HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS AND REGIONAL STABILITY

Exploring Geopolitical, Security, *and Diplornatic* Dimensions from Global Practices to the Myanmar–Bangladesh Frontier

Edited by

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KMF
PUBLISHERS

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KMF Publishers (International Standard Identifier Number: 000000050389326X)

First published in Bangladesh, August 2025, by the

KMF Publishers
(ISIN: 000000050389326X)
(RJSC&F: P-48328/2022)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16920102

ISBN: 978-984-35-8043-6

QR CODE

978-984-35-8043-6

Computer Editing:

KMF Cyber Solutions

Soft Copy: Open Access

Barcode

978-984-35-8043-6

Preface

The landscape of global humanitarian intervention is continuously evolving in response to crises marked by conflict, displacement, and regional instability. In this context, the concept and implementation of humanitarian corridors have emerged as a vital yet complex instrument in ensuring access to aid and protection for vulnerable populations. The book Humanitarian Corridors and Regional Stability: Exploring Geopolitical, Security, and Diplomatic Dimensions from Global Practices to the Myanmar-Bangladesh Frontier is the product of critical inquiry into these dynamic mechanisms—both as tools of international law and as instruments of geopolitical negotiation.

This book has been meticulously structured to serve as a foundational resource for students, policymakers, diplomats, humanitarian practitioners, and scholars of International Relations. It addresses not only the historical and theoretical constructs of humanitarian corridors but also the multifaceted challenges—security-related, political, logistical, and regulatory—that shape their real-world application. These insights are enriched with a focused case study on Myanmar's Rakhine State and the complex humanitarian relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

This regional lens allows readers, particularly in South and Southeast Asia, to contextualise the global debate within familiar geographic and political boundaries. The situation in Rakhine and the humanitarian responses surrounding it highlight the limitations and possibilities of humanitarian corridors when seen through the prism of national sovereignty, regional diplomacy, and geopolitical influence.

It is important to note that this book is designed with an interdisciplinary approach. While rooted in political science and international relations, it also engages with legal, logistical, and technological considerations. For students from CSE and CSIT backgrounds, the book offers an opportunity to explore how digital tools, cybersecurity, and communication infrastructure can support—or undermine—the effectiveness of humanitarian efforts. This reflects our belief in broadening the analytical frameworks available to future leaders and encouraging cross-sectoral collaboration.

As editor, I express my sincere appreciation to the scholars and contributors who lent their expertise to this volume. I also extend special thanks to KMF Publishers for supporting the dissemination of this critical work, and to my students and colleagues at Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology, who continuously inspire academic exploration of real-world issues.

In conclusion, I hope this book serves as a stimulus for research, debate, and policy dialogue on the future of humanitarian intervention. Whether addressing global emergencies or regional crises, the questions surrounding humanitarian corridors demand not only urgent answers but also thoughtful, ethical engagement. It is my earnest hope that this volume contributes meaningfully to that discourse.

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August, 2025

Student Reflection

Participating in this research project on International Humanitarian Corridors has been one of the most intellectually rewarding experiences of my academic journey. As a student of Science and Engineering, this interdisciplinary exploration into humanitarian law and policy allowed me to expand my understanding beyond technical subjects and engage with critical global issues like civilian protection, armed conflict, and humanitarian governance.

Through this course, I developed essential research skills, particularly in qualitative analysis, literature review, and legal interpretation. Working closely with my teammates, I learned how to conduct comparative case studies, critically evaluate international legal instruments, and assess the real-world implications of humanitarian policies. The process of studying real conflict zones such as Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia was emotionally intense but also deeply eye-opening. It made me realise how gaps in regulation and legal enforcement can have life-or-death consequences for civilians in war-affected regions.

One of the most meaningful aspects of this experience was understanding how law, diplomacy, and technology intersect in humanitarian responses. The absence of a universal legal framework for humanitarian corridors is not just a theoretical issue; it affects how fast aid reaches people, how safe they are, and whether global organisations can act effectively. This motivated me to think critically about policy reforms and the role that innovation and accountability play in improving humanitarian outcomes.

This research also improved my academic writing, referencing APA style, and collaboration skills. Being able to contribute to a professionally compiled book under the guidance of Professor Dr Kazi Abdul Mannan has been an honour, and it has inspired me to consider future studies in international policy or public service.

Overall, this course has not only deepened my academic capabilities but also enriched my sense of responsibility as a global citizen. I now view research not just as an academic requirement, but as a tool for meaningful change.

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August, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SL	Author(s)	Title	
1.	Mridul Hasan Raihan; Mst. Tahsina Jannat; Shihab Sarker; Md. Kamrul Hasan	Rethinking Humanitarian Corridors in the Contemporary World	7
2.	Nawsin Saiwara Juthi; Aisha Azad Aspiya; Nawsin Saiwara Juthi; Abrar Rahman; Samira Alam Efa	Security Dimensions of Humanitarian Corridors	21
3.	Sadman Nasim Sakin; Samia Nahar Samanta; Md. Naimur Hasan; Azizul Islam Ridoy	Political Manipulation in Humanitarian Corridor Operations	39
4.	Zulfikar Zulhash; Fahima Hossain Mili; Md. Mezbah Uddin Mahir; Tasif Hossain Emon	Logistical Barriers in Humanitarian Corridors	55
5.	Munia Zaman Mim; Kazi Shah Hamza; Paval Ahammed Nijum; Md Nahidur Rahman Nabil	Diplomatic Complexities of Humanitarian Corridors	71
6.	Sraboni Akter; Anowar Hossain; Faria Jahan Toma; Minhajul Islam	Legal and Regulatory Aspects of Humanitarian Corridors	86
7.	Hasibul Islam Shanto; Kaspia Hasan Bithi; Taflia Akter Mim; Tasmia Yeasmin Oyshi; Mahbuba Sultana Faria	Regional Geopolitics of Aid Delivery to Myanmar's Rakhine State	102
8.	Rotna Moni; Md. Tawhid Mondol; Hasib Khan; Sarbary Das Roy; Md. Fayjul Karim Hridoy	Myanmar-Bangladesh Relations in the Context of Humanitarian Aid	121
9.	Kulsum Bhuiyan; Shariful Billah; Zakia Sultana Bhuiyan; Md. Latifur Rahman Ratul	Strategic and Operational Challenges in Rakhine Aid Corridors	142
10.	Rabeya Boshri Sarna; Jakaria Hossan Riyan; Jarin Sultana Arpa; Liza Akter	Bangladesh's Security Concerns in Rakhine Humanitarian Efforts	159

11.	Md. Shagor Islam; Shanzida Akter Mim; Shaishab Das; Md. Shoaib Hossain Alshan	Political Challenges for Bangladesh in Cross-Border Aid to Rakhine	176
12	Ibrahim Kholilulla; Md. Mazharul Islam Hridoy; Md. Abu Bakar Siddik; Nazrin Islam Chowdhury	Diplomatic Hurdles for Bangladesh in Rakhine Aid Initiatives	192

Rethinking Humanitarian Corridors in the Contemporary World

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

Keywords: Humanitarian corridors, international law, armed conflict, humanitarian aid, safe passage, geopolitical crisis, multilateral cooperation

1. Introduction

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

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

Theoretically, humanitarian corridors are grounded in several international legal instruments, including the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols, particularly those relating to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. These legal frameworks underscore the obligations of state and non-state actors to permit unimpeded humanitarian access and ensure the protection of civilian populations (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2020). However, in practice, these corridors often operate in legal grey zones, particularly when established unilaterally or without sufficient international oversight.

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

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

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

By analysing previous experiences and proposing a contemporary model, the article aspires to contribute to both scholarly discussions and policy formulation. It is hoped that the insights offered here will be of value to humanitarian actors, international legal scholars, and policy-makers seeking to reform humanitarian response strategies in a volatile global landscape.

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

This article addresses the following research questions:

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

2. Theoretical Framework

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

2.1. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as Normative Foundation

At the core of this research lies the legal theory embedded in international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. IHL provides the normative structure for humanitarian corridors, grounding their legitimacy in the rights of civilians and the obligations of parties to a conflict. Article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) mandates the free passage of essential humanitarian goods for civilian populations, and Article 59 further stipulates that relief actions must be permitted when civilians are inadequately supplied (ICRC, 2013). These principles establish that humanitarian corridors are not merely tactical mechanisms but legally supported rights under international law.

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

2.2. Realism and the Politics of Humanitarian Access

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

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

Realist perspectives thus offer a critical lens through which to understand the disjuncture between humanitarian ideals and political realities, highlighting the need for alternative mechanisms that are less dependent on high-level state consent or more enforceable through multilateral or regional frameworks.

2.3. Constructivism and Norm Diffusion in Humanitarian Practice

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

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

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

2.4. Humanitarian Ethics and Moral Positioning

The ethical dimension of humanitarian action is addressed through the lens of humanitarian ethics, particularly the works of Slim (2015), who emphasises that humanitarian practitioners operate in morally charged environments where they must balance principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence against the practical realities of power and violence. This theory explains the ethical dilemmas faced by humanitarian organisations when cooperating with warring parties to establish corridors that may be used for propaganda or coercion.

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

2.5. Synthesis and Application

These theoretical perspectives collectively inform the study's analytical framework. IHL provides the legal basis, realism exposes the power constraints, constructivism highlights the normative evolution, and humanitarian ethics reveal the moral and practical challenges. The integration of these theories enables a

multidimensional understanding of humanitarian corridors, accounting for both structural failures and opportunities for reform.

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

3. Literature Review

The concept of humanitarian corridors occupies an interdisciplinary space encompassing international law, conflict studies, humanitarian policy, and operational logistics. The literature on this subject has grown considerably in the last two decades, especially in response to the increasing complexity of modern conflicts. This section synthesises the academic and policy-oriented literature under five thematic categories: (1) legal foundations of humanitarian corridors, (2) historical implementations and outcomes, (3) political manipulation and ethical dilemmas, (4) logistical and operational constraints, and (5) contemporary theoretical models and reform proposals.

3.1 Legal Foundations of Humanitarian Corridors

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

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

3.2 Historical Implementations and Outcomes

Several case studies dominate the academic and policy discourse on the implementation of humanitarian corridors. The 1992–1995 Bosnian War is often cited as the earliest modern precedent for internationally monitored humanitarian corridors. The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) facilitated access to besieged areas, but their efforts were severely limited by weak mandates and poor enforcement mechanisms (Minear et al., 2000). The failure of these corridors to prevent the Srebrenica massacre revealed the dangers of symbolic protection without absolute operational guarantees.

In the 2000s, the Darfur crisis, the Sri Lankan civil war, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict saw the use of temporary corridors, often unilaterally declared and lacking neutral oversight (Pantuliano, 2019). These cases

highlighted the challenge of ensuring impartiality and transparency, as many corridors became extensions of state-controlled zones with limited humanitarian benefit.

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

3.3 Political Manipulation and Ethical Dilemmas

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

Furthermore, humanitarian corridors are often proposed during active conflict without adequate guarantees of safety and security. In many cases, as in Aleppo (2016) and Mariupol (2022), corridors became battlegrounds themselves, with reported violations of ceasefires and attacks on civilians attempting to flee (UNOCHA, 2022). This undermines the humanitarian imperative and raises serious questions about the ethics of proposing corridors in situations where security cannot be assured.

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

3.4 Logistical and Operational Constraints

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

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

3.5 Contemporary Theoretical Models and Reform Proposals

Several scholars and institutions have proposed reforms to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of humanitarian corridors. Fast (2017) advocates for a "humanitarian governance" model, where standardised

norms and decentralised accountability structures are implemented globally. This would allow local agencies to participate meaningfully in corridor design and decision-making.

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

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

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

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

4. Methodology

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

4.1 Research Design

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

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

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

4.2 Data Collection

The study primarily utilised documentary and archival data, including:

- Reports and resolutions from international organisations (e.g., United Nations, ICRC, OCHA),
- Legal texts (e.g., Geneva Conventions, UNSC resolutions),
- Scholarly peer-reviewed articles and books, and
- NGO situation reports, press releases, and monitoring data.

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

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

4.3 Data Analysis

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

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

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

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

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the politically sensitive and sometimes classified nature of humanitarian corridor operations, ethical standards were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained for all interviews, and data were anonymised. No personally identifiable or confidential operational information was disclosed.

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

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

5. Results

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

5.1 Legal Frameworks and Compliance

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

In more recent examples, such as Syria, despite numerous UN Security Council resolutions (e.g., Res. 2165, 2014), state actors frequently imposed unilateral conditions, selectively permitted aid, or manipulated access for strategic gain (Ferris & Kirişci, 2016). These inconsistencies underscore the gap between legal frameworks and their enforcement mechanisms.

5.2 Political Manipulation and Strategic Interests

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

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

5.3 Operational Security and Access

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

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

5.4 Civilian Impact and Perceptions

Despite the challenges, evidence shows that when well-implemented, humanitarian corridors can save lives and restore dignity to affected populations. In the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict (2021–2022), temporary corridors facilitated by the African Union and supported by the UN enabled the delivery of food, medical supplies, and the evacuation of the wounded. Surveys conducted by Médecins Sans Frontières and corroborated in this study suggest that even limited access can dramatically reduce mortality rates (MSF, 2022).

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

5.5 Emerging Innovations and Monitoring

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

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

6. Discussion

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

6.1 Revisiting the Humanitarian Purpose Amidst Political Realities

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

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

6.2 Legal Ambiguity and Fragmented Enforcement

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

Furthermore, the absence of a binding enforcement mechanism under international humanitarian law (IHL) exacerbates this weakness. The Security Council may authorise humanitarian access (e.g., Resolution 2165 for Syria), but geopolitical deadlocks and veto power often paralyse timely action (Bellamy & Williams, 2015). The discussion thus confirms what Hathaway and Shapiro (2017) termed "the enforcement gap" in modern humanitarian operations, where law exists but lacks coercive enforcement.

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

6.3 Operational Constraints and the Importance of Local Engagement

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

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

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

6.4 Ethical Dilemmas in Forced Displacement and Safe Passage

A troubling ethical dimension arises when corridors become conduits for forced displacement or demographic engineering. This was evident in Syria, where corridor agreements often coincided with population transfers from opposition-held areas (Zyck & Muggah, 2017). Such practices violate the voluntary nature of humanitarian assistance and contradict the 1951 Refugee Convention and customary international law.

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

6.5 Toward a New Model: Principles for a Contemporary Proposal

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

- Neutral Multilateral Coordination: Corridors should be designed and overseen by neutral international coalitions such as the ICRC, UN OCHA, and regional humanitarian bodies (e.g., ASEAN, AU), excluding direct control by parties to the conflict.
- Transparent Legal Mandates: Mandates for corridors must be grounded in both International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and specific United Nations Security Council resolutions, with explicit protection clauses and established accountability mechanisms.
- Technological Monitoring: Real-time satellite and blockchain systems should be employed to monitor aid flow and corridor usage, reducing theft, manipulation, and misreporting (WFP, 2023).
- Community Consent and Participation: Local leaders and civil society actors must be part of corridor planning, ensuring cultural appropriateness, legitimacy, and awareness.
- Enforcement and Accountability: Violations of corridor agreements must trigger international responses—legal, political, and economic—under frameworks like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) or targeted sanctions.
- Post-Corridor Integration: Corridors must be linked to long-term protection plans, such as resettlement assistance, trauma support, and eventual return mechanisms, aligning with UNHCR guidelines.

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

7. Conclusion

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

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

This study underscores the urgent need for a globally endorsed, principles-based framework for humanitarian corridors. Such a framework must emphasise legal clarity, impartial oversight, technological integration, and meaningful community engagement. Only by addressing the legal and political deficiencies of past practices and incorporating contemporary innovations can humanitarian corridors evolve into reliable instruments of

civilian protection and conflict mitigation. Future research should build on this foundation to quantify the impact of corridors, explore regional governance models, and enhance cross-sector collaboration.

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Security Dimensions of Humanitarian Corridors

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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.

Keywords: Humanitarian corridors, International security, Armed conflict, Humanitarian intervention, Civilian protection.

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). However, 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. 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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Political Manipulation in Humanitarian Corridor Operations

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This study critically examines the political exploitation of international humanitarian corridors—mechanisms designed to provide safe passage for civilians and aid during armed conflicts. Drawing on three case studies—Syria, Ukraine, and Sudan—it reveals how humanitarian corridors are frequently co-opted for strategic military and political gain, undermining their neutrality and humanitarian purpose. Utilising a multidimensional theoretical framework incorporating realism, constructivism, and critical humanitarianism, the analysis highlights how both state and non-state actors instrumentalise these corridors to influence battlefield outcomes, control civilian populations, and construct normative legitimacy. The methodology combines qualitative content analysis of UN reports, NGO documentation, and academic literature with a thematic synthesis approach. Findings suggest that humanitarian corridors are often sites of coercion, misinformation, and legal ambiguity, calling into question the efficacy of international humanitarian law in protecting vulnerable populations. The study concludes with practical recommendations for strengthening legal enforcement, operational transparency, and ethical accountability in humanitarian interventions. It also proposes the integration of advanced monitoring technologies and more inclusive diplomatic negotiations to safeguard the humanitarian intent of such corridors. This research contributes to a growing body of literature that advocates for a reevaluation of humanitarian tools in contemporary conflict zones and proposes pathways for more principled and effective intervention strategies.

Keywords: humanitarian corridors, International humanitarian law, Political exploitation, Syria, Ukraine, Realism, Constructivism.

1. Introduction

Humanitarian corridors are designated routes or zones established during armed conflicts or large-scale emergencies to ensure the safe passage of civilians, the wounded, and humanitarian aid. These corridors are typically negotiated between warring parties under the auspices of international organisations or third-party mediators, aiming to uphold principles enshrined in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), especially those codified in the Geneva Conventions (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2020). They serve as vital lifelines during sieges, displacements, and warfare, seeking to uphold the inviolable rights of civilians amidst chaos and violence.

Despite their humanitarian intentions, the operationalisation of such corridors has become increasingly politicised in modern conflict zones. As state and non-state actors vie for tactical advantage, humanitarian corridors have emerged not only as tools of compassion but also as instruments of strategy and propaganda (Slim, 2016). Rather than being protected zones of neutrality and safety, they are often used to manipulate civilian movements, consolidate military control, legitimise territorial claims, or project compliance with international norms, even while violating them in practice (Amnesty International, 2018).

This duality between the intended humanitarian function of corridors and their actual utilisation on the ground raises critical questions about the integrity of humanitarian operations in conflict zones. Cases such as the prolonged siege of Eastern Ghouta in Syria, the contested evacuations in Ukraine during the Russian invasion, and the ethnic-based access to aid in the recent Sudanese civil strife illustrate how these corridors can be co-opted to serve political or military goals (Human Rights Watch, 2017; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2022; Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2024).

Furthermore, the international legal and normative frameworks surrounding humanitarian corridors, while theoretically robust, are often unenforceable in practical terms due to power asymmetries, fragmented governance, or lack of third-party oversight. The result is an erosion of trust in humanitarian mechanisms and a growing perception that humanitarian tools are susceptible to manipulation by powerful actors (Billerbeck, 2020). In a global environment increasingly characterised by asymmetric warfare, proxy conflicts, and hybrid threats, the ability of humanitarian actors to remain neutral and effective is being severely tested.

This research aims to examine the political exploitation of international humanitarian corridors through a comparative lens, focusing on three contemporary conflict zones: Syria, Ukraine, and Sudan. By employing theoretical insights from both Realism and Constructivism in International Relations, this paper explores how power interests and normative constructions shape the creation, use, and perception of humanitarian corridors. Realism highlights the instrumentalisation of such corridors for strategic gain, while Constructivism sheds light on how actors justify or condemn their usage through normative discourse (Wendt, 1999; Mearsheimer, 2001).

The central research question guiding this study is: How are international humanitarian corridors politically exploited in contemporary conflict settings, and what are the implications for humanitarian principles and international law? Through this inquiry, the study aims to bridge the gap between legal theory, humanitarian practice, and political reality, offering not only a critical assessment of existing practices but also policy-oriented recommendations to mitigate future exploitation.

This paper seeks to analyse the challenges posed by the political exploitation of humanitarian corridors. It does so through a theoretical lens that combines realism and Constructivism, supported by case-based

qualitative content analysis. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How are international humanitarian corridors politically exploited, and what implications does this have for humanitarian principles and international law?

2. Theoretical Framework

To critically assess the political exploitation of international humanitarian corridors, this study employs a dual-theoretical lens combining Realism and Constructivism—two foundational paradigms in International Relations (IR). While these approaches differ in their assumptions about the nature of international politics, their intersection allows for a more comprehensive understanding of both the strategic manipulation and normative justification surrounding humanitarian corridors.

2.1 Realism: Power and Strategic Calculations

Realism posits that the international system is anarchic, and its principal actors pursue survival and power as their primary objectives (Mearsheimer, 2001). Under this framework, humanitarian corridors are not merely neutral instruments of relief but potential tools to achieve strategic advantages in war zones. Realists argue that actors, especially states and powerful non-state entities, may endorse such corridors only to the extent that they align with their geopolitical objectives. For instance, corridors may be allowed to facilitate the relocation of populations from strategically valuable territories or to manipulate the international community's perception of a state's adherence to humanitarian norms (Waltz, 1979; Bellamy, 2015).

In Syria, for example, the Assad regime, with the support of Russia, often employed so-called "evacuation corridors" as mechanisms for consolidating control over besieged areas after prolonged aerial bombardment and starvation tactics (Amnesty International, 2018). Realist theory helps explain this behaviour as a rational strategic choice rather than a humanitarian gesture. These corridors, although presented as humanitarian exits, served to remove opposition-held populations and reassert state sovereignty over contested urban centres.

2.3 Constructivism: Norms, Identity, and Legitimacy

In contrast, Constructivism emphasises the role of ideational factors, such as norms, identities, and discourses, in shaping international behaviour (Wendt, 1999). Constructivists assert that international actors do not merely respond to material interests but also act in ways that are socially constructed and deemed legitimate within prevailing normative frameworks. In this sense, humanitarian corridors are embedded within broader humanitarian discourses that value neutrality, impartiality, and the protection of civilians.

Constructivism enables scholars to examine how actors justify or critique humanitarian corridors not only in terms of outcomes but also through the lens of legitimacy. States and international organisations often invoke the humanitarian norm of "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) to justify the establishment or enforcement of such corridors, even when such actions intersect with political motives (Weiss, 2016). Moreover, actors who violate or manipulate corridors may still frame their actions in humanitarian terms to preserve their international image or avoid sanctions, indicating that norms have both constraining and enabling power.

For instance, during the Russia-Ukraine war, both sides accused each other of violating agreed-upon humanitarian corridors, while simultaneously presenting themselves as more compliant with international humanitarian norms (UNOCHA, 2022). Constructivism helps explain this behaviour by analysing the performative aspects of humanitarianism—how actors seek moral legitimacy and soft power even amidst brutal conflict.

2.4 Integrative Utility of the Framework

Together, Realism and Constructivism provide a complementary lens for analysing the dual nature of humanitarian corridors. Realism highlights how power dynamics and strategic interests shape the material design and function of corridors. Constructivism, meanwhile, illuminates how those same actions are framed, justified, or contested within international normative structures. This dual approach is beneficial for understanding both the actions and the discourses of state and non-state actors in modern asymmetric conflicts, where the boundaries between military necessity and humanitarian concern are increasingly blurred (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

By applying this theoretical framework, the research seeks to dissect not only the operational dimensions of humanitarian corridors but also the political narratives that accompany them, thereby uncovering the layers of exploitation that may be masked by ostensibly humanitarian language.

3. Literature Review

The concept of international humanitarian corridors has garnered increasing scholarly attention in recent decades, particularly as protracted conflicts and complex emergencies have challenged traditional modes of humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian corridors, generally defined as negotiated pathways enabling the safe evacuation of civilians or delivery of aid during armed conflicts, have evolved from ad hoc arrangements into highly politicised and strategically significant tools. This literature review critically surveys the evolution, implementation, and challenges of humanitarian corridors, while also emphasising the emerging discourse on their political manipulation.

3.1. Historical and Legal Foundations

The early conceptualisation of humanitarian corridors is rooted in the Geneva Conventions and subsequent protocols, particularly Article 70 of Additional Protocol I (1977), which outlines the right of access to humanitarian relief in times of armed conflict (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2016). However, as scholars such as Fleck (2013) and Kolb and Gaggioli (2013) note, these legal instruments are often aspirational, lacking robust enforcement mechanisms. Legal scholars have criticised the discretionary power they grant to sovereign states, which often results in uneven implementation depending on political will and military objectives.

3.2. Operational Realities and Challenges

The practical deployment of humanitarian corridors has demonstrated a series of operational difficulties. According to Terry (2002) and Barnett (2011), humanitarian actors frequently find themselves entangled in the logic of war, whereby their neutral and impartial status is compromised. The Syrian conflict presents a paradigmatic example, where so-called “safe zones” and corridors were often created under siege-like conditions, resulting in forced displacement rather than voluntary humanitarian relief (Slim, 2015; Healy & Tiller, 2014). These corridors became instruments of regime consolidation rather than humanitarian sanctuaries.

Several reports by Médecins Sans Frontières (2016) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2022) highlight the recurring issue of insecurity and manipulation of corridors by belligerents. In Ukraine, for instance, temporary ceasefires for humanitarian passage have frequently been violated, with civilians caught in crossfire or redirected against their will (ICRC, 2022; Gowan, 2022). In

Sudan, fragmented governance and inter-militia competition have made coordination nearly impossible, often delaying aid or rerouting it through corrupt networks (ReliefWeb, 2023).

3.3. Political Instrumentalisation and Normative Tensions

A significant body of recent literature interrogates the politicisation of humanitarianism. Scholars such as Donini (2012) and Duffield (2014) argue that state and non-state actors are increasingly co-opting humanitarian corridors to further their political or military agendas. The corridors cease to function as neutral humanitarian mechanisms and instead become embedded within broader geopolitical strategies. This is particularly evident in asymmetric warfare, where weaker parties may leverage humanitarian optics to garner international sympathy or to delegitimise opponents (de Lauri, 2016).

Kaldor (2012) and Fassin (2011) further contend that the very act of establishing a humanitarian corridor often legitimises certain forms of violence while obscuring others. For example, designating one area as "safe" implicitly marks other regions as disposable, reinforcing a hierarchy of life and undermining the universality of humanitarian norms. The temporary nature of corridors, which often lasts only hours or days, exacerbates this problem by creating fleeting windows of safety rather than providing sustainable protection.

3.4. The Role of International Actors

The literature is divided on the role of international organisations in managing or mitigating these exploitations. While the United Nations, particularly through OCHA and the Security Council, has played a pivotal role in facilitating humanitarian access, it has also been criticised for acquiescing to power asymmetries. Scholars such as Weiss (2013) and Macrae and Harmer (2004) note that UN-mandated corridors often reflect the geopolitical interests of dominant states, resulting in a form of selective humanitarianism. The lack of consensus among permanent members of the Security Council frequently impedes decisive action, as seen in the Syrian and Ukrainian contexts.

On the other hand, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local civil society actors are increasingly recognised for their adaptive, community-based approaches to corridor negotiation. According to Fast (2014) and Hilhorst (2018), these actors are better positioned to understand local power dynamics and are often more trusted by communities than international agencies. Nonetheless, they face challenges of scale, security, and funding that limit their impact in high-intensity conflict zones.

3.5. Emerging Solutions and Ethical Debates

There is a growing academic discourse on innovative solutions and ethical paradigms that might improve the functioning of humanitarian corridors. The use of technology, such as satellite monitoring and blockchain-based tracking systems, is viewed as a promising approach to enhancing transparency and accountability (Mancini-Griffoli & Talbot, 2019). However, these solutions also raise ethical concerns about surveillance, data protection, and the militarisation of aid.

Ethical debates in the literature also revolve around the principle of "not harm." As Slim (2015) warns, the establishment of corridors without robust ethical oversight can inadvertently cause more harm than good by legitimising forced evacuations or becoming tools of demographic engineering. The literature calls for a re-centring of humanitarianism around affected populations rather than political convenience.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study methodology to investigate the political exploitation of international humanitarian corridors in contemporary conflict zones. A qualitative approach is most appropriate given the complex, context-dependent nature of the phenomena under investigation, particularly the intersection between humanitarian norms, state behaviour, and international political discourse (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Through in-depth analysis of three specific cases—Syria, Ukraine, and Sudan—the research seeks to identify patterns, divergences, and implications surrounding the strategic use and misuse of humanitarian corridors.

4.1 Case Selection

The case study approach allows for a contextualised exploration of specific events while maintaining analytical generalizability through comparison (Yin, 2018). The three selected cases—Syria (2011–2020), Ukraine (2022–present), and Sudan (2023–present)—were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Presence of declared humanitarian corridors: All three contexts feature formally established humanitarian corridors, either through bilateral agreements, international mediation, or unilateral declarations.
- Documented instances of political manipulation: Each case presents credible allegations or evidence of corridors being used for purposes other than civilian protection.
- Variation in geopolitical context: These conflicts span different regions, actors, and international responses, providing a diverse backdrop for comparative insights.

This purposive sampling ensures theoretical relevance rather than statistical representativeness, aligning with the goals of qualitative IR research (George & Bennett, 2005).

4.2 Data Collection

The study relies primarily on secondary data sources, including:

- Reports from international organisations (e.g., United Nations, ICRC, MSF)
- NGO publications (e.g., Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch)
- News archives and investigative journalism
- Academic literature
- Government and intergovernmental briefings and communiqués

These materials were systematically reviewed using document analysis to identify discourses, policy actions, and outcomes related to the implementation and manipulation of humanitarian corridors. The selected documents were screened for relevance, credibility, and recency to ensure analytical validity (Bowen, 2009).

Additionally, discourse analysis was employed to assess how various actors—state, non-state, and international—frame their engagement with humanitarian corridors. This helps unpack the normative and political justifications for their use or violation, consistent with the constructivist strand of the study's theoretical framework (Gee, 2014).

4.3 Analytical Strategy

The analysis was conducted in two stages:

- Within-case analysis: Each case was examined independently to identify the political dynamics, actors involved, humanitarian consequences, and instances of corridor exploitation.
- Cross-case comparison: The findings were then compared across the three cases to identify common themes and key divergences. Particular attention was given to how power asymmetries, strategic military objectives, and international responses influenced the use or misuse of corridors.

This dual-level analysis enables the research to move beyond descriptive accounts toward theoretical generalisations about the political instrumentalisation of humanitarian norms in conflict zones.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the reliance on secondary sources, no direct human subjects were involved, and ethical clearance was not required under standard institutional guidelines. However, the study maintained a strong commitment to representing conflict-affected populations ethically, avoiding the reproduction of state narratives that dehumanise or victimise communities (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, care was taken to triangulate data from multiple perspectives to reduce bias and increase interpretive validity.

By combining methodological rigour with contextual depth, this research offers a robust platform to interrogate the paradoxes inherent in the modern deployment of humanitarian corridors—mechanisms intended to save lives but often wielded in the service of power.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents a comparative analysis of three major conflict zones—Syria, Ukraine, and Sudan—where humanitarian corridors have been employed with varying degrees of political manipulation. Drawing on qualitative data from institutional reports, academic analyses, and media investigations, the section analyses the actors, motives, and consequences surrounding these corridors. Findings are organised thematically to uncover patterns of exploitation and deviation from humanitarian norms.

5.1. Syria: The Politicisation of Humanitarian Corridors as Siege Warfare Tools

In Syria, humanitarian corridors were widely publicised as mechanisms to evacuate civilians from besieged zones, particularly between 2013 and 2018. However, extensive evidence suggests that the Assad regime and its allies strategically manipulated these corridors to consolidate territorial control. Humanitarian corridors were often implemented only after prolonged sieges and the deliberate use of starvation and bombardment, creating conditions where civilians had no choice but to evacuate (Amnesty International, 2018; Lundgren, 2019).

A notable example is the 2016 evacuation of Aleppo, where Syrian and Russian forces facilitated corridors to allow civilians and rebel fighters to leave under an agreement with the United Nations. However, reports indicated that these corridors were not truly voluntary, as access to food, water, and medical care had been deliberately restricted in opposition-held areas for months (Siegel, 2017). The corridors thus became instruments for forced displacement, effectively enabling the regime to reclaim strategic urban territories without prolonged ground combat.

From a realist perspective, this aligns with the logic of using humanitarian rhetoric to mask strategic objectives (Mearsheimer, 2001). The manipulation of these corridors allowed the regime to gain legitimacy in international discourse while engaging in actions that contravened international humanitarian law. From a constructivist perspective, the regime framed these evacuations as acts of clemency and peace-making,

despite their coercive nature, demonstrating how humanitarian discourse can be co-opted to legitimise state violence (Wendt, 1999).

5.2. Ukraine: Competing Narratives and Weaponised Humanitarianism

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine presented a different dynamic, with both sides engaging in strategic communication surrounding humanitarian corridors. Following the siege of Mariupol and other eastern Ukrainian cities, several corridors were negotiated under international pressure to allow civilian evacuations. However, multiple independent sources confirmed that Russia bombarded designated evacuation routes, leading to civilian casualties and raising questions about the corridors' integrity (UN News, 2022; ICRC, 2022).

Russia's declaration of unilateral corridors—primarily directing evacuees toward Russian-held territories or Russia itself—was interpreted by the Ukrainian government and many observers as a tactic of population control and forced assimilation (BBC, 2022). Human Rights Watch (2022) reported that Ukrainian civilians were subjected to "filtration camps," where individuals were interrogated, detained, and, in some cases, forcibly deported to Russia.

This strategy resonates with both realist and constructivist interpretations. From a realist view, Russia's manipulation of corridors reflects its military goal of depopulating contested zones and using civilians as leverage in negotiations. Constructivist analysis reveals how humanitarian terminology was employed to soften the perception of coercive relocations. Russian media narratives portrayed these corridors as protective actions, reinforcing state legitimacy while undermining Ukrainian sovereignty (Kazansky, 2023).

Meanwhile, Ukraine and Western allies also used the discourse around humanitarian violations to mobilise international support, showing how even accusations of corridor violations are weaponised within the information war. Thus, the Ukrainian case reveals a dual exploitation of humanitarian corridors through both physical manipulation and discursive warfare.

5.3. Sudan: Humanitarian Access Amid State Fragmentation

Sudan's 2023 conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) presents a distinct case, characterised by institutional collapse and fragmented state authority. Humanitarian corridors, rather than being centrally negotiated or enforced, have depended mainly on ad hoc agreements and the capacity of local actors, international agencies, and tribal networks (UNOCHA, 2023).

In contrast to Syria and Ukraine, Sudan lacks a centralised authority capable of guaranteeing corridor security. This has led to frequent violations of ceasefires and widespread looting of humanitarian convoys. Humanitarian access is also highly politicised—both sides have selectively permitted aid to areas under their control, using it as leverage to garner local support and legitimacy (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2023).

The politicisation here is less about overt deception and more about functional survival in a fragmented sovereignty environment. The RSF has been accused of granting corridor access in return for loyalty pledges, while the SAF has obstructed aid delivery to opposition-controlled territories (International Crisis Group, 2023). Humanitarian corridors are not only manipulated but also often absent in areas that are most in need due to logistical and security constraints.

Realism explains this behaviour as rational within an anarchic system where neither actor can afford to cede control. Constructivism also contributes insights: local identities, historical grievances, and ethnic affiliations

shape which communities receive humanitarian protection. Normative commitments to civilian protection are often highly selective, based on factors such as political, ethnic, or strategic proximity.

5.4. Comparative Patterns and Political Exploitation Typologies

Analysing these three cases reveals four major typologies of political exploitation in humanitarian corridors:

- Strategic Evacuation as Territory Consolidation (Syria)
- Corridors were used to depopulate contested areas and enforce demographic shifts.
- Often followed sieges and indiscriminate attacks.
- International actors faced dilemmas in legitimising these corridors by participating in their negotiation.
- Corridor Manipulation as Information Warfare (Ukraine)
- Both establishment and violation of corridors were used to influence international opinion.
- Evacuations were redirected to hostile territories, effectively weaponising humanitarian protection.
- Corridors functioned as both military and propaganda tools.
- Fragmentation and Localised Negotiation (Sudan)
- The absence of a single authoritative power led to patchwork corridors governed by militias, tribal leaders, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
- Aid was selectively granted, politicised at local levels, and subject to looting.
- Lack of enforcement mechanisms enabled rampant impunity.
- Normative Co-optation Across Contexts
- In all cases, humanitarian discourse was used to mask or justify politically motivated actions.
- Actors appealed to international law and humanitarianism while engaging in practices antithetical to those principles.
- The performative use of humanitarian language served to evade accountability.

These findings reinforce the notion that humanitarian corridors, while normatively rooted in civilian protection, are highly susceptible to instrumentalisation when embedded within power asymmetries and contested sovereignties.

5.5. Implications for Humanitarian Practice and International Law

The research demonstrates that humanitarian corridors are rarely neutral. Their effectiveness is contingent on a balance of power, the presence of credible enforcement mechanisms, and the ability of neutral actors to monitor and implement agreements. When these conditions are absent, corridors become susceptible to manipulation and may even exacerbate conflict dynamics.

Moreover, the dual role of corridors—as both practical relief mechanisms and symbolic gestures—makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. States and non-state actors can comply with international expectations superficially while using corridors to achieve coercive ends. This creates a challenge for international humanitarian law (IHL), which assumes exemplary faith implementation of principles such as neutrality and distinction (ICRC, 2016).

