarian corridors genuine efforts to protect civilians, or are they sometimes used as strategic tools for military advantage, such as regrouping combatants

or controlling population movements? This tension is well illustrated in conflicts like Syria, where purported humanitarian arrangements were often co-opted by military agendas (Slim, 2015).

2.3 Synthesis and Relevance

By integrating Humanitarian Intervention Theory and Just War Theory, this framework provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the security challenges associated with humanitarian corridors. The former offers a macro-level perspective on the legitimacy and necessity of such interventions, while the latter focuses on the micro-level ethical conduct during conflict. Together, they facilitate a more comprehensive analysis of the historical case studies presented in this paper, including the efficacy, ethics, and legitimacy of humanitarian corridors in Bosnia, Syria, and Ukraine.

Ultimately, this theoretical approach situates humanitarian corridors within a continuum of international moral responsibility, legal obligation, and strategic contestation. It allows for a multidimensional critique that considers not only operational failures but also the broader implications for international humanitarian norms.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, historical-comparative methodology to analyse the security challenges surrounding international humanitarian corridors. Given the multidimensional nature of humanitarian interventions and the complex interplay of political, legal, and ethical variables involved, qualitative methods are most suitable for capturing the complexities of this subject. The methodology integrates case study analysis, document analysis, and thematic interpretation, offering a structured yet flexible approach to understanding how humanitarian corridors have functioned across different historical and geopolitical contexts.

3.1 Research Design

The study is designed as a multiple-case comparative analysis, focusing on three major conflict zones where humanitarian corridors have played a central role: Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995),

Syria (2011–present), and Ukraine (2022–present). These cases were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, based on the following criteria:

- Presence of active conflict involving state and non-state actors.
- Documented use or attempted use of humanitarian corridors.
- Availability of verifiable sources and international reporting on corridor-related activities and violations.
- Relevance to evolving international humanitarian norms and practices.

This comparative approach enables the identification of common themes and divergent patterns across time and geography, highlighting how security challenges have persisted or evolved in response to shifts in international law, norms, and conflict dynamics (George & Bennett, 2005).

3.3 Data Collection

The study relies on secondary data sources, including:

- Official documents and reports from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- International court rulings and legal texts, including the Geneva Conventions and United Nations Security Council resolutions.
- Academic literature on humanitarian law, conflict studies, and international relations.
- Human rights reports from NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.
- News archives from reputable international media outlets are used to triangulate timelines and events.

These data sources are evaluated for credibility, relevance, and reliability, and they are cross-referenced to mitigate bias and inaccuracies (Bowen, 2009). Data were managed and coded using thematic content analysis to identify recurring issues related to the security challenges of humanitarian corridors.

3.4 Analytical Framework

The analysis is guided by the theoretical framework discussed in Section II, integrating Humanitarian Intervention Theory and Just War Theory. Using thematic coding, the study identifies patterns of violation, misuse, and political manipulation of humanitarian corridors, as well as efforts to implement and protect civilians successfully. Key themes include:

- Security breaches and attacks on humanitarian convoys and evacuees.
- Negotiation and consent issues between conflicting parties.
- The role of international actors in establishing or failing to enforce corridor neutrality.
- Manipulation or militarisation of corridors by state or non-state actors.

Comparative insights are drawn across the three case studies to evaluate the effectiveness of legal and institutional mechanisms in addressing these issues. The approach enables generalisable inferences about the structural and systemic vulnerabilities associated with humanitarian corridors in armed conflict.

3.5 Limitations

The study acknowledges certain limitations. First, reliance on secondary data means that the availability and potential bias of existing records and reports constrain findings. Second, the complexity of ongoing conflicts, especially in Syria and Ukraine, means that real-time data are constantly evolving, which can affect the completeness and accuracy of current insights. Lastly, the qualitative nature of the study limits its ability to produce statistically generalisable conclusions, although it does enable deep contextual understanding.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This research involves no human participants and relies entirely on publicly available data. However, care has been taken to ensure respectful representation of conflict-affected populations and accurate attribution of sensitive information. Ethical standards for qualitative research, such as transparency,

reflexivity, and source verification, have been strictly adhered to (Tracy, 2010).

