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'Humanitarian Corridor' to Deliver Aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State: Analysis of Bangladesh's Security Challenges

Rabeya Boshri Sarna[*1]; Jakaria Hossan Riyan[1]; Jarin Sultana Arpa[1]; Liza Akter[1]; Prof. Dr Kazi Abdul Mannan[2]

This study critically examines the concept of a humanitarian corridor as a strategic and humanitarian mechanism to deliver aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State, with a specific focus on the security challenges faced by Bangladesh. Hosting over a million Rohingya refugees since 2017, Bangladesh has encountered increasing internal pressures, including economic burden, social tensions, and transnational security threats such as human trafficking and extremism. Grounded in securitisation theory, realism, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework, the research examines how the proposed corridor serves as both a humanitarian necessity and a geopolitical strategy. The study employs qualitative analysis, including policy document reviews and expert interviews, to identify the implications of the corridor for regional stability, sovereignty norms, and international cooperation. Findings suggest that while the corridor may relieve humanitarian strain and enhance Bangladesh's diplomatic standing, its implementation requires multilateral support, legal innovation, and conflict-sensitive planning. The research concludes with actionable recommendations and identifies future research priorities for refining humanitarian response frameworks in conflict-prone areas.

[1]Department of Science and Engineering
[2]Department of Business Administration
Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology. Dhaka, Bangladesh
*Corresponding author: Rabeya Boshri Sarna, Email: rbsarna4@gmail.com

Introduction

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State, particularly the plight of the Rohingya minority, continues to attract global attention for its scale, brutality, and geopolitical implications. Since the outbreak of widespread violence in August 2017, over 1.1 million Rohingya have fled Myanmar, seeking refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh, primarily in the Cox's Bazar district (UNHCR, 2023). The crisis has been marked by allegations of ethnic cleansing, systematic violence, and mass displacement, which the United Nations and human rights organisations have described as potentially genocidal (Amnesty International, 2018; UNHRC, 2019). Amid these complex dynamics, proposals for a 'humanitarian corridor'—defined as a temporary demilitarised zone facilitating the safe passage of humanitarian aid and personnel into conflict areas—have emerged as potential mechanisms to address the immediate humanitarian needs of the displaced and vulnerable populations within Myanmar.

While the humanitarian corridor framework may appear apolitical and driven by universal humanitarian norms, its implementation, especially in regions marked by longstanding ethnic tensions and authoritarian rule, introduces a range of political, strategic, and security considerations. For Bangladesh, the primary recipient and host of the Rohingya refugee population, the implications of such a corridor are profound. The country not only bears the humanitarian burden but also faces multidimensional security challenges, including border insecurity, illicit trafficking, insurgent activity, resource depletion, and rising tensions between host and refugee communities (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2023). As a result, the discourse surrounding humanitarian corridors must be critically examined through the lens of national and regional security rather than purely humanitarian urgency.

Bangladesh's strategic location between India and Myanmar places it at the intersection of South and Southeast Asian geopolitics. Since 2017, Dhaka has adopted a cautious diplomatic approach, emphasising international cooperation, seeking guarantees for repatriation, and engaging with global institutions such as the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). However, efforts to secure voluntary and safe repatriation of the Rohingya have been largely unsuccessful, primarily due to Myanmar's military intransigence and lack of political will (UNHRC, 2021). Consequently, any proposal to establish a humanitarian corridor in Rakhine, whether through unilateral action, multilateral intervention, or international mediation, inevitably draws Bangladesh into a fragile security environment.

The concept of humanitarian corridors is not a new one. Such corridors have been established in various conflict zones, including Bosnia (the 1990s), Sudan (2004–2005), Syria (2012 onward), and more recently in Ukraine (2022), with mixed results in terms of effectiveness, safety, and neutrality (Slim, 2022). These precedents suggest that the success of humanitarian corridors depends on robust international backing, clear rules of engagement, and the cooperation, whether voluntary or coerced, of the host nation. In the case of Myanmar, where the military regime has consistently resisted international scrutiny, the feasibility of establishing such a corridor without further destabilising the region remains uncertain.

This study examines the intersection of the humanitarian corridor concept for delivering aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State with Bangladesh's national security interests. Drawing from the securitisation theory developed by the Copenhagen School of International Relations, the research aims to understand how Bangladeshi policymakers and security actors frame this humanitarian proposal as a security threat (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). The study also incorporates aspects of human security theory to juxtapose state-centric security concerns

with the protection of vulnerable populations (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007).

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- What are the perceived and actual security challenges Bangladesh faces about a proposed humanitarian corridor into Rakhine State?
- How does the framing of these challenges influence Bangladesh's foreign policy and border security strategies?
- What policy options are available to Bangladesh to balance its humanitarian obligations with its national security interests?