The findings suggest a need for increased monitoring, verification, and conditionality in establishing humanitarian corridors. Agreements must include third-party verification, enforceable sanctions for violations, and robust documentation processes to ensure accountability and transparency. Furthermore,

humanitarian actors must navigate the fine line between engagement and complicity, ensuring that their participation does not legitimise exploitative arrangements.

6. Discussion

This section synthesises the key findings of the data analysis within the broader academic discourse on humanitarianism, international law, and conflict strategy. It critically evaluates the implications of political exploitation in humanitarian corridors and provides a theoretical assessment through the lenses of realism, constructivism, and critical humanitarianism. The section also explores how these findings inform policy, law, and humanitarian practice.

6.1. Humanitarian Corridors as Political Instruments

Humanitarian corridors, though conceptualised as life-saving pathways for civilians during armed conflict, often morph into tools of strategic gain. In all three case studies—Syria, Ukraine, and Sudan—the original intent of corridors was subverted by political and military interests. These findings align with Slim's (2015) argument that humanitarian space is never politically neutral; somewhat, it is shaped, constrained, and exploited by the actors who control territory and discourse.

In Syria, the state used humanitarian corridors to achieve a dual objective: consolidating territory and depopulating resistance zones. These corridors were created after prolonged sieges that violated the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined in International Humanitarian Law (ICRC, 2016). The Syrian case exemplifies how corridors can serve as mechanisms of coerced displacement rather than voluntary refuge. The corridor thus becomes a “humanitarian alibi” (Terry, 2002), enabling state actors to legitimise military objectives through a veneer of legality and compassion.

Ukraine’s conflict revealed how humanitarian corridors could serve as battlegrounds for information and psychological warfare. Russia’s establishment of corridors leading into Russian territory, coupled with documented attacks on evacuation routes, demonstrates a strategy of instrumentalising humanitarian mechanisms for both population control and media influence (Kazansky, 2023). Meanwhile, Ukraine and its allies emphasised violations to garner international condemnation and reinforce normative narratives around Russian aggression. This mutual manipulation highlights how humanitarian corridors have become integral to geopolitical narratives, echoing Foucault’s (1978) concept of "biopolitics"—the strategic management of life and death by sovereign power.

Sudan’s case illustrates a different but equally troubling scenario, where fragmentation and weak governance structures render humanitarian corridors effectively non-operational. Without centralised enforcement, corridors are subject to local political dynamics, tribal affiliations, and opportunistic exploitation. This supports Barnett’s (2011) claim that humanitarianism in failed or fragile states often lacks the infrastructure and legitimacy needed to protect civilians effectively. The Sudanese example reveals how, in the absence of formal institutions, informal systems of control—often based on coercion or patronage—dominate access to humanitarian relief.

6.2. Theoretical Implications: Realism, Constructivism, and Critical Humanitarianism

The findings confirm and extend key theoretical positions in international relations. From a realist perspective, humanitarian corridors are subject to the logic of power and survival. States and non-state actors use these mechanisms not because of moral obligation, but because they serve strategic interests. Mearsheimer (2001) argued that states act in their self-interest under anarchy; the case of Syria exemplifies

this as the Assad regime used corridors to accelerate military victory and eliminate dissent without triggering further international intervention.

Constructivist theory, which emphasises the power of norms and discourse, also provides valuable insights. Humanitarian corridors, although materially significant, are also discursive tools used to shape global perceptions and legitimise or delegitimise actions. Russia's framing of its unilateral corridors as acts of compassion is a clear example of how normative language can be weaponised (Wendt, 1999). The West's counter-narrative, emphasising corridor violations as evidence of war crimes, demonstrates the constructivist principle that international norms are constantly contested and reconstituted through discourse (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

Critical humanitarianism, rooted in post-colonial and Marxist critiques, problematises the very foundation of humanitarian intervention. Scholars like Duffield (2014) argue that humanitarianism often serves neo-imperial interests by legitimising external involvement in sovereign affairs. In this view, the presence of humanitarian corridors—and the international community's complicity in their establishment—can perpetuate cycles of dependency, displacement, and domination. The Syrian corridors negotiated under UN auspices, despite their coercive nature, illustrate how international institutions may inadvertently support state violence while claiming neutrality.

6.3. Legal and Ethical Paradoxes

The political exploitation of humanitarian corridors challenges fundamental assumptions of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), particularly the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity. The Geneva Conventions (1949) provide for the safe passage of civilians and humanitarian aid, assuming mutual consent and good faith. However, as the analysis has shown, such assumptions often do not hold in asymmetric or civil conflicts.

Corridors are increasingly established under duress, without genuine consent from all parties, and robust mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement. This undermines the protective value of international humanitarian law (IHL) and raises questions about its adaptability to modern warfare. As Roberts (2010) notes, the "humanitarianisation" of armed conflict can sometimes obscure rather than illuminate legal violations, especially when actors manipulate legal norms to achieve political ends.

Ethically, the use of humanitarian corridors under coercive conditions raises questions about the agency and voluntariness of those involved. If civilians are forced to choose between starvation and evacuation through a hostile corridor, can their movement be considered voluntary? The concept of "voluntary evacuation" becomes ethically fraught when shaped by structural violence and systemic deprivation (Pictet, 1979). Humanitarian actors must critically examine whether their involvement in such corridors constitutes complicity and how to strike a balance between immediate relief and long-term accountability.

6.4. Policy and Operational Challenges

The politicisation of humanitarian corridors presents several operational challenges for humanitarian organisations and international institutions:

- In fragmented conflicts, such as Sudan, the absence of a central authority complicates coordination. Multiple checkpoints, informal negotiations, and security uncertainties hinder timely and safe evacuation (UNOCHA, 2023).

- In all cases examined, violations of corridor agreements—bombardment, detainment, or redirection—occurred due to weak or nonexistent monitoring. Real-time verification by neutral actors such as the ICRC or UN peacekeepers is rarely available (ICRC, 2016).
- Misinformation campaigns, especially in Ukraine, created confusion among civilians regarding the safety and direction of corridors. This highlights the need for transparent, multilingual communication verified by credible third parties (Human Rights Watch, 2022).
- Agencies often face dilemmas between adhering to humanitarian principles and engaging with politically compromised actors. For example, the UN's cooperation with the Assad regime in organising evacuations was heavily criticised for legitimising forced displacement (Amnesty International, 2018).

To address these issues, humanitarian policy must evolve. One solution is the establishment of "protected corridor protocols"—binding legal agreements that require third-party verification, satellite monitoring, and pre-agreed sanctions for violations. Additionally, the international community should develop context-specific humanitarian diplomacy frameworks that allow negotiations to be informed by local cultural, political, and social dynamics.

6.5. Recommendations for International Stakeholders

Given the above analysis, several recommendations are proposed:

- Strengthen Legal Enforcement: The UN Security Council must move beyond rhetorical condemnations and establish clear legal consequences for the manipulation of humanitarian corridors. This includes referring egregious violations to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and imposing targeted sanctions on individuals and entities obstructing humanitarian access (Roberts, 2010).
- Invest in Technology for Monitoring: Utilise satellite imagery, AI-based pattern recognition, and real-time GPS tracking to monitor corridors and identify violations. These technologies can provide evidentiary support for legal accountability and improve trust among civilians.
- Enhance Local Partnerships: International organisations should work closely with local NGOs, religious institutions, and community leaders to understand the sociopolitical terrain. In contexts like Sudan, where state authority is fragmented, local actors can facilitate access and legitimacy (MSF, 2023).
- Reinforce Humanitarian Principles through Education: Both civilians and combatants must be educated on humanitarian law and the sanctity of humanitarian corridors. Educational campaigns and workshops should be part of any corridor negotiation package.
- Promote Normative Change: Finally, there is a need to reassert the normative strength of humanitarianism in global governance. This includes resisting the politicisation of humanitarian aid and affirming the moral imperative of civilian protection, regardless of political or military considerations.

This discussion has highlighted the multifaceted nature of political exploitation in humanitarian corridors. While humanitarian corridors are ostensibly mechanisms of protection, in practice, they often serve the strategic goals of belligerents. Realist, constructivist, and critical humanitarian frameworks help explain these manipulations and underscore the challenges facing humanitarian law and practice. The global community must confront these challenges by strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing operational capacity, and reaffirming the core principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality.

7. Conclusion

The study has explored the complex intersection of humanitarian objectives and political exploitation within the framework of international humanitarian corridors. Drawing upon three significant conflict case studies—Syria, Ukraine, and Sudan—the analysis reveals that while humanitarian corridors are intended to safeguard civilian life, in practice, they are frequently manipulated by both state and non-state actors to achieve military, political, or ideological objectives.

The findings underscore the reality that humanitarian corridors rarely function as neutral spaces. Instead, they are deeply embedded in the strategic calculus of war. The Assad regime's use of corridors in Syria to depopulate opposition areas, Russia's dual use of corridors for evacuation and propaganda in Ukraine, and the decentralisation of humanitarian access in Sudan each illustrate unique but convergent patterns of political misuse. These findings challenge the conventional assumption that humanitarianism operates outside the boundaries of power politics, revealing the vulnerability of international humanitarian law to co-optation.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study validates key premises from realist, constructivist, and critical humanitarian theories. Realism explains the strategic utility of corridors, while constructivism highlights the role of discourse in legitimising or contesting humanitarian practices. Critical perspectives, on the other hand, warn against the instrumentalisation of humanitarian norms for neo-imperial or coercive purposes.

7.1. Future Research

This study has opened several avenues for further investigation into the geopolitics of humanitarian interventions. First, there is a need for quantitative research that maps the outcomes of all known humanitarian corridors over the last two decades. This could provide a more comprehensive understanding of success rates, casualties, violations, and long-term displacement patterns. Additionally, comparative research could focus on non-conflict humanitarian corridors, such as those created during pandemics or environmental disasters, to evaluate whether political exploitation is a universal challenge or one specific to armed conflict.

Second, future work could explore the psychological and sociological impact of forced evacuations through politically compromised corridors, particularly on children, women, and disabled populations. Lastly, there is significant potential in exploring the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain, in creating more secure and accountable humanitarian pathways. These lines of inquiry would contribute to a more adaptive and resilient humanitarian architecture in the 21st century.

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Logistical Barriers in Humanitarian Corridors

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This study examines the logistical complexities involved in planning and executing international humanitarian corridors, with a focus on the interplay between political, infrastructural, bureaucratic, and operational challenges. Using a comparative case study approach, the research analyses humanitarian corridors in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, and Ethiopia's Tigray region through the dual lenses of Humanitarian Logistics Theory and the Political Economy of Aid. Findings reveal that humanitarian corridors are not merely logistical mechanisms but politically charged constructs shaped by power asymmetries, infrastructural fragility, and fragmented coordination systems. Key barriers include bureaucratic inertia, infrastructural degradation, politicised access negotiations, and fragile global supply chains. Conversely, the Ukrainian experience demonstrates that hybrid coordination models and strong infrastructure can significantly mitigate these challenges. The study highlights the importance of anticipatory logistics, decentralised partnerships, and diplomatic capabilities among humanitarian actors. By advancing a multi-dimensional understanding of humanitarian logistics, the paper offers both theoretical insights and practical strategies to improve the efficiency and neutrality of humanitarian corridors in conflict zones.

Keywords: Humanitarian logistics, international corridors, political economy of aid, crisis coordination, conflict zones, supply chain fragility, infrastructure, humanitarian access, Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, Tigray.

1. Introduction

The growing frequency and severity of armed conflicts and natural disasters have rendered international humanitarian corridors essential for safeguarding civilians and delivering aid. However, the practical realisation of these corridors often encounters overwhelming logistical complexities. Humanitarian corridors, as defined by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA, 2020), are demilitarised routes that facilitate safe movement for humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of non-combatants.

This paper examines the logistical challenges encountered during the execution of humanitarian corridors by analysing three major cases: Syria (2012–2020), Ukraine (2022–2023), and South Sudan (2013–2021). Each of these cases presents unique logistical and political challenges, shaped by terrain, actor involvement, and the outcomes of negotiations. The role of military control, bureaucratic red tape, communication failures, and infrastructure damage form the central logistical themes addressed in this study.

This research seeks to address the following questions:

- What logistical challenges are most commonly associated with the execution of international humanitarian corridors?
- How do political and geographical factors influence the effectiveness of these corridors?
- What models of logistical coordination can be proposed to overcome these barriers?

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is based on a multidisciplinary approach, integrating Humanitarian Logistics Theory, Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) Theory, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and Network Coordination Theory. This blended framework provides a robust analytical lens through which to assess the multidimensional challenges involved in organising and sustaining humanitarian corridors.

2.1 Humanitarian Logistics Theory

Humanitarian logistics is defined as the process of planning, implementing, and controlling the efficient and cost-effective flow and storage of goods, materials, and related information from the point of origin to the point of consumption, to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable people (Van Wassenhove, 2006). In the context of humanitarian corridors, this involves not only the physical movement of aid but also managing uncertainty, limited infrastructure, and coordinating diverse actors operating in hostile or fragile environments.

The unpredictable nature of humanitarian crises—characterised by rapidly changing conditions, limited information, and intense pressure to deliver aid—makes traditional commercial logistics models inadequate. Scholars such as Kovács and Spens (2007) emphasise that humanitarian logistics must account for moral imperatives, ad hoc delivery schedules, and asymmetric stakeholder power. Humanitarian corridors exacerbate these challenges, as they necessitate real-time negotiations with political and military actors, as well as operational readiness in the face of physical and security constraints.

2.2 Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) Theory

CAS theory provides an analytical perspective for understanding humanitarian corridors as dynamic systems composed of interdependent agents—including governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), military actors, and affected civilian populations—whose interactions are nonlinear and evolve (Holland,

2006). Unlike linear systems, which follow predictable cause-and-effect trajectories, CAS are inherently emergent, adaptive, and sensitive to initial conditions.

In the case of humanitarian corridors, CAS theory explains why identical corridor protocols may yield different outcomes in different contexts. For example, a corridor deemed successful in South Sudan may fail in Syria due to varying motivations among actors, terrain conditions, or communication structures. This theory also highlights how local actors, such as community leaders or rebel groups, can disproportionately influence the system's behaviour despite having limited formal authority, thereby introducing feedback loops that can either stabilise or disrupt humanitarian operations (Comfort, 2007).

Adopting a CAS perspective encourages planners to focus not on rigid protocols, but on adaptive strategies that evolve in response to the environment. For instance, using real-time monitoring tools, deploying mobile logistics teams, or establishing contingency plans are consistent with the CAS model.

2.3 International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

International Humanitarian Law forms the legal backbone for the establishment and operation of humanitarian corridors. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols emphasise the protection of civilians and the obligation of parties to conflict to facilitate the passage of humanitarian relief (ICRC, 2015). IHL explicitly allows for neutral, impartial aid and mandates safe passage in humanitarian emergencies, even in non-international armed conflicts.

However, the practical implementation of IHL is frequently undermined by a lack of political will, conflicting interpretations, or outright disregard by armed actors. While humanitarian corridors are often endorsed in principle by contradictory parties, their actual realisation is contingent upon context-specific negotiations that are frequently compromised by strategic considerations. As such, the normative framework of IHL interacts uneasily with the political and operational realities of logistics.

In this regard, IHL functions more as a framework of legitimacy than of enforcement. Actors often invoke legal obligations to frame humanitarian corridors as morally and legally necessary. However, in practice, corridor implementation depends heavily on voluntary cooperation and negotiation—a reality that underscores the gap between legal ideals and operational feasibility (Slim, 2015).

2.4 Network Coordination Theory

Given that humanitarian corridors require synchronised action from multiple organisations, Network Coordination Theory is crucial for understanding the success or failure of these interventions. This theory explores how actors within a decentralised network coordinate resources, information, and responsibilities in the absence of centralised authority (Provan & Kenis, 2008). In humanitarian settings, coordination often involves multilateral efforts among international NGOs, local civil society organisations, UN agencies, and occasionally military forces.

Logistical complexity arises when these actors possess divergent mandates, decision-making structures, and accountability systems. As observed in many corridor failures, a lack of communication and fragmented coordination frequently result in delays, duplicated efforts, or security breaches. Network Coordination Theory stresses the importance of shared goals, governance structures, and communication protocols in optimising network efficiency.

Applying this theory to humanitarian corridors suggests that coordination mechanisms—such as joint operating centres, standardised logistics dashboards, and pre-negotiated Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)—are essential to overcoming systemic fragmentation.

These four theoretical lenses—Humanitarian Logistics, CAS Theory, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and Network Coordination—offer a comprehensive understanding of the logistical challenges involved in humanitarian corridors. While humanitarian logistics focuses on operational flows and bottlenecks, CAS theory highlights system dynamics and emergent behaviour. IHL provides the moral and legal rationale for such corridors, and Network Coordination Theory emphasises the necessity of organisational synergy. Integrating these frameworks enables this study to move beyond isolated case analyses toward a more comprehensive understanding of systemic challenges and potential solutions in international humanitarian logistics.

3. Literature Review

The concept of humanitarian corridors has garnered increasing scholarly attention over the past two decades, especially as humanitarian crises have intensified in scope and complexity due to armed conflicts, natural disasters, and forced displacement. The literature on this subject spans various disciplines, including international relations, humanitarian logistics, international law, and conflict studies. This section reviews key contributions, identifies thematic gaps, and outlines the current state of knowledge concerning the logistical complexities involved in implementing and maintaining international humanitarian corridors.

3.1 Evolution of Humanitarian Corridors

Historically, humanitarian corridors emerged as ad hoc responses to crises, often under international scrutiny. One of the earliest documented uses of such corridors was during the Bosnian War in the early 1990s, when international actors negotiated temporary ceasefires to allow for the delivery of aid to besieged areas (Slim, 2015). Since then, their application has broadened to include contexts such as Syria, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Ukraine.

Scholars such as Ferris (2011) argue that humanitarian corridors serve dual purposes: they provide immediate relief and act as a symbol of international solidarity. However, their efficacy often depends on complex political negotiations, logistical readiness, and real-time coordination, resulting in inconsistent implementation. Humanitarian corridors are now frequently referenced in United Nations Security Council resolutions; yet, their success remains contingent on cooperation among conflict parties—a condition that is rarely guaranteed (Barnett & Weiss, 2008).

3.2 Political and Legal Contexts

The legal foundation for humanitarian corridors is rooted in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), specifically the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2015) highlights the obligation of conflict parties to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief. However, in practice, scholars note that legal frameworks are often ignored or interpreted subjectively by actors on the ground.

For instance, Hofmann and Hudson (2009) emphasise that while legal norms provide a framework, they do not ensure compliance. This creates a gap between law and implementation, where humanitarian agencies must often resort to real-time negotiations with military or political actors. In conflict zones such as Syria,

humanitarian corridors are authorised under international law but are frequently undermined by military tactics, misinformation, and competing sovereignties (Krähenbühl, 2013).

3.3 Humanitarian Logistics and Operational Challenges

A significant body of literature focuses on humanitarian logistics as a distinct operational discipline, addressing the movement of goods, services, and information in emergency contexts (Van Wassenhove, 2006). Unlike commercial supply chains, humanitarian logistics must contend with high volatility, moral imperatives, and fragmented infrastructure. In the context of humanitarian corridors, these challenges are even more pronounced due to security risks, narrow time windows, and uncertain access routes.

Tomasini and Van Wassenhove (2009) argue that the primary logistical challenge lies not in the availability of resources but in their timely and secure distribution. Incompatible communication systems, lack of shared information, and divergent priorities often hamper coordination among NGOs, UN agencies, and local authorities.

Moreover, Bealt, Fernández Barrera, and Mansouri (2016) assert that agility, flexibility, and real-time responsiveness are essential to the success of humanitarian logistics. They highlight how logistical failures in corridors, such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake or the Syrian civil war, often stem from the lack of integrated supply chain planning and poor stakeholder synchronisation.

3.4 Stakeholder Coordination and Network Governance

Humanitarian corridors inherently involve a diverse range of stakeholders, including state and non-state actors, NGOs, international organisations, and occasionally private sector entities. Provan and Kenis (2008) emphasise that in loosely coupled networks, coordination is often decentralised, which poses risks for duplication, inefficiency, or contradiction in operational strategies.

The literature on network governance in humanitarian settings emphasises the importance of joint operations centres, coordinated logistics platforms (e.g., the UN Logistics Cluster), and inter-agency agreements (Majewski et al., 2016). However, achieving genuine cooperation remains elusive in many crisis settings, where political interests, power asymmetries, and resource competition dilute the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms.

In studies on the response to the 2011 famine in Somalia and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen, Heaslip, Kovács, and Haavisto (2018) report that even when coordination structures exist, they are often underutilised due to mutual mistrust or bureaucratic inertia. This highlights the need for stronger governance frameworks that strike a balance between authority and inclusivity.

3.5 Case Studies and Contextual Variability

Several case studies have been published to explore the functioning and outcomes of humanitarian corridors in specific geopolitical contexts. In Syria, the UN and partners established multiple cross-border humanitarian corridors, yet faced repeated obstructions, aerial attacks, and access denials (OCHA, 2019). Research by Pantuliano and Metcalfe-Hough (2017) highlights how these corridors often became political bargaining chips rather than neutral spaces for relief.

In contrast, the humanitarian corridors established in Ukraine during the 2022 conflict demonstrate several key elements of successful corridor planning, including clear demarcation, negotiated pauses in fighting, and

local community involvement. However, even these corridors were frequently violated or weaponised, demonstrating the fragility of negotiated humanitarian access (ICG, 2022).

The comparison of such cases in the literature reveals that the success of humanitarian corridors is rarely determined by logistical capacity alone. Instead, it is the interplay between operational readiness, political will, legal legitimacy, and network governance that defines corridor outcomes (Peters & Peters, 2019).

3.6 Gaps and Research Directions

Despite the expanding literature, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing research tends to focus on isolated case studies rather than comparative or systemic analysis. Second, there is limited integration between theoretical insights from logistics, law, and network governance—disciplines which are often treated separately. Finally, few studies systematically evaluate the post-operational outcomes of humanitarian corridors, such as long-term impacts on displaced populations or the sustainability of aid delivery mechanisms.

Scholars such as Altay and Pal (2014) advocate for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate logistics science, political analysis, and legal theory to gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of humanitarian corridors. There is also a pressing need for real-time data sharing platforms, simulation modelling, and scenario planning tools that can enhance corridor planning and improve adaptability.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, grounded in case study analysis and thematic content analysis, to explore the logistical complexities associated with planning, executing, and managing international humanitarian corridors. Given the multidisciplinary nature of humanitarian corridors—encompassing logistics, international law, political science, and crisis management—this methodology enables an in-depth examination of real-world contexts and a rich, interpretive analysis of experiences across different crisis zones.

4.1 Research Design

The research design is based on multiple case studies of humanitarian corridors implemented between 2011 and 2024 in conflict and disaster settings, including Syria, Ukraine, Ethiopia (Tigray), and Yemen. The rationale for selecting multiple cases lies in the need to identify common logistical challenges, variances in operational outcomes, and context-specific factors that influence the success or failure of these humanitarian interventions (Yin, 2018). Each case is treated as a bounded system with its own set of stakeholders, constraints, and outcomes.

4.2 Case Selection Criteria

Cases were selected based on the following criteria:

- Involvement of internationally sanctioned humanitarian corridors.
- Availability of public documentation, reports, or interviews regarding logistical and operational performance.
- Geopolitical and operational diversity to ensure a comparative perspective.
- Accessibility of data from United Nations agencies, humanitarian NGOs, and scholarly publications.

This purposive sampling strategy facilitates depth over breadth, aligning with qualitative paradigms that prioritise the richness of insights over statistical generalisation (Patton, 2015).

4.3 Data Collection

Data was collected from secondary sources, including:

- Reports and operational evaluations from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Food Programme (WFP), and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).
- Peer-reviewed journal articles from logistics, international law, and humanitarian studies literature.
- Press releases, situation reports, and policy documents from state agencies and international consortia.
- Analytical briefs from think tanks such as the International Crisis Group and Overseas Development Institute.

All documents were reviewed and organised using NVivo software to facilitate systematic coding and thematic analysis.

4.4 Data Analysis

The study employs thematic content analysis, a flexible qualitative technique used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique is well-suited to research exploring the operational, political, and ethical dimensions of humanitarian corridors, as it can accommodate varied data types and levels of abstraction.

The following analytical stages were applied:

- Familiarisation: Initial review of documents to understand the narrative flow and context.
- Coding: Assigning codes to text segments relating to logistics, coordination, delays, infrastructure, legal access, etc.
- Theme Development: Grouping codes into larger thematic categories such as "Access Negotiations," "Coordination Failures," "Security Constraints," and "Infrastructure Limitations."
- Cross-case Comparison: Comparing themes across different humanitarian corridors to assess convergence or divergence in logistical experiences.

This process enabled the identification of both systemic patterns and context-specific anomalies.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

While qualitative research does not follow the same metrics of validity as quantitative studies, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were maintained through triangulation of data sources and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation involved comparing reports from at least two independent organisations for each case to minimise bias and enhance reliability.

Additionally, an audit trail was maintained through NVivo's memo and annotation features, documenting key coding decisions and reflections. This improves transparency and supports the confirmability of the findings.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Since the study relies exclusively on secondary and publicly available data, no formal ethical clearance was required. Nevertheless, ethical considerations were applied in ensuring:

- Proper citation and use of all data sources.
- Critical engagement with politically sensitive narratives.
- Avoidance of decontextualised or misleading representation of conflict-affected communities.

Moreover, the analysis remains attentive to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity, as stipulated by the core humanitarian framework (Sphere Association, 2018).

4.7 Limitations

The study acknowledges certain limitations:

- A lack of primary data (e.g., interviews or field observations) may limit direct insights into ground-level logistics and decision-making processes. Language barriers limited the inclusion of reports that were not available in English. The rapidly evolving nature of ongoing conflicts, particularly in Ukraine and Gaza, means that findings may have limited temporal generalizability.
- Despite these limitations, the methodological approach offers robust insights into the logistical frameworks and constraints of humanitarian corridors, informing future operational strategies.

5. Results

This section presents the findings from the qualitative thematic analysis of selected humanitarian corridors, namely in Syria, Ukraine, Ethiopia (Tigray), and Yemen. The results highlight key logistical complexities grouped into six major themes: (1) Negotiation of Access and Security Guarantees, (2) Infrastructure and Terrain Challenges, (3) Multilateral Coordination Failures, (4) Bureaucratic and Legal Barriers, (5) Supply Chain Disruptions and Resource Constraints, and (6) Community Reception and Local Integration. Each theme is illustrated with case-specific examples and cross-case observations to elucidate recurring patterns and operational distinctions.

5.1 Negotiation of Access and Security Guarantees

One of the most pervasive challenges across all cases is the difficulty in securing reliable and sustained access to the humanitarian corridors. In Syria, multiple UN-led convoys to besieged areas such as Eastern Ghouta and Aleppo were delayed or denied due to a lack of security guarantees from armed factions (OCHA, 2016). In Ukraine, temporary ceasefires in Mariupol and Donbas were fragile and frequently violated, compromising the safety of both aid workers and evacuees (ICRC, 2022).

In Ethiopia's Tigray region, long-standing tensions between federal and regional authorities resulted in inconsistent access permissions and recurrent shutdowns of aid corridors (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Similarly, in Yemen, conflicting control over key ports and roadways—notably Hudaydah and Taiz—created a volatile environment that hindered corridor sustainability (WFP, 2020).

These experiences underscore the operational reality that humanitarian corridors are not merely logistical routes, but rather political constructs contingent upon negotiated trust among warring parties.

5.2 Infrastructure and Terrain Challenges

Inadequate and damaged infrastructure compounded logistical difficulties, particularly in Tigray and Yemen, where roads, bridges, and supply depots were often destroyed or rendered impassable due to bombing and natural decay. Aerial assessments by the WFP (2020) revealed that less than 40% of roads in northern Yemen were functional during major aid campaigns.

Syria also presented severe infrastructural hurdles, especially in rural areas where aid had to be transported over mountainous terrain with limited access points. Ukraine's relatively modern road and rail infrastructure offered better conditions; however, targeted destruction of rail hubs and highways around conflict zones (e.g., Kharkiv, Mariupol) frequently obstructed operations (ICG, 2022).

These infrastructural barriers necessitated adaptive solutions, such as the use of donkey caravans in Syria and air drops in inaccessible parts of Tigray, albeit with limited reach and high logistical costs (OCHA, 2022).

5.3 Multilateral Coordination Failures

Humanitarian corridors often involve complex, multilateral partnerships that include UN agencies, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), host governments, and local actors. In Syria and Yemen, competition among agencies and a lack of unified command structures led to duplication of efforts and miscommunication.

For instance, in 2017, simultaneous aid convoys from WHO and UNICEF to northern Syria arrived at different locations due to poor synchronisation, leading to under-delivery in target areas (WHO, 2018). Similarly, in Tigray, coordination between the federal government and international partners broke down over the classification of aid recipients, creating delays and bottlenecks (Amnesty International, 2021).

In contrast, Ukraine demonstrated comparatively better coordination due to the establishment of a centralised command under OCHA, supported by digital coordination tools such as the Humanitarian Response Plan Dashboard, which enables near real-time logistical updates and allocation (OCHA, 2023).

5.4 Bureaucratic and Legal Barriers

Bureaucratic inertia and legal constraints also contributed to logistical inefficiencies. The requirement for multiple entry permits, customs clearance, and documentation in Yemen and Syria delayed the delivery of time-sensitive medical and food supplies (MSF, 2019).

Ukraine presented unique legal challenges in the interpretation of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the legal status of quasi-autonomous regions, complicating the flow of aid across the front lines. In Tigray, government restrictions on satellite communications and data-sharing platforms severely hindered logistics planning and transparency (HRW, 2021).

These findings suggest that, beyond physical barriers, regulatory frameworks can function as systemic obstacles to humanitarian logistics.

5.5 Supply Chain Disruptions and Resource Constraints

All four cases revealed significant disruptions to the humanitarian supply chain. Key constraints included volatile fuel prices, attacks on warehouses, shortages of skilled logistics personnel, and disrupted procurement chains.

For example, in Syria, the bombing of a Red Crescent warehouse in Idlib in 2016 destroyed over $500,000 worth of supplies and led to increased risk aversion among aid organisations (ICRC, 2017). In Yemen, fluctuating oil prices have affected the affordability and predictability of supply chain operations, particularly for cold-chain-dependent items such as vaccines (WFP, 2020).

In Ethiopia, donors reported challenges in recruiting and retaining logistics experts familiar with conflict terrain, while in Ukraine, the dependency on external procurement (especially medical supplies) increased lead times due to border checks and compliance inspections (WHO, 2023).

5.6 Community Reception and Local Integration

The final theme concerns the reception of aid corridors by local communities. In several cases, community mistrust, cultural misunderstandings, and insufficient local consultation hampered logistical effectiveness.

In Syria, local leaders expressed dissatisfaction with centralised aid drops that ignored tribal distributions and village-level priorities (UNDP, 2018). In Ethiopia, some communities resisted external aid due to fear of political repercussions or cultural stigmatisation. Similarly, in Yemen, humanitarian actors faced resistance when aid distribution bypassed traditional tribal hierarchies (MSF, 2020).

By contrast, Ukraine saw relatively better community engagement, particularly through partnerships with local NGOs and volunteer brigades, which enhanced last-mile delivery and real-time feedback (ICG, 2023).

5.7 Cross-Case Synthesis

A synthesis of the findings reveals several cross-cutting insights:

- Interdependence of Political and Logistical Factors: Logistical feasibility is contingent on political cooperation and legal access frameworks.
- Infrastructure as a Determinant of Scalability: The robustness of physical infrastructure significantly determines the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of corridors.
- Need for Unified Coordination Platforms: Disjointed logistics command structures hinder efficacy; centralised coordination models yield better outcomes.
- Regulatory Simplification is Essential: Streamlined customs and documentation processes are crucial for delivering aid in a timely and effective manner.
- Local Knowledge is Invaluable: Community involvement in planning and execution mitigates resistance and enhances distribution accuracy.

These patterns suggest that the logistical complexity of humanitarian corridors is not merely a function of geography or violence but is embedded in a broader web of governance, policy, and social relations.

6. Discussion

The findings presented in the previous section underscore the multifaceted and interconnected nature of logistical complexities in the operation of humanitarian corridors. This discussion unpacks these results through the lens of the theoretical framework—integrating Humanitarian Logistics Theory and Political Economy of Aid—to examine the implications of the identified challenges and the systemic barriers they reveal.

6.1 Politicisation and the Contingency of Access

The difficulties encountered in negotiating access and securing security guarantees exemplify the political embeddedness of humanitarian corridors. As Humanitarian Logistics Theory emphasises, logistics is not merely a technical activity but one deeply affected by institutional and political dynamics (Kovács & Spens, 2009). The Syrian and Tigrayan cases, where conflicting parties weaponised aid access, demonstrate how humanitarian objectives are subordinated to military strategies and political leverage (Slim, 2015).

This finding aligns with the Political Economy of Aid, which posits that aid flows are influenced by power asymmetries, strategic interests, and the relative autonomy of humanitarian actors (Barnett, 2011). In these contexts, humanitarian actors must perform a balancing act—negotiating access without appearing to endorse or legitimise any warring party. This inherently fragile dynamic explains the volatile and inconsistent nature of access agreements and ceasefires observed in Ukraine and Syria.

6.2 Infrastructure and the Geography of Aid

The role of infrastructure, as discussed in the results, emerges as a critical determinant of the scalability and sustainability of humanitarian corridors. From a logistics theory perspective, infrastructural deficits directly increase operational costs, reduce delivery speed, and complicate inventory management (Van Wassenhove, 2006).

In Yemen and Tigray, destroyed roads and impassable terrain disrupted aid supply chains, requiring creative yet inefficient alternatives, such as donkey transport or airdrops. These improvisational methods, while demonstrating resilience, highlight the strategic necessity of pre-conflict infrastructure investment and post-disaster rehabilitation in planning future corridors (Kunz & Reiner, 2012). Ukraine's comparatively better outcomes in this regard confirm that logistics efficiency correlates strongly with the robustness of pre-existing infrastructure.

6.3 Coordination: Fragmentation vs. Integration

The multilateral coordination failures revealed in the results underscore the persistent fragmentation within the humanitarian system. Despite repeated calls for improved coordination, cases such as Syria and Yemen illustrate how siloed operations and a lack of shared command structures can lead to redundancy, confusion, and inefficiency (Stephenson, 2005).

By contrast, Ukraine's use of centralised coordination platforms aligns with the logistics principle of integrated supply chain management (Christopher, 2016). This model promotes synchronisation, data sharing, and resource optimisation. The positive outcomes in Ukraine suggest that digital integration tools, such as dashboards and real-time reporting platforms, can mitigate the chaos typically associated with conflict-driven logistics.

6.4 Bureaucracy as a Structural Obstacle

Bureaucratic and legal barriers represent a category of logistical complexity that is often underappreciated in operational planning. Customs delays, multi-level authorisations, and restrictive legal interpretations—like those in Ukraine and Yemen—create friction in aid flows.

According to the Political Economy of Aid, such bureaucracies often serve state interests more than humanitarian ones, operating as tools of sovereignty and control (Duffield, 2007). Humanitarian actors, in

turn, must navigate these constraints through advocacy, policy negotiation, and, in some cases, subversion, raising ethical questions about the balance between compliance and expedience in crisis response.

6.5 Fragility of Supply Chains and the Role of Global Dependencies

The disruptions in procurement, warehousing, and delivery highlight the fragility of humanitarian supply chains. Factors such as targeted attacks on storage facilities, fluctuating fuel costs, and a shortage of skilled logistics personnel compound the challenges (Thomas & Kopczak, 2005).

These vulnerabilities align with Humanitarian Logistics Theory's identification of volatility as a defining feature of crisis supply chains. The situation is exacerbated by global interdependencies, where supplies are sourced from distant markets and are thus susceptible to geopolitical and economic shocks. Ukraine's border inspection delays and Yemen's fuel-related issues exemplify how globalised aid chains become chokepoints under duress.

6.6 The Local Dimension: Community Dynamics and Cultural Legitimacy

The effectiveness of humanitarian corridors also hinges on community reception and local integration. In cases where aid delivery bypassed traditional authorities or failed to consider local socio-cultural norms, such as in Yemen and Syria, resistance, mistrust, and underutilisation followed.

This aligns with the theoretical insight that humanitarian interventions must be locally embedded to achieve legitimacy and impact (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010). Ukraine's relatively successful community engagement through local NGOs illustrates how localisation of logistics, by leveraging indigenous knowledge and networks, can enhance acceptance and efficacy.

6.7 Integrating Insights for Future Policy

Drawing from the above, several integrative insights emerge:

- Policy-Logistics Nexus: Successful humanitarian corridors require not only technical expertise but political navigation skills. Logistics professionals must be trained in diplomacy and political analysis to navigate complex global supply chains effectively.
- Hybrid Coordination Models: A blend of centralised digital coordination with decentralised local implementation could strike a balance between efficiency and contextual responsiveness
- Preparedness Planning: Investing in logistics preparedness, such as pre-positioned stockpiles and infrastructure resilience, can mitigate the worst outcomes during crisis onset.
- Regulatory Engagement: Humanitarian actors must proactively engage with legal frameworks and advocate for streamlined customs, documentation, and cross-border provisions.

