Prizewinning Dissertation 2022

No.22-MR

Navigating humanitarian space(s) to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced persons: applying the concept of a humanitarian 'micro-space' to the case of Rukban in Syria

Miranda Russell

Published: Feb 2023

Department of International Development

London School of Economics and Political Science

Houghton Street

London

WC2A 2AE UK

Tel: +44 (020) 7955 7425/6252

Fax: +44 (020) 7955-6844

Email: d.daley@lse.ac.uk

Website: http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/home.aspx

Abstract

This research asks how humanitarian actors navigated the humanitarian space of Rukban in Syria between 2014 to 2020 to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced persons and the implications for affected populations. Data from 20 original interviews with stakeholders engaged in this response were analyzed to understand how this case challenges or contributes to humanitarian space theory, specifically the conceptual development of a humanitarian 'micro-space.' The results support the key assertions of this novel framework that humanitarian space in conflict contexts is composed of different dynamic, competitive spaces that require continuous negotiation, and extend the theory by noting critical interconnections between micro, meso, and macro humanitarian spaces. The results also demonstrate how the legal status of displaced persons intersects with humanitarian space debates and concur with recent evaluations of aid operations in Syria that negotiating access in this context is inseparable from political considerations that have been detrimental to affected populations.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

AI	Anonymous interview
GoJ	Government of Jordan
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JAF	Jordanian Armed Forces
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RQ	Research question
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation, theory, and case

In 2021, 53.2 million people were internally displaced by violent conflict (IDMC 2021). Although international law assigns states with primary responsibility to protect internally displaced persons (IDPs), this obligation is often unmet, especially when governments themselves generate such dislocation (Meininghaus 2016; Collinson, Darcy, et al. 2009). Further, politicization of aid provides challenges for aid delivery in conflict contexts (Macrae and Leader 2000). Evidence of how humanitarian actors *respond* to these challenges and the implication for affected populations is limited (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010).

Scholars and practitioners argue that the theoretical framework of *humanitarian space* can help fill this knowledge gap (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Abild 2010). While there is no single agreed definition of humanitarian space, consensus has formed around humanitarian space being simultaneously tangible (the literal space for operations) and conceptual (the abstract space for principled negotiation), and that it can be constructed and influenced (Ibid). Several scholars argue the negotiation dynamics that define humanitarian space, and the geopolitics that underlie these discussions, deserve greater attention (Acuto 2014; Brassard-Boudreau and Hubert 2010; Jansen and Hilhorst 2010; Mills 2013).

One dominant narrative asserts that humanitarian space is 'shrinking': that humanitarian organizations are working in progressively more hostile environments with security threats that limit their ability to uphold humanitarian principles (Guttieri 2005; Roisin 2009). Scholars and practitioners have challenged the value of this notion (Abild 2010; Clements 2018; Collinson and Elhawary 2012; Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Kool, Pospisil and Van Voorst 2021), arguing instead for analysis considering *how* humanitarian actors practically leverage and compromise principles to navigate politics to create more humane and effective humanitarian spaces (Ibid). While much literature considers national or cross-country comparisons, 'micro' scale analysis of humanitarian space (e.g., one or several areas of a country), can illuminate the dynamic nuances of conflict contexts and humanitarian actors' capabilities to navigate them (Kool, et al. 2021).

Almost nowhere has humanitarian space been more constrained and humanitarian action more tested than in Syria, where the regime has used sovereignty to block international aid to strengthen its authority (Ismail 2018). By 2021 there were 6.7 million IDPs in Syria (IDMC 2021). In 2018, three million IDPs were living in "hard-to-reach" and besieged areas (REACH n.d.). The

requisite international response has been deemed inadequate (Szybala 2015). Yet amid, and perhaps because of, Syria's extreme conditions, instances of successful humanitarian action can provide critical lessons. Further, careful examination of failures can help hold the humanitarian system accountable while navigating increasingly complex conflicts where anti-civilian warfare is becoming routine and impunity normalized (Chehayeb 2022; Tarakji, Almhawish and Haar 2021).

Rukban camp is one such under-researched, micro-level example of these challenges and lessons (Simpson 2018). Located in a demilitarized zone at the intersection of the Jordanian, Syrian, and Iraqi borders, this settlement highlights humanitarian space dynamics of simultaneous cross-border and 'cross-line' assistance, the latter meaning across government- and non-government-controlled areas (Security Council Report 2022). Micro-level analysis of Rukban demonstrates the interconnected political and practical ways that humanitarian access shifts depending on when, where, and by whom it is negotiated (Kool, et al. 2021). Finally, it demonstrates the extreme challenges facing IDPs caught between states of origin and asylum (Pasha 2018).