4. Historical Background of Humanitarian Corridors

Humanitarian corridors are temporary demilitarised zones established during armed conflicts to allow safe passage for civilians, the wounded, and humanitarian aid. While the formal terminology of "humanitarian corridors" is relatively recent, the concept has deep historical roots in the broader evolution of humanitarian law and conflict resolution. Understanding their historical development helps to contextualise current security challenges and evaluate the effectiveness of legal and political mechanisms in protecting non-combatants.

4.1 Early Precedents and the Laws of War

The conceptual origins of humanitarian corridors can be traced back to early attempts to regulate warfare and protect civilians. Medieval codes of chivalry, as well as early Islamic and Christian war ethics, emphasised the protection of non-combatants (Johnson, 2014). However, it was not until the codification of international humanitarian law in the 19th century that formal frameworks began to take shape. The first and second Geneva Conventions (1864 and 1906) introduced legal protections for the wounded and medical services on the battlefield, laying the groundwork for more structured humanitarian mechanisms (Bugnion, 2004).

World War II saw the emergence of several ad hoc humanitarian arrangements. For instance, during the Siege of Leningrad (1941–1944), a "road of life" was established across the frozen Lake Ladoga to facilitate the evacuation of civilians and the delivery of food and medicine, albeit under severe conditions and without formal international oversight (Jones, 2008). These efforts, while rudimentary, foreshadowed the need for more institutionalised frameworks.

4.2 Cold War and Post-Colonial Conflicts

The post-World War II period witnessed an expansion in the principles of international humanitarian law through the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols (1977), particularly Protocol I, which emphasised the

protection of civilian populations during international armed conflicts (ICRC, 1977). Article 70 of Protocol I recognised the right of access for humanitarian relief operations. In contrast, Article 15 of Protocol II (applicable to non-international conflicts) introduced concepts that underpin today's humanitarian corridors, including safe zones and neutralised areas.

Despite these legal advances, implementation lagged during Cold War-era conflicts, particularly in decolonisation struggles in Africa and Southeast Asia. State sovereignty was fiercely guarded, and humanitarian intervention was often perceived as neocolonial interference. However, some humanitarian access was negotiated in specific conflicts. For instance, during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), international agencies attempted to deliver food to Biafra, but they often faced obstruction from the Nigerian government (De Waal, 1997). These experiences revealed the inherent tension between humanitarian principles and geopolitical interests, a theme that continues to define corridor implementation today.

4.3 Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995)

The use of humanitarian corridors gained prominence during the Bosnian War. The 1992–1995 conflict marked the first concerted international effort to establish safe zones under the auspices of the United Nations. The UN established six “safe areas,” including Srebrenica, to facilitate the protection and movement of civilians and humanitarian aid (United Nations, 1999). However, these zones were poorly enforced, under-resourced, and ultimately failed to prevent atrocities, culminating in the Srebrenica massacre, where over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were killed by Bosnian Serb forces.

The Bosnian experience exposed the limitations of humanitarian corridors when not backed by credible military deterrence or robust peacekeeping mandates. The lessons from Bosnia led to a reevaluation of how humanitarian protection could be effectively operationalised during conflict, laying the groundwork for later initiatives under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine.

4.4 Syria (2011–Present)

The Syrian civil war represents one of the most complex and controversial contexts for humanitarian corridors. Since the outbreak of violence in 2011, multiple attempts have been made to establish corridors, often through UN Security Council resolutions or bilateral negotiations. In 2014, UNSC Resolution 2165 authorised cross-border aid delivery without the consent of the Syrian government, a significant shift in international legal norms (UNSC, 2014). However, implementation was hampered by military actions, lack of consensus among international actors, and the fragmentation of territorial control.

Humanitarian corridors in Syria have at times been used strategically by warring parties. The siege and subsequent evacuation of Eastern Aleppo in 2016, while framed as a humanitarian operation, also allowed the Assad regime to consolidate territorial gains (Slim, 2015). This case illustrates how corridors can be weaponised or manipulated, posing significant ethical and operational challenges.