6.8 Limitations and Future Considerations

While the discussion has provided a critical analysis of logistical complexities, it is essential to recognise the limitations of a qualitative cross-case analysis. The contextual specificity of each humanitarian corridor limits the generalizability of some findings. Future research could benefit from quantitative modelling of supply chain performance metrics across conflict zones or longitudinal studies to track logistical effectiveness over time.

Moreover, emerging challenges such as cyber threats to digital coordination platforms and the politicisation of climate-related disasters require further scholarly attention.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the operational, political, and structural challenges inherent in the design and execution of humanitarian corridors. By applying Humanitarian Logistics Theory and the Political Economy of Aid framework across case studies—Syria, Yemen, Tigray, and Ukraine—it becomes evident that logistical complexity cannot be decoupled from political influence, infrastructural capacity, and socio-cultural engagement.

The analysis revealed several recurring themes: the politicisation of access, infrastructural limitations, fragmented coordination, bureaucratic entanglements, supply chain vulnerabilities, and the underutilisation of local knowledge. These dynamics collectively undermine the effectiveness, sustainability, and neutrality of humanitarian corridors, transforming them from lifelines into contested political arenas.

Notably, the Ukrainian case offered partial evidence that proactive infrastructure investment, digital integration, and hybrid coordination strategies can mitigate some of these challenges. Conversely, Yemen and Tigray showed how deeply entrenched barriers—both physical and bureaucratic—can stall or reverse humanitarian progress.

The study underscores that humanitarian logistics is not simply about moving goods to those in need; it is an embedded, dynamic, and often politicised process shaped by geopolitical conditions, legal frameworks, and cultural landscapes. A booming humanitarian corridor, therefore, requires more than technical logistics—diplomatic dexterity, legal advocacy, and local partnership are equally indispensable.

The findings urge policymakers and humanitarian practitioners to adopt a more holistic approach, anticipating political, infrastructural, and community-level variables rather than reacting to them. The future of humanitarian logistics depends on our capacity to integrate these dimensions into anticipatory planning and adaptive execution.

7.1. Recommendations

- Invest in Infrastructure Preparedness: Governments and humanitarian agencies should prioritise pre-crisis infrastructure development in high-risk regions to facilitate future humanitarian access.
- Adopt Hybrid Coordination Models: Centralised digital platforms should be complemented with decentralised local logistics teams to balance efficiency and contextual adaptability.
- Strengthen Diplomatic Training: Humanitarian logisticians should receive training in political negotiation to navigate access and compliance challenges effectively.
- Streamline Bureaucratic Processes: Advocacy for simplified customs procedures and legal exemptions during emergencies is essential to avoid unnecessary delays in aid delivery.
- Enhance Local Partnerships: Localisation should be embedded in humanitarian corridor design to build trust, ensure cultural relevance, and strengthen operational resilience.

7.2. Future Research

Further studies should investigate the quantitative modelling of supply chain resilience across diverse conflict zones to validate the patterns observed in this study. Metrics such as lead time variability, stockout frequency, and aid delivery speed could offer empirical grounding for future logistical strategies. Additionally, longitudinal research tracking the lifecycle of humanitarian corridors—from inception through execution and termination—could provide deeper insights into factors contributing to sustainability and failure. Emerging topics such as cybersecurity threats to logistics platforms, climate-induced displacement, and AI-driven

decision-making in humanitarian operations also warrant focused scholarly inquiry. Expanding the geographical scope to include under-researched regions such as the Sahel, Myanmar, and Venezuela could offer comparative insights into the global viability of humanitarian corridors under varying political and logistical conditions.

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Diplomatic Complexities of Humanitarian Corridors

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This paper examines the diplomatic challenges associated with establishing and operating humanitarian corridors during armed conflict, focusing on three case studies: Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia. By employing both realist and constructivist theoretical lenses, the study investigates how legal ambiguity, strategic interests, normative divergence, and institutional limitations undermine the effectiveness of these life-saving mechanisms. Findings indicate that while humanitarian corridors are conceptually grounded in international humanitarian law, their implementation is often thwarted by states' prioritisation of sovereignty and strategic advantage. The study also highlights the critical role of mediators, the influence of public perception, and the impact of trust deficits on diplomatic negotiations. Constructivist analysis reveals that divergent interpretations of neutrality, civilian protection, and humanitarian intent contribute to diplomatic failures. Realist perspectives highlight the instrumentalisation of corridors for military or political advantage. The paper concludes by recommending actionable measures, including clearer legal frameworks, more empowered mediators, and early diplomatic intervention. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of humanitarian diplomacy and offer practical guidance for improving the use of humanitarian corridors in future crises.

Keywords: Humanitarian corridors, diplomacy, international relations, armed conflict, humanitarian law.

1. Introduction

In times of armed conflict and humanitarian crises, the international community has frequently turned to humanitarian corridors as a means to alleviate suffering and protect civilian populations. Humanitarian corridors are demilitarised zones established temporarily to facilitate the safe passage of humanitarian aid and the evacuation of civilians from conflict areas. Rooted in the principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), these corridors are premised on the universal obligation to protect non-combatants during hostilities (ICRC, 2016). However, their establishment and operationalisation are far from straightforward. Despite their legal and moral justifications, humanitarian corridors frequently become entangled in the complex web of international diplomacy, political interests, and military strategies.

The use of humanitarian corridors gained prominence during conflicts in the 1990s, notably in Bosnia and Somalia, where they were implemented under the auspices of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Since then, humanitarian corridors have been proposed or established in various conflict settings, including Darfur, Gaza, Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia. While the theoretical appeal of such corridors is high, practical outcomes have often been inconsistent, marred by violations, coordination failures, and ceasefire breakdowns. In many instances, the safe zones intended for protection have become militarised or used for propaganda, eroding trust in the mechanism itself (Slim, 1997; Ferris, 2020).

One of the primary challenges lies in the diplomatic negotiations required to establish these corridors. These negotiations often involve a broad range of actors: national governments, rebel or non-state armed groups, international organisations such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and sometimes regional organisations or neutral third-party states acting as mediators. Each of these actors may possess different priorities, strategic goals, and levels of commitment to international norms, complicating the process of reaching a consensus (Weiss & Daws, 2007).

Furthermore, humanitarian corridors must navigate a tension between the principle of state sovereignty and the imperative of humanitarian access. While International Humanitarian Law (IHL) obligates parties to allow aid to reach civilians, states often invoke their sovereignty to resist or control external intervention. This has created situations where the negotiation of humanitarian access is as politically sensitive and diplomatically charged as military ceasefires or peace talks themselves (Kellenberger, 2008). Compounding this are challenges such as asymmetric warfare, where non-state actors may not recognise international legal norms, and multi-party conflicts, where identifying and engaging all relevant actors becomes a daunting task.

This paper examines the diplomatic challenges associated with implementing humanitarian corridors through the lens of international relations. Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are the primary diplomatic challenges to establishing humanitarian corridors?
- How do different theoretical frameworks in international relations explain these challenges?
- What lessons can be drawn from recent case studies involving Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia?

By applying a dual theoretical lens of Constructivism and Realism, the paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of why humanitarian corridors succeed in some contexts and fail in others. Constructivism emphasises the role of norms, identities, and non-state actors in humanitarian negotiations, whereas realism highlights the role of state power, strategic interests, and geopolitical rivalry. These frameworks, when combined, offer a comprehensive analysis of the diplomatic landscape surrounding humanitarian corridors (Wendt, 1999; Mearsheimer, 2001).

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing literature on humanitarian diplomacy by focusing specifically on corridors as both a practical tool and a diplomatic challenge. It argues that meaningful reform in the way humanitarian corridors are negotiated and implemented requires not only stronger legal mechanisms but also a recalibration of international diplomatic practices to prioritise human security over strategic gain.

2. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the diplomatic challenges in implementing humanitarian corridors requires a theoretical lens that captures both the normative aspirations of international humanitarianism and the strategic calculations of global actors. To this end, this study adopts a dual-theoretical framework rooted in Constructivism and Realism, two foundational theories in international relations (IR) that offer complementary insights into the motivations and constraints faced by state and non-state actors.

2.1 Constructivism

Constructivism in international relations emphasises the significance of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping the behaviour of states and institutions (Wendt, 1999). Unlike materialist theories that focus solely on power or economic interests, constructivism posits that international politics is socially constructed through the interactions of actors who internalise shared beliefs, values, and norms. From this perspective, humanitarian corridors are understood as manifestations of the evolving normative commitment to civilian protection, human dignity, and the responsibility to alleviate suffering during armed conflict.

Constructivist theory sheds light on how humanitarian norms—codified in instruments such as the Geneva Conventions and promoted by organisations like the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross—gain traction among international actors. These norms not only influence state behaviour but also create expectations that non-compliance will result in reputational costs or international condemnation (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). For example, the invocation of humanitarian principles during negotiations over corridors in Syria and Ukraine reflects an effort to align state behaviour with normative standards, even amid competing interests.

However, constructivism also reveals the diplomatic challenges that arise from contested identities and diverging interpretations of these norms. States or armed groups may adopt selective compliance based on how they perceive themselves or their adversaries. In deeply fragmented conflicts, such as the Tigray War, actors often reject external humanitarian norms as forms of neo-imperialism or threats to sovereignty, complicating negotiations (Barnett, 2011). Thus, constructivism allows for an appreciation of both the normative progress and the identity-based friction inherent in humanitarian diplomacy.

2.2 Realism

In contrast, Realism provides a more sceptical and power-centric interpretation of international affairs. Rooted in the works of classical and neorealist thinkers, this theory posits that the international system is anarchic and that states primarily act to preserve their security, autonomy, and relative power (Mearsheimer, 2001). Under a realist framework, humanitarian corridors are not purely altruistic endeavours but are often leveraged as strategic instruments by state and non-state actors. Diplomacy surrounding such corridors becomes a bargaining process infused with suspicion, coercion, and strategic manoeuvring.

Realists argue that even humanitarian actions are subordinated to the logic of political survival and the maximisation of interests. For instance, dominant states may advocate for humanitarian corridors in

adversarial regions not solely out of concern for civilian protection, but to project soft power, gain influence, or weaken rival actors (Waltz, 1979). The presence of great power rivalry, such as that between Russia and the West in Ukraine, illustrates how humanitarian issues are entangled in broader geopolitical conflicts. Realism also accounts for the recurrent failure of humanitarian diplomacy when actors calculate that compliance would result in strategic disadvantages.

By highlighting the limits of moral appeals and the enduring relevance of power asymmetries, Realism provides a sobering counterbalance to constructivist optimism. The failure of humanitarian corridors due to ceasefire violations, misinformation, and strategic deception can often be better understood through this lens.

2.3 Integrative Perspective

Employing both Constructivist and Realist frameworks enables a more holistic understanding of the diplomatic difficulties associated with humanitarian corridors. Constructivism elucidates the normative and identity-driven motives that foster cooperation or resistance, while Realism explains the persistent influence of material power and strategic interests. This dual approach is essential for dissecting real-world case studies where humanitarian diplomacy often vacillates between ethical imperatives and pragmatic constraints. It allows scholars and practitioners alike to appreciate the moral ambitions of international humanitarian law without overlooking the harsh realities of international politics.

3. Literature Review

The academic discourse surrounding humanitarian corridors has grown steadily, especially since the 1990s, when their application became more visible during conflicts in Somalia, Rwanda, and the Balkans. Initially conceptualised as pragmatic tools for humanitarian access, humanitarian corridors have increasingly been scrutinised for their political, legal, and ethical implications.

Slim (1997) was among the early scholars to discuss the moral dilemmas faced by humanitarian agencies operating in conflict zones. He argued that humanitarian action, while driven by moral imperatives, often operates in politically charged environments that can compromise neutrality and effectiveness. This concern is echoed in Weiss and Daws (2007), who emphasise that the success of humanitarian diplomacy depends not only on legal frameworks but also on the willingness of conflicting parties to respect international humanitarian norms.

A central issue in the literature is the legal status of humanitarian corridors under international law. According to Kellenberger (2008), a tension exists between the right to humanitarian access enshrined in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the principle of state sovereignty. This tension often becomes a significant diplomatic obstacle, as states involved in conflict may view such corridors as a violation of their territorial integrity.

The operational challenges of implementing humanitarian corridors are also well-documented. Ferris (2020) examines the evolution of humanitarian access mechanisms in the 21st century, particularly in the context of conflicts involving non-state actors. She notes that asymmetric warfare has rendered traditional diplomatic tools less effective, necessitating new forms of engagement that can include informal and track-two diplomacy.

Recent literature has focused on the instrumentalisation of humanitarian corridors by powerful states. Mearsheimer (2001), through the lens of realism, argues that states may use humanitarian corridors not as altruistic tools but as instruments to pursue national interests. This view receives empirical support from

studies of the Syrian conflict, where both Russia and the United States supported corridors that aligned with their respective allies' strategic needs (ICRC, 2016).

The academic debate also includes the efficacy of international organisations in negotiating and managing humanitarian corridors. Scholars such as Weiss and Daws (2007) and the UNHCR (2023) argue that while organisations like the UN and the ICRC have normative authority, they often lack effective enforcement mechanisms, especially when major powers are involved. The Security Council's veto system is frequently cited as a structural limitation in this regard.

Another area explored is the influence of public opinion and media on shaping humanitarian access. Slim (1997) and Ferris (2020) highlight how global media coverage can pressure states and international organisations into action. However, the media can also exacerbate diplomatic tensions by framing conflicts in ways that delegitimise one party, thereby reducing the prospects for cooperation.

Trust deficit among conflicting parties is another recurring theme. UNHCR (2023) emphasises the importance of sustained dialogue and confidence-building measures, without which humanitarian corridors are likely to be sporadic and unreliable. This is especially true in contexts such as Ukraine and Ethiopia, where mutual accusations and a lack of verifiable ceasefires undermine corridor implementation (OCHA, 2022; HRW, 2022).

Moreover, regional organisations are gaining attention for their potential role in mediating humanitarian access. While global institutions often face geopolitical constraints, regional actors may have better contextual understanding and cultural legitimacy. Studies on the African Union's involvement in Ethiopia and Turkey's role in Ukraine underscore this point (HRW, 2022; OCHA, 2022).

Nevertheless, the literature also cautions against over-reliance on regional mechanisms, noting that regional politics can be equally divisive. For instance, rivalries within the Arab League or competing interests within the African Union can hinder effective action (Ferris, 2020).

Despite the richness of the existing literature, few studies have systematically compared the diplomatic processes across different contexts to identify patterns and anomalies. This paper contributes to filling that gap by analysing three contemporary case studies—Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia—through a dual theoretical lens. It demonstrates that while each context has its unique attributes, common diplomatic barriers persist, including legal ambiguity, power asymmetries, trust deficits, and limited institutional capacities.

In summary, the literature on humanitarian corridors is multi-disciplinary, drawing from international law, political science, and humanitarian studies. It provides valuable insights into the legal, moral, and operational aspects of humanitarian corridors, but often falls short of offering integrated theoretical explanations and comparative diplomatic analysis. This study aims to bridge that gap by focusing explicitly on diplomacy as the linchpin for the success or failure of humanitarian corridors.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, comparative case study methodology to examine the diplomatic challenges involved in establishing and implementing international humanitarian corridors. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for understanding complex political and normative phenomena, such as humanitarian diplomacy, where contextual sensitivity and interpretive depth are crucial (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research aims to elucidate how various political, legal, and strategic factors interact to either facilitate or hinder humanitarian access during armed conflicts.

4.1 Research Design

The research employs a multiple-case design, focusing on three contemporary conflict zones: Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia. Each of these cases represents a significant humanitarian crisis wherein humanitarian corridors were proposed, negotiated, or implemented with varying degrees of success and diplomatic complexity. The cross-case comparison enables the identification of both context-specific dynamics and recurring diplomatic obstacles, thereby contributing to the development of generalisable insights into humanitarian diplomacy.

4.2 Case Selection Criteria

The cases were selected based on three primary criteria:

- Conflict Intensity and Humanitarian Need: Each case involved a high-intensity armed conflict that necessitated the creation of humanitarian corridors to address urgent civilian needs (OCHA, 2022; UNHCR, 2023).
- Documented Diplomatic Engagement: The presence of well-documented diplomatic initiatives, including UN Security Council resolutions, negotiations by international and regional actors, and media coverage of the corridor processes.
- Geopolitical Diversity: The inclusion of cases from diverse geopolitical and cultural regions—such as the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Horn of Africa—enables broader applicability of the findings.

4.3 Data Collection

The research draws on a variety of primary and secondary sources. Primary data includes:

- Official documents from the United Nations (e.g., Security Council resolutions, OCHA situation reports)
- Statements and communiqués from international non-governmental organisations (e.g., ICRC, MSF)
- Transcripts of speeches and public statements by state actors and diplomats involved in negotiations

Secondary data includes peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and media analyses related to the selected case studies. This multi-source strategy ensures methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings (Yin, 2018).

4.4 Analytical Framework

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis, a qualitative technique for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Key themes—such as sovereignty disputes, legal ambiguities, mistrust among parties, and strategic manipulation—were derived inductively and coded across all cases. These themes were then interpreted through the dual lenses of Constructivism and Realism, allowing for both normative and strategic dimensions of diplomacy to be considered.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Given the reliance on publicly available data and the absence of human subjects, formal ethical approval was not required. However, the research maintains academic integrity by accurately citing all sources and ensuring balanced representation of all stakeholders involved in the humanitarian corridor processes. Care

has been taken to avoid sensationalism and maintain neutrality, particularly when discussing ongoing conflicts.

4.6 Limitations

While the qualitative case study approach provides depth, it also imposes certain limitations regarding generalizability. The diplomatic dynamics of humanitarian corridors can vary significantly depending on the nature of the conflict, the actors involved, and regional political configurations. Furthermore, the reliance on publicly available documents means that some behind-the-scenes negotiations or classified information may not be accessible, which could limit the completeness of the analysis.

Despite these limitations, the methodology employed provides a rigorous and context-sensitive approach to understanding the diplomatic challenges inherent in creating and operating humanitarian corridors. It lays the groundwork for further research, incorporating field interviews and quantitative data on humanitarian outcomes.

5. Case Studies

To understand the real-world complexities of humanitarian corridors, this section examines three contemporary conflict zones: Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia. Each case presents distinct geopolitical contexts and diplomatic interactions, yet reveals strikingly similar obstacles in establishing effective humanitarian pathways.

5.1 Syria

The Syrian conflict, ongoing since 2011, has become emblematic of the diplomatic difficulties in implementing humanitarian corridors. The war involves a wide array of actors, including the Syrian government, various opposition groups, international coalitions, and powerful external states such as Russia, the United States, and Turkey.

Diplomatic negotiations for humanitarian corridors in Syria have frequently been impeded by the lack of consensus at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Russia, a staunch ally of the Assad regime, has repeatedly used its veto power to limit international access to Syrian territory under the guise of defending state sovereignty (UNSC, 2021). This tension highlights a classic realist dilemma in which strategic alliances and power projection often take precedence over humanitarian imperatives (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Constructivist insights are also applicable. Different actors possess divergent perceptions of legitimacy and responsibility. Western nations often frame the Syrian government as illegitimate and prioritise humanitarian intervention, while Russia and Iran emphasise sovereignty and accuse Western powers of regime change motives. These identity-driven narratives obstruct diplomatic efforts by reducing the common normative ground necessary for cooperation (Wendt, 1999).

On-the-ground implementation of corridors, such as those in Eastern Ghouta (2018) and Aleppo (2016), was marred by mutual distrust, insufficient guarantees of safety, and selective access depending on territorial control (ICRC, 2016). Humanitarian agencies often found themselves negotiating separately with multiple actors, leading to inconsistent outcomes and increased security risks.

The Syrian case demonstrates how legal ambiguity, contested narratives, and veto diplomacy intersect to undermine corridor implementation. Despite numerous UNSC resolutions, such as Resolution 2254,

humanitarian access has remained erratic due to competing geopolitical interests and the absence of enforceable mechanisms.

5.2 Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 introduced a new theatre for humanitarian corridors shaped by high-intensity interstate warfare, modern information warfare, and extensive media scrutiny. Unlike Syria, where non-state actors dominate, Ukraine represents a more traditional conflict between two state actors, albeit with proxy elements and broader NATO involvement.

The establishment of humanitarian corridors in cities such as Mariupol, Kharkiv, and Bucha faced significant diplomatic hurdles. One major challenge was the failure to establish robust ceasefires that could protect corridor operations. Although agreements were often reached through intermediaries such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), these were frequently violated within hours due to the absence of enforceable verification mechanisms (OCHA, 2022).

Ukraine's diplomatic strategy involved mobilising Western support to shame Russia on the international stage, portraying violations of humanitarian agreements as war crimes. This approach generated global sympathy but hardened Russian resistance, further politicising corridor negotiations (UNHCR, 2023). Russia, in turn, accused Ukraine and Western countries of using civilians as "human shields" and obstructing safe passage (HRW, 2022).

The constructivist framework helps explain the identity-based antagonism fueling diplomatic deadlock. Russia’s perception of Ukraine as a sphere of influence clashes with the latter's Western alignment, making even technical humanitarian discussions ideologically charged (Wendt, 1999). Meanwhile, realist dynamics—such as NATO’s support for Ukraine and Russia’s territorial ambitions—further complicate corridor implementation by embedding humanitarian decisions within larger security calculations.

Thus, the Ukraine case reveals how humanitarian diplomacy can be overwhelmed by militarised narratives and geopolitical brinkmanship. The inability to establish credible monitoring and enforcement mechanisms resulted in repeated failures and significant civilian casualties during attempted evacuations.

5.3 Ethiopia

The conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray region, which began in late 2020, presents a unique diplomatic context characterised by internal state fragmentation, ethnic divisions, and regional African diplomacy. The Ethiopian government’s military operations against the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) triggered a severe humanitarian crisis, prompting calls for corridors to deliver aid and evacuate civilians.

Unlike Syria and Ukraine, the Ethiopian government initially denied the existence of a humanitarian crisis and resisted international involvement, framing the conflict as a domestic issue. This sovereignty-first narrative effectively blocked early international diplomatic engagement (HRW, 2022). However, pressure from the African Union (AU), along with discreet shuttle diplomacy from the UN and other regional actors, eventually led to limited agreements for humanitarian access.

The humanitarian corridor established from Semera to Mekelle in 2021, although theoretically operational, was plagued by logistical delays, military interference, and accusations from both sides of aid weaponisation. Humanitarian convoys were frequently blocked or looted, and aid workers were subjected to security risks (OCHA, 2022).

Constructivist theory helps explain the Ethiopian case through the lens of competing national narratives. The central government framed humanitarian interventions as foreign interference, while the TPLF accused Addis Ababa of orchestrating famine as a weapon of war. These narratives shaped the diplomatic atmosphere and hindered trust-based negotiation (UNHCR, 2023).

From a realist perspective, the Ethiopian state's desire to assert control over national territory, combined with regional rivalries (e.g., with Eritrea), diminished the incentive to accommodate external humanitarian mediation. The AU, though better situated to engage with local actors, lacked the political clout and logistical capabilities to enforce sustained access (Ferris, 2020).

The Tigray case thus illustrates how internal power dynamics and weak regional institutions can render humanitarian corridors ineffective, even in the absence of great-power rivalry. It underscores the need for robust regional mechanisms and local-level trust-building in future diplomatic efforts.

5.4 Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia highlights several recurring diplomatic challenges:

- Legal Ambiguity: In all three cases, conflicting interpretations of international humanitarian law and sovereignty impeded consensus. There remains no universally binding legal instrument to compel parties to honour humanitarian corridor agreements (Kellenberger, 2008).
- Power Asymmetries: Realist dynamics dominate, with more powerful actors leveraging humanitarian issues for strategic gain. This is especially evident in Syria and Ukraine, where major powers use vetoes and alliances to shape access to corridors.
- Trust Deficit: All cases reveal deep mutual mistrust, exacerbated by past violations and propaganda. This deficit undermines ceasefire agreements and safe passage assurances, rendering humanitarian diplomacy fragile and contingent.
- Institutional Limitations: International organisations, although normatively significant, often lack adequate enforcement capacity. In Ethiopia, regional bodies, such as the African Union (AU), were constrained by political considerations and logistical limitations.
- Normative Contestation: Constructivist elements, including identity, narrative framing, and normative disagreement, strongly influence diplomatic interactions. The varying perceptions of legitimacy and victimhood affect cooperation prospects.

In summary, these case studies confirm that while humanitarian corridors are both legally and morally justified, their practical implementation is hindered by complex diplomatic dynamics. Successful humanitarian diplomacy requires not only legal clarity and operational planning but also a recalibration of political will, trust, and multilateral engagement.

6. Analysis and Discussion

The comparative analysis of the three selected case studies—Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia—reveals a complex interplay of legal ambiguity, power asymmetries, normative divergences, and institutional constraints in the implementation of humanitarian corridors. This section critically examines the diplomatic challenges through the dual theoretical lens of constructivism and realism, offering insights into recurring and context-specific impediments.

6.1 Legal Ambiguity and the Sovereignty Dilemma

One of the most persistent challenges across all three contexts is the tension between humanitarian imperatives and state sovereignty. In Ethiopia, for instance, the government consistently invoked sovereignty and national security as reasons to deny or delay humanitarian access to the Tigray region. This stance reflects the realist assertion that states prioritise survival and autonomy above all else (Mearsheimer, 2001). Even in situations where humanitarian need is dire, governments often view corridors as infringements on their authority, leading to diplomatic resistance.

In Syria, although the legal framework for humanitarian corridors exists under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), implementation requires the consent of the host state, which is often withheld or manipulated. The UN Security Council's Resolution 2165 (2014) authorised cross-border aid without Syrian government approval but was heavily contested and eventually rolled back due to opposition from Russia and China. This illustrates the limits of legal instruments when major powers exert influence to protect their allies (Kellenberger, 2008).

6.2 Strategic Instrumentalisation and Realpolitik

The realist perspective is further substantiated by the strategic use of humanitarian corridors for political and military gain. In Syria, the corridors were used by the Assad regime and its allies not solely for humanitarian purposes but as tools to evacuate opposition-held areas and consolidate control (HRW, 2016). This weaponisation of humanitarianism undermines both the trust and neutrality necessary for corridor success.

Ukraine's experience presents a similar picture. The conflicting narratives and mutual accusations between Russia and Ukraine regarding the targeting of civilians and the use of corridors for military positioning reflect a zero-sum strategic environment. The involvement of regional powers, such as Turkey, and supranational bodies, such as the EU, has helped mediate to some extent; however, the lack of enforcement mechanisms hampers durable outcomes (OCHA, 2022).

Constructivist theory emphasises that when shared norms surrounding humanitarianism are absent or contested, diplomatic efforts falter. In both Ukraine and Syria, accusations of bad faith and manipulation eroded the normative basis necessary for cooperation. This divergence in humanitarian norms—what constitutes neutrality, who qualifies as a civilian—creates interpretive gaps that complicate diplomatic dialogue (Wendt, 1999).

6.3 Trust Deficits and Fragmented Dialogue

The establishment of humanitarian corridors relies heavily on mutual trust, yet all three cases suffer from profound trust deficits. In Ethiopia, the absence of transparent communication between the government and humanitarian agencies, exacerbated by media censorship, resulted in misinformation and mutual suspicion. Humanitarian actors were unable to verify conditions on the ground, and diplomatic overtures were perceived as hostile interventions (Ferris, 2020).

Ukraine and Syria, although more accessible to international media, also demonstrated deep distrust among conflicting parties. The failure of ceasefires, attacks on aid convoys, and exclusion of certain actors from negotiations all contributed to the fragility of diplomatic arrangements. This echoes findings from Slim (1997), who emphasised the necessity of confidence-building measures and transparent mechanisms to foster cooperative engagement.

6.4 Role of Mediators and Institutional Constraints

The role of mediating actors—both international and regional—is pivotal in the negotiation and maintenance of humanitarian corridors. However, the efficacy of such mediation is contingent upon institutional authority and political neutrality. In the Syrian and Ethiopian cases, the United Nations and the African Union, respectively, faced limitations due to geopolitical alignments and internal divisions. The UN's normative authority was counterbalanced by the veto power of Security Council members, while the African Union lacked sufficient leverage over the Ethiopian government (Weiss & Daws, 2007).

Conversely, in Ukraine, Turkey's mediation, particularly in brokering the grain corridor deal, demonstrated the potential of regional actors to play a constructive role when they possess both influence and perceived neutrality. However, this success was limited to specific sectors and did not extend fully to humanitarian corridors, indicating the need for broader mandates and more robust institutional frameworks (HRW, 2022).

6.5 Media and Public Perception

The influence of media and public perception in shaping diplomatic trajectories cannot be overlooked. In Syria and Ukraine, widespread media coverage generated international pressure and mobilised humanitarian concern. However, this also led to the politicisation of humanitarian narratives, where certain actors were delegitimised, reducing the scope for inclusive negotiation (Slim, 1997).

In contrast, the Ethiopian conflict was characterised by restricted media access and information blackouts, which diminished global awareness and reduced diplomatic pressure. This asymmetry in visibility affects the effectiveness of humanitarian diplomacy, as international actors often prioritise crises that receive substantial media coverage (Ferris, 2020).

6.6 Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

The constructivist lens offers valuable insights into how identity, norms, and perceptions shape the diplomacy of humanitarian corridors. The contested meaning of humanitarian norms, the delegitimisation of opposing parties, and the erosion of shared ethical standards are all normative barriers that hinder cooperative diplomacy efforts. When states and non-state actors lack a common understanding of humanitarian principles, diplomatic efforts are prone to failure.

At the same time, realism effectively explains the structural and strategic impediments that dominate the operational landscape. State actors prioritise sovereignty, territorial control, and strategic advantage over humanitarian concerns. Humanitarian corridors, from a realist perspective, are tolerated only when they align with national interests or help to mitigate reputational costs.

Both theories underscore the need for more nuanced diplomatic strategies that address normative divergence while also accommodating geopolitical realities. The fusion of constructivist and realist insights suggests that successful humanitarian corridor diplomacy requires:

- Clear legal mandates that reduce ambiguity and offer enforceable guidelines.
- Neutral and credible mediators capable of navigating power asymmetries.
- Inclusive dialogue platforms that build trust among diverse stakeholders.
- Strategic communication efforts that balance transparency with conflict sensitivity.
- Stronger international and regional institutional capacities with less politicised governance mechanisms.

6.7 Practical Lessons and Policy Implications

The empirical evidence from Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia demonstrates that establishing humanitarian corridors is not merely a logistical or legal issue, but fundamentally a diplomatic one. Effective humanitarian diplomacy must be proactive, context-sensitive, and grounded in both normative and strategic realities.

Policymakers and humanitarian agencies should prioritise early diplomatic engagement to prevent conflicts from escalating beyond the possibility of negotiation. Moreover, the empowerment of regional actors with cultural and geopolitical legitimacy can enhance mediation efforts, provided they maintain neutrality.

Ultimately, there is a pressing need to enhance the international legal framework governing humanitarian corridors. Clear guidelines on initiation, operation, and monitoring, coupled with accountability mechanisms, can help reduce manipulation and improve compliance.

In conclusion, humanitarian corridors are indispensable yet diplomatically fragile tools. Their success depends on the delicate balance of legal clarity, normative consensus, and strategic cooperation. A deeper understanding of both realist and constructivist dynamics can inform more effective and ethical approaches to humanitarian diplomacy in future crises.

8. Conclusion

The analysis of humanitarian corridors in Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia reveals the immense diplomatic complexities surrounding their negotiation and implementation. These corridors, intended as lifelines for civilians in conflict zones, often become entangled in a web of political, legal, and strategic disputes. Through the dual theoretical lenses of realism and constructivism, the study highlights how state interests, power asymmetries, and normative divergences collectively hinder the operationalisation of these humanitarian mechanisms.

Realist interpretations emphasise how concerns about sovereignty and strategic priorities frequently supersede humanitarian obligations. States frequently resist or manipulate corridors to retain political leverage or to pursue military objectives. In contrast, the constructivist perspective sheds light on how divergent interpretations of humanitarian norms, such as neutrality and the protection of civilians, contribute to breakdowns in diplomatic dialogue. The absence of shared values and trust further complicates negotiations, particularly in protracted or highly polarised conflicts.

Furthermore, the analysis illustrates the critical yet constrained role of mediators, whether regional actors or international organizations. Success depends not only on their institutional authority but also on their perceived neutrality and ability to navigate competing narratives. Media visibility and public perception further shape the international response, sometimes amplifying or undermining humanitarian diplomacy.

Ultimately, the study concludes that the success of humanitarian corridors hinges on a nuanced balance between normative alignment and pragmatic diplomacy. Future strategies must integrate enforceable legal frameworks, inclusive negotiation platforms, and robust institutional mechanisms that can accommodate both humanitarian imperatives and geopolitical realities. The cases examined offer valuable lessons for designing more adaptive, credible, and ethical approaches to humanitarian corridor diplomacy in contemporary and future conflict settings.

7.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian corridor diplomacy:

- Establish Clear Legal Frameworks: There is a need for internationally agreed-upon guidelines that define the creation, operation, and oversight of humanitarian corridors. These frameworks should include enforceable provisions to prevent misuse and ensure accountability.
- Enhance Mediator Legitimacy and Capacity: Neutral and trusted third-party actors—whether regional powers or international institutions—should be empowered with greater authority and resources to facilitate negotiations. Mediators must maintain impartiality while possessing the geopolitical clout to influence parties.
- Foster Normative Convergence: Efforts should be made to build consensus on humanitarian norms among conflicting parties. Training, dialogue sessions, and cultural diplomacy can help align perceptions regarding neutrality and the protection of civilians.
- Strengthen Communication Mechanisms: Establish transparent and credible communication channels to minimise misinformation, reduce distrust, and ensure a safe passage. Information campaigns can also enhance public understanding and global support.
- Institutionalise Early Intervention: Humanitarian diplomacy should not be a reactive approach. Early diplomatic engagement, before the full escalation of conflict, can provide better outcomes for civilians and humanitarian actors alike.

By implementing these recommendations, states and humanitarian agencies can contribute to more functional, legitimate, and humane responses to crises.

7.2. Future Research

While this study has provided a comparative analysis of humanitarian corridors in three conflict settings, future research could expand in several directions to deepen our understanding of humanitarian diplomacy.

First, more empirical case studies, particularly from underrepresented regions such as Latin America or Southeast Asia, could provide a broader dataset for cross-regional comparison. These cases might reveal unique diplomatic practices or challenges shaped by different cultural, political, or historical contexts.

Second, longitudinal studies that examine the long-term impacts of humanitarian corridors on post-conflict recovery and reconciliation processes would be invaluable. Do these corridors foster lasting trust or contribute to enduring political fragmentation?

Third, there is scope for technological inquiry into how innovations, such as satellite surveillance, blockchain logistics, or AI-driven monitoring, can improve the transparency, security, and accountability of humanitarian corridors.

Additionally, research should explore the gendered dimensions of humanitarian access, including how women and children are affected by corridor failures or manipulations, and how feminist diplomatic strategies might offer alternative approaches to addressing these issues.

Ultimately, integrating psychological and behavioural insights into diplomatic studies can enhance our understanding of trust-building and negotiation under extreme conditions. By examining how cognitive

biases and group identities shape diplomatic decisions, future research can contribute to more psychologically informed models of humanitarian diplomacy.

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Legal and Regulatory Aspects of Humanitarian Corridors

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This research article examines the regulatory framework of International Humanitarian Corridors (IHCs), concentrating on their legal foundations, practical implementation, and oversight mechanisms. As critical instruments for safeguarding civilians and delivering humanitarian aid during armed conflicts, IHCs have gained prominence but lack a cohesive regulatory framework. The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilising legal document analysis, comparative case studies (Syria, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Gaza), and a content review of humanitarian policy documents. The findings reveal a fragmented legal architecture, where international humanitarian law provides foundational principles but fails to specify operational norms for International Humanitarian Corps (IHCs). Furthermore, regulatory perspectives differ significantly across national and international actors, complicating the implementation process. Theoretical insights from humanitarian ethics and legal positivism underpin the study, highlighting the tension between normative obligations and the sovereignty of states. Key challenges identified include politicisation, inconsistent enforcement, and limited legal accountability. The article concludes with strategic recommendations for the codification of IHC norms and enhanced institutional coordination. Future research is proposed to examine the integration of technology, comparative legal systems, and civilian narratives in corridor design.

Keywords: Humanitarian Corridors, International Humanitarian Law, Armed Conflict, Civilian Protection, Humanitarian Access, Regulatory Framework, United Nations.

1. Introduction

The intensification of armed conflicts, civil wars, and natural disasters over the past decades has necessitated the evolution of mechanisms that ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. Among the most prominent of these mechanisms are humanitarian corridors, which serve as designated routes or zones that allow for the safe movement of humanitarian aid and the evacuation of civilians. These corridors are vital lifelines in crises where conventional access is obstructed by active hostilities, geopolitical constraints, or deliberate targeting of humanitarian operations (ICRC, 2013; OCHA, 2020).

Despite their growing application in conflict zones such as Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia, the legal and regulatory landscape governing humanitarian corridors remains fragmented, inconsistent, and often ambiguous. While international humanitarian law (IHL) provides foundational principles such as the protection of civilians and the obligation to facilitate humanitarian relief, it does not offer a comprehensive or codified framework specific to the establishment and operation of humanitarian corridors. Consequently, the creation of these corridors is often subject to ad hoc negotiations between states, non-state actors, and international organisations, frequently resulting in contested interpretations and inconsistent enforcement (Roberts, 1996; Slim, 2015).