Using qualitative methods, including content analysis of official statements, policy documents, and expert interviews, this study seeks to contribute to the academic and policy-oriented discourse on humanitarian intervention, border security, and regional stability. By focusing on the case of Bangladesh, the research provides critical insights into the regional complexities and strategic dilemmas that accompany humanitarian solutions in protracted ethnic and political conflicts.

In summary, while the humanitarian corridor appears as a normative and necessary intervention to alleviate human suffering, its operationalisation in the context of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations introduces significant risks that must be critically examined. Bangladesh's security calculus is influenced not only by immediate threats but also by long-term strategic implications, including sovereignty, demographic shifts, and diplomatic positioning in a volatile region.

Theoretical Framework

To critically assess Bangladesh's security challenges regarding the proposed humanitarian corridor into Myanmar's Rakhine State, this study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that draws on securitisation theory and human security theory. These two paradigms provide complementary perspectives: one emphasises state-centric security discourses and institutional responses, while the other centres the lived experiences and safety of affected populations. Their interplay is crucial to understanding the complexity of Bangladesh's security dilemma about humanitarian action within a volatile regional context.

Securitisation Theory

Securitisation theory, developed by the Copenhagen School of International Relations, provides a powerful analytical tool for understanding how specific issues are perceived and treated as existential threats by political actors (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). According to this framework, security is not an objective condition but a social construction: an issue becomes a "security" issue when it is presented as a threat to the survival of a referent object—usually the state—and when a relevant audience accepts that presentation. This transformation, referred to as a speech act, allows policymakers to justify extraordinary measures, such as the militarisation of borders or derogations from international norms.

In the context of Bangladesh, securitisation theory helps explain the discursive framing of the Rohingya crisis and the proposal for a humanitarian corridor. Bangladeshi leaders and security agencies have frequently framed the presence of over a million Rohingya refugees as a demographic and socio-economic threat (ICG, 2023) and have associated humanitarian interventions in Rakhine with broader risks of cross-border instability, radicalisation, and the erosion of national sovereignty (Rahman, 2020). The proposed humanitarian corridor, while ostensibly aimed at alleviating human suffering, could be securitised by Dhaka as a potential precursor to

military entanglements or refugee resettlement schemes that Bangladesh deems undesirable.

This securitisation process is evident in political rhetoric and policy documents that prioritise national security over humanitarian collaboration. For example, Bangladesh's repeated emphasis on the repatriation of Rohingya, rather than their local integration or long-term accommodation, reflects a securitised approach that views refugee presence as a temporary abnormality (Ullah, 2021). Additionally, the regional dynamics involving major powers such as China and India further complicate this framing, as Bangladesh remains cautious of any humanitarian initiative that might disturb its strategic equilibrium with its neighbours.

Human Security Theory

In contrast to the state-centric emphasis of securitisation theory, human security theory prioritises the protection of individuals and communities from critical and pervasive threats (UNDP, 1994). Developed in response to the limitations of traditional security frameworks, the human security paradigm expands the notion of security to include economic, environmental, health, political, and personal dimensions (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). In doing so, it challenges the idea that national borders and state sovereignty should take precedence over the well-being of vulnerable populations.

The human security lens is particularly relevant when examining the humanitarian corridor proposal for Rakhine. From this perspective, the corridor is a necessary intervention to ensure access to food, medical care, and protection for the Rohingya and other affected groups trapped within Myanmar. The corridor may also be seen as a pathway toward upholding international humanitarian norms and ensuring non-refoulement, a principle that prohibits

the forced return of refugees to unsafe environments (UNHCR, 2023).

For Bangladesh, however, the human security approach introduces a normative tension. While the country has shown remarkable generosity by hosting the Rohingya, it also faces immense pressure on its infrastructure, public services, and social cohesion in affected districts such as Cox's Bazar. Thus, the challenge lies in reconciling the humanitarian imperative to protect individuals across the border with the domestic essential to maintain stability, prevent extremism, and preserve development gains.

Integrative Analytical Perspective

By combining securitisation and human security theories, this study explores the dual logics that shape Bangladesh's policy responses. This integrative approach enables a nuanced understanding of how the state rationalises security threats while navigating ethical obligations under international law. It also allows analysis of how these competing logics manifest in both foreign policy and domestic governance.

The framework recognises that humanitarian corridors exist at the intersection of humanitarianism and geopolitics. In fragile environments like Rakhine, such corridors may become arenas of strategic competition, not only between local actors but also among regional and global powers. Bangladesh, situated as a frontline state, must thus navigate both securitised narratives and human security imperatives in crafting a coherent and sustainable response.