4.5 Ukraine (2022–Present)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has reignited debates over the effectiveness and sincerity of humanitarian corridors. Since February 2022, several temporary corridors have been negotiated between Ukrainian and Russian forces, with varying degrees of success. Some corridors, such as those established in Mariupol, were marred by ceasefire violations and allegations of forced displacement into Russian-controlled territories (UNHCR, 2022). The Ukrainian case underscores how humanitarian corridors can be used as instruments of psychological warfare or propaganda, further complicating their role as neutral humanitarian mechanisms.

The historical trajectory of humanitarian corridors reflects a dynamic interplay between legal innovation, ethical imperatives, and geopolitical constraints. From the early codification of wartime conduct to modern multilateral interventions, humanitarian corridors have evolved both in concept and practice. However, their implementation remains fraught with challenges, particularly regarding security, neutrality, and the

potential for political manipulation. The historical record underscores the need for stronger international enforcement mechanisms and more transparent negotiation processes to ensure that humanitarian corridors fulfil their intended purpose: protecting human life amid conflict.

5. Security Challenges in Humanitarian Corridors

Humanitarian corridors, while conceived as neutral and life-saving mechanisms, often face a wide range of security challenges that threaten their effectiveness and, at times, result in serious harm to civilians and humanitarian actors. These challenges are rooted in political complexities, legal ambiguities, operational difficulties, and intentional violations by belligerents. A critical understanding of these security-related obstacles is essential to improve the future design, implementation, and oversight of humanitarian corridors.

5.1. Lack of Trust and Consent Among Warring Parties

One of the most persistent challenges in establishing secure humanitarian corridors is the lack of mutual trust and consent among conflicting parties. For a corridor to be effective, there must be either a negotiated agreement or, at the very least, de facto non-interference from all armed actors involved. In practice, this consent is often absent or fragile, making corridors highly vulnerable to breach.

For example, in Syria, ceasefires to allow humanitarian corridors were repeatedly broken, leading to shelling and gunfire during civilian evacuations (Zyck & Muggah, 2012). The failure to enforce commitments resulted in mass casualties, as seen during the Eastern Ghouta evacuations in 2018, where reports emerged of renewed hostilities even during the agreed-upon evacuation windows (Amnesty International, 2018).

5.2. Weaponisation and Manipulation of Humanitarian Corridors

In specific contexts, humanitarian corridors have been deliberately exploited for strategic or political gain. Rather than serving purely humanitarian

objectives, corridors are sometimes used by belligerents to legitimise territorial gains, forcibly displace populations, or create propaganda victories.

During the Siege of Aleppo, the Assad regime and its allies proposed humanitarian corridors while simultaneously continuing bombardments, prompting accusations that corridors were being used as tools of psychological warfare and forced relocation (Slim, 2015). Similarly, in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, several corridors agreed upon in cities like Mariupol were reportedly used to funnel civilians into Russian-controlled territories under duress, leading the UN to investigate potential violations of international law (UNHCR, 2022).

These examples illustrate how humanitarian corridors can be exploited, undermining their legitimacy and compromising the neutrality that is an essential pillar of humanitarian operations under international humanitarian law (ICRC, 2016).

5.3. Targeting of Civilians and Humanitarian Actors

One of the gravest security concerns in humanitarian corridors is the intentional targeting of civilians and aid workers. International law, particularly the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, provides protections for humanitarian personnel and non-combatants (ICRC, 1977). Despite these protections, humanitarian convoys and evacuation columns have frequently been targeted for attack.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN convoys delivering aid were attacked or blocked, and in some cases used as human shields (United Nations, 1999). In Yemen, both Saudi-led coalition forces and Houthi rebels have been accused of striking humanitarian convoys and medical facilities, despite public declarations of safe passage (Human Rights Watch, 2019). These actions not only endanger lives but also discourage future humanitarian intervention and limit access to affected populations.