1.2. Purpose and research questions

This research aims to deepen understanding of how humanitarian actors navigate politicized conflicts to protect and assist IDPs. It uses primary qualitative research and theory testing methods to interrogate how these approaches contribute to or challenge dominant and emerging humanitarian space theories. It aims to build evidence on humanitarian negotiations in Syria and spotlight a humanitarian context that some fear the international community is forgetting (McLoughlin 2020).

The research asks: how did humanitarian actors navigate the humanitarian space at Rukban camp from 2014 to 2020 to provide protection and assistance to IDPs? How do those actors' strategic and tactical responses challenge or confirm humanitarian space theory, specifically the conceptual development of a humanitarian 'micro-space'?

1.3. Structure

This dissertation has six sections. Section 2 reviews three relevant bodies of literature regarding humanitarian space, humanitarian negotiations, and the Syrian humanitarian response. Section 3 details the qualitative methodology used. Section 4 outlines the case study. Section 5 presents

the findings of thematic analysis of 20 interviews with humanitarian actors involved in the Rukban response between 2014 and 2020 and provides discussion. Section 6 provides a conclusion.

2. Literature review

This section considers three relevant literatures: humanitarian space; humanitarian negotiations; and specifics of the Syria humanitarian response, analyzing each in turn before restating the research questions.

2.1. Humanitarian space

There is a significant and growing literature on humanitarian space and humanitarian space theory, especially relating to action in conflict contexts (Collinson and Elhaway 2012). Drawing from these discussions, this section identifies the theoretical components critical for subsequent case study analysis.

2.1.1.   Defining humanitarian space

There is no commonly agreed definition of 'humanitarian space' (Brassard-Boudreau and Hubert 2010). The term's broad usage dates to the 1990s when the former President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) used it referring to humanitarian environments independent of external political agendas (Ibid). The term nonetheless remains poorly understood (Collinson and Elhaway 2012). Consensus is that humanitarian space is simultaneously tangible and conceptual, and that it can be constructed and influenced (Jansen and Hilhorst 2010). For example, it can mean the physical aid environment, such as refugee camps, and the conceptual and relational space in which humanitarian actors engage and affected populations reside (Ibid; Mills 2013).

Current definitions have been critiqued for several reasons. First, humanitarian organizations' definitional interpretations often reflect their distinct orientations (Collinson and Elhaway 2012). Given this diversity of understanding and application, the concept's practical utility can be vague and drive overgeneralized policy debates (Ibid). Additionally, much literature focuses on the physical and logistical dynamics of humanitarian spaces, ignoring their "inherent social construction" (Acuto 2014, 4). Several scholars argue that the negotiation dynamics defining these spaces deserve greater attention, requiring holistic understanding of underlying geopolitics (Acuto 2014; Brassard-Boudreau and Hubert 2010; Jansen and Hilhorst 2010; Mills 2013). Hilhorst and Jansen's (2010) influential study presents humanitarian space as an 'arena'— a defined space where actors struggle for advantage and aid is negotiated. Such interpretations

better encompass the "situated practices" humanitarian spaces influence and are influenced by, and the globalized contexts within which they exist (Acuto 2014, 4).

Another widely acknowledged definitional limitation is the shallow consideration afforded to local perspectives, including those of national and community-based organizations and affected populations (Abild 2010; Kool, et al. 2021; Shannon 2009). In part this is due to security constraints on access to local actors, generating methodological limitations (Shannon 2009; Abild 2010); but regardless these studies' proposed definitions of humanitarian space can lack localized nuance (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Tammi 2022). This limitation is considered part of a broader trend of local actor marginalization in professional humanitarian security and risk management discourse in complex contexts, and ultimately aid policy development in conflict environments (Kool, et al. 2021; Tammi 2022; Schenkenberg van Mierop 2016; Schenkenberg van Mierop 2018).

Relatedly, the literature tends to consider humanitarian space unitarily (Kool, et al. 2021). Grey literature, such as consultancy reports (University of Leeds n.d.), often provides a 'global' view, comparing humanitarian action in several countries to draw conclusions about humanitarian space trends worldwide (see Metcalfe, Giffen and Elhawary 2011; Healy and Tiller 2014; Tennant, Doyle and Mazou 2010). Academic scholarship by contrast mostly addresses the country level (e.g., Abild (2010) on Somalia and Shannon (2009) on Afghanistan). Further, many studies consider conflicts over a lengthy period (sometimes an entire history) and yet do not consider (or at least do not articulate how they consider) temporality in their methodologies. Localized subtleties critical to understanding political and conflict contexts and dynamics are thereby lost (Kool, et al. 2021; Pospisil 2022).

For this study, I will adapt the dominant narrative that humanitarian space is both physical and conceptual. My analysis will also center humanitarian space's relational, temporal, and negotiation features, and, to the extent possible, examine local actors' contributions to and perceptions of them.