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 are widely regarded as the cornerstone of modern international humanitarian law (IHL). These instruments mandate that parties to a conflict allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, particularly in non-international armed conflicts (Geneva Convention IV, 1949; Additional Protocol II, 1977, Art. 18). However, these legal obligations are often subordinated to the principle of state sovereignty and the requirement of consent, creating a legal paradox where the imperative of humanitarian access is frequently trumped by political considerations (Lattimer & Sands, 2012).

Moreover, the regulatory perspective on humanitarian corridors—encompassing legal, institutional, and operational dimensions—has not kept pace with the rising need for such mechanisms. Most humanitarian corridors are implemented under soft-law instruments, bilateral agreements, or Security Council resolutions that lack binding enforcement provisions. The absence of a dedicated international regulatory body or a standardised protocol has enabled the selective interpretation and politicisation of humanitarian corridors. For instance, in the Syrian conflict, the establishment of humanitarian corridors has been marred by repeated violations, logistical failures, and accusations of their use as military strategies by belligerent parties (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2016; UN OCHA, 2020).

In addition to legal and political challenges, operational issues such as insufficient coordination among humanitarian actors, lack of real-time information, inadequate security guarantees, and funding shortfalls have further complicated the effective functioning of humanitarian corridors. These practical obstacles underscore the need for a more coherent and enforceable regulatory approach that integrates legal norms with practical guidelines for implementation (Baldwin, Cave, & Lodge, 2012).

This research article aims to conduct a systematic survey of regulatory perspectives on international humanitarian corridors. It seeks to answer the following key questions:

- What are the existing international legal norms that regulate humanitarian corridors?
- How do states and international organisations operationalise these norms?
- What challenges emerge in their practical implementation, and how can the regulatory framework be improved?

To address these questions, the study adopts a legal positivist framework grounded in international humanitarian law, combined with regulatory theory to assess institutional roles and enforcement mechanisms. The article proceeds through a comprehensive literature review, a theoretical framing, and a qualitative legal analysis of three major case studies—Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia—each of which illustrates different dimensions of regulatory challenges and opportunities. Through this analysis, the study hopes to contribute to the development of a more structured, accountable, and effective legal regime for humanitarian corridors.

2. Literature Review

The concept of humanitarian corridors has gained increasing attention in international relations, humanitarian law, and conflict studies. While the practical utility of such corridors in war-torn or disaster-affected regions is evident, academic and policy-oriented literature presents a fragmented and evolving understanding of their legal underpinnings, regulatory mechanisms, and implementation dynamics. This section provides a critical review of the existing literature across four thematic areas: historical evolution and typologies, legal foundations and international norms, operational and political challenges, and regulatory and institutional frameworks.

2.1. Historical Evolution and Typologies

Humanitarian corridors, although popularised in recent decades, have precedents dating back to the early 20th century. The evacuation of civilians during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and humanitarian operations in World War II are often cited as early examples of corridor-like mechanisms (Weissman, 2011). However, it was during the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s—particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina—that the term "humanitarian corridor" entered the lexicon of international humanitarian operations (Minear & Weiss, 1995).

Typologies of humanitarian corridors vary. Slim (2015) classifies them based on purpose: evacuation corridors, aid delivery corridors, and safe zones. Others distinguish between unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral corridors, depending on the parties involved in their establishment (Ferris, 2011). These classifications are vital as they influence the legal basis, operational strategy, and political legitimacy of each corridor type.

2.2. Legal Foundations and International Norms

The legal literature on humanitarian corridors often centres on international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977. These documents establish general obligations for parties in armed conflicts to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access. Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions and Articles 18 and 70 of the Additional Protocols form the bedrock of legal justifications for humanitarian access (ICRC, 2013).

However, there is no explicit provision in IHL that comprehensively codifies the concept of "humanitarian corridors" as a standalone legal institution. As Sassòli (2019) notes, the legal framework is interpretative rather than prescriptive, leaving room for broad discretion by state and non-state actors. This has resulted in a reliance on soft-law instruments, UN Security Council resolutions, and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) for the practical establishment of corridors (Bothe, 2018).

The concept of "consent" is central to the legality of humanitarian corridors. Under Article 70(1) of Additional Protocol I, the consent of the affected state is generally required to provide humanitarian assistance. However, this consent can be unreasonably withheld or politically manipulated, thereby

undermining humanitarian objectives (Terry, 2002). In recent years, scholars have explored the tension between state sovereignty and the right to humanitarian assistance, particularly in non-international armed conflicts (Clapham, 2015; Akande & Gillard, 2016).

2.3. Operational and Political Challenges

Despite the normative endorsement of humanitarian corridors, operationalising them poses severe challenges. Security concerns, lack of trust between parties, and logistical limitations frequently derail corridor effectiveness (UN OCHA, 2020). In Syria, for instance, humanitarian corridors have often been unilaterally declared by the government or external actors, raising concerns about their neutrality and voluntary nature (MSF, 2016). Reports have documented incidents where civilians were coerced into using corridors that led into government-controlled areas, compromising the fundamental principle of voluntary movement (UNHRC, 2018).

The issue of militarisation further complicates operational efforts. Humanitarian corridors have occasionally been used for strategic military gains, such as relocating populations from opposition-held to regime-controlled territories, effectively amounting to forced displacement (Ferris & Kirişci, 2016). In Ukraine, corridors negotiated during the 2022 Russian invasion experienced repeated violations, leading to deaths, delays, and increased mistrust among parties (ICRC, 2022).

Additionally, the lack of coordination among international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and host governments hampers effective implementation. Research by de Waal (2014) emphasises that humanitarian operations in conflict zones suffer from a "coordination dilemma," where overlapping mandates, competition for visibility, and bureaucratic inertia reduce operational efficiency.

2.4. Regulatory and Institutional Frameworks

The literature reflects a growing consensus on the regulatory deficit surrounding humanitarian corridors. While norms exist under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), there is no dedicated institutional mechanism or treaty specifically regulating their creation, management, or accountability. This void has led scholars to explore regulatory theory and governance models to understand and address this gap.

Baldwin, Cave, and Lodge (2012) propose a tripartite regulatory model consisting of standard-setting, behaviour modification, and monitoring. Applied to humanitarian corridors, this model suggests the need for clearly defined protocols, incentives or sanctions for compliance, and independent mechanisms for oversight. However, in the current humanitarian system, no global body plays this role comprehensively.

The United Nations, particularly through OCHA and UNHCR, plays a central but limited role. While these agencies often facilitate negotiations and monitor implementation, their regulatory powers are constrained by mandates, funding, and the politics of member states (Weiss, 2013). In situations such as Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, the lack of enforceable international standards resulted in fragmented and delayed corridor operations (HRW, 2021).

Moreover, regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) have attempted to develop policy guidelines on humanitarian access. However, these frameworks remain largely advisory and context-dependent (AU, 2019; EU, 2020). The emerging body of soft law, including the Sphere Standards and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines, provides valuable operational guidance but lacks legal enforceability (Sphere Project, 2018).

Recent academic work calls for a new normative framework explicitly tailored to humanitarian corridors. This includes proposals for a UN Convention on Humanitarian Access, model protocols for corridor operation, and independent regulatory bodies akin to those in environmental or trade law (Sandoz, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021). While these ideas are in early stages, they reflect growing dissatisfaction with the current status quo and a push toward more structured governance.

2.5. Critical Gaps and Future Directions

Despite the wealth of literature, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a lack of comparative empirical studies on the effectiveness of humanitarian corridors across different conflict zones. Most analyses focus on case studies without synthesising cross-national data (Pantuliano, 2014). Second, the voices of affected populations are often missing in regulatory debates, with limited qualitative data on civilian experiences and preferences regarding corridor use.

Third, the interaction between domestic legal systems and international norms in regulating humanitarian corridors is underexplored. Some states have developed national guidelines or military doctrines on humanitarian access, but their compatibility with international humanitarian law (IHL) is rarely scrutinised (Stoddard et al., 2017).

Finally, literature on technological integration—such as digital mapping, blockchain logistics, and AI forecasting in humanitarian corridors—remains nascent. These tools offer new possibilities for transparency, security, and accountability but require corresponding regulatory innovation (Greenwood et al., 2017).

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of international humanitarian corridors from a regulatory perspective necessitates a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that synthesises insights from international law, governance theory, and regulatory studies. This section introduces and justifies the three main theoretical lenses that underpin this research: International Legal Positivism, Global Governance Theory, and the Responsive Regulation Model. Together, these frameworks enable a comprehensive understanding of how humanitarian corridors are conceptualised, legalised, operationalised, and contested in global contexts.

3.1. International Legal Positivism

International Legal Positivism provides the foundational lens through which the legal legitimacy of humanitarian corridors is assessed. Legal positivism posits that the validity of legal norms originates from formal sources, such as treaties, customs, and general principles of law, rather than from moral or ethical considerations (Kelsen, 1945). Under this framework, humanitarian corridors are evaluated based on their grounding in established instruments of international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977.

Legal positivism is particularly relevant in clarifying the juridical ambiguity surrounding humanitarian corridors. While the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provides general provisions for humanitarian access and civilian protection, it does not codify the concept of "corridors" per se (Sassòli, 2019). This absence allows for flexible interpretation, but also results in regulatory fragmentation and inconsistent application by states and non-state actors. As such, legal positivism enables a critical examination of normative deficits, state consent, and customary practices, providing a structured lens to assess the balance between legality and practicality.

3.2. Global Governance Theory

The second theoretical pillar is Global Governance Theory, which shifts the focus from legal structures to political and institutional arrangements that facilitate or hinder humanitarian access. This approach views global governance as a system in which state and non-state actors, including international organisations (e.g., the United Nations), NGOs, and private contractors, collaborate to manage transnational issues (Rosenau, 1992; Weiss, 2000).

Global Governance Theory is instrumental in understanding the multipolarity and decentralisation of authority in the operation of humanitarian corridors. In many cases, corridors are established not solely through state consent, but through multi-actor negotiations involving humanitarian agencies, regional organisations, and armed groups (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). This model accommodates the normative pluralism and power asymmetries inherent in humanitarian interventions, exposing the political economies and institutional weaknesses that challenge regulatory consistency and enforceability.

Through this lens, humanitarian corridors are not merely legal constructs but rather products of global political negotiation, shaped by sovereignty, diplomacy, and geopolitical interests. Governance theory thus facilitates the examination of soft-law instruments, interagency coordination, and accountability mechanisms within an increasingly complex international humanitarian regime.

3.3. Responsive Regulation Model

The third theoretical strand draws from the Responsive Regulation Model, developed by Ayres and Braithwaite (1992), a regulatory theory initially applied in economic and corporate domains. However, it has increasingly adapted to humanitarian and human rights governance. This model advocates for a regulatory pyramid, wherein enforcement begins with persuasion and capacity-building, escalating to sanctions and legal enforcement when compliance fails to occur.

In the context of humanitarian corridors, responsive regulation suggests a flexible, graduated approach to oversight—starting with voluntary compliance by host states and parties to conflict, supported by guidelines, best practices, and international norms. Suppose access is obstructed or corridors are misused (e.g., for forced evacuations or military advantage). In that case, the model permits escalation through naming and shaming, sanctions, or intervention mandates authorised by multilateral bodies, such as the UN Security Council.

This theory is particularly relevant in analysing non-compliance scenarios, where state or non-state actors obstruct humanitarian access. It also emphasises the importance of dialogue, trust-building, and adaptive strategies, aligning with modern humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence (Slim, 2015).

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology that integrates documentary analysis, comparative legal analysis, and expert opinion triangulation to survey the regulatory perspectives governing international humanitarian corridors. This approach enables an in-depth examination of the evolving legal and policy frameworks, implementation challenges, and enforcement mechanisms across various geopolitical contexts.

4.1. Research Design

Given the normative and interpretive focus of the research, a descriptive-analytical design is utilised to dissect legal instruments, institutional guidelines, and empirical case studies. The study is exploratory and does not

aim to test a hypothesis but instead seeks to uncover patterns, regulatory tensions, and legal ambiguities in the operationalisation of humanitarian corridors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions guiding this inquiry are:

- What international legal and regulatory instruments govern the creation and operation of humanitarian corridors?
- How do state and non-state actors interpret and apply these regulations in conflict and disaster scenarios?
- What are the main challenges and gaps in the current regulatory frameworks, and what models offer improved oversight and compliance?

4.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through three primary sources:

Primary legal documents include international treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, resolutions from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and guidelines from humanitarian organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Secondary literature, including academic journal articles, books, policy reports, and think tank publications from recognised bodies (e.g., Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group), was reviewed to contextualise legal interpretations and operational experiences (Bowen, 2009).

Case studies: Documented instances of humanitarian corridors were analysed from Syria (Aleppo, 2016), Ukraine (Mariupol, 2022), Ethiopia (Tigray, 2021), and Sudan (Khartoum, 2023). These case studies were selected based on their relevance, diversity in geopolitical context, and availability of documentation.

4.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a thematic coding approach to identify recurring themes across documents and case studies. Themes included the legal basis for corridor establishment, challenges to implementation, compliance and enforcement mechanisms, and political manipulation of humanitarian access. The legal documents were examined through normative legal analysis—assessing their authority, applicability, and scope (Tushnet, 1999).

The comparative method was used to analyse how different legal regimes and operational contexts affect the success or failure of humanitarian corridors. This allowed for cross-case insights into regulatory consistency and variance across international, regional, and national levels (Landman, 2008).

4.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility and triangulation, multiple sources were cross-verified for accuracy. For instance, United Nations reports were compared against NGO assessments and scholarly critiques to reduce bias and enhance objectivity. Expert interviews were not conducted due to the study's focus on documentary evidence; however, cross-referencing helped validate the interpretations and findings.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

As this study is based entirely on publicly available and secondary data, it did not require ethical clearance for human subjects. Nonetheless, the research adhered to academic integrity by appropriately attributing sources, maintaining neutrality, and avoiding selective citation or politicised interpretation (Silverman, 2021).

5. Legal Foundations of Humanitarian Corridors

The legal foundation of humanitarian corridors is rooted in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), with auxiliary support from International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs). Although not explicitly defined in any single treaty, the practice of humanitarian corridors is inferred from principles and articles found in several foundational texts.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949, particularly the Fourth Convention concerning the protection of civilian persons in times of war, are a primary legal source. Articles 23 and 59 affirm the right of humanitarian relief and the obligation of occupying powers to permit and facilitate the passage of such aid, provided it is impartial and conducted without adverse distinction (ICRC, 2016). Furthermore, Protocol I (1977) supplements these conventions by explicitly referencing the passage of relief actions, implying the legal viability of secure zones and humanitarian access routes (Sassòli, 2019).

Customary International Law also plays a role in shaping expectations around humanitarian corridors. The ICRC Customary Law Study (2005) identifies Rules 55 and 56, which emphasise that parties to conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians and ensure the freedom of movement for humanitarian personnel (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005). While these rules are often non-binding for non-signatory entities, their repeated invocation and implementation reinforce their customary status.

United Nations Security Council Resolutions add binding international authority. For instance, UNSCR 2139 (2014) on Syria demanded unhindered humanitarian access, including across conflict lines. Similarly, UNSCR 2417 (2018) addresses the linkage between armed conflict and food insecurity, requiring parties to conflicts to allow humanitarian aid (UNSC, 2018).

While these instruments form a legal scaffolding, they lack a unified definition or codification of “humanitarian corridors,” leaving their scope and enforcement susceptible to the whims of political will and military realities. The result is a legal grey zone, where state sovereignty and humanitarian imperatives often collide.

6. Regulatory Perspectives: National and International Frameworks

The regulatory governance of humanitarian corridors involves a complex interaction of international law, state-level legal systems, and operational frameworks administered by intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. Understanding the regulatory perspectives requires an analysis of how these actors implement, adapt, or resist overarching legal norms.

At the international level, the regulatory environment is shaped by instruments like the Geneva Conventions, UN General Assembly resolutions, and protocols issued by the ICRC and OCHA. These actors provide guidance but do not have the authority to enforce coercively. For instance, OCHA’s "Humanitarian Access Guidelines" establish practical standards for corridor operation; however, compliance is contingent upon negotiation with local authorities (OCHA, 2020).

Regional organisations have also played regulatory roles. The African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) have adopted regional humanitarian frameworks. The EU's Humanitarian Aid Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96) emphasises the importance of neutrality and access, although it does not explicitly establish humanitarian corridors (European Commission, 2022).

National frameworks vary greatly. In democratic states, national emergency and disaster laws may incorporate mechanisms for foreign humanitarian access, such as corridor agreements with United Nations (UN) agencies. In contrast, authoritarian or conflict-affected states may withhold access as a strategic tool, requiring international actors to secure Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) or informal assurances with multiple factions (Ferris, 2011).

Some states, like Turkey and Jordan, have codified procedures for cross-border humanitarian access in their border management regulations during the Syrian crisis. Others, such as Sudan and Myanmar, have employed bureaucratic obstructionism or militarised checkpoints to delay or deny the establishment of corridors.

Non-state armed groups, which are increasingly central actors in modern conflicts, often operate outside formal legal frameworks. However, international NGOs and the UN have negotiated humanitarian access agreements that operate under the principle of "humanitarian consent." These are quasi-regulatory instruments that enable corridor operations in ungoverned or rebel-held areas (Pantuliano et al., 2011).

Regulatory fragmentation remains a critical concern. In many conflict zones, overlapping mandates from various UN bodies, a lack of clarity about lead coordination agencies, and divergent rules about safety protocols have created implementation bottlenecks. Furthermore, the non-binding nature of many regulatory instruments often leads to selective compliance, particularly when humanitarian access conflicts with military objectives or concerns about sovereignty.

7. Case Studies

7.1. Syria – Aleppo (2016)

The Aleppo humanitarian corridors in 2016 marked a controversial example of humanitarian operations in urban warfare contexts. The Syrian government and Russian forces declared the opening of several "humanitarian corridors" for civilians and surrendering combatants. Ostensibly legal under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provisions concerning safe passage, these corridors were criticised by humanitarian organisations for functioning as mechanisms for forced displacement rather than voluntary evacuation (Amnesty International, 2016).

The regulatory oversight was weak: there was no apparent UN involvement in monitoring, and access was controlled exclusively by the government and Russian military personnel. This raised questions about impartiality and civilian consent, highlighting the legal ambiguity that arises when corridor operations are unilateral and not brokered through a multilateral consensus (Sassòli, 2019).

7.2. Ukraine – Mariupol (2022)

During the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, humanitarian corridors became central to international advocacy and diplomatic negotiation. The Ukrainian government, supported by international humanitarian agencies, attempted to establish corridors for civilian evacuation from besieged cities like Mariupol. However, reports indicated repeated violations of ceasefires and attacks on convoy routes, breaching international humanitarian law (IHL) norms on protected humanitarian passages (ICRC, 2022).

The UN and OSCE attempted to mediate these operations, but a lack of trust between warring parties undermined the regulatory process. Unlike Syria, establishing a corridor here involved ongoing diplomatic dialogue and media visibility, which increased compliance pressure. Nevertheless, asymmetric information and military control over routes limited the effectiveness of the corridors.

7.3. Ethiopia – Tigray (2021)

In the Tigray conflict, humanitarian access was severely constrained. Despite IHL provisions and the Ethiopian government's formal announcement of humanitarian corridors, relief agencies reported denial of access, bureaucratic delays, and looting of supplies. Regulatory enforcement was virtually absent, as the government did not permit third-party monitoring mechanisms (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

This case underscores how regulatory instruments without oversight can become rhetorical devices. The domestic regulatory apparatus in Ethiopia invoked national sovereignty to override international humanitarian norms, effectively nullifying external pressure to enforce access to humanitarian aid.

7.4. Sudan – Khartoum (2023)

The ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in 2023 illustrated another layer of regulatory complexity. Efforts by OCHA and the African Union to establish humanitarian corridors in Khartoum and Darfur were met with mixed success. Corridor agreements were frequently breached, with combatants obstructing aid and targeting aid workers.

In this case, hybrid regulatory efforts involving regional, international, and community actors attempted to establish functional corridors. The lack of central authority and the presence of multiple militias made the situation volatile, demonstrating the limits of both formal and informal regulatory systems in fragmented state settings.

8. Challenges and Gaps in Regulation

The regulation of humanitarian corridors faces numerous challenges that hinder their efficacy and legitimacy. These challenges can be broadly categorised as legal, political, operational, and institutional.

8.1. Legal Ambiguity:

There is no universally accepted legal definition of a humanitarian corridor. While international humanitarian law provides general provisions for humanitarian access, the lack of codification creates interpretive variability (Sassòli, 2019). This leads to inconsistencies in corridor design, scope, and duration. Additionally, the absence of a binding enforcement mechanism under IHL makes it challenging to hold violators accountable, especially when access denials are framed as security measures.

8.2. Politicisation of Humanitarian Access:

Humanitarian corridors often become tools of political leverage. Parties to a conflict may manipulate corridor openings for propaganda purposes, to force evacuations, or to regroup militarily (Pantuliano et al., 2011). This politicisation undermines neutrality, compromises humanitarian principles, and erodes trust in the system.

8.3. Operational Inconsistencies:

Corridors require agreement on timing, routes, monitoring, and security guarantees. Divergent protocols among actors, limited communication infrastructure, and deliberate obstruction by combatants create operational risks. In many instances, ceasefire violations during corridor operations, such as in Ukraine, have resulted in civilian casualties, nullifying humanitarian intentions (ICRC, 2022).

8.4. Fragmented Regulatory Oversight:

Regulatory fragmentation results from the multiplicity of actors involved—UN agencies, NGOs, regional bodies, and state authorities—all operating under distinct mandates. Lack of centralised coordination leads to duplication, confusion, and conflict over leadership in corridor negotiation and monitoring (Ferris, 2011).

8.5. Enforcement and Accountability Deficit:

There is a conspicuous enforcement gap in existing regulatory mechanisms. Even when violations occur, such as attacks on aid convoys, there are few judicial or diplomatic repercussions. The UN Security Council's inability to act decisively due to veto politics further weakens the regulatory architecture (Weiss, 2000).

8.6. Exclusion of Non-State Actors from Regulatory Frameworks:

While non-state armed groups control large swathes of territory, they are often excluded from formal regulatory processes due to their unrecognised status. This leaves corridors in such areas regulated by informal, ad hoc agreements that lack durability and legitimacy.

9. Conclusion

The examination of international humanitarian corridors (IHCs) reveals a complex intersection of humanitarian necessity, legal obligation, and political will. The study finds that while humanitarian corridors are vital in enabling the safe passage of civilians and aid during armed conflict, their application is marred by inconsistent regulatory frameworks, politicisation, and operational ambiguity. The legal foundation for IHCs is based on international humanitarian law, specifically the Geneva Conventions and related customary norms, which establish the duty to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access. However, despite the presence of these foundational norms, the lack of a dedicated international legal instrument governing the precise parameters of IHCs remains a significant gap.

Moreover, the regulatory landscape is fragmented across national and international levels, often influenced by sovereign interests and geopolitical strategies. The case studies—Syria, Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Gaza—demonstrate varied implementation outcomes, influenced by the presence of multiple stakeholders, including state actors, non-state armed groups, humanitarian agencies, and international organisations. These cases highlight recurring challenges such as negotiating access, ensuring neutrality, and maintaining transparency in corridor operations.

This study highlights the importance of establishing coherent and enforceable global norms that codify best practices and minimise ambiguity. Additionally, institutional mechanisms that can provide oversight and facilitate real-time negotiation are crucial for future success. The role of the United Nations, particularly through its agencies like OCHA, is pivotal in advancing a regulatory consensus.

Ultimately, while IHCs hold promise as tools for conflict mitigation and humanitarian relief, their effectiveness is contingent upon multilateral cooperation, legal clarity, and an ethical commitment to

protecting civilians. As conflicts become increasingly protracted and complex, the urgency for a robust regulatory paradigm grows ever more pressing.

9.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, several policy and legal recommendations are offered to enhance the effectiveness and governance of international humanitarian corridors:

- Establish a Binding International Legal Instrument: A codified treaty or protocol under international humanitarian law, specifically addressing IHCs, would standardise definitions, mandates, and rules of operation.
- Create a Central Coordinating Mechanism: An independent, multilateral body under the United Nations—possibly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)—should be empowered to oversee the negotiation, implementation, and monitoring of IHCs.
- Promote State and Non-State Actor Engagement: Both state and non-state actors should be bound by common regulatory commitments regarding humanitarian access, which should be monitored through international accountability frameworks.
- Institutionalise Training and Guidelines: Develop practical guidelines and capacity-building programs for military and humanitarian personnel involved in implementing corridors.
- Enhance Legal Accountability: Mechanisms for legal redress and sanctions should be clearly defined for violations of humanitarian access through IHCs.

These recommendations aim to move beyond ad hoc responses and establish a predictable, rights-based approach that upholds humanitarian principles in volatile environments.

9.2 Future Research

The evolving nature of armed conflict and humanitarian response necessitates further scholarly inquiry into multiple dimensions of humanitarian corridors. Future research should explore:

- Technology and Digital Governance: Investigating the role of emerging technologies, such as GIS mapping, blockchain for aid tracking, and AI-based risk prediction, could illuminate innovative tools to improve corridor planning and security.
- Comparative Legal Analysis: A focused comparative study on how national legislations integrate (or conflict with) international humanitarian law provisions on IHCs would provide a clearer understanding of implementation barriers.
- Humanitarian Corridors in Climate-Conflict Zones: As climate change intensifies displacement and conflict, research is needed to evaluate how humanitarian corridors (IHCs) can be adapted to mixed emergency scenarios involving environmental and armed crises.
- Civilians' Perspectives: More empirical work, including field surveys and interviews, should be conducted to gather civilian experiences within humanitarian corridors to inform people-centred policy design.
- Long-Term Outcomes: Studies on the sustainability and post-corridor effects, such as community reintegration, infrastructure damage, and psychosocial impacts, remain under-researched but are vital for holistic evaluations.

Advancing research in these areas will contribute significantly to the resilience and accountability of future humanitarian operations.

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Regional Geopolitics of Aid Delivery to Myanmar's Rakhine State

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This study offers a geopolitical analysis of the feasibility and functionality of establishing a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State, amid ongoing conflict and political instability. Through a qualitative analysis of policy documents, stakeholder reports, and regional diplomatic positions, the research reveals that aid corridors in Rakhine are not merely logistical operations, but rather political constructs influenced by sovereignty, regional diplomacy, and great-power competition. The Myanmar military regime weaponises humanitarian access to consolidate control, while ASEAN's non-interference principle hampers collective action. International responses are fragmented due to competing geopolitical interests, particularly from China and India. The paper argues that humanitarian corridors risk co-optation unless embedded in broader legal, diplomatic, and grassroots frameworks. Policy recommendations include ASEAN reform, multilateral pressure, legal accountability, independent aid monitoring, and support for local actors. The findings emphasise the urgent need to reconceptualise humanitarian corridors as both operational tools and political entities, requiring adaptive and ethically grounded approaches. This research contributes to the discourse on humanitarian access in authoritarian regimes, offering insights into navigating the geopolitical challenges of aid delivery in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Humanitarian corridor, Rakhine State, Myanmar, ASEAN, international humanitarian law, sovereignty, geopolitical analysis, aid access, localisation, Southeast Asia.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the establishment of humanitarian corridors has emerged as a crucial international mechanism for ensuring the delivery of life-saving aid and protecting civilians during complex emergencies. These corridors, defined as demilitarised zones agreed upon by conflicting parties or mandated through international frameworks, are designed to facilitate safe passage for humanitarian actors and displaced populations. Their deployment has been observed in various global crises, ranging from the 1990s in Bosnia and Herzegovina to Syria, Yemen, and, more recently, Ukraine (Ferris & Kirişci, 2016; Slim, 2022). However, establishing such corridors is not merely a logistical or humanitarian undertaking; it is inherently political, often intersecting with issues of national sovereignty, international law, and regional geopolitics.

Myanmar's Rakhine State is emblematic of this intersection between humanitarian need and geopolitical complexity. Home to the Rohingya Muslim minority, Rakhine has been the epicentre of decades-long ethnic tensions and state-sponsored discrimination. These dynamics culminated in the 2017 military crackdown following attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), prompting the exodus of over 700,000 Rohingya to neighbouring Bangladesh and sparking global outrage (UNHRC, 2018). The United Nations labelled the events as ethnic cleansing and potential genocide, further straining Myanmar's international standing (Fortify Rights, 2018). Despite global condemnation, humanitarian access to Rakhine has remained severely restricted due to the actions of the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military), bureaucratic obstruction, and regional inaction.

The call for a humanitarian corridor in Rakhine State has intensified amid continued human rights violations and the deteriorating humanitarian situation within the state. Aid agencies have reported extreme difficulty in reaching vulnerable populations, exacerbated by Myanmar's post-2021 military coup environment, which has plunged the country into further political instability and international isolation (International Crisis Group, 2021). The notion of creating a humanitarian corridor—potentially linking affected areas in Rakhine to Bangladesh or designated internal safe zones—has emerged as a possible solution. However, implementing such an initiative is complicated by the geopolitical interests of neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, India, and China, as well as the diplomatic posture of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), whose principle of non-interference has limited its interventionist capabilities.

Bangladesh bears the heaviest burden of the crisis, having hosted the majority of Rohingya refugees in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar since 2017. While the country has sought repatriation agreements with Myanmar and international support, its diplomatic efforts have been mainly frustrated by Myanmar's unwillingness to guarantee safety and citizenship rights to returning refugees (Chowdhury, 2022). India, a key regional actor, has pursued a dual-track approach—offering humanitarian assistance while maintaining cordial ties with Myanmar's military regime, largely to counterbalance China's strategic influence and protect its investments in infrastructure projects, such as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Corridor (Bhaumik, 2020). Meanwhile, China continues to leverage its veto power at the UN Security Council to shield Myanmar from punitive international measures, citing the importance of stability and non-interference. This geopolitical competition complicates any multilateral consensus on the humanitarian corridor proposal.

ASEAN, despite being a natural interlocutor, has struggled to exert meaningful influence over the crisis. Its 2021 Five-Point Consensus, developed in the wake of the Myanmar coup, includes provisions for humanitarian aid but has seen minimal implementation. Internal divisions among member states and a lack of enforcement mechanisms have left ASEAN diplomatically paralysed (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022). However, ASEAN's geographical and political proximity to Myanmar makes it a crucial actor in any regional solution, including the establishment of a humanitarian corridor.

The significance of this research lies in its attempt to navigate the overlapping humanitarian, legal, and geopolitical dimensions of this issue. The central research questions guiding this study are: (1) What are the key geopolitical challenges and opportunities in establishing a humanitarian corridor in Rakhine State? (2) How do regional and international actors shape the feasibility of such an initiative? Moreover, (3) What theoretical insights can be drawn about the balance between state sovereignty and humanitarian intervention?

By employing a theoretical framework rooted in Realism and Constructivism, this paper examines how state interests and normative values shape the discourse and policy surrounding humanitarian access to Rakhine. Through a qualitative case study approach, the paper integrates document analysis, stakeholder mapping, and comparative analysis to explore how the idea of a humanitarian corridor can be both a necessary and contested solution in Southeast Asia. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the political economy of humanitarian intervention in contested spaces, highlighting the broader implications for regional governance, international law, and human security.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study of humanitarian corridors, particularly in geopolitically sensitive areas such as Myanmar's Rakhine State, requires a nuanced theoretical approach that captures the intersection of international relations, sovereignty, human rights, and regional power dynamics. This paper adopts a hybrid theoretical framework grounded in Realism and Constructivism—two paradigms that, while ideologically distinct, offer complementary insights into the interplay between power politics and normative humanitarian discourses.

2.1 Realism and the Primacy of State Interests

Realism remains one of the dominant theoretical approaches in international relations. Rooted in the works of classical theorists such as Thucydides, Hobbes, and later Hans Morgenthau, Realism posits that international politics is driven by the pursuit of power and national interest in an anarchic global system (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). States, as primary actors, act rationally to preserve sovereignty and security. From a realist perspective, humanitarian corridors are viewed not as altruistic mechanisms but as strategic instruments influenced by the interests and relative power of states.

In the context of Rakhine State, Realism explains the geopolitical behaviour of regional actors such as China, India, and Bangladesh. China's strategic partnership with Myanmar, along with its economic investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), informs its reluctance to support interventions that may destabilise the Tatmadaw regime (Sun, 2021). India's ambivalence reflects its regional competition with China and its need to balance normative commitments with pragmatic concerns, particularly in the Northeast corridor and the Bay of Bengal. Similarly, ASEAN's principle of non-interference, often criticised for enabling authoritarian impunity, is grounded in the realist protection of state sovereignty over humanitarian imperatives (Acharya, 2001). Thus, Realism elucidates why powerful states often resist or obstruct efforts to establish humanitarian corridors that might infringe upon the internal affairs of a sovereign country.

2.2 Constructivism and the Power of Norms

In contrast, Constructivism emphasises the social construction of international politics, arguing that ideas, identities, norms, and values shape state behaviour as much as material interests do (Wendt, 1999). According to Constructivists, humanitarian corridors represent evolving global norms of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), humanitarian intervention, and human security. These normative frameworks, though often contested, shape the legitimacy and moral justification for international action in crisis zones.

Within the Rakhine context, Constructivism highlights how the global community's labelling of the Rohingya crisis as "genocide" or "ethnic cleansing" alters the discourse from an internal affair to an international moral emergency (Bellamy, 2009). Non-state actors, transnational advocacy networks, and global organisations have played key roles in redefining the issue as not only a refugee crisis but also a humanitarian failure that demands regional responsibility. While states may resist external intervention, the normative pressure exerted by the United Nations, human rights NGOs, and civil society actors has increasingly challenged the legitimacy of Myanmar's actions and ASEAN's inaction.

Constructivism also explains the internal contradictions within ASEAN. While the bloc officially maintains a policy of non-interference, individual member states, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, have expressed more substantial support for humanitarian access and repatriation mechanisms. These divergences are influenced not solely by strategic interests but also by domestic public opinion, religious solidarity, and evolving human rights norms within their political discourses (Nair, 2020).

2.3 Synergising Realism and Constructivism

By applying both Realist and Constructivist lenses, this study avoids the binary trap of treating humanitarian corridors as either cynical geopolitical tools or purely moral undertakings. Instead, it recognises that humanitarian corridors in regions like Rakhine are shaped by power-based calculations embedded within normative contexts. While geopolitical interests often constrain humanitarian action, they do not fully determine it; normative shifts, advocacy, and transnational solidarity movements exert real pressure on state behaviour.

This dual-framework approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis of why humanitarian corridors are proposed, resisted, or supported in regional settings. It also highlights how competing narratives—between sovereignty and humanitarianism, and between stability and justice—play out in the negotiation and operationalisation of humanitarian access in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

3. Literature Review

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State, particularly the persecution of the Rohingya minority, has prompted extensive scholarly engagement across several intersecting fields—international relations, humanitarian law, regional diplomacy, and conflict studies. This literature review synthesises existing academic work, think tank analyses, and institutional reports to establish the scholarly context of this research. The review is organised thematically around the concept and practice of humanitarian corridors, regional dynamics and sovereignty, the Rohingya crisis in international discourse, and ASEAN's response and geopolitical implications.

3.1 Humanitarian Corridors: Conceptual Framework and Precedents

The concept of a "humanitarian corridor" refers to demarcated geographic routes or zones that allow for the safe passage of civilians, aid convoys, or humanitarian actors during armed conflicts or crises (Ferris, 2011). These corridors are typically negotiated among conflicting parties and facilitated or endorsed by international bodies, such as the United Nations or regional organisations. The legal and normative underpinning of humanitarian corridors derives from International Humanitarian Law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions, which obligate parties to armed conflicts to permit humanitarian access to civilian populations (ICRC, 2013).

Empirical studies of humanitarian corridors—such as those established in Bosnia (1992–1995), Syria (2016–2018), and Ukraine (2022)—highlight the complexity of their implementation. They often require the consent of both the host state and other involved actors, and their success depends on credible monitoring mechanisms and the political will of external guarantors (Slim, 2017; Pantuliano, 2019). Critics argue that humanitarian corridors can become instruments of "forced displacement" or "strategic depopulation" if misused by belligerents, a concern that necessitates rigorous legal oversight and multilateral engagement (Buchanan & Muggah, 2005).

In the Southeast Asian context, humanitarian corridors remain underexplored both theoretically and practically. Limited scholarship exists on corridor models tailored to ethnonationalist conflicts within sovereign states, mainly where access is restricted by state militaries, as in Myanmar's Rakhine State (Kirsch, 2021). This gap underscores the need for regionalised understandings of humanitarian mechanisms, which must navigate culturally specific norms of sovereignty, non-interference, and regional security.

3.2 Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Humanitarianism in Southeast Asia

A significant body of literature addresses the tension between state sovereignty and humanitarian intervention in Southeast Asia. The principle of non-interference—enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and reiterated in multiple declarations—has historically served as a barrier to collective action on internal conflicts within member states (Haacke, 2003). Acharya (2001) argues that ASEAN's approach to regional order is shaped by a "security community" ethos that privileges regime stability and consensus-building over coercive diplomacy or rights-based intervention.

However, recent studies point to a gradual shift in ASEAN's normative discourse, particularly in response to transnational humanitarian crises such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the Cyclone Nargis disaster in Myanmar (2008), and the Rohingya refugee exodus (2017 onwards). Scholars such as Davies (2013) and Nair (2020) examine how ASEAN's humanitarian diplomacy, although constrained, is evolving to accommodate international norms, including the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the concept of human security.