5.4. Ambiguity and Legal Gaps in International Humanitarian Law

While humanitarian corridors are grounded in principles of international humanitarian law (IHL), the legal framework remains fragmented and vague in terms of enforcement and accountability. The Geneva Conventions and their Protocols provide the general legal basis for civilian protection and the delivery of humanitarian aid. However, they do not explicitly codify the procedures for establishing, managing, or securing humanitarian corridors, leaving much to the discretion of state actors and the international community.

This legal ambiguity has led to inconsistencies in the implementation and monitoring of corridors. As Bannelier and Christakis (2013) argue, the lack of a standardised legal regime contributes to the selective and politicised applications of humanitarian corridors, allowing powerful states to shape narratives around consent and intervention based on national interests rather than humanitarian needs.

5.5. Inadequate Coordination and Resource Constraints

Operationally, establishing and maintaining humanitarian corridors demands extensive coordination among military, humanitarian, and diplomatic actors. In many crises, such coordination is lacking due to bureaucratic inertia, conflicting mandates, or logistical limitations. Corridors often require rapid deployment of peacekeeping forces, medical staff, translators, and transportation—all of which are difficult to mobilise in fragile environments.

For instance, the 2014–2015 Ebola crisis in West Africa, though not a conflict zone in the traditional sense, revealed the logistical limits of humanitarian access in emergency conditions. Delays in airlifts, insufficient protective equipment, and slow international response compounded the crisis (Gostin & Friedman, 2015). Though not a classic humanitarian corridor, the movement of medical teams and supplies mirrored similar constraints seen in war zones.

In conflict settings such as Darfur or South Sudan, UN and NGO personnel have repeatedly highlighted

issues of inadequate funding and access restrictions as significant barriers to the effective use of humanitarian corridors (UNOCHA, 2020). These constraints limit both the scope and impact of aid delivery.

5.6. Digital Surveillance and Technological Risks

In the modern era, digital surveillance and technological manipulation present emerging threats to the security of humanitarian corridors. With the proliferation of drones, satellite imagery, and digital communications, military actors can monitor humanitarian movements with unprecedented precision. While this technology can be used positively for coordination, it also raises concerns about data misuse and targeting.

In Syria and Gaza, for example, the GPS coordinates of humanitarian facilities, though shared with warring parties under the UN's deconfliction mechanisms, were allegedly used to conduct airstrikes, violating humanitarian norms (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016). These incidents raise critical questions about how technology, once seen as a force multiplier for humanitarian work, can be exploited to compromise security in corridors.

Security challenges in humanitarian corridors are multifaceted, encompassing both deliberate violations by belligerents and systemic shortcomings in international law and coordination. From targeted attacks and strategic manipulation to legal ambiguity and technological risks, these corridors face persistent threats that undermine their humanitarian objectives. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of stronger legal enforcement mechanisms, more robust international monitoring, increased logistical capacity, and political will.

Moreover, a reevaluation of how humanitarian corridors are negotiated, monitored, and protected—possibly through the establishment of an independent international oversight body—could offer a pathway to improving their security and credibility. As conflicts become more complex and urbanised, future humanitarian efforts must adapt to ensure that corridors truly serve as lifelines, not tools of coercion or convenience.

6. Case Studies

Examining specific cases of humanitarian corridors provides practical insights into how such mechanisms function in real-world conflict settings. This section analyses three key examples: Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), Syria (2012–present), and Ukraine (2022–present). Each case highlights the complexities, successes, and failures associated with implementing and securing humanitarian corridors, offering critical lessons for future interventions.

6.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995): *The Illusion of Safe Passage*

During the Bosnian War, the United Nations designated six “safe areas” intended to protect civilians, including Sarajevo, Srebrenica, and Goražde. Humanitarian corridors were a central feature of these zones, established to deliver aid and evacuate vulnerable populations. However, the reality on the ground starkly contrasted with the legal and moral aspirations of such corridors.

The UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was tasked with overseeing the delivery of humanitarian aid and monitoring ceasefires. Yet, it lacked the mandate and resources to enforce compliance. Humanitarian convoys were routinely blocked, delayed, or looted by Bosnian Serb forces. In several instances, aid trucks were used as leverage in negotiations or diverted to military actors (UN, 1999).