2.1.2.   Debates in humanitarian space theory

Although defined and applied differently, the negotiated relationship between humanitarian space and politics has become central to relevant academic discourse (Collinson and Elhawary 2012). The literature commonly portrays humanitarian space as 'shrinking': humanitarian organizations

are working in progressively more hostile environments, limiting their ability to uphold humanitarian principles (Guttieri 2005; Roisin 2009). However, several scholars argue this is oversimplified and unsubstantiated (Abild 2010; Clements 2018; Collinson and Elhawary 2012; Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Kool, et al. 2021). They note that fragile security conditions for humanitarian workers are considered a prominent demonstration of this shrinkage but assert that contemporary humanitarians are consistently operating in more dangerous contexts than their predecessors (Ibid; Gordon and Donini 2015). Moreover, while there are many examples of limited humanitarian access during internal conflicts, including in Syria, some civil wars provide evidence of aid operations that contravene a ruling power's political and military agenda (Brassard-Boudreau and Hubert 2010).

Perhaps most importantly to this research, claims of shrinking humanitarian space owe much to the idea that lines have blurred between humanitarian action and the roles of other conflict stakeholders (Collinson and Elhawary 2012). This blurring is considered to cause violations of the humanitarian principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence (Ibid). Amid the large literature considering the application of these principles in conflict contexts (see Gordon and Donini 2015 and Macrae 1998; Rieffer-Flanagan 2009 amongst others), I will only discuss themes relevant to humanitarian space theory.

The humanitarian principles, developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC) in 1965, are now entrenched in mission statements and codes of conduct of many organizations globally (Gil 2019). Adherence to International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which considers the actions that uphold or contravene humanitarian rights during armed conflict (Ibid), is therefore important for assessing application of principles and thus of the supposed 'expansion' or 'shrinking' of humanitarian space (Collinson and Elhawary 2012). Yet in modern wars, major internal conflicts often involve many actors, including governments and non-state groups that may violate international Conventions or may not be signatories altogether (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Salehyan 2013). According to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project's 2021 annual report, non-state armed groups were the greatest perpetrators of civilian targeting, but state forces remain the "dominant conflict agents globally" (Lay 2021, 3).

Clearly, overarching humanitarian principles and enforcement mechanisms for these standards are inadequate to secure impartial aid provision without challenge (Gil 2019). Further, some literature highlights increasing skepticism of host communities and affected populations about the

neutrality and impartiality of aid organizations (Ibid). These trends are often articulated as the 'politicization of humanitarian aid,' portrayed as fundamentally harmful to principled (and effective) humanitarian intervention and thus are said to constrain humanitarian space (Collinson and Elhawary 2012).

Several scholars have convincingly argued against these contentions, highlighting that politics has always influenced humanitarianism (Collinson and Elhawary 2012; Hilhorst and Jansen 2010). They contend that more useful analysis considers how humanitarians practically leverage and compromise on principles to influence more humane and effective aid environments (Ibid). They argue denial of inherently political dynamics distracts from the development of effective solutions (Ibid). My understanding of humanitarian space in Syria, and of Rukban specifically, is built upon this argument.

2.1.3. The novel concept of a humanitarian 'micro-space'

Several analyses of the Syrian humanitarian space take this politically grounded approach (see Alejandria, et al. 2022; Dieckhoff 2020; Haid 2019; Richardson Jané and Meyer 2021). Among them are Kool, et al. (2021), who consider how humanitarian negotiations challenge the single, linear, and shrinking humanitarian space notion. These scholars argue that countries and conflicts should not be considered in such a unified fashion (Kool, et al. 2021). Contemporary conflicts, they assert, fragment aid environments into multiple 'micro-spaces' (Ibid).

According to Kool, et al. (2021), micro-spaces have three defining features: 1) they constantly shift and overlap; 2) they are competitive and exclusive; and 3) they require continual negotiation and renegotiation. The authors argue humanitarian actors' decisions to intervene in some spaces and not in others need not imply 'shrinking' (Ibid). Instead, these decisions can reflect the generation of different micro-spaces that independently protect and extend humanitarian action and principled and effective aid delivery (Ibid). In this framework, politics is not a barrier to humanitarian action but a factor in navigating and managing humanitarian micro-spaces (Ibid). The authors thus demonstrate that micro-level studies are a useful and underutilized tool for humanitarian space analysis during armed conflict, capturing temporality and local levels of politics at play, and their implications for aid actors and affected populations (Ibid). Further, the micro-space concept highlights how practitioners and their relationships ('trust-based networks') and negotiation skills play key roles in maintaining or even expanding humanitarian space (Abild 2010; Clements 2018; Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Kool, et al. 2021).

In the next two sections, I will argue that humanitarian micro-space is the key intersection among this study's three relevant literatures, and thus provides an effective theoretical framework for this research.