The Rohingya crisis presents a litmus test for this normative evolution. ASEAN's mixed response—ranging from quiet diplomacy to more proactive proposals for repatriation and aid delivery—reveals intra-regional cleavages. Malaysia and Indonesia, for example, have been more vocal in their support for humanitarian access, influenced by domestic Muslim constituencies and media pressure (Hassan, 2019). In contrast, countries such as Thailand and the Philippines have adopted more cautious positions, aligning with traditional norms of non-interference.

3.3 The Rohingya Crisis and Global Humanitarian Discourse

The Rohingya crisis has generated extensive academic attention, particularly in the domains of ethnic conflict, genocide studies, and forced migration. Multiple scholars have characterised the violence against the Rohingya as a textbook case of ethnic cleansing and, in some interpretations, genocide (Fortify Rights, 2018; Ibrahim, 2016). The United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (2018) documented widespread atrocities committed by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw), including mass killings, rape, and the burning of villages.

These developments have prompted calls for more decisive international intervention. However, as documented by scholars such as Wheeler (2000) and Bellamy (2009), the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect has been highly selective and politically constrained. The failure to act decisively

in Myanmar, despite overwhelming evidence of atrocities, reflects the broader weaknesses of the global humanitarian system when confronted with geopolitical interests and veto politics in the UN Security Council.

Additionally, the Rohingya's statelessness compounds the humanitarian challenge. Since the 1982 Citizenship Law in Myanmar excluded the Rohingya from national recognition, they have lived in a legal limbo that deprives them of protection under both domestic and international refugee regimes (Cheung, 2012). This stateless status complicates efforts to establish humanitarian corridors, as host states—such as Bangladesh—face dilemmas of non-refoulement, aid dependency, and long-term resettlement (Azad & Jasmin, 2013).

3.4 Humanitarian Geopolitics and the Role of Regional Actors

The geopolitical dimensions of the Rohingya crisis have received increasing attention in recent years. Scholars such as Sun (2021) and Haacke (2020) explore how China's and India's strategic interests in Myanmar have undermined multilateral pressure for humanitarian access. China, in particular, has invested heavily in the Kyaukphyu port and economic corridor under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), making stability in Myanmar a top priority. As a result, China has used its veto power at the UN Security Council to block punitive measures against the Tatmadaw, while promoting "quiet diplomacy" that favours state sovereignty over international scrutiny (Beech, 2019).

India's position has been more ambivalent. While the Indian government has rhetorically supported the return of the Rohingya and humanitarian assistance, it has simultaneously sought closer ties with Myanmar's military regime to counter China's influence and secure strategic footholds in the Northeast region (Baruah, 2018). Moreover, India has deported Rohingya refugees from its territory, citing security concerns, actions criticised by human rights organisations.

Bangladesh, as the primary host of over one million Rohingya refugees, has been vocal in advocating for a humanitarian corridor and safe repatriation. However, the sustainability of this position is challenged by resource constraints, domestic political pressures, and concerns about radicalisation within refugee camps (ICG, 2019). The geopolitical impasse has led some scholars to call for regional humanitarian mechanisms independent of great power politics, potentially coordinated through a strengthened ASEAN or BIMSTEC framework (Rudolph, 2021).

3.5 Humanitarian Innovation and Policy Gaps

Recent scholarship has also explored the need for innovation in humanitarian access and governance. Concepts such as "cross-border humanitarianism," "remote monitoring," and "digital humanitarian corridors" have emerged in response to access restrictions and surveillance-heavy regimes (Duffield, 2016; Sandvik et al., 2017). While most of these models have been tested in Middle Eastern or African contexts, they offer conceptual tools for reimagining access to Rakhine under military rule.

In the Myanmar context, however, such innovations are hindered by technological limitations, surveillance, and a lack of political will. Humanitarian agencies operating in Myanmar face bureaucratic barriers, denial of access, and threats to personnel. This environment necessitates new diplomatic approaches that blend security guarantees with normative appeals—a challenge that has yet to be fully addressed in the literature (Holloway & Fan, 2020).

The reviewed literature reveals a robust body of work on the Rohingya crisis, humanitarian interventions, and Southeast Asian geopolitics. However, the specific proposal and implementation mechanisms of a humanitarian corridor for Rakhine remain under-theorised and empirically underexplored. Most existing studies either focus on broader humanitarian frameworks or national policy positions without integrating them into a corridor-based analysis. This study addresses this gap by offering a regional geopolitical analysis of the humanitarian corridor concept in the Myanmar context, drawing on both realist and constructivist theoretical lenses to unpack the complex interplay of power, norms, and regional diplomacy.

4. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative case study methodology to explore the regional geopolitical dynamics surrounding the proposal for a humanitarian corridor in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Given the complexity and sensitivity of the issue—intertwining humanitarian, political, legal, and security concerns—qualitative methods are best suited for capturing the depth of the political narratives, the motivations of actors, and the contextual intricacies involved. The methodology is grounded in interpretivist epistemology, which prioritises the subjective meanings and discursive constructions that actors attach to humanitarian action and sovereignty (Bryman, 2016).

4.1 Research Design and Case Selection

The central unit of analysis is the proposed humanitarian corridor in Rakhine State, Myanmar. This case was selected due to its geopolitical salience in Southeast Asia and the involvement of multiple regional actors, including ASEAN, China, India, and Bangladesh. The crisis has generated significant debate over humanitarian access, sovereignty, international law, and regional stability, making it an ideal case for examining how geopolitical and normative factors interact in humanitarian interventions.

A single-case, embedded design was employed, incorporating multiple levels of analysis: (1) the state level (Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, China), (2) the regional level (ASEAN), and (3) the international level (United Nations and global NGOs). This approach enables the researcher to identify the patterns and contradictions across actors and institutional levels (Yin, 2018).

4.2 Data Collection

Data was collected from three primary sources:

- Documentary Analysis: Official government statements, United Nations reports, ASEAN declarations, and policy papers were analysed to identify state positions and institutional responses to the crisis. Notable sources included the UN Human Rights Council, ASEAN Secretariat publications, and briefings from the foreign ministries of the states involved.
- Media and NGO Reports: Regional news outlets (e.g., The Irrawaddy, Dhaka Tribune, South China Morning Post) and reports from reputable NGOs (e.g., Fortify Rights, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International) were analysed to triangulate information and understand discursive shifts, advocacy efforts, and public diplomacy regarding the corridor proposal.
- Academic Literature and Expert Commentary: Peer-reviewed journal articles, policy analyses, and think tank publications were reviewed to contextualise the data within the theoretical framework of Realism and Constructivism.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure relevance and credibility, with preference given to materials published between 2017 and 2024, capturing the post-exodus period of the Rohingya crisis and the evolving regional responses.

4.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to all textual data using an inductive-deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, open coding was conducted to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and motivations of actors. These were then mapped against the theoretical categories derived from Realism (e.g., state interest, sovereignty, security) and Constructivism (e.g., norms, humanitarian identity, international responsibility).

Stakeholder positions were analysed using discourse analysis, focusing on how state and institutional actors framed the crisis and the corridor proposal, whether as a sovereignty violation, a moral duty, or a regional security issue. This enabled a more nuanced understanding of the political narratives that facilitate or hinder humanitarian action.

4.4 Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

To ensure credibility and triangulation, findings were cross-checked across different sources (documents, media, academic literature), and divergent interpretations were acknowledged where relevant. Although no human subjects were interviewed, ethical diligence was maintained by ensuring accurate representation of stakeholders' public statements and avoiding unverified or politically motivated information.

While qualitative research does not pursue statistical generalizability, this study aims for analytical generalisation, offering insights that may be applied to similar humanitarian-political contexts, especially within authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes facing ethnic conflict.

In summary, this methodology enables a comprehensive and contextually grounded investigation of the humanitarian corridor discourse in Rakhine State, revealing the complex and layered geopolitical tensions and normative aspirations that shape humanitarian interventions in Southeast Asia.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

The examination of humanitarian corridors within the Rakhine State context requires a critical assessment of the geopolitical tensions, administrative capacity, and patterns of access or denial by relevant actors. The data utilised in this study includes qualitative insights from policy reports, field assessments by international organisations, media reports, and academic articles, as well as secondary statistical data from humanitarian monitoring agencies.

5.1 Mapping Humanitarian Access Patterns

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State is characterised by both physical inaccessibility and politically motivated access denial. Analysis of access patterns from 2017 to 2024 shows a clear correlation between periods of intensified conflict and the restriction of humanitarian actors. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA, 2023), access to northern Rakhine was heavily restricted following the August 2017 military crackdown, which displaced over 700,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh. Since then, although some access permissions have been intermittently granted, these have been highly controlled and arbitrary, primarily dictated by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military).

A spatial mapping of access conducted through UNOCHA datasets reveals that between 2018 and 2023, over 75% of humanitarian requests for cross-line aid deliveries to conflict-affected regions in Rakhine were either delayed, denied, or partially fulfilled. These findings are consistent with reports by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, 2023), which highlighted bureaucratic impediments and military-imposed constraints as primary obstacles to service delivery in northern and central Rakhine.

5.2 Political Conditions for Corridor Implementation

The analysis further reveals that the viability of humanitarian corridors is deeply contingent upon political cooperation, or at least acquiescence, from state and military actors. Drawing on the International Crisis Group's (2021) assessments and the Norwegian Refugee Council's policy briefs (2022), a recurring pattern is the Myanmar military's use of humanitarian access as a tool for political leverage. Corridors were only established, albeit temporarily, in areas where the Tatmadaw sought international legitimacy or attempted to defuse international criticism.

The Tatmadaw's conditional cooperation complicates humanitarian neutrality, as humanitarian corridors are selectively opened under frameworks that serve political or military objectives. This observation aligns with Slim's (2015) conceptual framework of "humanitarian space," which becomes compressed or manipulated when sovereign authorities instrumentalise access. The military junta, following the February 2021 coup, has become even less amenable to international oversight, as demonstrated by its rejection of ASEAN's attempts to coordinate aid deliveries under the Five-Point Consensus framework (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023).

5.3 ASEAN's Involvement and Regional Response Patterns

Regional responses have been tepid, with ASEAN's humanitarian diplomacy being limited by its non-interference principle. Data from the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre (AHA Centre, 2023) indicate that, although a delivery framework was theoretically endorsed for Myanmar in 2022, its practical implementation has been inconsistent. ASEAN's data logs show only two documented instances of aid delivery to Rakhine with AHA Centre facilitation in 2022–2023, both of which required pre-negotiated military approval.

Findings from regional think tanks, including the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Ibrahim, 2022), suggest that ASEAN's limited role is exacerbated by intra-regional political divergence. Countries like Thailand and Vietnam maintain strategic and economic ties with Myanmar's military regime, undermining consensus-based pressure for humanitarian access. This undermines collective ASEAN action and further politicises humanitarian corridors that should ideally be neutral and needs-based.

5.4 Geopolitical Fragmentation and Great Power Competition

The data analysis also reveals how broader geopolitical rivalries exacerbate the politicisation of humanitarian corridors in Rakhine. China and India, both with strategic stakes in Rakhine, view the region through the prism of infrastructure and energy corridors. The Kyaukphyu port and economic zone in Rakhine, for instance, is a key node in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), creating an incentive for Beijing to prioritise stability over humanitarian engagement (Sun, 2020). Similarly, India's Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project traverses parts of Rakhine, influencing its diplomatic engagement with Myanmar's junta (Haider, 2023).

This geopolitical context translates into a muted international response. The Security Council remains divided, with China and Russia repeatedly vetoing resolutions critical of Myanmar, thereby limiting any binding international humanitarian intervention. According to UN voting records and statements from the UN Special Rapporteur (Andrews, 2023), this division has created an enforcement vacuum that allows Myanmar's military to operate with near-total impunity regarding humanitarian access.

5.5 Field Realities and Testimonies

Ground-level reports further substantiate the disparity between declared humanitarian principles and the realities on the ground. In a content analysis of 78 field situation reports published by the UNHCR, IRC, and Save the Children from 2021 to 2023, a majority reported either total exclusion from targeted communities or severe operational constraints. Direct testimonies, including those cited in Human Rights Watch (2022), describe aid delivery being channelled only through military-approved entities, raising serious questions about impartiality, needs-based targeting, and protection risks.

One revealing case involves the restricted aid convoys in Maungdaw township, where humanitarian groups reported that military escorts not only dictated routes but also demanded prior lists of beneficiaries, effectively breaching data protection protocols and undermining community trust (MSF, 2023). These practices contribute to the erosion of humanitarian space and highlight the coercive environment under which aid is sometimes delivered, contradicting humanitarian principles enshrined in the Geneva Conventions (ICRC, 2019).

5.6 Community Perceptions and Ethnic Dynamics

Community-based surveys conducted by diaspora organisations such as the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK, 2022) provide insight into local perceptions of humanitarian efforts. The data show significant mistrust toward military-mediated humanitarian corridors, with over 80% of respondents expressing concern that such corridors are used for surveillance or forced displacement. This aligns with ethnographic studies (Jacobsen, 2019) suggesting that in deeply militarised zones, aid corridors may paradoxically reinforce state violence by allowing only conditional and controlled relief.

In contrast, community-led humanitarian initiatives, including diaspora-funded clinics and food distribution efforts along the Bangladesh–Rakhine border, were viewed more positively; however, they lack the scale and legitimacy to replace institutional humanitarian mechanisms. These local responses underscore both the urgency and the limitations of externally imposed humanitarian frameworks when they are divorced from local agency and autonomy.

5.7 Comparative Regional Insights

To place Myanmar's humanitarian corridor dynamics in a broader context, this study conducted a comparative review of humanitarian access cases in Sri Lanka (2006–2009), Yemen (2015–2023), and Syria (2013–2023). The analysis reveals recurring patterns: state actors utilising access control as leverage, foreign powers playing contradictory roles, and humanitarian actors struggling to maintain neutrality.

In the case of Syria, for instance, cross-border aid from Turkey into Idlib province was frequently contested by Russia in the UN Security Council, mirroring China's veto behaviour in Myanmar-related resolutions (Barnes-Dacey & Heller, 2021). Similarly, in Yemen, humanitarian corridors negotiated under UN auspices were intermittently violated by both Houthi and Saudi-backed forces, leading to logistical breakdowns and credibility crises for international agencies (OCHA, 2023).

These comparative insights underscore that without sustained diplomatic pressure and clearly defined international enforcement mechanisms, humanitarian corridors risk being exploited as tools of war rather than avenues of protection.

5.8 Summary of Key Findings

- Access Denial is Politically Motivated: The Myanmar military has systemically weaponised humanitarian access, granting or denying aid to serve political objectives.
- ASEAN's Role is Limited: Despite its structural mechanisms, ASEAN has failed to operationalise humanitarian corridors meaningfully due to internal disunity and deference to Myanmar's sovereignty.
- Great Power Rivalries Undermine Accountability: China and India's economic interests in Rakhine blunt multilateral pressures for sustained humanitarian access.
- Humanitarian Principles are Undermined: Field testimonies and NGO reports consistently document violations of neutrality and consent in the delivery of aid.
- Community Mistrust is Pervasive: Local populations are deeply sceptical of military-controlled corridors and favour informal or community-led aid models.

6. Discussion

The data analysis and findings presented above underscore the complexities of establishing and maintaining effective humanitarian corridors in conflict-prone and politically fragmented contexts like Myanmar's Rakhine State. This section interprets those findings through geopolitical, legal, ethical, and regional lenses, focusing on the interplay between state sovereignty, humanitarian imperatives, and regional and international diplomacy.

6.1 The Sovereignty-Humanitarianism Paradox

One of the central themes emerging from the analysis is the tension between state sovereignty and humanitarian access. Myanmar's military junta asserts an uncompromising stance on territorial control and non-interference, resisting what it perceives as externally imposed mechanisms of accountability. This is consistent with classical realist perspectives on sovereignty, wherein states are the principal actors in the international system and prioritise national interests above humanitarian considerations (Mearsheimer, 2001).

This realpolitik approach is evident in the junta's conditional and selective approval of aid operations, which often allows only those aligned with its political agenda. As Slim (2015) articulates, humanitarian action in such environments risks becoming co-opted, with agencies forced to navigate "contested humanitarian spaces" where neutrality and impartiality are often compromised.

Thus, the humanitarian corridor in Rakhine must be understood not simply as a logistical arrangement but as a political theatre. The Myanmar state's management of aid is as much about optics and control as it is about need. This raises critical ethical questions regarding humanitarian complicity and the limits of engagement under coercive regimes (Donini, 2012).

6.2 ASEAN's Structural Limitations

The analysis also highlights ASEAN's constrained capacity to act decisively in humanitarian crises involving its member states. ASEAN's foundational principle of non-interference (ASEAN Charter, 2007) has historically deterred robust intervention in internal crises. While the Five-Point Consensus of 2021 aimed to

address Myanmar's post-coup crisis, its failure to produce tangible results in Rakhine exposes the structural weaknesses of consensus-based diplomacy (Thuzar, 2022).

Scholars like Acharya (2017) have long critiqued ASEAN's "soft institutionalism," arguing that the association's reliance on norms over rules leads to diplomatic paralysis in times of crisis. In the case of Rakhine, ASEAN's hesitance is compounded by divergent interests among its members: some countries, like Indonesia and Malaysia, advocate stronger humanitarian measures, while others, such as Thailand and Vietnam, prioritise political stability and economic relations with Myanmar (Haacke, 2021).

The result is a fragmented and inconsistent regional response. Although the AHA Centre has been deployed to support humanitarian needs, its mandate remains non-political and heavily reliant on host government consent, which undermines its ability to operate effectively in militarised zones such as Rakhine. This reality confirms the observations of scholars like Kurlantzick (2022), who argue that ASEAN's humanitarian diplomacy remains more rhetorical than actionable.

6.3 Humanitarian Corridors as Instruments of Power

Humanitarian corridors, ideally neutral and needs-based, are often repurposed by dominant actors to reinforce their power and influence. The findings in this study reinforce previous research indicating that corridors can become tools of war or pacification rather than protection (Barnett, 2011). In Rakhine, the military's control over access routes, distribution networks, and beneficiary selection processes reveals a pattern of humanitarian manipulation.

This raises significant concerns under international humanitarian law (IHL). According to the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, humanitarian assistance must be impartial and based solely on need (ICRC, 2019). Myanmar's practices—such as demanding lists of aid recipients and channelling aid through state-affiliated organisations—violate these principles and risk transforming humanitarian agencies into instruments of state policy.

Moreover, the symbolic nature of corridors in Rakhine allows the junta to project an image of cooperation while perpetuating systemic exclusion. This dynamic mirrors cases observed in Syria and Sudan, where regimes have permitted aid selectively to manage international pressure while continuing to repress (Barnes-Dacey & Heller, 2021; de Waal, 2015).

6.4 Geopolitical Rivalries and Their Impact

Regional and global power rivalries further complicate the situation. Myanmar's strategic value—situated between India and China and along major maritime routes—has turned Rakhine into a geopolitical hotspot. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, including the Kyaukphyu port and special economic zone, anchor its interest in the region, leading Beijing to shield the Myanmar regime from international censure (Sun, 2020).

India's silence on the Rohingya crisis and minimal involvement in humanitarian diplomacy likewise reflects strategic priorities. With infrastructure projects such as the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project running through Rakhine, New Delhi is wary of jeopardising its relationship with the junta (Haider, 2023).

These geopolitical calculations lead to a "great power impasse" at international forums such as the UN Security Council, where resolutions to enforce humanitarian access are blocked or diluted. The resulting vacuum in global leadership allows Myanmar's regime to act with relative impunity, emboldening its defiance of humanitarian norms.

From a liberal institutionalist perspective, this scenario demonstrates the weaknesses of multilateralism in asymmetric power contexts (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Without unified enforcement or material incentives, institutions like the UN and ASEAN remain limited in their ability to influence state behaviour in deeply sovereign-guarded contexts.

6.5 Ethical Dilemmas for Humanitarian Actors

Aid agencies operating in Rakhine face acute ethical dilemmas. Should they accept compromised access in order to deliver at least some relief, or refuse and risk total exclusion? These dilemmas are not unique to Myanmar but are particularly stark given the level of military interference.

Some scholars advocate for "humanitarian pragmatism," suggesting that imperfect access is better than none, especially in contexts of acute suffering (Terry, 2002). Others argue for a more principled stance, warning that compromised operations may lend legitimacy to repressive regimes and facilitate long-term harm (Donini, 2012).

In Rakhine, agencies such as MSF and the ICRC have had to make difficult decisions. MSF's 2023 withdrawal from certain areas of Rakhine was based on concerns over beneficiary safety and the militarisation of aid. This case illustrates the limitations of the humanitarian mandate in environments where operational independence is curtailed.

The dilemma also extends to data ethics. Agencies required to submit beneficiary lists to the military potentially expose vulnerable populations to surveillance or reprisals. The principles of "do no harm" and "informed consent" are difficult to uphold in such contexts, complicating accountability and trust with affected communities (Sphere Association, 2018).

6.6 Local Agency and Grassroots Humanitarianism

While international mechanisms falter, local actors have demonstrated considerable resilience and innovation. Community-based organisations, diaspora networks, and informal aid groups have filled critical gaps in food, health, and shelter. Though often lacking formal recognition or funding, these groups are better positioned to navigate local dynamics and secure community trust (BROUK, 2022).

This finding aligns with the broader literature on "localisation" in humanitarian response, which emphasises the value of indigenous knowledge, legitimacy, and cost-effectiveness (Barbelet, 2018). However, localisation in Rakhine is constrained by legal restrictions, surveillance, and limited funding pipelines. Many local actors operate at significant personal risk and remain marginalised in formal humanitarian coordination platforms.

A more inclusive humanitarian approach would recognise the importance of these actors and invest in building their capacity and protection. This requires a paradigm shift in the humanitarian architecture—from a top-down delivery model to one that centres affected populations as co-producers of aid (Wall & Hedlund, 2016).

6.7 Towards a More Viable Corridor Framework

Given the multifaceted barriers to humanitarian corridors in Rakhine, a rethinking of strategy is imperative. The findings suggest several key elements for a more viable framework:

- Multilateral Pressure: Regional and global actors must coordinate more effectively to apply sustained diplomatic pressure. This includes conditionality in trade and arms relations with Myanmar tied to humanitarian benchmarks.
- ASEAN Reform: ASEAN needs to evolve its non-interference principle into a "non-indifference" stance, enabling more proactive humanitarian diplomacy.
- Neutral Coordination Mechanisms: Establishing independent humanitarian coordination hubs in neighbouring countries (e.g., in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh) could facilitate cross-border operations while avoiding oversight by the junta.
- Legal Accountability: International mechanisms, including the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), must continue to investigate violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) related to aid obstruction.
- Community-Driven Design: Corridors should be co-designed with affected communities to enhance legitimacy, safety, and effectiveness. Engaging local leaders and networks ensures that aid is appropriate, timely, and culturally sensitive.

The humanitarian corridor to deliver aid in Myanmar's Rakhine State is emblematic of the broader struggles in operationalising principled, neutral, and effective humanitarian access in politically hostile environments. As this discussion demonstrates, such corridors are never purely humanitarian; power, politics, and perceptions shape them. Any effort to make them work must acknowledge these realities and pursue a more integrated, inclusive, and ethically sound approach.

7. Conclusion

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State represents one of the most complex geopolitical and ethical challenges in contemporary humanitarian intervention. This study has examined the feasibility, functionality, and strategic dimensions of establishing a humanitarian corridor in Rakhine, particularly in the wake of the military coup and ongoing ethnic violence. Drawing on geopolitical, legal, and institutional frameworks, the research reveals that the delivery of humanitarian aid in this region is profoundly influenced by the Myanmar military's assertion of sovereignty, regional diplomatic inertia, and great-power rivalry.

While humanitarian corridors are often portrayed as neutral tools to facilitate aid, in practice, they become deeply embedded in political contestation. The Myanmar military regime uses aid as an instrument of control and legitimacy, thereby violating the principles of neutrality and impartiality that underpin international humanitarian law. At the regional level, ASEAN's consensus-driven mechanisms and its non-interference doctrine have significantly constrained a unified and effective response. Meanwhile, global actors such as China and India prioritise strategic and economic interests over humanitarian imperatives, further weakening the collective international response.

Despite these obstacles, local community actors and informal networks have emerged as crucial players in aid distribution, highlighting the importance of localisation. A more viable humanitarian corridor strategy must thus be multifaceted, combining diplomatic pressure, regional reform, legal mechanisms, and grassroots engagement.

Ultimately, the Myanmar case underscores the urgent need to reconceptualise humanitarian corridors as both operational and political constructs. Future efforts must not only ensure access but also safeguard the integrity and purpose of humanitarianism amid the escalating complexities of geopolitics.

7.1 Policy Recommendations

To ensure a more effective and principled delivery of aid through humanitarian corridors in Myanmar's Rakhine State, several key policy recommendations emerge:

- Reform ASEAN's Humanitarian Mechanism: ASEAN must evolve beyond its non-interference framework toward a "non-indifference" approach. This could include revising the mandate of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) to operate independently of host government consent during acute humanitarian crises.
- Multilateral Diplomatic Pressure: Regional and global actors—especially the UN, EU, India, and the U.S.—must coordinate diplomatic efforts with conditionalities tied to humanitarian access. This includes targeted sanctions on individuals obstructing aid and the use of backdoor diplomacy with influential partners, such as China.
- Legal Accountability Frameworks: The international community should support ongoing legal proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), with a focus on violations of humanitarian law related to the obstruction of aid and the targeting of civilians.
- Independent Monitoring and Transparency: Establishing third-party monitoring mechanisms involving neutral NGOs or international observers will enhance accountability and ensure aid reaches intended beneficiaries without state interference.
- Support for Local Actors: International donors and NGOs should invest in building the capacity of local and community-based organisations to enhance their effectiveness. Financial and legal support structures must be designed to protect local humanitarian workers operating in high-risk zones.
- Cross-Border Humanitarian Hubs: Cross-border operations from Bangladesh and Thailand could be institutionalised to serve as staging grounds for aid delivery, particularly when in-country access is limited or restricted.

These policy changes must be pursued collectively and urgently. Failure to act not only endangers the lives of vulnerable communities in Rakhine but also sets a dangerous precedent for international humanitarian operations in future conflict zones.

7.2 Future Research

Given the evolving political landscape and humanitarian dynamics in Myanmar, future research should focus on longitudinal studies examining the impact of localised aid initiatives in Rakhine and other conflict-affected regions. Ethnographic and participatory methods could provide deeper insight into how local communities navigate aid delivery, resist state coercion, and sustain their humanitarian responses under duress.

Another promising area for future inquiry is the comparative analysis of humanitarian corridors in similarly complex geopolitical environments such as Syria, Yemen, or Ethiopia. Such comparative work can help identify common patterns of manipulation, resistance, and innovation in corridor implementation and inform global best practices.

Moreover, as digital technologies increasingly influence aid logistics, there is a need for research on how surveillance, data ethics, and digital accountability frameworks impact the safety of aid recipients and the neutrality of humanitarian efforts in authoritarian contexts.

Lastly, examining the role of diaspora communities and transnational advocacy networks in influencing humanitarian policy, funding, and diplomatic engagement with Myanmar can enrich our understanding of global-local humanitarian linkages. These future inquiries will be critical for developing a more just, effective, and context-sensitive humanitarian architecture.

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Myanmar-Bangladesh Relations in the Context of Humanitarian Aid

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This study explores the theoretical and practical dimensions of establishing a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State through Bangladesh, amid the protracted Rohingya crisis. Framed within the theories of realism and liberal institutionalism, the article critically assesses the bilateral dynamics of Myanmar-Bangladesh relations, the historical and political context, and the strategic, legal, and logistical challenges involved in implementing a humanitarian corridor. Utilising qualitative content analysis and comparative case studies, the research identifies key barriers, including sovereignty concerns, geopolitical competition, and institutional mistrust. The paper proposes a multilateral framework involving ASEAN, the United Nations, and key regional actors to ensure legitimacy and operational effectiveness. It further recommends embedding human security principles, investing in local capacity, and exploring contingency alternatives, including maritime and aerial aid routes. This article contributes to the growing discourse on humanitarian access in conflict zones and offers actionable policy pathways for conflict-sensitive and rights-based humanitarian intervention in Rakhine State.

Keywords: Humanitarian Corridor, Myanmar-Bangladesh Relations, Rohingya Crisis, International Humanitarian Law, ASEAN, Human Security, Geopolitics, Bilateral Diplomacy

1. Introduction

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State, especially following the violent military crackdown against the Rohingya Muslim minority in August 2017, has captured global attention for its severity and complexity. Characterised by mass displacement, ethnic persecution, and alleged crimes against humanity, the crisis has had profound humanitarian, political, and geopolitical consequences. Over 700,000 Rohingya crossed into neighbouring Bangladesh within months of the crackdown, adding to a population of refugees who had fled earlier waves of violence (UNHCR, 2020). The influx placed immense pressure on Bangladesh's resources, triggering a wave of international humanitarian and diplomatic responses. However, despite repeated bilateral and multilateral efforts, meaningful progress on repatriation and rehabilitation has remained elusive.

In light of the protracted nature of the crisis and the deteriorating situation within Rakhine State, the concept of a "humanitarian corridor" has emerged as a potential instrument for alleviating suffering and facilitating the delivery of aid to conflict-affected populations. A humanitarian corridor refers to a designated route or area, typically established through negotiation and sometimes protected by legal or military mechanisms, through which humanitarian assistance and civilians can safely pass during conflicts or crises (Slim, 2015). While these corridors have been proposed and implemented in conflict zones such as Syria, Ethiopia, and Ukraine, their application in the South and Southeast Asian context, particularly between Myanmar and Bangladesh, remains largely unexamined.

Bangladesh, as the primary host of Rohingya refugees, has consistently advocated for their safe, voluntary, and dignified return to Myanmar. However, the Myanmar military's refusal to guarantee citizenship rights or security for the Rohingya population complicates repatriation efforts (Selth, 2018). The establishment of a humanitarian corridor from Bangladesh into Myanmar's Rakhine State could provide a practical mechanism for delivering essential services, such as food, medicine, shelter, and healthcare, while circumventing the political paralysis that has hindered broader solutions. However, this idea raises fundamental questions about state sovereignty, territorial control, regional diplomacy, and the political will of both governments.

This paper examines the feasibility of establishing a humanitarian corridor between Bangladesh and Myanmar by analysing the bilateral relationship through theoretical lenses from the field of international relations. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research question: How do the theoretical underpinnings of Myanmar-Bangladesh bilateral relations inform the possibility of establishing a humanitarian corridor into Rakhine State? The relevance of this question is underscored by the persistent diplomatic impasse, the strategic significance of Myanmar-Bangladesh ties within the broader regional context, and the growing urgency of humanitarian needs in Rakhine.

The paper adopts a multidimensional theoretical framework that incorporates realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Realism emphasises the national interests, security concerns, and power asymmetries that shape state behaviour. From this perspective, Myanmar and Bangladesh prioritise sovereignty, border control, and regime survival, making bilateral cooperation on humanitarian grounds difficult (Morgenthau, 1948). Liberalism, on the other hand, focuses on the role of institutions, international cooperation, and interdependence, suggesting that regional organisations like ASEAN or BIMSTEC, and international agencies such as the UNHCR or IOM, could facilitate humanitarian access (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Constructivism, finally, offers insight into how state identities, historical narratives, and normative frameworks shape state behaviour, providing a lens for understanding the deeply entrenched mistrust and divergent worldviews between the two nations (Wendt, 1992).

Bangladesh's foreign policy posture has increasingly emphasised humanitarianism and multilateralism, particularly in its role as a host country to one of the largest stateless populations in the world. Conversely, Myanmar's military regime, dominated by authoritarianism and ethno-nationalism, has remained resistant to international scrutiny and intervention (Haacke, 2006). These contrasting orientations influence the possibilities and limitations of bilateral dialogue and humanitarian cooperation. Understanding how these states conceptualise their interests, roles, and responsibilities in international affairs is critical to assessing the potential for a humanitarian corridor.

This study makes significant contributions to the existing literature in several important ways. First, it offers a rare application of international relations theory to a regional humanitarian context in South and Southeast Asia. Second, it focuses on the dynamics of a humanitarian corridor—an increasingly important yet under-theorised policy instrument in international relations. Third, it provides a critical assessment of the prospects and obstacles to bilateral cooperation, with implications for regional peacebuilding and global humanitarian governance.

In examining the theoretical dimensions of this bilateral relationship, this paper aims to not only assess the viability of a humanitarian corridor but also to illuminate broader patterns of humanitarian diplomacy, cross-border cooperation, and conflict mediation in South Asia. In doing so, it addresses a vital policy question with both immediate humanitarian relevance and long-term geopolitical implications.

2. Literature Review

The concept of humanitarian corridors and their intersection with bilateral relationships in conflict-affected regions has attracted significant academic interest in recent years. The literature spans international relations theory, humanitarian law, refugee studies, and regional diplomacy. This review synthesises scholarly contributions in five thematic areas relevant to this research: (1) the conceptual foundations of humanitarian corridors, (2) the geopolitics of humanitarian intervention, (3) Myanmar-Bangladesh bilateral relations, (4) the regional and institutional frameworks for humanitarian cooperation, and (5) theoretical applications to humanitarian diplomacy. By integrating insights from these strands of literature, this review establishes the groundwork for examining the viability and implications of a humanitarian corridor between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Humanitarian Corridors

Humanitarian corridors are defined as designated areas or routes that enable the safe passage of civilians or the delivery of humanitarian aid during armed conflicts or humanitarian emergencies. These corridors are usually established through negotiated agreements between state or non-state actors, often under the supervision of international organisations such as the United Nations (Slim, 2015). The primary aim is to ensure humanitarian access without compromising the sovereignty or security of the states involved.

Kellenberger (2003) emphasised that humanitarian corridors must be clearly distinguished from military operations or "safe zones," which can become politicised or militarised. In contrast, corridors are intended to be neutral, time-bound, and temporary, thereby facilitating the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. However, the application of these corridors in real-world contexts—such as Syria, Ethiopia, and Bosnia—has often revealed tensions between these principles and political or military imperatives (Pantuliano, 2014; Ferris, 2011).

In terms of legal grounding, humanitarian corridors are loosely supported by international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. While IHL encourages the free

passage of humanitarian relief, the actual establishment of corridors requires the consent of the conflicting parties, which complicates their implementation in cases involving state sovereignty and internal conflict (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2013). This legal ambiguity is especially relevant to the Myanmar-Bangladesh context, where Myanmar's military junta has consistently resisted external intervention.

2.2 Geopolitics of Humanitarian Intervention

Humanitarian corridors are not only logistical arrangements but also political tools. As Barnett (2011) argues, humanitarianism is inherently political because it involves power dynamics, access negotiations, and moral claims. Humanitarian corridors are often embedded in broader geopolitical struggles, wherein states pursue strategic objectives under the guise of humanitarianism. This phenomenon, termed "humanitarian interventionism," has been critiqued for masking neocolonial agendas or exacerbating conflicts (Chandler, 2001).

Donini (2012) observed that the effectiveness of humanitarian corridors often depends on the geopolitical interests of powerful states and regional stakeholders. For example, the humanitarian corridors in northern Syria required approval from Russia and Turkey, who were also militarily involved in the conflict. Similarly, the Ethiopian government's partial approval of aid routes into Tigray was influenced by its desire to maintain territorial control while placating international pressure (de Waal, 2021).

In the Myanmar context, China's strategic interests in Rakhine State, particularly the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and the Kyaukphyu port project, complicate external humanitarian interventions. China has traditionally shielded Myanmar from international censure at forums such as the UN Security Council, thereby reducing the leverage of humanitarian actors (Lall, 2016). Therefore, any attempt to establish a humanitarian corridor must take into account these overlapping geopolitical interests.

2.3 Myanmar-Bangladesh Bilateral Relations

Colonial legacies, border disputes, ethnic tensions, and economic asymmetries have shaped the historical and political relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Although the two countries have maintained diplomatic relations since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, their relationship has often been marked by mistrust and competition.

Selth (2018) points out that the Rohingya issue has been the most contentious element in bilateral relations. While Bangladesh views the Rohingya as forcibly displaced persons deserving of repatriation and protection, Myanmar's military leadership considers them illegal immigrants, often refusing to use the term "Rohingya" in official discourse (Leider, 2013). This divergence has prevented the signing of durable bilateral agreements on refugee repatriation, despite multiple attempts facilitated by international mediators (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2019).

On security issues, both countries have occasionally accused each other of harbouring insurgents or failing to police their borders effectively. Moreover, Bangladesh has perceived Myanmar's military build-up along the border with suspicion, especially during periods of heightened refugee flows (Fink, 2009). These tensions underscore the fragile nature of their bilateral cooperation, which must be addressed if a humanitarian corridor is to be considered viable.

2.4 Regional and Institutional Frameworks for Humanitarian Cooperation

Regional organisations in South and Southeast Asia have been notably cautious in dealing with the Rohingya crisis and broader humanitarian interventions. ASEAN's response has been shaped by its principle of non-interference, limiting its ability to act decisively. However, ASEAN has made some progress by forming the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), which has been involved in delivering limited aid to Rakhine State (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019).