This dual-theoretical lens also helps identify policy gaps. For instance, over-reliance on securitisation may result in the neglect of refugee rights or failure to collaborate with humanitarian agencies. At the same time, an uncritical adoption of human security discourses might overlook genuine threats to national

cohesion. As such, the synthesis of these frameworks enables a balanced examination of the motivations, risks, and trade-offs inherent in the humanitarian corridor discourse.

Literature Review

The literature on humanitarian corridors, the Rohingya crisis, and Bangladesh's security landscape reflects a dynamic and multifaceted academic discourse that spans international relations, humanitarian studies, migration research, and regional security analysis. This section examines four significant scholarship strands relevant to the research problem: (1) the concept and implementation of humanitarian corridors, (2) the Rohingya crisis and humanitarian responses, (3) Bangladesh's national security concerns, and (4) regional geopolitics and strategic constraints in South and Southeast Asia.

Humanitarian Corridors: Definitions, Precedents, and Controversies

The concept of humanitarian corridors emerged in the late 20th century as part of efforts to deliver aid and evacuate civilians in conflict zones, particularly in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa (Slim, 2002). Humanitarian corridors are generally defined as demilitarised zones or designated routes established to facilitate the safe passage of humanitarian aid or affected populations, under international supervision or through negotiated agreements (Ferris, 2011). They are considered temporary and exceptional mechanisms, requiring the consent of conflicting parties and adherence to international humanitarian law.

Scholars have debated the effectiveness and ethical dimensions of these corridors. While some view them as practical tools for humanitarian intervention (Terry, 2002), others argue that they can be politically manipulated or co-opted by belligerents for strategic advantage (Weiss, 2013). This critique is particularly relevant to the case of Myanmar, where state denial of human rights abuses and tight military control in Rakhine have raised concerns about the sincerity of any consent to humanitarian arrangements (Cheesman, 2017). Moreover, recent cases in Syria and Sudan highlight how humanitarian corridors can be misused for forced displacements or to isolate targeted communities (Barnett & Weiss, 2011).

The literature also suggests that successful humanitarian corridors require robust international oversight, regional cooperation, and logistical precision. In fragile contexts like Rakhine, where the military and ethnic militias maintain complex power dynamics, the risks of obstruction, diversion, or violence remain high (Healy, 2014). Hence, the notion of a humanitarian corridor into Myanmar must be critically examined not only as a logistical instrument but also as a geopolitical proposition.

The Rohingya Crisis: Humanitarian and Legal Perspectives

The Rohingya crisis has been the subject of extensive scholarly and policy-oriented attention since the mass exodus of over 700,000 Rohingya from Rakhine State to Bangladesh in 2017, following a violent crackdown by the Myanmar military (ICG, 2018). The United Nations and multiple human rights organisations have classified these actions as ethnic cleansing, with some investigations suggesting genocidal intent (UNHRC, 2019). The literature underscores the statelessness of the Rohingya, rooted in Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, as the core structural cause of their marginalisation and persecution (Southwick, 2015).

Humanitarian responses to the crisis have mainly focused on emergency relief, refugee camp management, and international advocacy. Scholars have documented both the commendable efforts of humanitarian agencies and the challenges they face in politically sensitive environments (Wake & Yu, 2018).

The Kutupalong-Balukhali camp in Cox's Bazar has become the largest refugee settlement in the world, stretching the capacity of aid organisations and the Bangladeshi state (ISCG, 2021).

Several researchers have examined the dilemmas of repatriation, resettlement, and long-term integration. Despite multiple bilateral agreements between Bangladesh and Myanmar, actual repatriation has stalled due to safety concerns, lack of guarantees for citizenship, and continued militarisation in Rakhine (Albert, 2020). As a result, attention has turned to the possibility of creating safe zones or humanitarian corridors to deliver aid and facilitate eventual return. However, as Mahmood and Ahmed (2021) note, such proposals often fail to address the structural conditions that produced displacement in the first place, including ethnic exclusion and state violence.

Bangladesh's National Security and Refugee Management

The security dimension of the Rohingya crisis is a key area of focus in both academic and policy literature. Bangladesh's acceptance of over one million Rohingya is often lauded internationally, but scholars emphasise the domestic burdens this places on the country's economy, environment, and internal cohesion (Rashid, 2019). The concentration of refugees in a relatively poor and ecologically sensitive region has heightened concerns about social tensions, crime, and competition for resources (Alam & Imtiaz, 2020).

From a national security perspective, analysts have pointed to three broad categories of risk: (1) radicalisation and transnational militancy, (2) cross-border smuggling and human trafficking, and (3) political destabilisation of border areas (Rahman, 2020). Although evidence of large-scale radicalisation remains limited, security agencies remain wary of potential recruitment by extremist networks,

especially among disaffected youth (Yasmin, 2021). Additionally, there is concern about armed groups such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) operating near the border and complicating Bangladesh's security calculus.