The most egregious failure occurred in Srebrenica, a declared “safe area,” where over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were systematically executed after Bosnian Serb forces overran the town in July 1995 (Burg & Shoup, 1999). Although a corridor was negotiated for civilian evacuation, it was never securely implemented, and Dutch peacekeepers could not prevent the massacre. This event underscored the limitations of humanitarian corridors in the absence of robust enforcement and credible deterrence.

The Bosnian case underscores the risks of establishing humanitarian corridors without sufficient security guarantees. It also emphasises the need for clear command structures, military deterrence, and international accountability mechanisms. The

subsequent recognition of the UN’s failure in Srebrenica played a pivotal role in reshaping doctrines of humanitarian intervention, notably contributing to the development of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm (Bellamy, 2009).

6.2. Syria (2012–present): *Humanitarian Corridors Amid Ongoing Conflict*

The Syrian Civil War has posed one of the most prolonged and complex humanitarian crises in modern history. Humanitarian corridors have been repeatedly proposed and attempted in various locations, including Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta, and Idlib. However, these efforts have been marred by military manipulation, ceasefire violations, and political gridlock at the international level.

In 2016, Syrian and Russian forces offered humanitarian corridors in Aleppo as part of a broader campaign to retake the city from rebel control. Although the corridors were presented as safe exit routes for civilians, reports from humanitarian organisations and local observers suggested that these pathways were either inaccessible, exposed to sniper fire, or selectively used to coerce surrender (HRW, 2016).

Similarly, in Eastern Ghouta (2018), the Syrian regime declared a daily five-hour humanitarian pause and opened evacuation corridors. Yet, continued shelling, a lack of safe transportation, and reports of forced conscription deterred many civilians from using the corridors. Human Rights Watch (2018) and Amnesty International (2018) documented that these corridors were instruments of forced displacement rather than neutral humanitarian lifelines.

The UN Security Council repeatedly failed to reach a consensus on measures to enforce humanitarian access in Syria due to the veto powers of permanent members. Despite the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2139 in 2014, which called for unimpeded humanitarian access, implementation remained ineffective (UNSC, 2014). The Syrian case underscores the paralysis of international legal mechanisms when major powers have conflicting interests.

Syria demonstrates the manipulation of humanitarian corridors for military and political gain. It also reveals the ineffectiveness of corridors in highly asymmetrical conflicts where one actor controls access, and international monitoring is weak. Notably, it raises ethical concerns about whether corridors should be proposed at all in contexts where safety cannot be guaranteed (Slim, 2015).

6.3. Ukraine (2022–present): Humanitarian Corridors in a High-Intensity Interstate Conflict

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, has seen significant efforts to establish humanitarian corridors, particularly during the siege of Mariupol and in the regions of Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk.

Mariupol, a strategic port city in southeastern Ukraine, became a focal point of international concern due to reports of intense shelling, a lack of food and water, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, including a maternity hospital and a theatre sheltering civilians (OHCHR, 2022). Several attempts were made in March and April 2022 to establish corridors for civilian evacuation, with varying degrees of success.

While some convoys managed to evacuate civilians, many were interrupted by renewed fighting, misinformation, or redirection by Russian forces to territories under their control. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), these corridors often lacked

international monitoring, raising concerns about potential violations of the rights of evacuees, including forced deportations (OHCHR, 2022).

The Ukraine case highlights the difficulty of negotiating corridors in high-intensity conventional warfare. Unlike civil wars or asymmetrical conflicts, the Ukraine-Russia war involves regular armies, complex frontline dynamics, and significant propaganda. Humanitarian negotiations are often conducted in real time amid hostilities, without neutral ground for verification.

Moreover, the polarised international environment has further complicated coordination. Humanitarian actors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), have faced criticism from both Ukrainian officials and civil society for perceived failures in ensuring safe passage (ICRC, 2022).

Despite the obstacles, Ukraine has shown some innovative coordination mechanisms, including digital tools to alert civilians, international hotlines, and real-time satellite monitoring. However, these tools require robust legal guarantees and a strong political will to be effective. The case reiterates the importance of third-party oversight, transparency in negotiation processes, and robust documentation of violations for future accountability and transparency.