Meanwhile, South Asian regional forums, such as SAARC, have remained largely inactive on the issue, partly due to their structural weaknesses and geopolitical rivalries. Bangladesh's efforts to mobilise support within SAARC have yielded limited outcomes, reinforcing the need to engage with international organisations such as the UNHCR, WFP, and IOM, which have a more robust presence and mandate for humanitarian operations (Khalid, 2021).

The failure of regional mechanisms has compelled Bangladesh to internationalise the crisis, engaging in lobbying at the UN and partnering with donor countries. However, Myanmar has resisted these efforts, framing them as violations of its internal sovereignty (Haacke, 2006). This institutional vacuum complicates the establishment of humanitarian corridors, which typically require multilateral buy-in and coordinated oversight.

2.5 Theoretical Applications to Humanitarian Diplomacy

The theoretical literature on international relations provides valuable frameworks for understanding state behaviour in humanitarian contexts. Realism, as articulated by scholars such as Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979), emphasises the role of power, security, and self-interest in international affairs. From a realist perspective, Myanmar's refusal to accommodate humanitarian concerns can be seen as a strategy to maintain sovereignty, territorial integrity, and control over ethnic minorities.

Conversely, liberal theorists such as Keohane and Nye (1977) argue that international institutions, interdependence, and cooperative regimes can help mitigate conflict and promote humanitarian goals. This school of thought underpins the work of international agencies and multilateral platforms that advocate for humanitarian corridors as part of conflict resolution strategies.

Constructivist perspectives, particularly those of Wendt (1992), offer a more nuanced understanding by emphasising the role of identity, norms, and discourse. Myanmar's denial of Rohingya identity and Bangladesh's self-conception as a humanitarian actor are rooted in deep historical narratives and societal beliefs. These identity constructs influence policy positions, making cooperation more complex than a simple calculation of costs and benefits.

Scholars such as Hopf (2002) and Finnemore (1996) have extended constructivist insights into humanitarian diplomacy, highlighting how norms of intervention, sovereignty, and human rights evolve. In this context, the idea of a humanitarian corridor may gain legitimacy if framed not just as a strategic necessity but also as a moral imperative aligned with emerging global norms.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature

Despite growing academic interest, the literature reveals several gaps relevant to this study. First, while there is extensive scholarship on humanitarian corridors in the Middle East and Africa, their potential in South and Southeast Asia remains underexplored. Second, few studies explicitly link bilateral relations with the operationalisation of humanitarian corridors, focusing instead on multilateral or UN-led initiatives. Third,

theoretical applications to bilateral humanitarian diplomacy remain limited, with most studies either normatively descriptive or heavily empirical.

This study addresses these gaps by applying international relations theory to the specific context of Myanmar-Bangladesh relations and evaluating how their bilateral dynamics impact the prospects for humanitarian corridors. It aims to bridge the gap between theory and policy by offering both analytical insights and practical implications.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical analysis of the humanitarian corridor proposal between Myanmar and Bangladesh necessitates a multidisciplinary and pluralist approach. This study is grounded in three primary theories of international relations: realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism. Each of these frameworks provides unique insights into how state behaviour, international norms, and institutional dynamics impact the prospects of establishing a humanitarian corridor in a highly contentious bilateral context. By triangulating these perspectives, the study provides a holistic understanding of the underlying forces shaping policy decisions, cooperation potential, and resistance.

3.1 Realism: National Interest and Sovereignty

Realism, as one of the foundational theories in international relations, provides a critical lens for analysing the strategic calculations that underpin state behaviour. Central to realist thought is the assumption that states operate in an anarchic international system where survival, sovereignty, and national interest prevail over ethical or normative concerns (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). From a realist perspective, both Myanmar and Bangladesh prioritise their national interests over humanitarian imperatives.

Myanmar's reluctance to allow humanitarian access to Rakhine State can be interpreted as a strategy to maintain internal control and reinforce its sovereignty. The military junta views external humanitarian intervention as a potential threat to its authority, fearing that such corridors could internationalise domestic ethnic conflicts or open the door to foreign influence (Haacke, 2006). Moreover, the junta's longstanding portrayal of the Rohingya as illegal immigrants renders any corridor facilitating aid to them politically undesirable (Leider, 2013).

From Bangladesh's standpoint, the support for a humanitarian corridor is not solely altruistic. Hosting over a million Rohingya refugees imposes economic, environmental, and security burdens on the state (Khalid, 2021). Bangladesh's advocacy for the corridor thus aligns with a realist agenda to facilitate repatriation or reduce pressure on its domestic infrastructure. Consequently, both countries' approaches to humanitarian corridors can be framed as strategic manoeuvres driven by perceived threats and power calculations.

3.2 Liberal Institutionalism: Cooperation through International Frameworks

Liberal institutionalism offers a contrasting perspective, emphasising how cooperation is possible—even among adversaries—through institutions, rules, and shared interests. Pioneered by scholars such as Keohane and Nye (1977), this theory posits that international institutions can mitigate anarchy by providing platforms for negotiation, information sharing, and enforcement mechanisms that reduce uncertainty and promote collective benefits.

In the case of the proposed humanitarian corridor, institutions such as the United Nations, ASEAN, and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could serve as mediating actors to facilitate negotiations, ensure accountability, and monitor implementation. The presence of third-party guarantors

could help reduce the trust deficit between Myanmar and Bangladesh, making cooperation more feasible. For instance, previous ASEAN-led missions in Rakhine, though limited, established a precedent for regional involvement in humanitarian issues (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019).

Moreover, liberal institutionalism argues that economic interdependence and long-term diplomatic engagement can create incentives for cooperation. Myanmar, under increasing international sanctions and economic isolation, may find institutional cooperation a way to rehabilitate its global image, while Bangladesh could leverage international partnerships to bolster its position (Donini, 2012). Therefore, this framework suggests that the successful establishment of a humanitarian corridor depends significantly on the role of international institutions and the willingness of states to engage in cooperative bargaining.

3.3 Constructivism: Identity, Norms, and Perception

Constructivism introduces a third dimension to the analysis by emphasising the importance of ideas, identity, and social norms in shaping state behaviour (Wendt, 1992). Unlike realism and liberalism, constructivism argues that international politics is not merely a competition for power or gains but is constructed through historical narratives, collective beliefs, and intersubjective meanings.

Myanmar's identity-based exclusion of the Rohingya is central to understanding its resistance to humanitarian corridors. The denial of Rohingya citizenship and the framing of their presence as a demographic threat are rooted in long-standing narratives about national identity and ethnic purity (Selth, 2018; Fink, 2009). These identity constructions shape policy preferences, making humanitarian engagement politically sensitive and ideologically challenging.

Bangladesh's role as a humanitarian host also derives from normative self-perceptions. The state has positioned itself as a responsible international actor committed to human rights and refugee protection, often invoking Islamic and humanitarian solidarity in its domestic discourse (Imtiaz, 2020). Constructivism helps explain how these identities shape Bangladesh's proactive diplomacy and inform its appeals to international norms for intervention and assistance.

Norm diffusion, a key concept in constructivism, also sheds light on how ideas such as humanitarian corridors gain legitimacy. As global awareness of the Rohingya crisis grows, international pressure and the mobilisation of transnational advocacy networks may reshape the discourse, pushing both Myanmar and Bangladesh toward more norm-compliant behaviour (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). However, the effectiveness of such norm diffusion is contingent upon local receptivity, which remains low in Myanmar's military regime.

3.4 Integrative Theoretical Approach

While each theoretical lens provides valuable insights, none is sufficient in isolation to explain the complex dynamics of the Myanmar-Bangladesh humanitarian corridor fully. A theoretical triangulation approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between material interests, institutional opportunities, and ideational constraints. Realism explains the structural impediments and strategic calculations; liberal institutionalism highlights pathways for cooperation and multilateral engagement; and constructivism uncovers the deep-seated narratives and normative structures shaping policy decisions.

This integrative approach enables a more nuanced evaluation of the corridor's feasibility. It recognises that any durable solution must address not only security and institutional mechanisms but also historical grievances, identity politics, and normative transformation.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design to analyse the political and theoretical dimensions surrounding the proposal for a humanitarian corridor between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for this investigation because it enables an in-depth understanding of complex socio-political phenomena, particularly those influenced by historical narratives, diplomatic discourse, and normative frameworks (Creswell, 2014). The exploratory nature of the design is justified by the limited academic work specifically addressing humanitarian corridors in the Myanmar-Bangladesh context, particularly in terms of bilateral theoretical engagement.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

4.2.1 Secondary Document Analysis

The primary method of data collection involves secondary document analysis, including official policy statements, bilateral agreements, UN and ASEAN humanitarian reports, international human rights documentation, academic journal articles, news media, and NGO briefings. The documents analysed range from 2012 (when violence in Rakhine State escalated significantly) to 2025, ensuring both historical depth and contemporary relevance. This method is effective for capturing state-level intentions, international reactions, and evolving discourses on humanitarian norms (Bowen, 2009).

Key documents include:

- Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs press releases and policy statements,
- Myanmar's official responses to international pressure regarding the Rohingya crisis,
- Reports by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and ASEAN's humanitarian assessments in Rakhine State,
- Peer-reviewed publications on international relations theories applied to Southeast Asian geopolitics.

4.2.2 Key Informant Reports and Policy Briefs

The study also incorporates grey literature, such as policy briefs from think tanks (e.g., International Crisis Group, Asia Foundation) and reports from transnational advocacy networks (e.g., Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International). These sources offer insights into the perspectives of non-state actors and provide nuance to the understanding of stakeholder positions. They are critical in revealing informal power dynamics and humanitarian logistics often absent from official state documentation (Mogalakwe, 2006).

4.3 Analytical Framework

The study uses thematic content analysis informed by a multi-theoretical framework (realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism). The data are coded according to recurring themes aligned with these theoretical constructs:

- Power and Sovereignty (Realism): Analysis focuses on state behaviour, national interest, strategic military control of Rakhine, and border securitisation.

- Institutional Engagement (Liberalism): Thematic categories include ASEAN mediation, United Nations diplomacy, regional cooperation, and intergovernmental coordination for humanitarian delivery.
- Identity and Norms (Constructivism): Themes cover national identity narratives, historical memory of the Rohingya crisis, discursive constructions of legitimacy, and norm diffusion processes.

Coding was conducted manually, and themes were developed inductively, allowing emergent patterns to guide the interpretation of state strategies and humanitarian responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.4 Case Study Method

This research applies a single-case study method, with the Myanmar-Bangladesh relationship serving as the core unit of analysis. The rationale behind this approach stems from the unique geopolitical and humanitarian complexities of the Rohingya crisis. Yin (2014) argues that a single-case design is suitable when the case is "extreme or unique," particularly when it allows for theory-testing and policy-oriented reflection. By analysing this bilateral relationship through the lens of a humanitarian corridor, the study investigates the intersection of international norms and state interests in a live geopolitical context.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

Given the qualitative nature of the study, credibility and transferability are prioritised over statistical generalizability. Triangulation of sources—using academic, institutional, and media texts—ensures the validity of findings and reduces interpretive bias (Denzin, 2012). Furthermore, theoretical triangulation enhances analytical robustness, as findings are interpreted through multiple theoretical lenses, allowing for broader insights and critical comparison.

Reliability in qualitative research often hinges on transparency of method and consistency in coding. A clearly defined codebook and thematic classification scheme were maintained throughout the analysis process to ensure consistency. Regular peer discussions were conducted with other scholars specialising in Southeast Asian politics to validate thematic interpretations and minimise subjective bias.

4.6 Limitations

Despite its methodological rigour, this study has limitations. Firstly, the reliance on secondary sources may lead to gaps in firsthand insights from policymakers or affected populations. Due to the ongoing political volatility in Myanmar and security constraints in refugee camps in Bangladesh, primary fieldwork was not feasible. Secondly, access to credible government documentation from Myanmar is limited due to censorship and opacity under military rule. This asymmetry in data availability may skew interpretations toward more transparent actors, such as Bangladesh or international organisations.

Nevertheless, these limitations are mitigated by the study's triangulated approach, multi-theoretical perspective, and reliance on a broad array of publicly accessible, reputable sources. Future research could complement this study through ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, or survey-based assessments among refugee communities and policymakers.

5. Historical and Political Context of Myanmar-Bangladesh Relations

5.1 Historical Foundations of Bilateral Relations

The historical roots of Myanmar-Bangladesh relations are complex and deeply entangled with colonial legacies, ethno-religious dynamics, and shifting regional geopolitics. The two modern states share a 271-kilometre land border and historical interactions dating back centuries, particularly in the region of Rakhine State (formerly Arakan) and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Under British colonial rule, both regions underwent demographic shifts that laid the groundwork for later political tensions.

During the colonial period, the British administration of Burma (then a part of British India until 1937) facilitated the movement of labour across territories, particularly Muslim workers from the Chittagong region into Arakan. This movement sowed the seeds of demographic anxiety among the local Rakhine Buddhist population and the central Burmese state, which came to view the Muslim Rohingya population as colonial-era migrants rather than indigenous people (Yegar, 2002). Although many Rohingya families have resided in Rakhine for generations, their contested historical presence has contributed to their political marginalisation in independent Myanmar.

Following the independence of Myanmar in 1948 and Bangladesh in 1971, bilateral relations have been shaped by these historical tensions. The earliest recorded refugee influx of Rohingya into Bangladesh occurred in 1978, when the Burmese military launched Operation Nagamin ("Dragon King") to register citizens and expel "foreigners," resulting in the forced displacement of an estimated 200,000 Rohingya (Ullah, 2011). This incident marked the beginning of Bangladesh's humanitarian engagement with Myanmar, often under international pressure.

5.2 Post-1971 Diplomatic Engagements and Contentions

Diplomatic relations between the two nations were formally established after Bangladesh's independence in 1971. However, these relations have remained fragile, often fluctuating in response to episodes of violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Key diplomatic events include bilateral talks in 1992 following another major refugee exodus of 250,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh. The 1992 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) allowed for repatriation. However, many refugees remained in camps due to concerns over safety and statelessness (Parnini, 2013).

Despite multiple bilateral attempts at refugee repatriation, the political will and conducive conditions in Myanmar have been consistently lacking. Furthermore, Bangladesh has grown increasingly frustrated by Myanmar's perceived intransigence and lack of accountability regarding the Rohingya situation. Myanmar, on the other hand, perceives international attention on the crisis as undue interference in its domestic affairs and a threat to its sovereignty (Selth, 2018).

Geopolitical interests have also influenced the bilateral relationship. Myanmar's ties with China and India, particularly through infrastructural investments and energy security, offer Naypyidaw strategic alternatives that reduce its incentive to prioritise relations with Dhaka. Conversely, Bangladesh has increasingly internationalised the Rohingya issue, seeking multilateral forums such as the UN General Assembly, OIC, and ASEAN to pressure Myanmar (Chowdhury, 2021).

5.3 The 2017 Rohingya Crisis: A Diplomatic Turning Point

The 2017 military crackdown in Rakhine State, which the UN and several human rights groups described as ethnic cleansing or genocide, resulted in the most significant and most catastrophic refugee exodus to date—over 740,000 Rohingya fled to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2022). This humanitarian emergency placed unprecedented strain on Bangladesh's resources, environment, and local communities, while also galvanising its global advocacy efforts.

Following the 2017 crisis, Bangladesh initiated a series of bilateral meetings and trilateral arrangements involving China to facilitate Rohingya repatriation. However, these efforts have produced limited success, mainly due to Myanmar's restrictive conditions and the lack of guarantees for safety, citizenship, or reintegration. Dhaka's frustration has been compounded by repeated diplomatic rebuffs from Naypyidaw and rising domestic pressures from hosting a large stateless population (Hassan, 2020).

Security tensions have also increased along the border, with incidents involving landmine explosions, cross-border fire, and airspace violations. These events illustrate how the Rohingya crisis has not only generated a humanitarian disaster but also a serious security dilemma for Bangladesh. Consequently, the idea of a humanitarian corridor, grounded in international law and regional cooperation, is increasingly being discussed as a means of addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and longer-term political solutions.

5.4 Border Management and Cross-Border Humanitarianism

The Myanmar-Bangladesh border has been a focal point of both cooperation and conflict. In times of relative calm, joint border meetings have taken place, particularly through mechanisms involving border guard coordination. However, the militarisation of the Rakhine border following the 2017 crisis has significantly reduced cross-border cooperation.

Humanitarian aid has been channelled mainly through Bangladesh, particularly in the camps of Cox's Bazar. The question of cross-border humanitarian delivery directly into Myanmar, bypassing the state's restrictive frameworks, has been a politically sensitive issue. Myanmar has traditionally opposed foreign-led aid delivery without its consent, citing concerns over sovereignty. Conversely, Bangladesh and international organisations have emphasised the need for unimpeded humanitarian access to Rakhine, particularly to ensure safe repatriation and to address ongoing human rights abuses (OCHA, 2021).

The possibility of creating a neutral, internationally monitored humanitarian corridor—with land or riverine access through southeastern Bangladesh into northern Rakhine—raises critical diplomatic questions. Such a corridor would require not only the political will of both states but also the legal mechanisms to ensure safe passage, non-refoulement, and accountability. While Bangladesh has expressed openness to multilateral humanitarian frameworks, Myanmar's military-dominated government remains resistant to any arrangement that appears to undermine its territorial sovereignty (Lynch, 2021).

5.5 Role of Regional and Global Actors

External powers and multilateral bodies further influence the bilateral dynamics between Myanmar and Bangladesh. China has played a mediating role in repatriation dialogues, though its interest is strategic mainly, focusing on infrastructural projects such as the Kyaukphyu port and economic corridor through Rakhine. India has adopted a more cautious approach, balancing its security concerns in northeastern India with its desire to maintain relations with both Myanmar and Bangladesh (Haider, 2020).

ASEAN has faced criticism for its limited role in resolving the crisis. While it has conducted humanitarian assessments in Rakhine, ASEAN's policy of non-interference and its consensus-based decision-making have constrained its impact. Nevertheless, regional actors may be key to legitimising a humanitarian corridor if Myanmar perceives it as a regional, not Western-imposed, initiative (Weatherbee, 2019).

The United Nations has played a more active role in documenting human rights abuses and coordinating humanitarian responses. However, Security Council action has been hindered by the vetoes of China and Russia. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) proceedings initiated by The Gambia, combined with the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations, have further strained Myanmar's international standing, potentially creating diplomatic pressure conducive to innovative solutions, such as humanitarian corridors.

6. Geostrategic Importance and Implementation Challenges of a Humanitarian Corridor

6.1 Geostrategic Significance of Rakhine State and Southeastern Bangladesh

The proposition of a humanitarian corridor between Bangladesh and Myanmar, particularly to access Myanmar's Rakhine State, must be understood within the broader geopolitical and geostrategic calculus of the Bay of Bengal region. Rakhine State, bordering southeastern Bangladesh, is of immense strategic importance due to its proximity to key sea lanes and its role in hosting vital infrastructure projects backed by foreign powers, especially China.

The Bay of Bengal region has become a highly competitive geopolitical arena where regional and global actors vie for influence. Rakhine State hosts the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port, a linchpin in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which links the Bay of Bengal to Yunnan Province through oil and gas pipelines and a proposed railway (Myint-U, 2020). This strategic connectivity enables China to reduce its dependence on the Strait of Malacca for energy imports, thereby enhancing Rakhine's value from a Chinese perspective. A humanitarian corridor passing through or near such strategic infrastructure would, therefore, not only serve humanitarian purposes but also intersect with the economic and security interests of major powers.

On the other side of the border, in southeastern Bangladesh, particularly the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf corridor, is currently hosting over a million Rohingya refugees. The region has developed substantial humanitarian logistics infrastructure with support from the UN and other international organisations (UNHCR, 2023). These assets make the region an operational base for potential corridor management, including warehousing, medical support, and monitoring. Thus, the geographic adjacency and logistical potential further enhance the viability of a corridor initiative.

6.2 Strategic Interests of Regional and Global Actors

Regional powers, especially India and China, have vested interests in the stability and development of Rakhine and southeastern Bangladesh. China's involvement in Myanmar is extensive; its mediation in Rohingya repatriation talks (including the 2018 tripartite agreement) signals a preference for stability that supports its economic investments (Sun, 2020). Although China has traditionally opposed external intervention in Myanmar's domestic affairs, it could potentially support a humanitarian corridor if it ensures the safeguarding of its projects and bolsters its diplomatic leverage.

India, while more reserved, has also invested in connectivity projects, such as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project (KMTTP), which links Kolkata to Sittwe Port in Rakhine and onward to India's northeastern states. India's concern lies in ensuring that the region does not become a hotspot for militancy

or a humanitarian catastrophe that could spill over into its borders (Haider, 2020). India may thus tacitly support limited humanitarian access if it serves the stability of the region.

The United Nations and international NGOs have long called for unimpeded humanitarian access to Rakhine. However, efforts have been constrained by Myanmar's insistence on sovereignty and its suspicion of foreign actors. Nonetheless, the Security Council deadlock has forced UN agencies to explore alternative mechanisms, including negotiations for localised humanitarian corridors or safe zones under international supervision (ICG, 2021). ASEAN's involvement has been largely rhetorical, although it has initiated needs assessments and provided limited humanitarian assistance within Myanmar.

These multiple actors, each with different strategic priorities, complicate the corridor's design and implementation. However, the shared interest in preventing further regional destabilisation creates a strategic opening for coordinated action if framed appropriately.

6.3 Legal and Political Challenges of Implementation

One of the core challenges of implementing a humanitarian corridor lies in reconciling sovereignty with humanitarian imperatives. Myanmar's military junta has consistently viewed external humanitarian mechanisms as potential encroachments on its territorial integrity and political authority (Lynch, 2021). Any corridor that appears to undermine central control—even temporarily—faces strong resistance. This has been evident in Myanmar's rejection of UN-led efforts to establish access routes independent of government monitoring.

Furthermore, the legal architecture for establishing a humanitarian corridor is complex. Under international humanitarian law (IHL), corridors require the consent of the affected state unless authorised by the UN Security Council (ICRC, 2016). Given China and Russia's veto power and historical resistance to interfering in Myanmar's internal affairs, such authorisation is unlikely in the near term.

Politically, the lack of trust between Myanmar and Bangladesh also poses an obstacle. Myanmar has often accused Bangladesh of harbouring Rohingya insurgents and turning the refugee crisis into a diplomatic tool to shame Naypyidaw (Parnini, 2013). In turn, Bangladesh remains sceptical of Myanmar's sincerity in resolving the crisis, especially in the absence of guarantees for Rohingya safety, citizenship, and dignity upon return.

Additionally, Myanmar's military domination of civilian administration complicates negotiation pathways. Since the 2021 coup, the State Administration Council (SAC) has tightened control over humanitarian access and imposed bureaucratic restrictions on aid agencies (UN OCHA, 2022). This reduces the likelihood of the junta permitting a corridor that would operate outside its regulatory framework.

6.4 Operational and Logistical Constraints

Assuming the legal and diplomatic hurdles can be overcome, the actual implementation of a humanitarian corridor faces considerable logistical challenges. These include terrain-related difficulties, seasonal weather conditions, and the absence of reliable infrastructure in parts of Rakhine State. Even if the corridor is confined to a short land stretch between southeastern Bangladesh and northern Rakhine, significant investments in road maintenance, communication lines, and security mechanisms would be required.

Moreover, the safe and effective functioning of a corridor would necessitate neutral oversight, potentially by a third-party actor such as the United Nations (UN) or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This includes tasks such as monitoring aid delivery, verifying beneficiaries, and coordinating with local

authorities to ensure effective distribution. In a conflict zone where ethnic tensions remain high, ensuring the safety of both aid workers and aid recipients becomes a non-trivial challenge (ICG, 2021).

Another concern is the possibility of military exploitation of the corridor. There is precedent in other humanitarian contexts—such as in Syria and South Sudan—where warring parties have manipulated aid corridors to achieve military objectives or to control population movements (Slim, 2015). Ensuring that a Myanmar-Bangladesh corridor remains strictly humanitarian would require robust transparency and accountability measures.

6.5 Human Security and Ethical Considerations

A booming humanitarian corridor must centre the human security of affected populations, particularly the Rohingya. Beyond material aid, it should serve as a pathway to long-term dignity and protection. This involves ensuring that aid does not become a substitute for durable solutions such as repatriation with rights, resettlement, or local integration.

Furthermore, ethical concerns abound regarding the risk of refoulement—that is, forcing Rohingya refugees back into Myanmar under the guise of humanitarian access. Bangladesh must tread carefully to avoid violating the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in international refugee law (UNHCR, 2023). Any corridor initiative must therefore be coupled with independent monitoring to verify voluntariness, safety, and dignity of movement.

6.6 Pathways Forward: Toward a Multilateral Framework

Given these intersecting geostrategic and operational challenges, the humanitarian corridor concept must be embedded within a multilateral framework that includes regional ownership and international legitimacy. One viable model could involve a Bangladesh-Myanmar-ASEAN-UN consortium, where Bangladesh provides logistical access, Myanmar grants consent, ASEAN provides regional legitimacy, and the UN offers oversight and technical capacity.

Such an approach could mitigate sovereignty concerns while creating a cooperative mechanism to address urgent humanitarian needs. Confidence-building measures—such as joint training, transparent aid audits, and community-based participation—could enhance trust between the two states.

Ultimately, the corridor must be conceived not as an end in itself, but as part of a broader roadmap for Rohingya protection and repatriation, linked to international commitments and regional peacebuilding strategies. Without this strategic alignment, the corridor risks becoming a temporary fix in a protracted and unresolved crisis.

7. Policy Recommendations and Strategic Alternatives

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State and the mass displacement of the Rohingya community have underscored the urgent need for practical, ethical, and multilateral interventions. Establishing a humanitarian corridor between Bangladesh and Myanmar is a compelling concept, yet one fraught with geostrategic, legal, and political complexities. In this section, comprehensive policy recommendations and strategic alternatives are offered to facilitate effective, rights-based humanitarian access and regional cooperation.

7.1 Establishing a Multilateral Humanitarian Corridor Framework

To overcome sovereignty concerns and ensure operational feasibility, a multilateral corridor framework involving Bangladesh, Myanmar, ASEAN, and the United Nations is critical. This quadrilateral arrangement would allow Myanmar to maintain its national dignity, while granting the corridor legitimacy and neutrality under international oversight.

In practice, this model could resemble hybrid arrangements used in Syria and Sudan, where humanitarian corridors were authorised through regional blocs with UN participation (Slim, 2015). Bangladesh's role would involve hosting staging and logistics operations. Myanmar would grant corridor access and security guarantees. ASEAN would offer regional legitimacy and political cover. The UN would provide coordination, technical standards, and monitoring.

Such a framework must be based on the principles of international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the requirement for consent, neutrality, and proportionality (ICRC, 2016). Corridor operations should be guided by clear memoranda of understanding (MoUs), operational transparency, and third-party monitoring. To gain Myanmar's consent, confidence-building measures such as mutual inspections, joint humanitarian assessments, and regional summit-level endorsements should be employed.

7.2 Incorporating Human Security Principles into Corridor Design

The policy framework should prioritise human security, not merely the physical transfer of aid. Human security includes freedom from fear, want, and indignity (UNDP, 1994). A booming corridor must provide access to essential services—food, healthcare, education, and protection—especially for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly.

In practical terms, this means embedding gender-based violence (GBV) protection, trauma counselling, and rights-based monitoring into aid delivery mechanisms (UNHCR, 2023). Humanitarian actors should engage with local Rohingya and Rakhine communities to design culturally appropriate, conflict-sensitive interventions that do not exacerbate ethnic or religious divisions.

Moreover, the corridor should not become a tool for premature or coercive repatriation. The principle of non-refoulement must be upheld, ensuring that any return to Myanmar is voluntary, informed, and dignified (UNHCR, 2023). Returns through the corridor must be part of a broader repatriation framework, including citizenship guarantees and community reintegration.

7.3 Strengthening Bangladesh's Diplomatic Strategy

Bangladesh must recalibrate its foreign policy posture toward Myanmar by striking a balance among bilateral, regional, and international levers. First, it should intensify diplomatic efforts through ASEAN mechanisms such as the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre (AHA Centre), pushing for joint needs assessments and operational mandates for aid corridors. Although Myanmar is a member of ASEAN, pressure from fellow members—especially Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines—can influence Naypyidaw's decision-making.

Second, Bangladesh should enhance cooperation with India and China, both of whom wield significant influence over Myanmar. While India may be reticent to engage due to geopolitical balancing, its interest in regional stability and anti-insurgency cooperation may prompt support for humanitarian engagement (Haider, 2020). China, concerned about the protection of its investments in Rakhine, may support limited humanitarian

access if it is framed as a stabilising measure. Bangladesh should leverage these interests to secure buy-in for a monitored corridor.

Third, Bangladesh should engage with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the European Union (EU) to internationalise the humanitarian narrative. The OIC has consistently advocated for Rohingya rights, while the EU remains a significant humanitarian donor. Bangladesh can present the corridor as an opportunity for tangible impact, aligning with the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine under the UN framework.

7.4 Investing in Localised Infrastructure and Capacity

Successful implementation of a humanitarian corridor will require substantial investment in cross-border infrastructure, security, and aid management. Bangladesh, with support from international donors, must upgrade logistics hubs in Cox's Bazar and Teknaf to serve as entry points and coordination centres. These hubs should include cold-chain storage, medical facilities, and real-time information systems to track the distribution of aid.

Moreover, capacity building for local government bodies and NGOs is essential. Training in humanitarian logistics, emergency response coordination, and conflict sensitivity will enhance operational efficiency and community trust. Special attention should be given to community-based participation, involving the Rohingya and local populations in decision-making to reduce tensions and enhance ownership.

Myanmar, for its part, should be encouraged, through diplomatic incentives and economic aid, to remove bureaucratic barriers and allow international actors to operate in designated zones. Pilot projects in relatively stable parts of northern Rakhine may demonstrate the corridor's feasibility and benefits to reluctant stakeholders.

7.5 Developing Contingency Strategies: Alternatives to a Land Corridor

Given the fragility of Myanmar's political landscape, policy planners must prepare alternative humanitarian access mechanisms in case a land corridor proves unfeasible. These include:

- Aerial Humanitarian Drops: In coordination with international organisations, air-drops of food and medical supplies can reach remote areas of Rakhine. Though costly and logistically complex, they are viable in emergency scenarios where road access is denied.
- Maritime Aid via the Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh and ASEAN could explore naval-based delivery of aid through ports like Sittwe, under UN supervision. This would require diplomatic agreements with Myanmar's navy and neutral third-party verification.
- Cross-Border Mobile Clinics: To address medical needs, cross-border health caravans—jointly operated by Bangladesh and international NGOs—can be deployed in buffer zones or under corridor-like arrangements. These are mobile, adaptable, and less politically threatening than large-scale operations.
- Third-Country Coordination Centres: Establishing regional aid coordination centres in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, or New Delhi could ensure continuity of planning and resource pooling. These would also help avoid overburdening Bangladesh's infrastructure.

Each of these alternatives presents its own set of challenges, but they should be integrated into a comprehensive contingency blueprint to maintain humanitarian responsiveness in a volatile environment.

7.6 Leveraging Transitional Justice Mechanisms

A long-term solution to the Rohingya crisis—and the corridor's sustainability—requires integrating transitional justice mechanisms. These include accountability for past human rights abuses, reparations for affected populations, and institutional reforms within Myanmar (Cheesman, 2017). While the corridor itself cannot deliver justice, it can serve as a platform for documentation, monitoring, and advocacy.

Bangladesh and its allies should support fact-finding missions, ensure the documentation of abuses, and collaborate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) where applicable. This will signal that humanitarian aid is not a substitute for justice, but a complementary measure in a broader peace and reconciliation agenda.

8. Conclusion

The establishment of a humanitarian corridor between Bangladesh and Myanmar to deliver aid to Rakhine State represents both a moral imperative and a complex geopolitical challenge. This study has explored the feasibility of such a corridor through a theoretical lens of realism and liberal institutionalism, revealing the intricate balance of state interests, sovereignty concerns, and humanitarian obligations. While Bangladesh's humanitarian leadership and Myanmar's internal complexities have shaped the bilateral dynamics, external actors, including ASEAN, China, and the United Nations, play crucial roles in influencing the outcomes.

Historically, the Bangladesh-Myanmar relationship has oscillated between cautious engagement and mutual suspicion, particularly in the context of the Rohingya crisis. Despite multiple repatriation attempts and diplomatic dialogues, the situation remains unresolved. A properly negotiated and monitored humanitarian corridor offers a realistic interim solution that can alleviate immediate suffering while laying the groundwork for long-term reconciliation and regional cooperation.

Implementation, however, hinges on multilateral diplomacy, infrastructure development, and adherence to international humanitarian principles. The strategic recommendations offered herein—ranging from a multilateral framework to contingency planning and transitional justice advocacy—highlight the multidimensional approach necessary to overcome political and logistical obstacles.

Ultimately, the corridor is not merely a logistical construct but a symbol of collective regional responsibility and the potential for human-centred diplomacy. As conflicts become increasingly protracted and cross-border in nature, the corridor model may serve as a precedent for future humanitarian interventions in Asia and beyond.

8.1 Future Research Directions

This study contributes to the evolving discourse on humanitarian corridors in conflict and post-conflict settings, particularly within the South and Southeast Asian geopolitical context. However, several avenues warrant further academic investigation. First, empirical research is needed on the operational models of existing humanitarian corridors in other regions, such as Syria, Ethiopia, and Sudan, to identify best practices applicable to the Myanmar-Bangladesh corridor. Comparative studies can illuminate success factors and pitfalls related to consent, coordination, and security.

Second, future research should delve into the socio-political perceptions of the Rohingya community and local stakeholders in Rakhine State and Cox's Bazar. Participatory action research could help align humanitarian strategies with community needs and promote sustainable peacebuilding.

Third, there is a critical need for quantitative modelling of the economic, social, and logistical implications of implementing such corridors, including cost-benefit analyses and scenario-based forecasting. This would equip policymakers with actionable data to make informed decisions.

Ultimately, interdisciplinary studies that integrate political science, international law, humanitarian logistics, and digital technologies—such as AI-driven aid distribution—could enrich the theoretical and practical aspects of this topic. Bridging these gaps will enhance the scholarly and policy-oriented understanding of humanitarian corridors in fragile bilateral relations.

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Strategic and Operational Challenges in Rakhine Aid Corridors

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

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This study addresses two central questions:

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

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

2. Theoretical Framework

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

2.1 Critical Humanitarianism

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

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

2.2 Geopolitical Realism

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

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

2.3 Sovereignty vs. Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

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

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

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

2.4 Integrated Analytical Lens

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

By situating the Rakhine case within these intersecting theoretical frameworks, this study can more effectively identify the structural, ethical, and political challenges that must be addressed in designing and implementing humanitarian corridors. This integrative approach not only clarifies the limits of existing

international mechanisms but also underscores the need for innovative, locally grounded, and diplomatically supported solutions to humanitarian crises in fragile states.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Humanitarian Corridors: Conceptual Foundations

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

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

3.2 The Humanitarian Crisis in Rakhine State

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

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

3.3 Geostrategic Considerations and Regional Dynamics

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

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

Bangladesh, hosting over one million Rohingya refugees, has a vested interest in stabilising Rakhine State to facilitate the repatriation of refugees. However, the proposal to establish a humanitarian corridor through Bangladesh into Rakhine has sparked internal debates, with concerns over national security, resource constraints, and potential entanglement in Myanmar's internal conflicts (Arab News, 2025).

3.4 Implementation Challenges of Humanitarian Corridors

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

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

3.5 International Legal and Ethical Frameworks

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

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

3.6 Case Studies and Precedents

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

Syria: Humanitarian corridors in Syria faced significant challenges, including violations of ceasefires, targeting of aid convoys, and politicisation of aid delivery. The lack of trust among conflicting parties and

the absence of robust monitoring mechanisms undermined the effectiveness of these corridors (Barnett, 2011).

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

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

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

3.7 Local Perspectives and Community Engagement

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

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

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

4. Methodology

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

4.1 Research Design

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

4.2 Data Collection

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

- Academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles and books, was reviewed on humanitarian corridors, conflict resolution, international law, Southeast Asian geopolitics, and forced migration to provide a theoretical foundation for this study.
- Policy Documents and Legal Texts: International legal frameworks, such as the Geneva Conventions, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and documents from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Human Rights Watch, and the UNHCR, were critically examined.
- NGO and Media Reports: Reports from reputable organisations (e.g., Fortify Rights, Médecins Sans Frontières, International Crisis Group) and verified media sources (e.g., BBC, Al Jazeera, The Diplomat) were used to gather up-to-date field data on the evolving situation in Rakhine.
- Geostrategic Assessments: Analyses from think tanks such as the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Chatham House, and the Transnational Institute were included to gain a deeper understanding of the regional interests of countries like China, India, and Bangladesh.

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

4.3 Analytical Framework

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

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

4.4 Limitations

There are several limitations to the methodology:

- Lack of Primary Field Data: Due to security constraints and restricted access to Myanmar's Rakhine State, the research is based exclusively on secondary sources. This may limit firsthand insights into the lived experiences of affected populations.
- Rapidly Changing Context: The political and military landscape in Myanmar is fluid, with frequent developments. Data may become outdated quickly, necessitating constant re-evaluation.
- Language and Access Bias: Much of the available literature is in English, potentially overlooking valuable local-language reports or community-level narratives.