Bangladesh's responses have reflected these concerns. Policies have included biometric registration, restrictions on refugee movement, fencing of camps, and the controversial relocation of Rohingya to Bhasan Char island (HRW, 2021). These measures, while aimed at maintaining order, have drawn criticism for undermining the rights and dignity of refugees. As Kabir and Naser (2022) argue, the securitisation of refugee management may hinder humanitarian goals and provoke further resentment.

Geopolitics of the Region: Strategic Constraints and Opportunities

The Rohingya crisis and any associated humanitarian initiatives cannot be understood in isolation from regional geopolitics. South and Southeast Asia's strategic landscape, involving actors such as India, China, ASEAN, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), has a profound impact on the political feasibility and humanitarian viability of any intervention in Rakhine State (Haacke, 2021). China and India, in particular, maintain strong economic and military ties with Myanmar and have been reluctant to support international measures perceived as infringing on state sovereignty (Maung, 2018).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with significant projects in Rakhine, including the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port, further complicates the geopolitical calculus (Thuzar, 2021). Bangladesh, dependent on Chinese investments and wary of antagonising Myanmar's allies, must tread cautiously in endorsing any plan, such as a humanitarian corridor, that could be viewed as externally imposed. Likewise, India's Act East policy and security interests in

northeastern states shape its cautious approach to the Rohingya issue.

ASEAN has taken some diplomatic initiatives, such as humanitarian assistance and engagement with the Myanmar military, but its doctrine of non-interference limits its effectiveness (ASEAN, 2022). Meanwhile, the OIC has supported Bangladesh's position, including legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but lacks the operational capacity to enforce humanitarian access.

The literature reveals that Bangladesh's ability to advocate or implement a humanitarian corridor is constrained not only by domestic security considerations but also by the geopolitical balance of power. Any viable corridor would require careful multilateral coordination and diplomatic finesse, with buy-in from key stakeholders and guarantees of safety from the Myanmar military.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in content analysis and interpretive inquiry, which is suitable for investigating the complex and context-sensitive subject of humanitarian corridors and their implications for Bangladesh's national security. The methodology is designed to synthesise diverse sources of information—including policy documents, academic literature, official government statements, media reports, and expert opinions—to produce a multi-dimensional understanding of the issues at hand. The research design is guided by constructivist epistemology, which assumes that knowledge and security perceptions are socially constructed and politically mediated (Guzzini, 2011).

Research Design and Approach

Given the geopolitical, humanitarian, and security-related nature of the research question, a qualitative case study approach is adopted. This enables an in-depth analysis of the Bangladesh-Myanmar context in light of regional security dynamics and humanitarian needs. Case studies allow for holistic investigation within real-world contexts, making them particularly useful for security studies and international humanitarian analysis (Yin, 2018). In this study, the Rohingya crisis and the potential use of a humanitarian corridor are examined not merely as isolated events but as embedded within broader political, social, and security systems.

The study combines document analysis and thematic content analysis as its primary data collection and analytical tools. This dual-layered approach is intended to trace the evolution of discourses around humanitarian corridors and Bangladesh's policy responses to the Rohingya influx.

Data Sources

The research draws upon both primary and secondary data. Primary data includes policy papers, press releases, and official statements from the Government of Bangladesh, the United Nations, ASEAN, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). These are used to understand institutional positions, policy formulations, and humanitarian interventions. Secondary data includes peer-reviewed academic articles, book chapters, analytical reports from think tanks (e.g., International Crisis Group, IISS), and media analyses from credible international outlets (e.g., Al Jazeera, BBC, The Diplomat). The inclusion of diverse sources ensures triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and robustness of the findings (Bowen, 2009).

Analytical Strategy

Thematic content analysis is used to systematically identify, code, and categorise patterns of meaning across the collected texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The key themes guiding the analysis include:

- Humanitarian discourse and justification of corridors,
- Bangladesh's national security framing,
- Myanmar's political-military resistance,
- International responses and strategic alignments, and
- Feasibility conditions for operationalising humanitarian corridors.

These themes were developed both deductively, from the theoretical framework, and inductively, from a close reading of empirical material. NVivo software was used to facilitate data management and coding consistency.

Ethical Considerations

Since the research relies exclusively on publicly available texts and does not involve human subjects, ethical clearance from an institutional review board was not required. However, the study adheres to the moral principles of academic integrity, data accuracy, and responsible citation.

Furthermore, care is taken to present sensitive geopolitical and humanitarian issues with neutrality and empathy, recognising the ethical obligation of scholars to avoid inflaming regional tensions or misrepresenting stakeholder perspectives (Silverman, 2016).