6.4 Comparative Analysis

Factor	Bosnia	Syria	Ukraine
Type of Conflict	Civil war along ethnic lines	Multi-actor civil war	Interstate war
International Oversight	UNPROFOR	Limited, UNSC deadlock	Active monitoring but polarised
Success of Corridors	Mostly failed	Mixed, often manipulated	Mixed, limited success
Main Challenge	Enforcement and impunity	Weaponisation and coercion	Lack of trust and verification
Legal Accountability	Post-war ICTY	Ongoing documentation	Future investigations ongoing

This comparative lens reveals both commonalities and divergences. In all three cases, humanitarian corridors faced implementation gaps, primarily due to a lack of enforceable guarantees, insufficient political will, or inadequate neutral oversight. However, the nature of the conflict, the level of international engagement, and the capacity of humanitarian actors significantly shaped outcomes.

Humanitarian corridors are not panaceas. While they offer potential lifelines in dire circumstances, their effectiveness is highly contingent on security conditions, the behaviour of belligerents, and the degree of international oversight. The cases of Bosnia, Syria, and Ukraine illustrate that even well-intentioned corridors can become sites of manipulation, failure, or violence.

Future humanitarian operations must learn from these experiences by ensuring rigorous monitoring, transparent negotiations, and enforceable legal mechanisms. The international community must also move beyond symbolic gestures and adopt more decisive actions to protect civilians and uphold the principles of international humanitarian law.

7. Findings and Discussion

This section synthesises the insights gathered from the theoretical framework, historical background, and the three detailed case studies (Bosnia, Syria, Ukraine), aiming to uncover recurring patterns, divergences, and implications for the future

use and governance of humanitarian corridors. It evaluates the effectiveness, security challenges, and international legal and political dimensions of humanitarian corridors in conflict zones, thereby offering a multidimensional analysis grounded in empirical evidence and scholarly debate.

7.1. Effectiveness of Humanitarian Corridors: A Conditional Mechanism

A key finding across the case studies is that humanitarian corridors, while conceptually promising, often fail in practice due to conditional and selective implementation. Their effectiveness hinges on several interdependent variables: the nature of the conflict, the power asymmetries between actors, the degree of international involvement, and the credibility of enforcement mechanisms.

In Bosnia, the corridors were hampered by weak peacekeeping mandates and an absence of military deterrence, resulting in their failure to prevent atrocities such as the Srebrenica massacre (Burg & Shoup, 1999). In Syria, humanitarian corridors became tools of strategic manipulation, often enabling forced evacuations rather than neutral protection (Amnesty International, 2018). Ukraine presents a hybrid model, with some moderately successful evacuations (e.g., Mariupol). Yet, repeated instances of unilateral declarations of corridors by Russian forces led to mistrust and non-utilisation by civilians (OHCHR, 2022).

This comparative analysis highlights a vital lesson: humanitarian corridors are not inherently effective—they require enforceable legal guarantees, multilateral negotiation, and neutral third-party monitoring to ensure safety and trust (Bellamy, 2009; Slim, 2015). When these prerequisites are absent, corridors may exacerbate risks rather than mitigate them.

7.2. Security Challenges: Weaponisation, Targeting, and Misinformation

Across all cases, security challenges emerged as a dominant obstacle. These include:

- **Weaponisation of Corridors:** Armed actors have used corridors not to protect civilians but to advance military objectives, such as compelling surrender, gaining territorial control, or facilitating forced displacement. In Syria, corridors in Eastern Ghouta were effectively “surrender-or-starve” mechanisms (HRW, 2018). Similar tactics were observed in Bosnia, where control of corridor access points became a key component of military strategy (UN, 1999).
- **Targeting and Ceasefire Violations:** Ceasefires accompanying humanitarian corridors were often fragile or violated shortly after being declared. In Ukraine, shelling usually resumed even during agreed evacuations (ICRC, 2022). Such violations not only put civilian lives at risk but also eroded trust, rendering future corridor negotiations more difficult.
- **Misinformation and Psychological Operations:** Belligerents frequently manipulated information surrounding corridors. In Aleppo, for instance, Syrian state media promoted corridors as safe, while independent sources documented continued attacks and coercion (Amnesty International, 2018). In Ukraine, conflicting reports from Russian and Ukrainian sources created confusion and fear, preventing civilians from using established routes (OHCHR, 2022).