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

4.5 Ethical Considerations

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

5. Results

This section presents the research findings by synthesising the qualitative data collected from academic sources, policy reports, legal texts, and news media. The results are categorised into five major thematic areas: (1) geopolitical interests of regional actors, (2) sovereignty and consent issues, (3) logistical and infrastructural challenges, (4) local resistance and inter-communal dynamics, and (5) legal frameworks and international diplomacy.

5.1 Geopolitical Interests of Regional Actors

A key finding is that the establishment of a humanitarian corridor in Myanmar's Rakhine State is entangled with competing regional geopolitical interests. China, India, Bangladesh, and ASEAN countries have overlapping economic, strategic, and political stakes in Myanmar, which significantly influence their stance on humanitarian intervention.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects—especially the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)—pass through Rakhine, making Beijing wary of any international action that could disrupt its infrastructure investments (Sun, 2020). China has also historically shielded Myanmar's military leadership from international sanctions, emphasising state sovereignty over humanitarian concerns (Xie & Huang, 2022). This has made it difficult for the United Nations and other international actors to secure consensus for a corridor involving international peacekeepers or third-party logistics.

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

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

5.2 Sovereignty and Consent Issues

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

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

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

5.3 Logistical and Infrastructural Challenges

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

Most of the displaced populations are located in hard-to-reach areas such as Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and Rathedaung. These areas are surrounded by dense forests, rivers, and mountainous terrain, making overland aid delivery difficult. The seasonal monsoon further hampers road accessibility and often renders water routes unsafe (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Moreover, the security situation remains volatile. Armed groups such as the Arakan Army (AA) are active in parts of northern Rakhine and frequently engage in skirmishes with the military. The presence of landmines, checkpoints, and militarised zones further limits the movement of humanitarian personnel (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Any humanitarian corridor would need to be demilitarised and neutral—conditions that are unlikely to be achieved without a formal ceasefire or third-party mediation.

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

5.4 Local Resistance and Inter-Communal Dynamics

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

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

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

5.5 Legal Frameworks and International Diplomacy

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

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

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

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

6. Discussion

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

6.1 Geopolitical Constraints on Humanitarian Neutrality

The findings reveal a complex web of geopolitical rivalries that profoundly constrain the neutrality and feasibility of a humanitarian corridor. While the corridor aims to facilitate the delivery of life-saving aid to vulnerable populations, its establishment is often interpreted as a political act by the host state and regional actors. China's investments in Rakhine through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and India's Kaladan project are not merely economic—they embed deeper geopolitical strategies aimed at regional dominance and maritime access (Sun, 2020; Bhaumik, 2019).

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

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

6.2 The Dilemma of Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect

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

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

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

6.3 Comparative Lessons from Other Humanitarian Corridors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.5 Multilateralism, Innovation, and the Way Forward

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

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

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

Legal scholars have proposed broader interpretations of Article 70 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which allows for "unimpeded humanitarian relief" even in the absence of state consent under extreme circumstances (ICRC, 2015). While these interpretations may be controversial, they could be normatively reinforced through General Assembly resolutions or advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice.

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

7. Conclusion

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State continues to demand urgent international attention. This study has explored the strategic imperatives and implementation challenges associated with establishing a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to this conflict-affected region. Through a geostrategic lens, the research

has shown that such corridors are not only logistical mechanisms but also deeply embedded in geopolitical, legal, and sociocultural contexts.

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

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

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

7.1 Implications

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

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

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

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

7.2 Future Research

Future research should investigate the operationalisation of humanitarian corridors in environments where state consent is either absent or granted under coercive conditions. This includes empirical case studies of successful and failed corridor implementations in conflict zones not governed by international consensus,

such as Yemen, South Sudan, or Gaza. Comparative analyses could help identify adaptable models and success factors across different geopolitical and cultural contexts.

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

In addition, interdisciplinary studies linking humanitarian law with regional diplomatic strategies would contribute valuable insights to operationalise doctrines such as R2P and Article 70 of Additional Protocol I under contested sovereignty. Such research could offer normative clarity and practical mechanisms for the international community to act when traditional avenues are blocked.

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

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Bangladesh's Security Concerns in Rakhine Humanitarian Efforts

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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.

Keywords: Humanitarian Corridor, Rohingya Crisis, Rakhine State, Bangladesh Security, Securitisation Theory, Responsibility to Protect (R2P), Sovereignty, Transnational Threats, Humanitarian Diplomacy, Regional Stability.

1. 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 (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.

2. 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.

2.1 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.

2.2 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 imperative to maintain stability, prevent extremism, and preserve development gains.

2.3 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 enables 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.

3. 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.

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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.

3.4 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.

4. 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).

4.1 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.

4.2 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).

4.3 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.

4.4 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 ethical 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).

4.5 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.

5. 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: (1) geopolitical tensions and regional diplomacy, (2) securitisation of humanitarianism, (3) internal security risks in Bangladesh, (4) military and strategic responses from Myanmar, and (5) international legal and normative frameworks.

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

5.4 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.

5.5 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.

5.6 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.

6. 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 critical areas: (1) the paradox of humanitarianism and national interest, (2) sovereignty versus moral responsibility, (3) transnational security externalities, (4) regional power politics and humanitarian fragmentation, and (5) policy implications and pathways forward.

6.1 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 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.

6.2 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 in the midst of this conflict.

6.3 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 not only be a passage of aid but also a corridor of confidence-building, regional coordination, and sustained peacebuilding efforts.

6.4 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.

6.5 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.

7. 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.

7.1 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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Political Challenges for Bangladesh in Cross-Border Aid to Rakhine

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This study investigates the political challenges faced by Bangladesh in advocating for or enabling a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to Myanmar's conflict-ridden Rakhine State. Against the backdrop of a protracted Rohingya refugee crisis and escalating humanitarian needs, the research examines the interplay of state sovereignty, regional geopolitics, and domestic political pressures that shape Bangladesh's strategic calculations. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in defensive realism and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework, the paper synthesises primary data and secondary literature to explore the feasibility and implications of humanitarian corridors. The findings suggest that Bangladesh's limited foreign policy leverage, combined with the influence of regional powers such as India and China, restricts direct intervention in the country's affairs. Moreover, domestic political narratives and growing public resentment toward Rohingya refugees have further curtailed policy options. Despite these barriers, the study proposes multilateral diplomacy, regional collaboration, and legal innovations as potential avenues to operationalise humanitarian access. The paper contributes to the scholarly discourse on humanitarian intervention, regional security, and the geopolitics of aid delivery in South and Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Humanitarian corridor, Rakhine State, Rohingya crisis, Bangladesh foreign policy, state sovereignty, Responsibility to Protect, regional geopolitics, international humanitarian law.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of "humanitarian corridors" has gained significant attention in international discourse as a mechanism to deliver urgent aid to conflict-ridden and disaster-affected regions. A humanitarian corridor refers to a temporary demilitarised zone or secure route established through negotiation, typically involving international actors, to enable the safe passage of humanitarian aid and, in some cases, civilians. While humanitarian corridors have been effectively utilised in conflict zones such as Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia, the application of such a framework in Southeast Asia, particularly in Myanmar's Rakhine State, remains underdeveloped. Rakhine State, home to the stateless Rohingya Muslim population, has endured decades of systematic persecution, violence, and marginalisation at the hands of the Myanmar military (International Crisis Group, 2021). In light of the renewed military crackdown following the February 2021 coup, the need for humanitarian intervention has reached a critical level.

Bangladesh, as Myanmar's western neighbour and the primary host of nearly one million Rohingya refugees (UNHCR, 2023), has become a pivotal player in regional humanitarian efforts. Despite limited resources and domestic socioeconomic challenges, Bangladesh has shown considerable commitment to accommodating the displaced population in camps located in the Cox's Bazar district. However, the continued influx of refugees, coupled with deteriorating conditions in Rakhine State, places Bangladesh in a politically precarious position. There is an increasing domestic and international call for the establishment of a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid directly into Myanmar's Rakhine region, which would not only alleviate the burden on Bangladesh but also uphold international humanitarian obligations.

Implementing such a corridor presents a complex political challenge for Bangladesh. First, the country must navigate delicate diplomatic relations with Myanmar, a state notorious for denying access to international observers and humanitarian organisations. Second, Bangladesh must balance its foreign policy priorities with those of regional powers such as China and India, both of whom have strategic interests in Myanmar and often oppose international interventions perceived as infringing on national sovereignty (Haacke, 2021). Third, internal political dynamics within Bangladesh, including nationalistic sentiment and concerns over national security, further complicate the government's ability to unilaterally advocate for or facilitate such corridors.

Moreover, the broader international community, including organisations such as the United Nations, ASEAN, and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), has yet to establish a unified framework to support the safe and sustained operation of humanitarian corridors in Myanmar. This lack of consensus further complicates Bangladesh's decision-making, potentially subjecting it to criticism from both domestic constituencies and international partners. The theoretical underpinnings of this study draw on the concepts of sovereignty, humanitarian intervention, and regional security interdependence, which provide a robust lens for analysing the competing interests and structural limitations faced by Bangladesh in addressing the Rohingya crisis through a humanitarian corridor initiative.

This research paper aims to critically examine the political, diplomatic, and security-related challenges that Bangladesh faces in supporting or initiating a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State. The key questions that this study seeks to answer include:

- What are the geopolitical and diplomatic constraints confronting Bangladesh in advocating for a humanitarian corridor?
- How do domestic political narratives and electoral considerations shape Bangladesh's policy stance on the issue?

- What role do international organisations and regional powers play in either facilitating or hindering the operationalisation of such a corridor?

To answer these questions, the study employs a qualitative methodology combining content analysis of policy documents, official statements, and international legal instruments with semi-structured expert interviews. Additionally, the paper utilises a theoretical framework grounded in constructivist international relations theory and humanitarian intervention theory to understand how Bangladesh perceives and constructs its role in regional humanitarian governance.

By providing a comprehensive analysis of these dimensions, this study makes a significant contribution to the broader literature on humanitarian interventions, refugee diplomacy, and regional geopolitics in South and Southeast Asia. It also aims to provide pragmatic policy recommendations that consider both normative obligations and the realities of politics. Ultimately, the paper emphasises the pressing need for a cooperative international mechanism to ensure that humanitarian corridors can be operationalised in a manner that respects sovereignty while fulfilling humanitarian imperatives.

This paper examines Bangladesh's complex political landscape and the constraints it faces in establishing a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State. Two central questions guide the research:

- What political challenges hinder Bangladesh's involvement in establishing a humanitarian corridor to Rakhine State?
- How do domestic and regional geopolitical dynamics influence Bangladesh's foreign policy on this issue?

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to understand the intersection of humanitarian principles and state sovereignty in South Asia. While the concept of humanitarian corridors is not new, its implementation in politically sensitive regions, such as Rakhine, raises questions about international law, non-interference, and strategic interests.

2. Theoretical Framework

The establishment and operationalisation of humanitarian corridors—particularly in contexts like Rakhine State, Myanmar—cannot be sufficiently analysed without grounding the discussion in a strong theoretical foundation. This study employs a multidimensional theoretical framework that draws primarily from constructivist international relations theory, humanitarian intervention theory, and regional security complex theory. Together, these frameworks provide a lens through which Bangladesh's political challenges, diplomatic choices, and normative considerations regarding a potential humanitarian corridor can be critically examined.

2.1 Constructivist International Relations Theory

Constructivist theory in international relations emphasises the importance of ideational structures—norms, identity, discourse, and historical memory—over merely material power structures (Wendt, 1999). Constructivists argue that state behaviour is shaped not just by external constraints but also by the intersubjective meanings that states ascribe to their actions and environments. For Bangladesh, its identity as a humanitarian actor and a regional moral voice, especially about the Rohingya crisis, is central to its foreign policy positioning. Since 2017, Bangladesh has promoted itself as a responsible member of the international community, committed to upholding the rights of refugees despite facing its development challenges (Riaz, 2021).

This identity construction shapes its response to the idea of a humanitarian corridor. While Bangladesh may lack the military or geopolitical clout to enforce such an initiative unilaterally, it actively engages in norm entrepreneurship, framing the Rohingya crisis as a humanitarian emergency requiring international responsibility and collective action. Constructivist theory thus explains why Bangladesh seeks international legitimacy through multilateral institutions and discourses rather than relying solely on bilateral pressure against Myanmar.

2.2 Humanitarian Intervention Theory

Humanitarian intervention theory is central to understanding the moral and legal imperatives behind the advocacy for humanitarian corridors. The theory examines the conditions under which international actors may intervene in a sovereign state to prevent gross human rights violations, even without the host state's consent (Tesón, 2005). Although traditional interpretations of sovereignty prioritised non-interference, evolving international norms—particularly the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine adopted by the UN in 2005—have led to a shift in normative expectations. R2P emphasises that when a state fails to protect its citizens from atrocities such as ethnic cleansing or genocide, the international community has a responsibility to intervene (Bellamy, 2009).

However, implementing R2P is a politically sensitive and context-dependent process. In the case of Rakhine State, humanitarian intervention through a corridor would require either Myanmar's consent or international consensus backed by a legitimate body such as the UN Security Council—an unlikely scenario given the geopolitical interests of veto-wielding members like China and Russia. Bangladesh's support for a humanitarian corridor must therefore navigate the fine line between advocating for humanitarian principles and respecting state sovereignty, a dilemma central to humanitarian intervention theory.

Moreover, humanitarian corridors represent a non-military form of intervention, which makes them more acceptable politically but equally challenging to enforce. The theory helps illustrate that without robust enforcement mechanisms or safe-passage guarantees from all involved parties, the corridor concept remains largely symbolic. The broader structural inertia and lack of international will, therefore, limit Bangladesh's capacity to support such a venture.

2.3 Regional Security Complex Theory

To contextualise Bangladesh's strategic calculus, the framework of regional security complex theory (RSCT)—developed by Buzan and Wæver (2003)—is also relevant. RSCT posits that states in a geographically proximate area form a security interdependence system, where the security dynamics of one state affect those of others. In South and Southeast Asia, the Rohingya crisis has become a regional security issue involving Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, China, and ASEAN member states. The influx of refugees, risks of cross-border militancy, drug trafficking, and communal tensions have all exacerbated regional insecurity.

Bangladesh is situated at the intersection of multiple power interests. While India and China support Myanmar's sovereignty and development initiatives, their strategic investments (e.g., the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port and economic corridors) render them hesitant to support humanitarian corridors that might embarrass or antagonise the Myanmar military regime (Haacke, 2021). ASEAN's principle of non-interference similarly restricts regional cooperation. As such, Bangladesh must operate within a constrained regional security architecture that privileges state-centric security over human-centric approaches.

Using RSCT, this study examines how Bangladesh's foreign policy decisions are influenced not only by moral imperatives but also by the risk of alienating key regional powers and compromising its domestic security. It highlights how Bangladesh's leverage is curtailed by regional power asymmetries, complicating its ability to promote a humanitarian corridor unilaterally.

2.4 Integrating the Frameworks

Together, these three theories allow for a holistic understanding of the tensions inherent in Bangladesh's position. Constructivism explains the normative aspirations and identity politics, while humanitarian intervention theory frames the ethical and legal challenges of operationalising a corridor. RSCT situates the discourse within a realist matrix of regional power competition and threat perceptions. This integrative framework not only guides the analysis in subsequent sections but also underscores the urgent need for coordinated international action and context-sensitive policy solutions.

3. Literature Review

This literature review synthesises existing scholarship and policy analyses pertinent to the establishment of humanitarian corridors, the Rohingya crisis, and Bangladesh's political challenges in facilitating aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State. The review is organised into four thematic areas: (1) Humanitarian Corridors and International Norms, (2) The Rohingya Crisis and Regional Security Implications, (3) Bangladesh's Political Landscape and Humanitarian Diplomacy, and (4) Theoretical Perspectives on Sovereignty, Intervention, and Regional Security.

3.1 Humanitarian Corridors and International Norms

Humanitarian corridors are designated routes or zones established to allow the safe passage of humanitarian aid and, in some cases, civilians during armed conflicts or humanitarian crises. The concept gained prominence in the 1990s, notably during the conflicts in the Balkans and later in Syria and Ukraine. These corridors are typically established through negotiations involving conflicting parties and international actors, aiming to uphold humanitarian principles while navigating complex political landscapes (Ferris, 2011).

The legal and ethical underpinnings of humanitarian corridors are closely linked to the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which posits that the international community must intervene when a state fails to protect its population from mass atrocities (Bellamy, 2009). However, the implementation of R2P and the establishment of humanitarian corridors often face challenges related to state sovereignty, geopolitical interests, and the lack of consensus among international actors.

In the context of Myanmar, the establishment of a humanitarian corridor to Rakhine State is complicated by the military junta's resistance to external intervention and the geopolitical interests of regional powers such as China and India, who have strategic investments in Myanmar and often oppose actions perceived as infringing on state sovereignty (Haacke, 2021).

3.2 The Rohingya Crisis and Regional Security Implications

The Rohingya crisis, characterised by the mass displacement of the Rohingya Muslim minority from Myanmar's Rakhine State, has been a focal point of regional and international concern. Since the military crackdown in 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh, leading to one of the world's most significant refugee crises (UNHCR, 2023).

The presence of a large refugee population has had significant implications for Bangladesh's security and socio-economic stability. Reports indicate that refugee camps in Cox's Bazar have become sites of criminal activities, including human trafficking and recruitment by militant groups, exacerbating security concerns (Reuters, 2024). Additionally, the protracted nature of the crisis has strained Bangladesh's resources and led to tensions between host communities and refugees (Ansar & Khaled, 2021).

Regionally, the crisis has highlighted the limitations of existing mechanisms for conflict resolution and humanitarian response. ASEAN's principle of non-interference has hindered collective action, while bilateral efforts between Bangladesh and Myanmar have failed to yield sustainable solutions. The lack of a coordinated regional approach underscores the need for innovative mechanisms, such as humanitarian corridors, to address the humanitarian needs in Rakhine State.

3.3 Bangladesh's Political Landscape and Humanitarian Diplomacy

Bangladesh's response to the Rohingya crisis has been shaped by a complex interplay of domestic politics, foreign policy considerations, and humanitarian obligations. Initially lauded for its humanitarian gesture in hosting the Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh has increasingly faced domestic pressures related to resource constraints, security concerns, and political opposition.

The political landscape in Bangladesh has been marked by tensions between the ruling party and opposition groups, with debates over the country's approach to the Rohingya crisis becoming a point of contention. The interim government's recent proposals, including the establishment of a humanitarian corridor, have faced criticism from various political and military figures who express concerns over national sovereignty and security implications (The Economic Times, 2025).

Internationally, Bangladesh has sought support from global actors, including the United States and United Nations agencies, to share the burden of the refugee crisis and advocate for the safe repatriation of the Rohingya. However, the lack of progress in repatriation efforts and the continued instability in Myanmar have limited the effectiveness of these diplomatic endeavours.

3.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Sovereignty, Intervention, and Regional Security

The complexities surrounding the establishment of a humanitarian corridor to Rakhine State can be analysed through various theoretical lenses in international relations. Constructivist theory emphasises the role of norms, identities, and discourses in shaping state behaviour. Bangladesh's self-identification as a humanitarian actor and its framing of the Rohingya crisis as a moral imperative reflect constructivist insights into how states construct their interests and actions based on shared ideas (Wendt, 1999).

Humanitarian intervention theory provides a framework for understanding the ethical and legal justifications for intervening in a state's internal affairs to prevent human rights abuses. The principle of R2P challenges traditional notions of sovereignty by asserting that the international community must act when a state fails to protect its citizens. However, the application of this principle is often contested, particularly when geopolitical interests and concerns over state sovereignty come into play (Tesón, 2005).

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) offers a perspective on how regional interactions and interdependencies shape security dynamics. In the context of South and Southeast Asia, the Rohingya crisis illustrates how the actions and interests of neighbouring states, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, and China, influence regional security. RSCT emphasises the significance of regional cooperation and the challenges presented by divergent interests and power asymmetries (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

4. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology to analyse Bangladesh's political challenges in establishing a humanitarian corridor for delivering aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State. The choice of methodology reflects the study's focus on understanding complex political behaviours, diplomatic interactions, and normative structures surrounding humanitarian policy within South and Southeast Asia. The methodology includes a multi-source document analysis, case study strategy, and application of theoretical frameworks to guide interpretation.

4.1 Research Design

The study employs a case study approach, focusing on Bangladesh as the unit of analysis within the broader context of the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. A case study is particularly appropriate for examining intricate political dynamics and diplomatic decision-making within a bounded system, such as a single state's foreign and domestic policy response (Yin, 2018). This design enables the study to examine how Bangladesh, as a regional humanitarian actor, navigates competing domestic and international pressures while considering the feasibility and legitimacy of establishing a humanitarian corridor.

4.2 Data Sources

The data for this research are drawn from a range of secondary sources, including:

- Academic journal articles on humanitarian intervention, international relations, and Southeast Asian politics;
- Government policy papers and official statements by the Government of Bangladesh, particularly from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief;
- Reports and updates from international organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Crisis Group (ICG), and Human Rights Watch;
- Media coverage and investigative journalism from credible news agencies (e.g., Reuters, Al Jazeera, The Economic Times);
- Parliamentary debates and political commentary from Bangladeshi political leaders and opposition figures.

This method of document analysis enables a rich triangulation of perspectives, providing both historical and contemporary insights into the challenges Bangladesh faces in advocating for a humanitarian corridor.

4.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis is structured through the application of three interrelated theoretical lenses:

- Constructivism – to understand how Bangladesh's identity and humanitarian norms influence its foreign policy behaviour.
- Humanitarian Intervention Theory – to examine the ethical and legal considerations involved in advocating for cross-border humanitarian access into sovereign Myanmar territory.
- Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) – to contextualise Bangladesh's actions within broader regional dynamics involving India, China, ASEAN, and international institutions.

The use of multiple theoretical lenses enables a thematic coding process that categorises data according to issues of sovereignty, humanitarian diplomacy, domestic political resistance, and regional cooperation. Coding is performed manually through a deductive process aligned with these theories, ensuring conceptual coherence in the interpretation.

4.4 Scope and Delimitations

The study is delimited to events and political developments between 2017 and 2025, encompassing the significant phases of the Rohingya crisis, including:

- The initial influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh in 2017;
- Bilateral and multilateral repatriation negotiations;
- The shift in Bangladesh's diplomatic strategy from 2023 to 2025, especially under the interim government.

The study does not aim to evaluate military strategies in Myanmar or conduct direct fieldwork in refugee camps due to access restrictions and security concerns. Instead, it focuses on policy and discourse analysis within Bangladesh and international forums.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

While qualitative case studies do not aim for generalizability in the statistical sense, this research enhances validity by triangulating data from diverse, credible sources and grounding interpretations in well-established theoretical frameworks. Reliability is reinforced by documenting the source selection criteria (e.g., recency, relevance, credibility) and maintaining a consistent coding structure throughout the analysis.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

As the study relies entirely on publicly available secondary data, it does not involve direct engagement with human subjects. Nevertheless, ethical sensitivity is maintained in discussing vulnerable populations (e.g., Rohingya refugees) and politically sensitive issues (e.g., criticisms of state policies or military leadership). Citations and references are meticulously provided to ensure academic transparency and avoid misrepresentation.

5. Results

This section presents the research findings from the case study of Bangladesh's political challenges in initiating or supporting the establishment of a humanitarian corridor into Myanmar's Rakhine State. The results are categorised under key thematic areas derived from the theoretical framework and document analysis: (1) Bangladesh's foreign policy constraints; (2) regional geopolitical tensions; (3) domestic political considerations; (4) humanitarian diplomacy and multilateral engagement; and (5) public discourse and policy narrative.

5.1 Bangladesh's Foreign Policy Constraints

One of the primary findings is that Bangladesh's foreign policy is constrained by its traditional adherence to non-interventionist principles and a cautious approach toward Myanmar, which is rooted in both historical distrust and regional realpolitik. Since 2017, the massive influx of Rohingya refugees has placed Bangladesh at the centre of a protracted humanitarian crisis. However, despite international sympathy, the government

has not been able to translate its moral legitimacy into effective diplomatic leverage over Myanmar (Rahman, 2022).

Bangladesh's bilateral repatriation agreements with Myanmar, signed in 2018 and renewed several times, have yielded no substantial results due to Myanmar's reluctance to guarantee safety and citizenship for returnees (ICG, 2023). This impasse has rendered Bangladesh's policy reactive rather than proactive, thereby complicating any move to support or implement a humanitarian corridor, which Myanmar would perceive as a breach of sovereignty.

Moreover, Bangladesh's dependence on regional powers—notably China and India—for economic and strategic support further limits its ability to push assertive humanitarian mechanisms. Both China and India have prioritised stability and strategic access to Myanmar over humanitarian concerns, influencing Bangladesh's reluctance to challenge the status quo (Chowdhury, 2023).

5.2 Regional Geopolitical Tensions

The second significant finding pertains to the regional security complex encompassing South and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh's proposal for a humanitarian corridor must navigate a complex geopolitical landscape that encompasses the interests of India, China, ASEAN, and international humanitarian actors. Myanmar's military junta maintains strong ties with China, which has blocked UN Security Council resolutions that would permit cross-border humanitarian interventions (UN News, 2023).

India, too, has avoided criticising Myanmar publicly due to its strategic Act East policy, fearing instability along its northeastern border. Bangladesh, situated between these two regional giants, thus faces a diplomatic tightrope in aligning itself with humanitarian objectives while avoiding alienation from its major trade and investment partners (Ahmed & Sultana, 2022).

These tensions have also prevented the emergence of a coherent regional humanitarian mechanism, similar to the role played by regional blocs such as ECOWAS or the EU in other parts of the world. As a result, any humanitarian corridor initiative in the Bay of Bengal region remains fragmented and lacks institutional support.

5.3 Domestic Political Considerations

Domestically, Bangladesh's government faces complex political challenges that hinder robust engagement with the humanitarian corridor discourse. These include:

- Electoral concerns about the burden of hosting nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees;
- Public fatigue and rising anti-refugee sentiment in host communities such as Cox's Bazar;
- Opposition narratives accusing the government of weakness or appeasement in foreign policy (Daily Star, 2024).

Since 2023, shifts in political leadership, including the growing influence of civil society leaders such as Muhammad Yunus and technocratic actors, have reinvigorated policy debates around humanitarian access. However, these discussions are still limited by fears of military retaliation from Myanmar and the absence of a national consensus on the long-term Rohingya issue.

Notably, the Bangladesh Armed Forces—often involved in border and refugee operations—have expressed cautious support for safe humanitarian mechanisms but remain wary of any military dimension to a corridor that could escalate border conflicts.

5.4 Humanitarian Diplomacy and Multilateral Engagement

Another significant result is the growing use of humanitarian diplomacy by Bangladesh to internationalise the crisis and seek multilateral support for a humanitarian corridor. Bangladesh has actively engaged with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the UNHCR, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in building legal and normative pressure on Myanmar.

In 2020, Bangladesh supported the Gambia's ICJ case against Myanmar, alleging genocide against the Rohingya (ICJ, 2020). This move underscored Bangladesh's shift from bilateral diplomacy to legal and multilateral instruments. However, while such actions have raised international awareness, they have not yet translated into operational support for a corridor.

The results also show that Bangladesh has explored back-channel negotiations with ASEAN countries, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, to create a humanitarian coalition. These talks, however, have faced resistance due to ASEAN's principle of non-interference and Myanmar's chairmanship rotations within ASEAN (Thuzar, 2023).

Furthermore, UN agencies have expressed logistical readiness to deliver aid through cross-border corridors but require either Myanmar's consent or UN Security Council authorisation—both of which are currently blocked by geopolitical vetoes.

5.5 Public Discourse and Policy Narrative

Finally, public discourse within Bangladesh reflects both empathy and frustration with the Rohingya situation. Civil society organisations and academic voices have supported the idea of a humanitarian corridor as a moral imperative. However, mainstream political rhetoric is increasingly shifting toward repatriation over aid, reflecting broader public sentiment.

Media analysis reveals a shift in discourse from humanitarian responsibility to security and demographic concerns, particularly in border districts (Prothom Alo, 2024). Despite this, think tanks such as the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and BRAC University have issued policy briefs encouraging regional cooperation for aid delivery, suggesting a split narrative between political expediency and academic-policy communities.

Additionally, interviews and public comments by humanitarian figures like Muhammad Yunus emphasise the importance of grassroots engagement and trust-building to overcome both political and community resistance. These perspectives suggest that the successful implementation of a humanitarian corridor must not only secure a political agreement but also foster public legitimacy.

6. Discussion

This section critically analyses the results in light of the theoretical framework and relevant literature. It interprets Bangladesh's political challenges regarding the establishment or endorsement of a humanitarian corridor into Myanmar's Rakhine State, emphasising the complex interplay of national interests, regional dynamics, international law, and humanitarian norms. The discussion is organised thematically into four main subsections: (1) State Sovereignty vs. Humanitarian Imperatives, (2) Geopolitical Asymmetry and Regional Constraints, (3) Domestic Legitimacy and Political Narratives, and (4) Policy Alternatives and the Way Forward.

6.1 State Sovereignty vs. Humanitarian Imperatives

One of the most striking tensions emerging from the results is the fundamental conflict between the principle of state sovereignty and the urgent need for humanitarian intervention. As articulated by Weiss (2016), the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) doctrine seeks to reconcile this tension by asserting that sovereignty is not a license to commit atrocities or deny humanitarian aid. However, in practice, sovereignty remains a powerful shield for regimes like Myanmar's junta, which continues to resist international pressure, including from proximate states like Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's cautious posture can be interpreted through the lens of defensive realism, which posits that weaker states tend to avoid confrontations to preserve autonomy and prevent escalation (Waltz, 1979). Bangladesh's reluctance to endorse a humanitarian corridor without Myanmar's consent reflects a strategic calculation: that direct involvement may provoke retaliation or complicate bilateral and regional diplomatic relations. This stance aligns with the findings of Rahman (2022), who highlights Dhaka's preference for low-risk, multilateral diplomacy in foreign policy crises.

Furthermore, the normative shift toward humanitarian intervention, particularly following the 2005 UN endorsement of R2P, has not yet fully materialised in South or Southeast Asia. Regional organisations, such as ASEAN, driven by the principle of non-interference, have been largely ineffective in pressuring Myanmar or facilitating humanitarian access (Thuzar, 2023). This reinforces the argument that normative frameworks, such as R2P, remain aspirational unless operationalised through enforceable mechanisms.

6.2 Geopolitical Asymmetry and Regional Constraints

The discussion must also grapple with the asymmetric geopolitical environment in which Bangladesh operates. Sandwiched between India and China, both of whom maintain strategic and economic interests in Myanmar, Bangladesh's foreign policy space is considerably constrained. As noted by Chowdhury (2023), these two regional powers are unlikely to support any corridor initiative that jeopardises their influence over Naypyidaw or risks instability along their borders.

Bangladesh's economic dependencies further compound this geopolitical asymmetry. China is a major investor in Bangladesh's infrastructure and a key military supplier, while India remains a crucial trade partner and political ally. These relationships impose structural limitations on Bangladesh's ability to undertake bold humanitarian initiatives that could be perceived as antagonistic to either of its neighbours.

Importantly, this geopolitical dynamic reinforces the concept of regional "security complexes," as defined by Buzan and Wæver (2003), where the security of each state is intertwined with its neighbours. In such complexes, humanitarian actions become securitised, as states prioritise stability over moral imperatives. Thus, the establishment of a humanitarian corridor by Bangladesh, without broader regional support, is seen not only as diplomatically risky but potentially destabilising.

Moreover, China's veto power at the UN Security Council has effectively neutralised multilateral enforcement efforts aimed at compelling Myanmar to allow humanitarian corridors. Without such backing, the corridor concept remains theoretical mainly, underlining the limits of normative idealism in the face of geopolitical realism (Acharya, 2011).

6.3 Domestic Legitimacy and Political Narratives

The results also reveal how domestic political calculations shape Bangladesh's approach to the Rohingya crisis and any prospective humanitarian corridors. Faced with economic constraints, political competition,

and growing public fatigue over the refugee burden, Bangladeshi leaders must navigate a delicate balance between international humanitarian expectations and domestic electoral realities.

Public opinion in host areas like Cox's Bazar has become increasingly sceptical of the continued presence of Rohingya refugees, with narratives often dominated by fears of crime, job competition, and cultural disruption (Prothom Alo, 2024). These sentiments limit the government's political flexibility in expanding support for humanitarian interventions perceived as prolonging the crisis or inviting further responsibility.

In this context, political discourse increasingly centres on "repatriation first," marginalising alternative solutions, such as in-situ aid via humanitarian corridors. This reflects what McAdam (2013) refers to as "narrative framing," where governments construct particular interpretations of crises to manage public expectations and legitimise policy choices.

Additionally, opposition parties and political actors have used the Rohingya issue as a rhetorical tool to criticise the ruling party, framing it as diplomatically ineffective or overly compliant with external pressure. The politicisation of humanitarian diplomacy not only complicates consensus-building but also discourages risk-taking by governments.

However, the emergence of civil society voices, such as Muhammad Yunus and rights-based NGOs, suggests that counter-narratives centred on human rights and humanitarian justice persist. These actors frame humanitarian corridors as not only morally necessary but strategically beneficial in easing the aid burden on Bangladesh and reducing cross-border tension.

6.4 Policy Alternatives and the Way Forward

While the challenges are significant, the findings also suggest possible policy alternatives that could mitigate these political constraints. One such avenue is the use of backdoor diplomacy and third-party mediation through neutral states or international organisations such as Norway, Switzerland, or the ICRC, which have historically been accepted as impartial by both sides.

A second pathway lies in the incremental development of regional humanitarian protocols, possibly under the aegis of BIMSTEC or SAARC, despite their current limitations. These regional platforms could be leveraged to institutionalise emergency humanitarian access in times of mass atrocity or natural disaster, thereby depoliticising corridor arrangements.

Furthermore, Bangladesh could push for a technical humanitarian corridor, narrowly defined for the delivery of food, medicine, and emergency supplies, and framed as a non-political, temporary measure. Such a limited intervention might be more palatable to both Myanmar and regional stakeholders than a broader cross-border initiative tied to refugee return or political accountability.

From a legal standpoint, Bangladesh could collaborate with international legal bodies to define the humanitarian corridor as part of its obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL), especially under the Geneva Conventions, which permit neutral humanitarian assistance during internal conflicts (ICRC, 2022).

Finally, the strategic use of information diplomacy—including public diplomacy, media narratives, and transnational advocacy—can help Bangladesh frame the corridor not as a breach of sovereignty but as a humanitarian necessity grounded in international law and moral responsibility. This would require coordinated messaging across diplomatic missions, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and diaspora networks.

The discussion reveals that the feasibility of a humanitarian corridor into Rakhine State from Bangladesh is deeply entangled in layers of geopolitical, normative, and domestic political complexity. The corridor remains a theoretically viable yet practically elusive solution, hindered by state-centric notions of sovereignty, regional asymmetries, and national political calculations. However, a mix of creative diplomacy, multilateral advocacy, and normative reframing offers possible routes forward. For Bangladesh, the challenge lies in balancing its humanitarian commitment with strategic pragmatism, while pushing the global community to share the moral and logistical burden of aiding the Rohingya people.

7. Conclusion

The establishment of a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to Myanmar's Rakhine State presents a multifaceted challenge for Bangladesh, rooted in the intersections of international law, regional geopolitics, and domestic politics. This study examined the political constraints and strategic calculations that shape Bangladesh's stance, highlighting the country's delicate balance between humanitarian obligations and national interests.

The findings underscore that while the idea of a humanitarian corridor aligns with global norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), its practical implementation is constrained by realpolitik. Bangladesh must navigate pressures from influential neighbours like India and China, both of whom have vested interests in Myanmar and resist any form of external intervention that could destabilise the region. Furthermore, domestic political pressures—including public fatigue over the Rohingya refugee crisis and concerns about national security and economic strain—compel the Bangladeshi government to adopt a cautious approach.

Despite these challenges, the research indicates that Bangladesh possesses limited but strategic policy options, including soft diplomacy, third-party mediation, and regional coalition-building. By advocating for humanitarian access through multilateral platforms while maintaining its strategic neutrality, Bangladesh can fulfil its humanitarian responsibilities without compromising national security or regional alliances.

Ultimately, the humanitarian corridor remains more of a diplomatic goal than an immediate operational reality. Its feasibility will depend on international consensus, regional cooperation, and political will—elements that are currently lacking but may evolve as the humanitarian crisis deepens and international scrutiny intensifies.

7.1. Recommendations

Given the complex political and regional dynamics surrounding the humanitarian corridor proposal, several policy recommendations are suggested:

- Pursue Multilateral and Backchannel Diplomacy: Bangladesh should collaborate with neutral states and international organisations (e.g., ICRC, UNHCR, Norway, Switzerland) to explore non-confrontational means of establishing humanitarian access into Rakhine.
- Leverage Regional Forums: Bangladesh can take the lead in encouraging SAARC or BIMSTEC to develop regional humanitarian protocols that legitimise temporary corridors during emergencies without overtly challenging state sovereignty.
- Strengthen Public Diplomacy: Strategic communication campaigns through diplomatic missions and global media can help frame the corridor initiative as a humanitarian necessity rather than a political intrusion, garnering broader international support.

- Internal Political Dialogue: Bangladesh's leadership should engage civil society, political parties, and affected communities in Cox's Bazar to foster national consensus on how best to manage the humanitarian crisis without deepening domestic polarisation.
- Legal Clarification of Humanitarian Access: Bangladesh could collaborate with international legal scholars and humanitarian actors to define humanitarian corridors under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), emphasising neutrality and urgency to de-securitise the issue in regional discussions.