2.1.4.   Negotiating dynamic and competitive micro-spaces

Humanitarian negotiation has emerged as a recognized field in the past 30 years (Clements 2018). Yet there is a dearth of literature on the topic (Ibid; Glaser 2005; Grace 2015). These negotiations can take different forms, from "ad-hoc field-level bargains" (sometimes referred to as 'frontline negotiations') to formal agreements under IHL (Clements, 2018, 19). Generally, negotiation objectives relate either to humanitarian access or protection, or both (Mancini-Griffoli and Picot 2004). Humanitarian negotiations literature does not offer a single definition of the practice (Ibid; Grace 2017). Clements (2018, 20), a prominent scholar and practitioner, draws from existing sources to propose a succinct definition:

"a process through which humanitarian actors seek to secure agreement from parties to a conflict for the safe and principled provision of assistance and protection for civilians facing humanitarian needs."

According to Clements (2018) humanitarians enter negotiations from a position of weakness, without weapons or territorial control (Herrero 2014). Therefore, they rely on international law, which often holds limited sway with counterparts (Ibid). There is a small but growing literature analyzing practices aimed at overcoming these imbalances (Carter 2014; Clements 2018; Grace 2015; Magone and Neuman 2011), including emergence of dedicated guidance and training (see Mancini-Griffoli and Picot 2004, McHugh and Bessler 2006, and Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs 2014). However, some scholars suggest there is limited institutional uptake of existing guidance and training, and staff often remain unclear on acceptable negotiation strategies and tactics (Clements 2018). Further, the confidentiality often required in humanitarian negotiations has constrained discussion about practices (Clements 2018), which drives "fragmented and inconsistent" negotiation approaches across the sector (Jackson 2014, 2).

Contexts of internal displacement and contested jurisdiction underline humanitarian negotiations' significance for determining access and protection outcomes (Schrepfer 2018). While refugee protection is firmly rooted in international law, particularly the 1951 Convention Relating to the

Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (Orchard 2021), IDPs are not afforded the same protections, since they remain within their own state, which has primary responsibility for their security (Ibid). In this aspect, "sovereignty is a form of responsibility to protect one's citizens" (Cohen 2006, 90). Such protection, however, is often absent, especially when obligated governments themselves *drive* displacement (Collinson, Darcy, et al. 2009). The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were created in 1998 to strengthen the legal basis for IDP protections (Schrepfer 2018). Despite being 'soft law,' they are widely recognized as a legitimate framework (Orchard 2016). However, some assert the challenges of IDP protection are not legal but operational (Schrepfer 2018).

This study considers an acute case of these challenges (Lund 2018), and thus aims to examine how displaced population status and related international legal frameworks intersect with humanitarian space debates and drive distinct negotiation practices, a topic on which existing literature is limited. I will adapt Clements' definition, to consider different stakeholders' micro-level negotiation strategies in relation to higher-level political dialogues and military actions and examine their intersecting contributions to developing humanitarian 'micro-space(s)' in Rukban.

2.2. Syria response

The growing literature on humanitarian theory and practice relating to the Syria conflict is anchored in its complex politics and the extreme challenges for aid organizations working there. This section broadly considers the literature, and then explores specifics related to humanitarian space and negotiations.

2.2.1. Response overview

Syria remains one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, and one of the most expensive (Sparrow 2016). Academic and grey literatures outline the complex international and local aid infrastructure and responses inside and outside the country (Giesen and Leenders 2015; Hays 2016; Kraft and Smith 2018; Margesson and Chesser 2015; Svoboda, Barbelet and Mosel 2018; US Government Accountability Office 2016). With the scale of need, number and complexity of aid actors involved, and the international attention on the crisis (Mahmoud 2016) there is unsurprisingly much Syria programmatic literature, including reports and evaluations emanating from aid organizations (see Sida, Trombetta and Panero 2016 and United Nations, General Assembly 2016, amongst others). The documentation's reliability and transparency, particularly

when coming from the UN, has been critiqued by scholars and advocates (Meininghaus 2016; Sparrow 2016; Szybala 2015).

Scholarship also addresses how warring parties use granting or restricting humanitarian access to advance military and political objectives, furthering the 'politicization' of humanitarian space (Berti 2016; Ismail 2018). For the Assad regime, blocking aid to rebel-held areas has been a strategy to weaken opposition groups (Ibid). By identifying select cooperating organizations, particularly The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), as designated local partners, the government has also centralized control over aid (Margesson and Chesser 2013). The international humanitarian response strategy consequently evolved from heavy reliance on coordination with the government toward a strategy bound by two distinct operating models: 1) 'crossline' assistance through the limited regime-approved organizations based in Damascus, and 2) 'cross-border' aid delivered by organizations based in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq (Hayes 2016; Stoddard, Jillani, et al. 2017). The 'Whole of Syria' approach led by the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was adopted in 2015 to create a single coordination structure, although the distinct inside-outside modalities have continued separately to define humanitarian action and negotiations (Deardorff Miller 2017).