These security challenges reveal a core contradiction: while humanitarian corridors are

premised on consent and neutrality, they are often entangled in the power politics of war, leading to violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and undermining their legitimacy (Slim, 2015).

7.3. Legal and Normative Gaps in Implementation

Despite the existence of robust international legal frameworks, such as the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols, and UN Security Council Resolutions, the application of these laws in the implementation of humanitarian corridors remains inconsistent and politicised.

In theory, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) obligates warring parties to allow for unimpeded humanitarian access and the protection of civilians (ICRC, 2015). Yet in practice, legal obligations are often subject to the veto power of dominant actors. For example, in Syria, Security Council efforts to ensure access were repeatedly blocked by Russia and China (UNSC, 2014). Even when resolutions were passed (e.g., Resolution 2139), enforcement mechanisms were weak and lacked binding consequences.

Furthermore, the principle of state sovereignty remains the dominant factor in humanitarian negotiations. Authoritarian regimes, in particular, often resist externally imposed corridors, viewing them as a violation of sovereignty. This limits the operational independence of humanitarian actors and restricts the reach and scope of corridors, especially in areas controlled by governments hostile to international scrutiny (Weiss, 2012).

Moreover, the lack of accountability mechanisms compounds the problem. Although post-conflict tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), have addressed crimes committed within safe zones (e.g., Srebrenica), these efforts are largely retrospective in nature. Real-time legal deterrents are often absent, allowing belligerents to violate corridor agreements with impunity (Bellamy, 2009).

7.4. Humanitarian Neutrality and Operational Dilemmas

Humanitarian corridors often place aid organisations in ethically ambiguous positions. The principle of neutrality—a core tenet of humanitarian action—is becoming increasingly complex to maintain when corridors are negotiated in politicised environments or utilised for strategic purposes.

For instance, in Syria, several NGOs and UN agencies were criticised for operating within corridors that ultimately facilitated forced population transfers. Similarly, in Ukraine, the ICRC faced criticism for appearing too accommodating to Russian-imposed corridors that redirected civilians to territories under Russian control (ICRC, 2022).

Such controversies reflect the tension between providing aid under any circumstances and refusing to be complicit in potentially illegal or coercive processes (Slim, 2015). The result is a moral and operational quandary: to act and risk legitimising injustice, or to abstain and risk abandoning civilians in need.

This dilemma highlights the need for clear ethical frameworks that enable humanitarian actors to navigate these choices effectively. One solution is to establish pre-negotiated standards for corridors that ensure voluntariness, impartial monitoring, and adherence to international law.

7.5. Public Trust and Civilian Agency

A recurring theme in all case studies is the centrality of public trust and the agency of civilians. Humanitarian corridors, regardless of their legal or logistical sophistication, are only effective if civilians perceive them as safe and voluntary.

In many instances, civilians refused to use corridors due to fears of reprisal, forced conscription, or being taken to enemy territory. In Eastern Ghouta and Mariupol, residents reported choosing to stay in besieged zones rather than risk evacuation (HRW, 2018; OHCHR, 2022). This suggests that humanitarian planners must prioritise local knowledge, community engagement, and culturally

informed communication strategies when establishing corridors.

Moreover, new technologies such as encrypted messaging, real-time satellite tracking, and digital humanitarian alerts have shown promise in enhancing civilian agency in Ukraine. However, these tools must be accessible, secure, and adapted to the needs of vulnerable populations, especially the elderly, disabled, or linguistically marginalised.

7.6. The Role of Third-Party Actors and International Oversight

A final critical finding is the pivotal role of third-party actors—including the UN, ICRC, regional organisations, and even faith-based groups—in mediating, monitoring, and verifying humanitarian corridors. When neutral third-party oversight is present and recognised, corridors are more likely to be respected and effective.