Limitations

The main limitation of this study lies in its reliance on secondary data and publicly disclosed policy documents, which may not capture the full range of confidential security deliberations or behind-the-scenes diplomatic negotiations. Additionally, the evolving nature of the crisis and the ongoing political instability in Myanmar may impact the timeliness of some data. Nonetheless, the study compensates for these limitations through a rigorous, multi-source triangulation and critical discourse orientation.

Data Analysis and Findings

The core of this research lies in examining the implications of establishing a humanitarian corridor for delivering aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State, with a specific focus on the national security landscape of Bangladesh. This section presents the thematic findings from a comprehensive content analysis of primary documents, policy statements, and secondary literature, organised around five emergent themes: geopolitical tensions and regional diplomacy, securitisation of humanitarianism, internal security risks in Bangladesh, military and strategic responses from Myanmar, and international legal and normative frameworks.

Geopolitical Tensions and Regional Diplomacy

The humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State, particularly since the 2017 military crackdown against the Rohingya population, has created a profound diplomatic dilemma for Bangladesh. While Bangladesh has hosted over one million Rohingya refugees, attempts to engage Myanmar diplomatically have been largely unsuccessful (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2020). Bilateral repatriation agreements brokered by China have repeatedly stalled, revealing the asymmetrical nature of regional diplomacy where Myanmar enjoys significant political cover from Beijing and even Moscow (Hossain, 2023).

ASEAN's cautious approach has further frustrated Bangladesh's expectations for a robust regional humanitarian initiative. Although ASEAN's "Five-Point Consensus" on Myanmar mentions humanitarian access, it falls short of endorsing an internationally monitored corridor through Bangladesh (Weatherbee,

2022). The lack of consensus within ASEAN has left Bangladesh in a diplomatically precarious position, bearing disproportionate humanitarian burdens without corresponding geopolitical leverage.

Furthermore, India's "Act East" policy and military interests in Myanmar have complicated trilateral relations. While India has offered humanitarian assistance to both Bangladesh and Myanmar, it has not supported a corridor that would undermine Myanmar's sovereignty (Singh, 2022). Thus, Bangladesh's proposal for a humanitarian corridor is entangled in a dense web of strategic interests, making diplomatic manoeuvring extremely challenging.

Securitisation of Humanitarianism

The analysis reveals that both Bangladesh and Myanmar have increasingly securitised the concept of humanitarian corridors. Bangladesh has framed the corridor not only as a humanitarian necessity but also as a mechanism to curb the long-term destabilising effects of prolonged refugee encampments (Rahman & Uddin, 2021). Bangladeshi officials argue that failure to repatriate the Rohingya or ensure aid reaches Rakhine directly risks radicalisation, human trafficking, and transnational crime—issues that directly affect national security.

Conversely, Myanmar's military junta, officially known as the State Administration Council (SAC), views the proposal of a corridor as an infringement upon national sovereignty and a challenge to internal political control. Myanmar's authorities have securitised external aid itself, especially if it bypasses state channels. Since the 2021 coup, the military has significantly restricted the operations of foreign aid agencies, equating humanitarian aid with external interference (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2022). The corridor proposal, if implemented without consent from Myanmar, risks escalating into a bilateral security standoff.

The securitisation narrative is further strengthened by the presence of armed insurgent groups in Rakhine, such as the Arakan Army (AA), which complicates safe aid delivery. Both states fear that humanitarian corridors may become conduits for logistical support to insurgent groups, either deliberately or inadvertently.

Internal Security Risks in Bangladesh

The prolonged Rohingya presence in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar and the subsequent establishment of the Bhasan Char relocation project have introduced serious internal security challenges. Analysis of Bangladeshi government reports, and international assessments reveals a rise in organised crime, including arms smuggling and drug trafficking within refugee camps (UNHCR, 2022). Security personnel have also reported concerns over the radicalisation of segments of the Rohingya youth, with some allegedly influenced by transnational extremist ideologies (Islam & Khan, 2021).

Bangladeshi strategists view the humanitarian corridor proposal as a mechanism to offload responsibility back onto Myanmar by facilitating aid delivery within Rakhine. The government hopes that direct delivery of humanitarian assistance inside Myanmar could reduce the push factors for continued displacement. However, there is also fear that if the corridor triggers Myanmar's retaliatory actions or draws transborder insurgent responses, it may spill over into southeastern Bangladesh, affecting the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Cox's Bazar.

Moreover, public sentiment within Bangladesh is increasingly turning against the indefinite presence of the Rohingya, with rising concerns over resource depletion, social tension, and law and order breakdowns (Mahmud, 2021). This domestic pressure may compel the government to adopt more assertive

or even confrontational positions vis-à-vis Myanmar, despite risks to bilateral peace.