2.2.2. Fragmented humanitarian space and negotiations

Several scholars discuss the complexities of this two-pronged system and its humanitarian space implications, particularly fragmentation (Deardorff Miller 2017; Elkahlout and Elgibali 2020; Ferris and Kirisci 2016; Meininghaus 2016; Stoddard, Jillani, et al. 2017). Comes, Walle, and Wassenhove (2020) highlight the information-sharing challenges between organizations operating in government-controlled versus opposition-controlled areas. Much literature also focuses on remote management practices, and their impact on international-local partnerships (Duclos, et al. 2019; Elkahlout and Elgibali 2020; Fradejas-García 2019; Howe and Stites 2019; Kraft and Smith 2019). This body of evidence highlights the challenges international actors face operating in Syria (Ismail 2018; Meininghaus and Kuhn 2018; Sida, Trombetta, and Panero 2016) and the distinct abilities of local actors, given the rapidly shifting and localized nature of the conflict (Fradejas-Carcía 2019; Svoboda, Barbelet and Mosel 2018; Svoboda 2017). Importantly, the regime views many Syrian organizations, especially those in opposition-held areas, as foes (Meininghaus 2016). To mitigate security risks, their work and perspectives are often undocumented (Ibid), which has methodological implications for this study.

Civil society organization and scholarly discussions about aid's politicization and its fragmentation of Syria's humanitarian space have centered on the intimate relationship between the Assad government and SARC, and criticism of the UN for prioritizing cooperation with both over other partners and those in most need (Abdulrahim 2013; Dieckhoff 2020; Kenner 2012; SACD 2021; Sparrow 2016). Media reporting has also covered the security challenges faced by humanitarian responders, including the regime's targeting of medical personnel and hospitals (Amnesty International 2016; Ekzayez and Sabouni 2020; McKernan 2019), and the extreme violence and threats of ISIS, including its inconsistent compliance with humanitarian agreements (Associated Press in Washington 2014; Callimachi and Goldman 2019; Dalton 2017). These factors have obstructed humanitarian action (Stoddard, Jillani, et al. 2017). Nonetheless, grey literature illustrates how organizations have practically mitigated constraints while emphasizing unresolved challenges (Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation 2017).

There is less *scholarly* literature specifically analyzing negotiations in these challenging contexts and their implications for affected populations, and even less concerning local case studies regarding specific conflict-affected populations. This research aims to address the gap by testing the micro-space concept in relation to humanitarian efforts specifically for IDPs. The study will also interrogate the concept's utility for future humanitarian space analysis of simultaneous cross-border and 'cross-line' interventions.

2.3. Restatement of research questions

Kool, et al.'s (2021) micro-space concept highlights the intersection of the three reviewed bodies of literature, offering an appropriate, novel theoretical framework for this study. To address the gaps highlighted by this review, namely the limited discussion of the political, temporal, relational and negotiation dynamics of humanitarian spaces in specific, localized conflict contexts, and to help build evidence on humanitarian negotiations in Syria in relation to IDPs, this research considers a micro-level case study and asks:

1. How did humanitarian actors navigate the humanitarian space of Rukban camp from 2014 - 2020 to provide protection and assistance to IDPs?

2. How do these actors' strategic and tactical responses challenge or confirm humanitarian space theory, specifically the conceptual development of a humanitarian 'micro-space'?

3. Methodology

The research utilized a case study for theory testing, a method to strengthen or reduce support for a theory, narrow or broaden its scope, or determine which of two or more theories best explain a phenomenon (George and Bennett 2005). For this purpose, I have employed a qualitative methodology detailed below.

3.1. Case selection

Other 'micro-space' cases were considered, including Za'atari and Sheikh Bilal refugee camps inside Jordan and Syria respectively. Rukban camp was selected instead for several reasons. First, it is a geographically bounded, dynamic operating environment generated by one of the most complex and violent contemporary political conflicts. Rukban camp was established in 2014 and by 2015 had grown substantially, with humanitarian access both denied and to an extent negotiated successfully during the study period (Lund 2018). It thus represents a strategic test case for the 'micro-space' concept which considers humanitarian space fragmentation in bound areas with temporal, shifting and competitive political features (Kool, et al. 2021). Further, the displaced population is in a 'legal grey-zone' where governing international legislation and norms are unclear (Pasha 2018). The study thus highlights ways in which legal status intersects with humanitarian space debates and expands insight into aid provision for a growing conflict-affected population: IDPs (Collinson, Darcy, et al. 2009). Finally, timely primary data collection was feasible given my existing professional network from prior work in Jordan on the Syria response.