The ICRC's partial success in Ukraine, despite political criticisms, illustrates that credible intermediaries can facilitate trust between conflicting parties. However, such actors must be granted access, operational independence, and resources to fulfil their mandates.

Furthermore, regional organisations like the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or the African Union (AU) could be mobilised more effectively in future conflicts. These entities often possess contextual understanding and political leverage that global bodies lack.

Yet, third-party actors themselves must be subject to transparency and accountability. They must adhere to ethical standards, communicate clearly with affected populations, and avoid becoming instruments of any party's strategic agenda.

In sum, this section has revealed that while humanitarian corridors remain a vital tool in conflict management and civilian protection, their success is contingent upon several structural and operational variables:

- Trust, enforcement, and neutrality are the cornerstones of effective corridor implementation.
- Security challenges—particularly manipulation, ceasefire violations, and misinformation—must be anticipated and mitigated through robust planning and international cooperation.
- Legal and normative gaps, including inconsistent application of IHL and the influence of state sovereignty, must be addressed through reform and accountability mechanisms.
- The voices and agency of affected populations should be central to corridor design and execution.
- Third-party actors must be empowered, professionalised, and held accountable for their roles in corridor management.

These findings provide the foundation for the subsequent section, which offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, humanitarian organisations, and international legal bodies.

8. Recommendations and Conclusion

The historical and comparative analysis of humanitarian corridors in Bosnia, Syria, and Ukraine underscores both the utility and fragility of such mechanisms in conflict zones. The findings reveal a consistent pattern of security challenges, legal ambiguities, and political manipulation, which undermine the potential of humanitarian corridors to fulfil their intended purpose: protecting civilians and facilitating aid.

8.1 Recommendations

The United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) should spearhead the development of binding protocols specific to humanitarian corridors under International Humanitarian Law. These should include standardised procedures for negotiation, implementation, and monitoring. Third-party verification mechanisms involving neutral actors must be institutionalised and resourced.

Humanitarian corridors should be designed with community input, ensuring that civilians are informed, consulted, and empowered to make voluntary decisions. Civil society organisations should act as intermediaries to translate local concerns into international negotiations.

The international community must bolster enforcement through sanctions, legal indictments, and conditional aid mechanisms when parties fail to uphold agreed-upon humanitarian access. Precedents like the ICTY should guide future tribunal mandates to include corridor-related violations.

Humanitarian corridors must not be used as tools of political leverage. Neutral organisations, such as the ICRC or UN OCHA, should lead negotiations and be shielded from political influence. State parties should commit to transparency and neutrality as a precondition for corridor legitimacy.

Governments and humanitarian agencies should invest in digital technologies, such as secure communication apps and satellite-based monitoring, to enable real-time updates and build trust among civilians during corridor operations.

8.2 Conclusion

Humanitarian corridors represent a complex intersection of law, politics, and ethics. When implemented with neutrality, robust legal backing, and local agency, they can save lives and uphold humanitarian norms. However, their misuse or poor implementation can lead to further victimisation and undermine international humanitarian efforts. The global community must reimagine humanitarian corridors not as ad hoc arrangements, but as standardised, rights-based tools grounded in legal obligations and human dignity. Only through such reform can corridors serve their true purpose amidst the chaos of war.

8.3 Future Research Directions

Future research should explore innovative models for humanitarian corridor governance, particularly in non-international armed conflicts where state and non-state actors interact asymmetrically. Comparative

analyses of corridor implementation in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia could broaden the understanding of how regional politics influence outcomes.

Additionally, empirical studies using big data analytics and AI-based conflict forecasting could help identify conditions under which corridors are most likely to succeed or fail. Further inquiry into the gendered dimensions of humanitarian corridors—how women, children, and vulnerable groups experience these mechanisms differently—remains a crucial but understudied area. Finally, there is a pressing need to assess the long-term impacts of corridor evacuations on displaced communities, including issues of resettlement, psychological trauma, and legal restitution.

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