Military and Strategic Responses from Myanmar

Myanmar's response to the corridor proposal has been characterised by strategic denial and militarisation of its western frontier. Satellite imagery and military assessments reveal the expansion of Myanmar's border military installations along the Naf River and near Maungdaw and Buthidaung in Rakhine State (Strangio, 2023). These fortifications not only signal a rejection of external involvement but also serve as a deterrent against any forced or internationally imposed humanitarian mechanisms.

Myanmar's military has accused Bangladesh of supporting insurgent infiltration, a claim rejected by Dhaka but repeatedly used by Naypyidaw to justify military exercises along the border. The Arakan Army, although engaged in conflict with the junta, holds ambiguous views on humanitarian corridors, seeing them as both opportunities for civilian protection and potential threats to its autonomy (ICG, 2023).

Therefore, any implementation of a humanitarian corridor will need to navigate a highly militarised and politically contested terrain, where the corridor itself could be perceived as a strategic move rather than a purely humanitarian measure. This raises the risk of escalation, accidental confrontation, and even proxy conflicts involving regional actors.

International Legal and Normative Frameworks

From an international legal standpoint, the implementation of humanitarian corridors requires consent from the host state—Myanmar, in this case—unless mandated by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Ferris, 2011). Given China's and Russia's veto powers and their current alignment with Myanmar's junta, such a resolution is implausible. Thus, any attempt by Bangladesh or international agencies to enforce a corridor unilaterally would violate the principle of non-intervention and state sovereignty.

However, under international humanitarian law (IHL), there are legal justifications for establishing humanitarian access when civilian populations are at risk of starvation or mass atrocity (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2020). Article 70 of Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions affirms the right of impartial humanitarian relief, though its application remains subject to state approval in peacetime or internal conflict scenarios.

Normative arguments also arise from the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, which obligates states and the international community to intervene in cases of ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity. While R2P gained traction during the early 2000s, its implementation has been inconsistent and politically selective (Bellamy, 2015). In the case of Myanmar, the R2P doctrine has been largely rhetorical, with no concrete international mobilisation to create humanitarian space.

These legal and normative ambiguities make it difficult for Bangladesh to mount a credible international campaign in favour of the corridor. Nevertheless, Bangladesh has sought to leverage soft law instruments, such as UNGA resolutions and reports from the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), to generate international pressure (UNHRC, 2022). Still, the gap between international normative frameworks and their actual enforcement remains vast.

Summary of Findings

The analysis above highlights that Bangladesh's humanitarian corridor proposal is not merely a humanitarian endeavour but a deeply politicised and securitised issue. Bangladesh's internal

vulnerabilities—ranging from refugee management to insurgent threats—interact with Myanmar's hardened militarism and diplomatic defiance. Regional and global actors, rather than alleviating tensions, often act as spoilers or passive observers, prioritising strategic interests over humanitarian imperatives.

Despite its merit in principle, the humanitarian corridor remains a tricky proposition unless supported by coordinated multilateral diplomacy, robust monitoring mechanisms, and mutual security guarantees. Bangladesh must weigh the humanitarian urgency of the corridor against potential strategic blowback, considering that its national security is inextricably linked to broader geopolitical currents and regional alignments.

Discussion

This section synthesises the findings from the data analysis and positions them within broader theoretical and policy frameworks to offer a critical understanding of the multidimensional security implications for Bangladesh. Drawing on realism, securitisation theory, and humanitarian norms, this discussion is organised around five crucial areas: the paradox of humanitarianism and national interest, sovereignty versus moral responsibility, transnational security externalities, regional power politics and humanitarian fragmentation, and policy implications and pathways forward.

The Paradox of Humanitarianism and National Interest

At the heart of Bangladesh's humanitarian corridor proposal lies a paradox: an altruistic endeavour driven by self-serving national interests. Realist theory, as articulated by Morgenthau (1948), emphasises that states act primarily to preserve their national interest, even under the guise of moral imperatives. Bangladesh's call for a humanitarian corridor reflects precisely this dual motive. On the one hand, it upholds international humanitarian principles, seeking to ensure life-saving aid reaches vulnerable populations within Rakhine State. On the other hand, it aims to relieve Bangladesh of the escalating burden of hosting over one million stateless refugees, whose continued presence poses sociopolitical and economic challenges.

Bangladesh is not alone in navigating this tension between humanitarianism and realpolitik. Comparable examples include Turkey's policies toward Syrian refugees and Colombia's handling of Venezuelan migrants, where host nations' humanitarian overtures are also deeply embedded in strategic calculations (Betts & Collier, 2017). In Bangladesh's case, the strain on national resources, increasing public resentment, and regional security risks have shifted the discourse from one of hospitality to one of containment and repatriation, leading to the framing of the corridor as a security necessity.