3.2. Data collection

To find secondary data, including academic publications and journal articles on humanitarian space theory, humanitarian negotiations, and aid provision in Syria, I searched interdisciplinary scholarly databases, such as SAGE Research Methods, JSTOR, and Scopus. I then identified grey literature on these topics via sector-specific databases, such as the UN iLibrary, ALNAP, and ReliefWeb, filtering by the study's target years. I also utilized these sources to identify policy and programmatic documentation, and media reporting on Rukban. Finally, some respondents shared unpublished organizational documents or personal research about Rukban.

The case study builds from 20 original semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A: List of Anonymized Interview Participants). Sampling was purposive and includes the perspectives of different stakeholders involved in humanitarian negotiations and operations, international human rights advocates, and journalists with case expertise. For this study, 'local organizations' included

Syrian and Jordanian organizations and 'local actors' also refers to national INGO staff members. Sampling considered temporality during the study period (2014 – 2020) to ensure dynamics from all years were incorporated.

Table 1. Participant profiles

20 total participants	
17 humanitarian actors involved in the response between 2014 – 2020	
3 human rights advocates and journalists	
Humanitarian stakeholder groups	
4 UN aid agency	3 international donor agencies
6 INGO	4 national organizations
Profiles (international v. local)	
14 international	6 local
Locations (during period of 2014-2020)	
15 Jordan	2 Syria
2 Switzerland	1 United Kingdom
Organizational roles	
Humanitarian affairs officer	Humanitarian advisor
Country Director	Head of advocacy
Program manager	Program officer
Deputy director of programs	President / CEO
Deputy head of office	Regional advisor
Security and access advisor	Coordinator

I utilized seed sampling via my professional network for the first three interviewees and then snowball sampling for the remainder. Interviews followed informed consent procedures, ranged from 45 to 120 minutes, with video use optional, and were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. As Table 1 highlights, most participants worked from the Jordanian side of the border and were international. Additionally, only three humanitarian respondents identified as women. Section 3.4 discusses these trends.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for contextual reflection grounded in experience (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), which supported my aim to deepen both tangible and conceptual understanding of humanitarian micro-spaces. The interview protocol included seven question areas to

interrogate the defining variables of a 'micro-space,' including their temporality, fluidity, and competitiveness (Kool, et al. 2021) (See Appendix B: Interview Protocol). Given limited robust quantitative data in many conflict contexts (Haer and Becher 2011) and in Syria specifically (Meininghaus 2016), quantitative methods could not feasibly capture this complex response's nuance. Further, remote interviews enabled greater access to respondents. The optional video approach also helped mitigate participation risks, critical for generating valid insights (Kostovicova and Knott 2020) in the sensitive Syrian context.

3.3. Data analysis

I used thematic analysis (via a qualitative data analysis tool, Nvivo), a method for identifying and analyzing explicit and implicit themes within a qualitative data set (Nowell, et al. 2007). It considers how systemic issues influence individual perspectives (Braun and Clarke 2006). The method thus effectively highlights the implications of shifting political considerations on the practical activities of humanitarian space actors over time. Additionally, the approach encourages attention to the researcher's role as 'translator' of findings (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). My former experience as an international aid worker and familiarity with Rukban was particularly relevant to reflect on whether and how this might bias my findings.

Findings were analyzed to test how humanitarian actors' approaches align with humanitarian space and micro-space theories, and tensions between the two frameworks. This analysis draws on pertinent humanitarian space debates, situating my primary research in the context of secondary literature.

3.4. Limitations and critical considerations

This research has several limitations. First, it sacrifices breadth for depth through its single case focus. Despite purposive sampling, the limited number of interviews also restricts generalization across other contexts, a common issue with qualitative research on displacement (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). This has been mitigated by corroborating interview insights with previous research and qualitative insights from media reporting. My findings may be impacted by these sources' limitations, such as their limited quantitative data and restricted inclusion of local perspectives.

There are also limitations related to ethical, security, and logistical considerations. IDPs were not interviewed to avoid potentially exposing this already vulnerable group to harm. This will reinforce a rightly critiqued dynamic in humanitarian space literature of inadequate representation of

affected populations (Kool, et al. 2021). Despite sample balancing efforts, local actors constitute only 30% of interviewees for several reasons. Given Rukban's access restrictions, there were few national organizations working on the response from the Jordanian side (Anonymous Interview (AI)17). Additionally, the Syrian regime's restrictions on aid operations meant only the UN and SARC had camp access and no other Syrian organizations were officially permitted to engage (AI2).