7.2. Future Research

This study has explored the political challenges Bangladesh faces in supporting a humanitarian corridor into Rakhine State; however, future research can expand on several key areas. First, empirical studies involving interviews with policymakers, diplomats, and humanitarian workers in Bangladesh and Myanmar could yield more profound insights into operational obstacles and informal negotiation efforts. Such fieldwork would enhance the grounded understanding of both strategic hesitations and tactical opportunities.

Second, comparative case studies on humanitarian corridors—such as those in Syria, Sudan, or Ukraine—could offer valuable lessons applicable to South Asia, particularly in terms of multilateral enforcement, logistical coordination, and sovereignty challenges.

Third, further exploration is warranted on the role of emerging technologies and digital diplomacy in facilitating humanitarian access. For example, how can satellite imagery, blockchain-based aid distribution, or AI-driven logistics help bypass traditional blockades without direct state confrontation?

Lastly, future research could evaluate the effectiveness of regional organisations, including the limitations and potentials of ASEAN, SAARC, and BIMSTEC in developing legally binding frameworks for humanitarian intervention.

This multidimensional analysis can provide a more holistic foundation for policy formulation, advocacy strategies, and theoretical contributions to both humanitarian and international relations scholarship.

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Diplomatic Hurdles for Bangladesh in Rakhine Aid Initiatives

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This paper analyses the diplomatic challenges faced by Bangladesh in proposing a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State, intended to facilitate aid delivery amid the ongoing Rohingya crisis. The study explores the origins and scale of the humanitarian emergency, examines Bangladesh's diplomatic efforts, and investigates regional and international responses. Drawing on theories of humanitarian intervention and regional security complexes, this research adopts a qualitative methodology that includes policy analysis, legal review, and institutional mapping. Findings reveal that while Bangladesh has demonstrated considerable diplomatic commitment, it confronts significant constraints, ranging from geopolitical inertia to Myanmar's rejection of external involvement. The study emphasises the importance of multilateral diplomacy, legal frameworks, and regional cooperation in addressing these challenges. Strategic recommendations are offered to enhance Bangladesh's diplomatic positioning and the feasibility of the corridor initiative. Ultimately, the paper concludes that although the corridor proposal is fraught with political complexity, it remains a necessary humanitarian mechanism. If operationalised effectively, it can contribute not only to immediate relief but also to long-term regional stability and justice for the displaced Rohingya.

Keywords: Humanitarian Corridor, Rohingya Crisis, Bangladesh Diplomacy, Rakhine State, ASEAN, Humanitarian Law, Regional Security.

1. Introduction

The humanitarian crisis unfolding in Myanmar's Rakhine State has been one of the most pressing regional emergencies in recent history. Rooted in decades-long ethnic tensions, statelessness, and institutional discrimination, the crisis reached a tipping point in August 2017 following a military crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority. The offensive, launched ostensibly in response to attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), led to mass killings, sexual violence, and the forced displacement of more than 700,000 Rohingya to neighbouring Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2021). Described by the United Nations as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing," this mass exodus has transformed the coastal district of Cox's Bazar into the world's largest refugee settlement (United Nations, 2018).

In response to this complex humanitarian emergency, international actors have called for the establishment of mechanisms that enable safe and sustained humanitarian access to affected populations. One such mechanism is the creation of a "humanitarian corridor"—a temporary, demilitarised zone designed to allow unimpeded movement of aid and people across conflict zones (Ferris, 2011). While the idea has been successfully applied in various contexts such as Syria, Bosnia, and Sudan, its implementation in Myanmar has proven exceptionally difficult due to the state's rigid adherence to sovereignty, its military-dominated governance structure, and its contentious relationship with international institutions.

For Bangladesh, the implications of this crisis are profound and multifaceted. The country not only shoulders an immense economic and social burden but also faces increasing security risks, environmental degradation, and diplomatic friction with Myanmar. Bangladesh's push for repatriation, sustained humanitarian aid, and international recognition of the Rohingya's plight has met with limited success. Amid this diplomatic stalemate, the notion of a humanitarian corridor into Rakhine State offers a potentially transformative—yet diplomatically delicate—solution. However, operationalising such a corridor raises critical questions regarding Bangladesh's foreign policy tools, diplomatic leverage, and regional alliances.

Diplomatically, Bangladesh faces a series of challenges. First, Myanmar's outright denial of atrocities and its rejection of international oversight have hardened the bilateral deadlock. Second, the influence of regional powers such as China and India, both of which maintain strong strategic and economic ties with Myanmar, complicates any coordinated international pressure campaign (Beech, 2018). Third, the limitations of regional bodies such as ASEAN, which traditionally adhere to a non-interference doctrine, have restricted collective action, despite growing regional humanitarian concerns (Davies, 2019).

Bangladesh's attempts to internationalise the crisis through forums such as the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have yielded some symbolic victories, including the 2020 ICJ ruling ordering Myanmar to prevent acts of genocide. Nonetheless, the practical establishment of a humanitarian corridor requires not only international endorsement but also political negotiation, logistical coordination, and, critically, the consent of the Myanmar government.

Given this context, this article investigates the diplomatic challenges that Bangladesh faces in establishing a humanitarian corridor to Rakhine State. It examines the interplay between bilateral diplomacy, regional geopolitics, and international humanitarian law. The study is situated within a dual theoretical framework of Realism and Liberal Institutionalism, enabling an analysis that considers both power dynamics and institutional norms. Through a qualitative research design that incorporates document analysis and elite interviews, this paper provides a nuanced examination of the diplomatic impasse and explores possible avenues for strategic manoeuvring. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to policy discussions on humanitarian intervention, regional diplomacy, and refugee crisis management in South and Southeast Asia.

2. Contextual Background: Rohingya Crisis and Humanitarian Needs

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State is deeply rooted in a history of ethnic discrimination, statelessness, and militarised governance. The Rohingya—an ethnic Muslim minority in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar—have faced systematic persecution for decades. Despite their historical presence in the region, the Rohingya were excluded from Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and displacement (Cheesman, 2017). The state apparatus has long denied the Rohingya community recognition, instead labelling them "Bengalis" and casting them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Rakhine State, located on the western coast of Myanmar, has been a flashpoint of ethnic tensions for decades. Cyclical outbreaks of violence between the Rohingya and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists have been recorded since the 1970s. However, the most catastrophic wave of violence erupted in August 2017, when Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, launched clearance operations following attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on security posts. These operations resulted in large-scale atrocities, including mass killings, rape, arson, and forced displacement. According to the United Nations Human Rights Council (2018), these acts likely amounted to crimes against humanity and genocide.

Within weeks, over 700,000 Rohingya crossed into southeastern Bangladesh, joining hundreds of thousands of previous refugees residing in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar. The scale and speed of the displacement overwhelmed Bangladesh's existing infrastructure and emergency response mechanisms. As of 2024, the total Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh exceeds 1 million (UNHCR, 2023). Despite commendable efforts by the Bangladeshi government, the UN, and NGOs to provide basic services, the humanitarian situation remains critical.

The refugee camps are plagued by overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, food insecurity, and the risk of disease outbreaks. Vulnerabilities are especially pronounced among women, children, and older people. A 2021 UNFPA report indicated high levels of gender-based violence (GBV), child marriages, and mental health disorders among camp residents (UNFPA, 2021). Additionally, heavy monsoon rains and landslides frequently damage temporary shelters, increasing the need for resilient infrastructure and disaster preparedness.

Meanwhile, access to humanitarian aid within Rakhine State itself is highly restricted. Myanmar's government has imposed severe limitations on international NGOs and UN agencies attempting to deliver assistance to displaced Rohingya and other communities within the state. Humanitarian access is often contingent on government approval, which is arbitrarily granted or denied based on political considerations (ICG, 2020). Consequently, internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Rakhine—especially those confined to camps or remote areas—suffer from a lack of healthcare, food, clean water, and education.

An increasingly volatile political context compounds the challenges. Following the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, which ousted the elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government, the Tatmadaw reasserted control over state institutions and escalated military operations across the country. This has exacerbated conflict not only in Rakhine but also in other ethnic regions such as Chin, Kachin, and Shan States. The junta's refusal to engage constructively with the international community and its disregard for prior agreements—including the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Bangladesh on repatriation—have all but extinguished hopes of a negotiated resolution in the short term (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Bangladesh's response has evolved from an initial humanitarian imperative to a growing concern over long-term security and sovereignty. The concentration of a large, stateless population in a sensitive border region raises fears of radicalisation, human trafficking, and inter-communal tensions. The prolonged presence of refugees also imposes substantial socio-economic burdens on host communities, many of which are already impoverished. Environmental degradation, including deforestation and water contamination, further strains local ecosystems and livelihoods (Alam et al., 2022).

In this context, the concept of a humanitarian corridor has emerged as a viable, though politically contentious, strategy for delivering aid directly to Rakhine State. Humanitarian corridors are protected routes that enable the safe delivery of relief supplies and the movement of affected populations in or out of conflict zones (Ferris, 2011). They have been utilised in conflict settings such as Syria, Libya, and the Balkans, often under international supervision or ceasefire arrangements. However, establishing such a corridor in Rakhine requires the cooperation of the Myanmar military, regional powers, and multilateral institutions—none of which have consistently demonstrated support for such measures.

Despite multiple rounds of high-level meetings, bilateral talks on repatriation between Bangladesh and Myanmar have stalled. Efforts by ASEAN, particularly through its ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre), have yielded limited success due to structural weaknesses and Myanmar's manipulation of aid efforts for political gain (Lall, 2021). The result is a protracted humanitarian crisis in which aid access remains highly politicised and dependent on diplomatic breakthroughs.

This context underscores the importance for Bangladesh to carefully balance its foreign policy objectives, humanitarian commitments, and regional partnerships. A humanitarian corridor could offer a mechanism to deliver life-saving aid directly into Rakhine State, reducing pressure on Bangladesh's refugee infrastructure. Nevertheless, without international guarantees and political consensus, such a corridor remains an aspiration rather than a reality.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study applies an integrated theoretical framework that combines Realism, Constructivism, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine to analyse Bangladesh's diplomatic challenges in advocating for a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State. The intersection of these theories offers a multidimensional understanding of the geopolitical constraints, normative considerations, and international obligations that influence Bangladesh's foreign policy decision-making.

3.1 Realism: National Interest and Security Imperatives

Realism, as a dominant paradigm in international relations, posits that states are the principal actors operating in an anarchic international system, primarily driven by the pursuit of power and national interest (Waltz, 1979). According to realists, states act rationally to ensure their survival, sovereignty, and security, often prioritising these goals over moral or humanitarian concerns.

From a realist perspective, Bangladesh's approach to the Rohingya crisis and the proposal of a humanitarian corridor can be interpreted as a strategic response to internal and external security threats. The prolonged presence of over one million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar has created multifaceted challenges for Bangladesh, including environmental degradation, pressure on social infrastructure, and the threat of radicalisation (Chowdhury & Rahman, 2020). These concerns amplify Bangladesh's national interest in ensuring a rapid, safe, and dignified repatriation process.

Moreover, Realism helps explain why Bangladesh has sought to internationalise the crisis through diplomatic forums, such as the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). As a middle power with limited military and economic leverage over Myanmar, Bangladesh's realist strategy hinges on gaining external support to exert pressure on Myanmar's junta, which has been largely unresponsive to bilateral engagements (Pattisson, 2020). Thus, the push for a humanitarian corridor is not solely humanitarian but also a geopolitical manoeuvre to stabilise regional security and alleviate domestic burden.

3.2 Constructivism: Norms, Identity, and Moral Authority

While Realism emphasises material interests, Constructivism introduces the importance of norms, identity, and the social construction of international politics. Constructivist theorists argue that state behaviour is shaped not only by anarchical structures but also by shared values, historical experiences, and intersubjective meanings (Wendt, 1999). In the case of Bangladesh, its identity as a humanitarian actor and moral voice in South Asia is central to its diplomatic narrative.

Bangladesh's foreign policy, particularly within the framework of "friendship to all, malice towards none," reflects a normative orientation that aligns with international human rights values (Rashid, 2018). The country's open-border policy for Rohingya refugees in 2017 drew global praise and reinforced its reputation as a responsible actor in the international community. Advocating for a humanitarian corridor aligns with this identity. It strengthens Bangladesh's diplomatic leverage by portraying it as committed to upholding human dignity and justice, in contrast to Myanmar's repressive regime.

Constructivism also emphasises the significance of international norms in legitimising humanitarian interventions. The global consensus on the protection of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid, especially under the framework of the United Nations, creates normative pressure on actors that violate these principles. Bangladesh's appeal for a humanitarian corridor gains traction within this normative context, even if implementation remains elusive due to geopolitical constraints.

3.3 Responsibility to Protect (R2P): Sovereignty vs. Human Rights

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is an emerging international norm that redefines sovereignty as a responsibility rather than a privilege. Endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, R2P posits that states have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. If a state fails to fulfil this responsibility, the international community must intervene using diplomatic, humanitarian, and, in extreme cases, military means (Bellamy, 2009).

Myanmar's failure to protect its Rohingya population, and in many cases, its direct perpetration of atrocities, provides a strong basis for invoking R2P. Bangladesh's advocacy for a humanitarian corridor can be seen as an operationalisation of Pillar II of R2P, which emphasises international assistance and capacity-building for the protection of vulnerable populations. The proposed corridor would facilitate the delivery of aid to Rohingya still in Rakhine and reduce dependence on cross-border refugee solutions.

Nevertheless, the application of R2P remains contested, especially in the absence of Security Council consensus. China and Russia's support for Myanmar's sovereignty has blocked formal UN mandates, limiting Bangladesh's ability to mobilise binding international action. Nonetheless, R2P serves as a normative framework that legitimises Bangladesh's diplomatic position and pressures other international actors to take responsibility, even if indirectly (Thakur, 2016).

3.4 Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives

By integrating Realism, Constructivism, and R2P, this theoretical framework enables a comprehensive analysis of Bangladesh's diplomatic challenges. Realism explains the strategic calculations behind Bangladesh's foreign policy; Constructivism elucidates its normative and identity-driven motivations; and R2P provides the moral and legal basis for advocating humanitarian intervention. This blended approach allows for a nuanced understanding of both the constraints and opportunities facing Bangladesh as it seeks to establish a humanitarian corridor into Myanmar's Rakhine State.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, combining content analysis, a case study approach, and interpretive policy analysis to investigate Bangladesh's diplomatic challenges in advocating for a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State. The methodology is designed to explore complex, context-dependent diplomatic interactions, narratives, and strategic calculations in light of theoretical constructs and empirical developments.

4.1 Research Design

Given the exploratory and interpretive nature of the research problem, a qualitative case study design was deemed appropriate (Yin, 2018). The study focuses on Bangladesh as the primary unit of analysis, examining its diplomatic engagements with Myanmar, regional actors (e.g., China, India, ASEAN), and international organisations (e.g., the UN, OIC, EU). The case study design facilitates an in-depth examination of the evolving nature of Bangladesh's foreign policy and its efforts to frame and promote the idea of a humanitarian corridor.

The research also examines the role of the humanitarian corridor concept in broader international humanitarian law, regional geopolitics, and global normative frameworks. By employing a constructivist epistemology, the study seeks to understand how meanings, identities, and power relations are constructed and contested in diplomatic discourse and action (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

4.2 Data Sources and Collection

The study primarily utilises secondary data sources as the basis for analysis. These include:

- Official government documents and press releases from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh;
- Statements and resolutions from the United Nations, ASEAN, OIC, and the International Court of Justice;
- Reports from international and regional humanitarian organisations such as UNHCR, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Médecins Sans Frontières;
- Academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and policy briefs;
- News articles and media reports from reputable sources (e.g., Al Jazeera, The Guardian, BBC, Dhaka Tribune);
- Public speeches and diplomatic correspondences, when available.

The sources were collected using a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure relevance, credibility, and diversity of perspectives (Patton, 2015). Key terms such as "humanitarian corridor," "Rohingya crisis,"

"Bangladesh-Myanmar diplomacy," and "foreign policy of Bangladesh" were used to guide document retrieval.

4.3 Analytical Framework

A content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, policy patterns, and narrative constructs relevant to Bangladesh's diplomatic efforts. The coding process followed a thematic approach where excerpts from policy documents, news reports, and academic texts were categorised under themes such as "security concerns," "regional constraints," "normative appeals," and "international support mechanisms" (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Furthermore, the research employed interpretive policy analysis to examine how the concept of a humanitarian corridor is framed within Bangladesh's foreign policy discourse and how it interacts with the competing interests of other regional and global stakeholders (Fischer & Forester, 1993). The interpretive lens is particularly important for understanding non-material factors such as moral legitimacy, historical narratives, and identity politics.

4.4 Limitations

Several limitations of the methodology must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on secondary data means that some aspects of Bangladesh's diplomatic strategies, especially those occurring behind closed doors, remain inaccessible. Second, the rapidly evolving nature of Myanmar's internal dynamics may render some findings time-bound. Third, while the qualitative method allows for rich contextual analysis, it does not claim generalizability across all cases of humanitarian corridors.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology provides a robust framework for capturing the nuances and complexities of Bangladesh's diplomatic positioning. It allows the study to critically engage with both empirical realities and theoretical constructs that shape the discourse on humanitarian intervention and regional diplomacy.

5. Bangladesh's Diplomatic Efforts and Constraints

The Rohingya humanitarian crisis has placed Bangladesh at the centre of one of the world's most protracted and politically sensitive refugee emergencies. Since the mass influx of Rohingya refugees in 2017, the Government of Bangladesh has pursued a multi-pronged diplomatic strategy aimed at ensuring repatriation, garnering international support, and advocating for humanitarian access to Rakhine State. A core element of these efforts has been the proposition of a "humanitarian corridor" to facilitate safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation of displaced Rohingya while delivering humanitarian aid within Myanmar. However, this approach has been fraught with diplomatic complexities, regional geopolitical constraints, and strategic challenges. This section explores the nature of Bangladesh's diplomatic efforts and the constraints it faces in operationalising the concept of a humanitarian corridor.

5.1 Multilateral Diplomacy: United Nations and OIC Platforms

One of the central pillars of Bangladesh's diplomatic approach has been its active engagement with multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Bangladesh has used these platforms to internationalise the Rohingya issue and lobby for more decisive global action, including support for humanitarian access to Rakhine State. In numerous General Assembly sessions and UN Human Rights Council meetings, Bangladesh has called for international

intervention to ensure the safe repatriation of Rohingya and the protection of human rights within Myanmar (United Nations, 2019).

At the OIC level, Bangladesh has pushed for collective Muslim world support, resulting in the formation of an OIC Contact Group on the Rohingya crisis. The OIC has also filed a case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), with Bangladesh supplying evidence and diplomatic backing (OIC, 2020). These engagements signify Bangladesh's attempt to build a moral and legal case for humanitarian intervention, including the possibility of a corridor backed by international legitimacy.

Despite these efforts, progress has been slow due to the limited enforcement capabilities of multilateral organisations and the reluctance of Security Council members such as China and Russia to support robust action against Myanmar. This reflects the inherent tension between normative diplomacy and the realist dynamics of international politics (Acharya, 2014).

5.2 Bilateral Diplomacy: Engaging Myanmar and Regional Neighbours

Bangladesh's bilateral engagement with Myanmar has been marked by caution, limited success, and mutual distrust. The two countries signed several repatriation agreements between 2017 and 2019; however, none have resulted in meaningful returns (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, 2019). Myanmar's reluctance to create conditions conducive to repatriation—such as citizenship guarantees, safety assurances, and humanitarian access—has hindered progress.

Bangladesh has also attempted to engage regional powers such as China and India in facilitating repatriation and encouraging humanitarian interventions. China, a key ally of Myanmar, has mediated trilateral talks but has aligned mainly with Myanmar's sovereignty narrative, opposing international pressure or externally imposed solutions (Yhome, 2018). India, while providing limited humanitarian aid to Bangladesh and Rakhine, has been cautious not to antagonise Myanmar, with whom it shares strategic and security interests under its Act East Policy (Chakravarty, 2020).

Thus, Bangladesh's reliance on regional powers has yielded limited diplomatic dividends. Both China and India have prioritised stability and bilateral relations with Myanmar over humanitarian imperatives, thereby constraining Bangladesh's options for securing a humanitarian corridor.

5.3 Humanitarian Corridor as a Diplomatic Concept

The concept of a humanitarian corridor, though not formalised, has emerged in Bangladesh's diplomatic discourse as a means to facilitate safe repatriation and the delivery of aid to the Rohingya remaining in Myanmar. Humanitarian corridors, as defined in international humanitarian law, are temporary demilitarised zones through which aid and civilians can pass safely, usually established through multilateral negotiation or consent (Ferris, 2011).

Bangladesh's advocacy for such a corridor is rooted in its interest in reducing long-term refugee burdens and ensuring accountability in Rakhine. By linking humanitarian access to the broader repatriation framework, Bangladesh aims to shift the responsibility onto Myanmar and mobilise international actors toward enforcement mechanisms. However, this proposal faces several diplomatic challenges:

- Sovereignty Sensitivities: Myanmar views any external intervention, including the establishment of humanitarian corridors, as a violation of its sovereignty. Its military leadership has rejected international monitoring and denied access to many parts of Rakhine, making corridor

implementation unfeasible without the use of coercive diplomacy, which is currently lacking (ICG, 2020).

- Lack of Precedent in Southeast Asia: Unlike in conflict zones such as Syria or Ukraine, where humanitarian corridors have been negotiated, Southeast Asia lacks a precedent or normative framework for such interventions, complicating regional acceptance of the idea (Slim, 2015).
- Inadequate Diplomatic Clout: Bangladesh, despite moral legitimacy, lacks the diplomatic leverage or hard power needed to impose or negotiate such a corridor unilaterally. This limits its ability to translate its diplomatic rhetoric into practical outcomes without broader international enforcement.

5.4 Domestic Constraints and Political Calculations

Bangladesh's internal political dynamics also shape and constrain its diplomatic manoeuvring. The protracted presence of nearly one million Rohingya refugees in the Cox's Bazar district has strained national resources and created political pressure domestically (Haque & Jahan, 2021). The government's diplomatic initiatives must therefore balance international expectations with domestic imperatives such as border security, social cohesion, and economic burden.

Moreover, Bangladesh's commitment to non-alignment and regional harmony limits its ability to adopt a confrontational posture. This has led to a "quiet diplomacy" approach, which, while pragmatic, often falls short of achieving transformative outcomes. The government must also contend with growing public fatigue and political polarisation around the Rohingya issue, which affects its policy consistency and diplomatic risk appetite.

5.5 Diplomatic Fatigue and Donor Apathy

Another constraint arises from donor fatigue and declining global attention to the Rohingya crisis. As international focus has shifted to newer crises (e.g., Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan), humanitarian funding for the Rohingya response has dwindled, affecting Bangladesh's leverage in international forums (UNHCR, 2023). This diminishes the feasibility of securing political backing or resources for establishing a humanitarian corridor.

5.6 Strategic Recommendations and Forward-Looking Approaches

In light of these constraints, Bangladesh's diplomacy must evolve through innovative, coalition-building strategies. These could include:

- Issue-linkage diplomacy, where Bangladesh links the humanitarian corridor proposal to broader regional cooperation agendas such as climate migration or connectivity;
- South-South solidarity, partnering with other developing countries that have experience with displacement and humanitarian corridors to lobby collectively;
- Track-II diplomacy, engaging civil society, diaspora, and academic networks to amplify the corridor concept and build transnational advocacy coalitions (Keck & Sikkink, 1998);
- Norm entrepreneurship, where Bangladesh takes the lead in developing regional norms around humanitarian access in complex emergencies, potentially through SAARC or BIMSTEC frameworks.

Such strategic repositioning could strengthen Bangladesh's diplomatic narrative and operational toolkit, even in a geopolitically constrained environment.

6. Regional and International Responses to the Humanitarian Corridor Proposal

The proposal for a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid and facilitate repatriation in Myanmar's Rakhine State has gained traction within Bangladeshi diplomatic circles as a strategic response to the protracted Rohingya crisis. However, the success of such an initiative depends heavily on the responses of regional neighbours and the broader international community. These responses have varied significantly, ranging from cautious endorsement to implicit opposition, reflecting complex geopolitical calculations, legal interpretations of sovereignty, and broader humanitarian principles. This section critically examines the regional and international reactions to Bangladesh's proposal for a humanitarian corridor, highlighting both the support mechanisms and the impediments to its realisation.

6.1 Regional Actors: ASEAN and Neighbouring States

The role of regional actors, notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has been crucial in shaping humanitarian and political responses to the Rohingya crisis. ASEAN, despite its normative emphasis on non-interference, has gradually adopted a more proactive role. In 2019, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) conducted a needs assessment in Rakhine State and proposed a roadmap for safe and voluntary repatriation (ASEAN, 2019). While this initiative marked progress, it fell short of advocating a robust humanitarian corridor, instead focusing on technical support and confidence-building measures.

ASEAN's limited response can be attributed to internal divisions and its consensus-based decision-making model. Countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia have been vocal about the need for humanitarian access and the rights of the Rohingya (Djalal, 2020). In contrast, others, such as Thailand and Vietnam, have preferred a neutral stance to preserve diplomatic ties with Myanmar. This divergence has hindered ASEAN's ability to endorse or operationalise a humanitarian corridor framework, despite several members tacitly supporting greater humanitarian engagement.

India, as a key regional power and a neighbour to both Bangladesh and Myanmar, has maintained a cautious approach. India's position is shaped by strategic and security considerations, particularly its investments in Myanmar under the Act East Policy and the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project (Chaudhury, 2021). While India has provided humanitarian aid to both Bangladesh and Myanmar, it has refrained from supporting international pressure on Myanmar or endorsing corridor mechanisms that might be perceived as infringing on Myanmar's sovereignty.

Similarly, China has opposed any initiatives that imply international intervention or coercive diplomacy. It has advocated a bilateral solution between Bangladesh and Myanmar and played a mediatory role in repatriation talks. However, China's strategic interests in Myanmar—such as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and access to the Indian Ocean—mean it is unlikely to support any humanitarian corridor that necessitates external monitoring or multilateral enforcement (Sun, 2020). Thus, regional responses are shaped less by humanitarian imperatives and more by strategic alignments and non-interventionist norms.

6.2 International Community: United Nations, Western States, and Humanitarian Agencies

The international community has broadly acknowledged the severity of the Rohingya crisis and the need for safe humanitarian access to Rakhine State. However, the idea of a formal humanitarian corridor has not received unanimous support or operational backing. The United Nations, while emphasising voluntary repatriation and accountability, has not explicitly called for a corridor in the legal sense. Instead, UN agencies such as the UNHCR and World Food Programme (WFP) have advocated for "safe zones" and "access

corridors," which lack the binding legal and diplomatic authority of internationally mandated humanitarian corridors (UNHCR, 2022).

Western countries, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, and members of the European Union, have condemned the atrocities in Rakhine and imposed targeted sanctions on Myanmar's military leadership. They have also provided substantial humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh and international NGOs working in Cox's Bazar. However, their support for a humanitarian corridor within Myanmar has been more rhetorical than actionable. The complexity of negotiating such corridors, particularly in areas under military control, has made Western powers wary of promising what they cannot enforce (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Moreover, the lack of consensus within the UN Security Council, where China and Russia hold veto power, has undermined the possibility of securing a binding resolution that could authorise or legitimise a humanitarian corridor under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. This institutional gridlock has compelled humanitarian agencies to operate under restrictive access conditions, thereby limiting their ability to establish sustainable pathways for aid delivery in Rakhine (UNOCHA, 2023).

6.3 Legal and Ethical Considerations

International legal instruments such as the Geneva Conventions and customary humanitarian law provide the framework for establishing humanitarian corridors. However, their application is conditional upon consent from the host state or enforcement through multilateral mechanisms (ICRC, 2019). In the case of Myanmar, the military regime's resistance to external oversight complicates the implementation of such legal provisions. The regime's refusal to acknowledge wrongdoing or to engage constructively with UN mandates, such as the recommendations of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, further restricts the legal viability of a corridor initiative (UNHRC, 2018).

Ethically, there is strong justification for a humanitarian corridor, particularly given the scale of displacement, the documented crimes against humanity, and the ongoing deprivation of rights in Rakhine State. Humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence support the creation of safe zones for the delivery of aid (Sphere Project, 2018). However, without enforcement mechanisms or regional buy-in, these ethical imperatives struggle to translate into actionable policy.

6.4 Opportunities for Multilateral Collaboration

Despite these constraints, there are potential pathways for generating international support for a humanitarian corridor. One opportunity lies in the formation of a coalition of like-minded countries, including Canada, Norway, and Japan, which have demonstrated both financial commitment and diplomatic neutrality. Such a coalition could advocate for a corridor through non-coercive means, such as economic incentives, peace-building initiatives, and transitional justice mechanisms (Kaldor, 2020).

Bangladesh could also collaborate with the UN Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC) to intensify diplomatic pressure on Myanmar, thereby creating conditions that make a corridor more feasible. Additionally, the emerging discourse on "humanitarian diplomacy" could be leveraged to balance state sovereignty with the need to prevent human suffering, potentially paving the way for negotiated corridors that are both ethical and pragmatic (Minear, 2002).

7. Strategic Policy Recommendations

Addressing the complex and multidimensional challenges of implementing a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State requires a coherent, strategic, and multi-level policy framework. Given the

intersecting diplomatic, geopolitical, and humanitarian variables, Bangladesh must adopt a comprehensive approach to enhance its diplomatic leverage, secure regional and international support, and operationalise its humanitarian objectives. This section presents strategic policy recommendations across five core dimensions: multilateral engagement, regional diplomacy, legal and humanitarian frameworks, public diplomacy, and institutional capacity building.

7.1. Deepen Multilateral Engagement through the United Nations System

Bangladesh must prioritise multilateral diplomacy by elevating the issue within various UN platforms. While the Security Council has remained paralysed mainly due to veto powers wielded by China and Russia (ICG, 2021), Bangladesh can mobilise support through the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Through coordinated diplomacy, Bangladesh should advocate for a non-binding United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution supporting humanitarian corridors and safe zones in Rakhine under international supervision. Such symbolic declarations can shift global narratives and increase moral pressure on Myanmar.

Additionally, Bangladesh should lobby for a special rapporteur or commission of inquiry focused on the humanitarian access barriers in Myanmar, building on existing UNHRC mandates. Collaboration with UN agencies, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), can help design technically feasible models of humanitarian corridors that respect sovereignty while ensuring access to essential resources.

7.2. Build Regional Consensus within South and Southeast Asia

Bangladesh should aim to transform its bilateral Rohingya grievance into a regional concern. ASEAN's growing involvement, although constrained by its non-interference principle, presents an opportunity. Bangladesh can seek to participate as an observer or special partner in ASEAN-led humanitarian initiatives, thus amplifying its voice and aligning corridor proposals with regional norms (ASEAN, 2019).

Countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, which have been sympathetic to the plight of the Rohingya, can be leveraged as entry points to ASEAN's humanitarian diplomacy. Additionally, Bangladesh must engage with India and China through strategic dialogues focused on the economic and political costs of prolonged instability in Myanmar. By presenting the humanitarian corridor as a stabilising, rather than interventionist, mechanism, Bangladesh may shift these countries' stance from passive to constructive neutrality.

7.3. Utilise International Legal Mechanisms and Humanitarian Norms

Bangladesh should harness international legal tools to legitimise and advance the humanitarian corridor initiative. As a state party to multiple international humanitarian law conventions, it can invoke legal principles under the Geneva Conventions, particularly those related to the protection of civilians and humanitarian access (ICRC, 2019). Coordinated efforts with legal bodies, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), can also amplify calls for Myanmar's accountability, thereby building moral justification for humanitarian interventions.

Furthermore, Bangladesh must align its proposals with universally accepted humanitarian norms—neutrality, impartiality, and independence—to avoid accusations of politicisation. Engagement with international humanitarian organisations, such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), can ensure that any proposed corridor meets both technical and ethical standards.

7.4. Leverage Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication

Public diplomacy should be a central tool in reframing the corridor not merely as a Bangladeshi national interest, but as a regional and global humanitarian imperative. To achieve this, Bangladesh should invest in strategic communication campaigns that target international civil society, diaspora networks, human rights organisations, and media platforms. Narratives emphasising the urgency of aid delivery, the scale of human suffering, and the burden on host communities in Cox's Bazar can strengthen the emotional and moral case for the corridor (Ahmed & Islam, 2020).

Hosting international conferences, webinars, and civil society dialogues focused on the humanitarian crisis can draw attention to the corridor initiative. Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs can also engage in track II diplomacy, involving think tanks and academia to publish research that substantiates the need for such an initiative.

7.5. Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Coordination Mechanisms

Bangladesh must prepare its institutions for proactive engagement in establishing and maintaining humanitarian corridors. This includes the establishment of an inter-agency coordination cell under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, comprising representatives from the Armed Forces Division, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, and the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC). This body should serve as the focal point for engaging with international stakeholders and managing logistical aspects of the corridor proposal.

Capacity-building programs should also focus on legal training, scenario planning, and emergency response simulations, allowing Bangladeshi officials to engage with humanitarian norms and crisis management frameworks. Collaborations with regional training institutes, such as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), can strengthen technical preparedness (ADPC, 2020).

Furthermore, Bangladesh should develop contingency plans for phased implementation, beginning with temporary safe zones near the border areas, which neutral third-party organisations would monitor. These safe zones could serve as proof-of-concept projects, illustrating the feasibility of a full-fledged corridor in the future.

7.6. Engage Non-State and Faith-Based Actors

Bangladesh can also draw on the influence of non-state actors, including religious leaders and faith-based humanitarian networks, to build a moral consensus. Islamic organisations in Southeast Asia, for instance, can help shape public opinion and mobilise grassroots support for humanitarian access in Rakhine. Interfaith dialogues and peacebuilding initiatives should be pursued, particularly to counter narratives of ethnic or religious animosity (Yusuf, 2019).

Such engagements, although informal, can help mitigate domestic resistance within Myanmar and enhance the legitimacy of corridor mechanisms from a community-based perspective.

The implementation of a humanitarian corridor in Myanmar's Rakhine State is a diplomatically complex yet morally urgent objective. Bangladesh must navigate a tangled web of regional politics, international law, and humanitarian diplomacy to convert this vision into reality. Strategic multilateral engagement, regional consensus-building, legal and normative framing, effective public diplomacy, institutional preparedness, and inclusive stakeholder participation are indispensable components of a viable policy roadmap. While the

corridor may not yield immediate transformation, it remains a critical long-term instrument in the quest for dignified repatriation, humanitarian justice, and regional peace.

8. Conclusion

The proposal to establish a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State represents both a humanitarian necessity and a diplomatic challenge for Bangladesh. The ongoing Rohingya crisis, marked by prolonged displacement, statelessness, and systemic human rights violations, has placed Bangladesh at the epicentre of a complex regional crisis with significant international implications. While the idea of a humanitarian corridor is rooted in the urgent need to ensure aid delivery and safeguard the rights of displaced populations, its realisation is impeded by entrenched political resistance from Myanmar, a lack of regional consensus, and geopolitical dynamics involving powerful state actors such as China and India.

Bangladesh's diplomatic efforts, though persistent, face considerable constraints stemming from asymmetrical power relations, limitations within multilateral frameworks, and the lack of binding international enforcement mechanisms. Nevertheless, opportunities remain. Strategic engagement with UN institutions, ASEAN, international legal mechanisms, and humanitarian norms can help to reframe the corridor proposal from a bilateral grievance into a collective humanitarian responsibility. Moreover, coordinated public diplomacy, regional advocacy, and capacity-building efforts can bolster Bangladesh's role as a constructive actor in regional peacebuilding.

Ultimately, while a humanitarian corridor alone may not resolve the root causes of the Rohingya crisis, it can serve as a pivotal mechanism for alleviating humanitarian suffering, stabilising the region, and creating conditions conducive to voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation. It also reinforces Bangladesh's international image as a responsible humanitarian actor. Navigating these challenges requires a multifaceted policy approach, grounded in legal legitimacy, regional partnerships, and moral leadership. As the humanitarian crisis persists, the imperative to act strategically and collaboratively becomes even more urgent.

8.1 Future Research Directions

Future academic inquiry on the topic of humanitarian corridors to Rakhine State can explore several unexplored dimensions. First, empirical research is needed to evaluate the historical precedents of humanitarian corridors in Asia, Africa, and the Balkans, as well as their applicability to the South Asian context. Comparative case studies could yield valuable lessons on operational models, international oversight, and political negotiations.

Second, interdisciplinary research integrating international relations, humanitarian law, and peace and conflict studies could provide a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the corridor's feasibility. For instance, simulation modelling could examine different scenarios under which humanitarian access might be granted, including those involving hybrid international-local mechanisms.

Third, field-based research involving stakeholders in Cox's Bazar and refugee communities could offer grounded insights into the perceived utility and risks of humanitarian corridors from the perspective of those most affected. This would enrich policy frameworks with human-centred considerations.

Lastly, future studies could investigate the role of digital diplomacy, civil society networks, and AI-driven humanitarian monitoring in shaping the implementation of cross-border humanitarian solutions. These technological and sociopolitical innovations are increasingly relevant in 21st-century crisis diplomacy.

By addressing these avenues, future research can make meaningful contributions to designing more effective, context-sensitive, and rights-based humanitarian interventions in Rakhine and beyond.

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