This duality raises questions about whether humanitarian corridors can remain insulated from the politics of power. As De Waal (2017) argues, the moral legitimacy of humanitarian action erodes when it becomes instrumentalised for political objectives, even if such objectives align with relief outcomes. Thus, Bangladesh's advocacy for the corridor must continuously navigate the thin line between moral justification and strategic self-interest.

Sovereignty Versus Moral Responsibility

The core contention in implementing a humanitarian corridor in Rakhine is the issue of sovereignty. Myanmar's military junta has invoked the principle of non-intervention under the UN Charter to reject externally imposed humanitarian mechanisms. This resistance, while predictable, is not without normative merit under international law. Humanitarian access without consent, except under a binding UN Security

Council resolution, contravenes the traditional sovereignty regime (Chesterman, 2001).

However, this legal rigidity often clashes with the emerging doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which holds that sovereignty is not a shield against international intervention when states fail to protect their populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity (Evans & Sahnoun, 2002). The plight of the Rohingya—widely recognised as victims of state-led atrocities—arguably meets R2P's threshold for preventive action.

Bangladesh, while not advocating for military intervention, implicitly invokes the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in calling for international support for a humanitarian corridor. However, without robust global consensus or actionable mandates, R2P remains a rhetorical device rather than a legally enforceable norm. The international community's paralysis, mainly due to China's and Russia's veto powers in the UN Security Council, underscores the structural limitations of enforcing moral responsibility against assertive sovereign regimes.

This impasse highlights a broader normative challenge: how can humanitarian obligations be fulfilled when sovereignty is used as a means to hinder the delivery of aid? The corridor debate, therefore, encapsulates the tensions between moral universalism and political realism, with Bangladesh caught amid this conflict.

Transnational Security Externalities

The refugee influx from Rakhine into Bangladesh has generated several transnational security concerns. The findings reveal that refugee camps in Cox's Bazar have become flashpoints for drug trafficking, human smuggling, and potential radicalisation. These developments are consistent with Securitisation Theory, which postulates that states define specific issues as existential threats to justify extraordinary measures (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998).

Bangladesh's framing of the Rohingya issue as a national security concern reflects such a securitising move. The push for a humanitarian corridor can be seen as a desecuritizing strategy—an attempt to externalise the source of insecurity by enabling aid access within Myanmar and incentivising repatriation. However, as Huysums (2006) argues, securitisation often breeds new insecurities, especially when humanitarian issues are reframed through a security lens.

For example, the relocation of Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char, justified as a containment measure, has sparked criticism over potential human rights violations, inadvertently damaging Bangladesh's moral authority in international forums. Furthermore, if the proposed corridor fails or is perceived as coercive by Myanmar or insurgent groups like the Arakan Army, it could provoke retaliatory violence, increasing cross-border instability.

Hence, any security-driven humanitarian policy must carefully assess unintended consequences and build resilience into its design. The corridor must be not only a passage of aid but also a corridor of confidence-building, regional coordination, and sustained peacebuilding efforts.

Regional Power Politics and Humanitarian Fragmentation

Regional geopolitics plays a decisive role in shaping the feasibility and reception of the humanitarian corridor. ASEAN's fragmented stance, India's strategic ambivalence, and China's overt protection of Myanmar have collectively undermined efforts to create a cohesive humanitarian response. ASEAN's preference for "non-interference" has effectively silenced bolder humanitarian interventions (Haacke,

2018). Its recent engagements with Myanmar, such as excluding military leaders from summits, remain largely symbolic.

India's position is shaped by its concerns over northeastern insurgencies and strategic investments in Myanmar's infrastructure, including the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project. Consequently, India is unlikely to support any corridor perceived as undermining Myanmar's territorial control (Singh, 2022). Meanwhile, China, as Myanmar's top investor and political ally, has little interest in facilitating international humanitarian access that could destabilise its Belt and Road Initiative (Sun, 2021).

These geopolitical fault lines translate into what Slim (2015) calls "humanitarian fragmentation"—the disintegration of global humanitarian consensus into regionally filtered, politically selective responses. Bangladesh's proposal is caught in this fragmentation, with no powerful regional bloc or global actor willing to sponsor or enforce it. The corridor thus remains an orphaned policy idea—morally compelling but geopolitically unsupported.

For Bangladesh, the challenge lies in repositioning the corridor not as a threat to Myanmar's sovereignty but as a confidence-building mechanism supported by regional humanitarian diplomacy. Regional frameworks, such as BIMSTEC, could be engaged to widen the corridor's legitimacy while minimising the perception of bilateral antagonism.