Securing participation of humanitarians from the Syrian side was particularly challenging given the more limited operations, my own limited network on that side of the border, and time limitations. It was also infeasible, given the personal security risks involved, to include interviewees still based inside Syria. Additionally, the confidentiality agreements often required of humanitarian negotiators can limit discussion about practices (Clements 2018). The extent of respondents' current involvement in the operation (either directly or via continued organizational affiliations), as well as profile considerations (their respective identities and roles), may have impacted their comfort in disclosing sensitive information, or participating at all (Alsalem and Grace 2021). More than five individuals declined to participate citing confidentiality. Awareness of these dynamics informed interview design and analysis of findings.

The gender disparity of participants also warrants interrogation. Humanitarians acknowledge diversity across the sector, including gender diversity, is lacking, particularly in leadership positions (Alsalem and Grace 2021). This is the case even more so in "security risk countries" or cases of armed conflict, where men tend to dominate even more (Patel, et al. 2020, 6). These issues may have limited the sample's gender diversity, especially when combined with potential drawbacks of snowball sampling, one critique being its limitation within existing networks, and potential susceptibility to respondent biases (Audemard 202).

Finally, the one-off nature of interviews likely limited rapport-building for greater transparency on sensitive issues (Dickson-Swift, et al. 2007). This was mitigated somewhat by personal introductions to interviewees, informed consent procedures, and communicating to interviewees my data management and anonymization plans, and GDPR adherence.
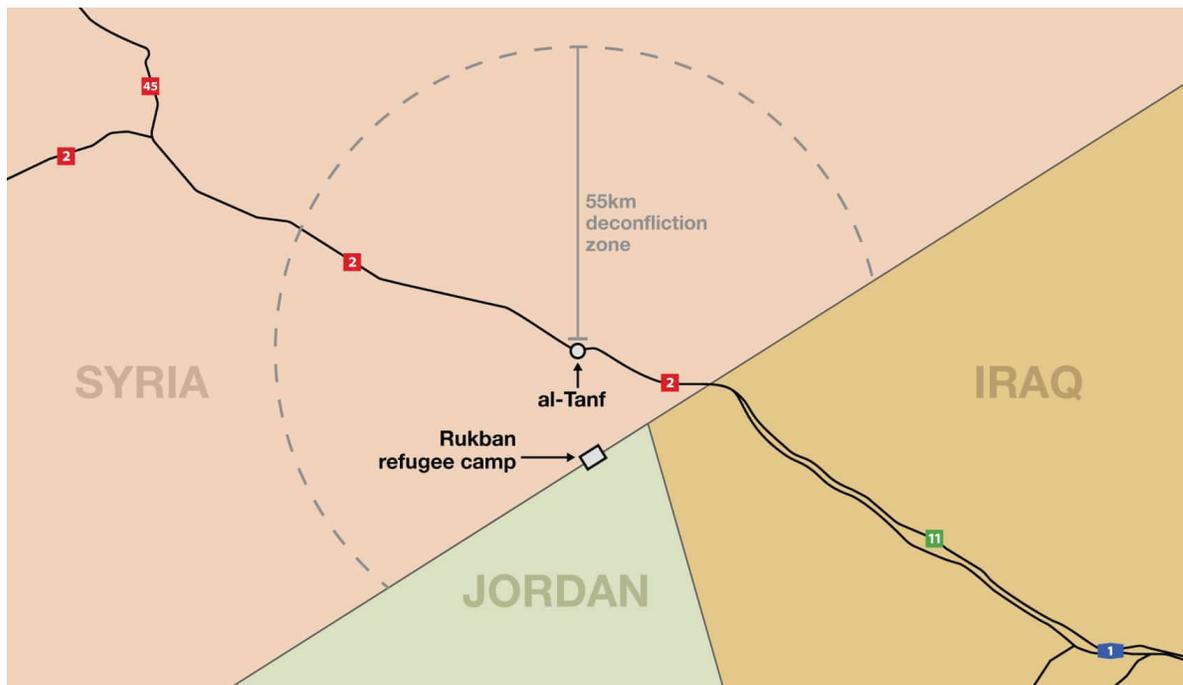
4. Case study: Rukban

This section draws on key informant interviews and secondary literature to outline the Rukban case, including an overview of relevant humanitarian context and key events between 2014 and 2020, which informed primary data collection and analysis.

4.1. Overview

'Rukban' refers to an informal settlement of displaced people at the Jordan-Syria-Iraq border (Pasha 2018). Fleeing violence in Syria, and blocked from seeking asylum in Jordan, the population in Rukban is trapped (Christou 2021). The encampment itself is located near the US Al-Tanf army base, within a 55-kilometer deconfliction zone that straddles the border (Lund 2018). At its peak during 2016-2018, up to 85,000 people were estimated to be displaced at Rukban, but the camp's population is now smaller (Pasha 2018). In 2022, estimates were of between 6,000 to 10,000 residents (ECHO 2022).