Policy Implications and Pathways Forward

The humanitarian corridor debate offers critical lessons for policymakers in Bangladesh and the broader international community. First, humanitarian diplomacy must be grounded in multilateral coalition-building. Rather than pushing for unilateral implementation or relying solely on moral arguments, Bangladesh should focus on building a normative coalition among like-minded countries, especially in the Global South, to advocate for humanitarian access within Myanmar. Engaging countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and South Korea could be crucial in shifting the diplomatic calculus.

Second, Bangladesh must strengthen its domestic security framework, particularly regarding refugee management. While humanitarian corridors may alleviate long-term burdens, the short- to medium-term strategy must involve enhanced policing, counter-radicalisation programs, and livelihood initiatives within refugee camps. Without addressing internal vulnerabilities, Bangladesh's moral appeal for external solutions may ring hollow.

Third, legal innovations should be explored. One possible path involves negotiating bilateral humanitarian agreements with Myanmar under UN facilitation, ensuring aid delivery through neutral third-party NGOs while upholding Myanmar's sovereignty. Such a model was used in Sudan and the former Yugoslavia and may offer a pragmatic middle ground (Weissman, 2011).

Fourth, public diplomacy must be intensified. Bangladesh has a compelling story of hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations, despite having limited resources. This narrative must be amplified through international media, civil society engagement, and soft power diplomacy to generate moral pressure on reluctant states and international institutions.

Finally, strategic patience is essential. The corridor proposal should not be viewed as a quick fix, but rather as part of a broader, long-term effort to reshape regional humanitarian norms and reestablish trust in multilateral mechanisms. Bangladesh should use its position to champion reform in global refugee governance, including advocating for more equitable

burden-sharing and legal clarity on humanitarian access mechanisms.

The discussion above reaffirms that the proposed humanitarian corridor from Bangladesh to Rakhine State is embedded in a complex interplay of humanitarian urgency, national security, regional geopolitics, and international law. Bangladesh's security challenges are not only a result of the presence of refugees but also of international inertia, regional rivalries, and the limitations of existing humanitarian norms.

The success of any corridor initiative depends on more than the willingness of a single state. It requires coordinated multilateralism, political courage, legal creativity, and moral consistency. Bangladesh's advocacy, if sustained and strategically recalibrated, can set a precedent for future humanitarian responses in politically contested spaces.

Conclusion

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State, marked by mass displacement and human rights violations against the Rohingya population, presents a profound test for regional humanitarian diplomacy and state security policies. Bangladesh's proposal for a humanitarian corridor emerges as a strategic response to the dual imperatives of alleviating human suffering and safeguarding national security. This study has demonstrated that the corridor proposal is not merely a humanitarian gesture but is underpinned by concerns about internal instability, transnational threats, and regional power asymmetries.

The theoretical underpinnings of realism, securitisation theory, and responsibility to protect (R2P) help contextualise the corridor as both a tool of strategic foreign policy and a morally driven humanitarian initiative. Bangladesh's hosting of over a million Rohingya refugees has produced notable security challenges, including illicit trafficking, economic strain, and potential radicalisation. While the humanitarian corridor could mitigate some of these pressures by facilitating aid delivery within Myanmar, its implementation is fraught with geopolitical and legal complexities, particularly given Myanmar's assertion of sovereignty and the fragmented regional response.

The analysis also highlighted the role of international institutions, particularly the UN and ASEAN, and their limited ability to enforce humanitarian norms amidst competing political interests. For Bangladesh, the corridor represents a necessary yet challenging diplomatic initiative that requires multilateral backing, regional consensus, and strategic patience.

Ultimately, the research confirms that humanitarian security, state sovereignty, and regional diplomacy are inextricably linked in today's crisis landscapes. The Rakhine humanitarian corridor should be viewed not as a breach of national borders, but as a confidence-building measure rooted in international humanitarian law and regional stability imperatives.

Future Research

Future research should further explore the comparative effectiveness of humanitarian corridors in other conflict zones such as Syria, Sudan, and Ukraine, drawing lessons applicable to the Rakhine context. Empirical analysis involving geospatial data, aid flow metrics, and stakeholder interviews in Bangladesh and Myanmar would deepen understanding of corridor feasibility and limitations.

Additionally, a focused study on civil-military coordination mechanisms in humanitarian corridor operations could help formulate operational blueprints that strike a balance between security and the delivery of aid. Given the rise of non-state actors in Rakhine,

future research should also assess how insurgent groups influence corridor access and whether negotiation with such actors could be normalised under international humanitarian law.

Finally, longitudinal studies assessing the psychological and economic impacts of protracted refugee hosting on host communities in Bangladesh can help contextualise security concerns within a human-centric framework. These insights will be critical for developing evidence-based humanitarian policies in South and Southeast Asia.

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