Figure 1. Map: Rukban and Al-Tanf base. Source: Adesnik, McMaster and Taleblu 2019

Conditions at Rukban have been dire since establishment (Christou 2021). Despite extreme needs, humanitarian action has not scaled accordingly (Pasha 2018). Limited shelter, extreme water pollution, high ambient temperatures, and, initially, virtually non-existent waste disposal (Allawi 2017; Al-Mashareq 2016) have driven major health issues, unmatched by affordable

access to healthcare and medicine during the study period (Al-Mashareq 2016; Christou 2021). Pregnant women faced particularly heightened health risks, including multiple reported instances of maternal and infant mortality due to insufficient medical attention (Lucas 2018; Lucas 2019).

Figure 2. Satellite image of Rukban. Source: Asharq Al-Awsat 2018

In addition to the site's remoteness and security considerations, challenges to aid deliveries were due largely to the complex politics and unclear legal norms governing the area (Lund 2018). The Jordanian government asserts that residents are displaced within Syria, making them IDPs, and thus protection responsibility lies with the Syrian government (Christou 2020). The United States (US) has reinforced that argument (Ibid). Humanitarian assistance from within Syria has been restricted as the camp is in a non-regime-controlled area and most Damascus-based organizations lacked permission to operate there (Alejandria, et al. 2022).

Insecurity, including interference by armed groups with humanitarian action further contributes to the camp's complex humanitarian space (Alejandria, et al. 2022). While the US-led coalition observed the security of the southeastern region of Syria via its Al-Tanf military base, Rukban is not technically part of the coalition's military operation (Han and Rossie 2018). The Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) are also a key actor with responsibility for border security, though not for

securing the camp itself (Alejandria, et al. 2022). Within the camp, rebel factions have attempted to fill this void (Ibid); while risks posed to and by its population are not accurately known, Rukban remains a highly unsafe environment (Simpson 2018). Perceptions of threats posed by residents are partially related to factors of geographic origin (AI17). Both Jordanian and US governments believed ISIS members and their families were residing amongst civilians there (Neely and Jaber 2017); however, given both governments' limited access, Simpson (2018, 18) alleges security policy has been "based on conjecture, not evidence." People displaced from Syrian areas without tribal affiliations to Jordan, such as Deir ez-Zur, were perceived as more dangerous than others simply because they were "people not known to Jordan" (AI17).

This context means that no state has consistently taken responsibility for Rukban's population, making humanitarian space for operations highly contingent on several governments, affiliated security actors, and a range of other armed groups (Alejandria, et al. 2022). As the Assad regime has regained control of Syrian territory, there is justified concern over forcible returns of this population to regime-controlled areas, including documented cases of returnee abuse (Amnesty International UK 2021). Despite select instances of successful humanitarian action, the camp encapsulates for some the international community's failure to *sustainably* overcome political gridlock to meet humanitarian imperatives in Syria (Han and Rossie 2018).

4.2. Key events shaping humanitarian space in Rukban during 2014-2020

In contrast to the highly researched Azraq and Za'atari refugee camps in Jordan, there is limited scholarly literature about the humanitarian situation at Rukban (Simpson 2018). As one respondent put it: "Rukban is engulfed in official secrecy" (AI18). Fundamental data, such as the number of residents and the assistance reaching them, have been difficult to capture (Simpson 2018). International media attention has fluctuated, although overall it has declined over time (AI20), while national and international advocacy groups have maintained attention to the crisis via camp contacts (AI15). According to one well-positioned journalist and humanitarian activist, humanitarians are reluctant to share information on the record because of risks of being denied humanitarian access by state actors (AI20). While others believe this is due to risks of exposing the limitations of the international, and particularly the UN, aid response (AI18).

Acknowledging such limitations, Table 2 outlines a timeline of key events related to humanitarian access and action in Rukban during the study period: 2014-2020. Information from interviews and secondary sources was triangulated for precision.

Table 2. Key events in Rukban, 2014 – 2020

Date	Context / Event
Summer 2014	Forcibly displaced Syrians begin to settle in Rukban (Pasha 2018)
2014	ICRC provides basic services at the border (AI11)
September 2015	Russia officially intervenes in the conflict and conducts airstrikes in opposition held areas (BBC News 2015)
November 2015	Jordanian authorities grant access for the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to provide basic services (AI1)
March – June 2016	MSF establishes mobile clinics for children under five and pregnant women on the Jordanian side of the border (MSF 2016) Jordan allows 20,000 asylum seekers to relocate from Rukban to Azraq camp in Jordan (Arraf 2016) after a direct request from US President Barack Obama to HE King Abdullah of Jordan (AI2)
June 2016	Number of displaced people at Rukban exceeds 60,000 (UNHCR 2022) ISIS claims responsibility for suicide attack near the Al-Tanf military base (Sweis 2016). Jordan closes its border and international aid provision is blocked (Ibid).
August 2016	International humanitarian organizations successfully negotiate access for, and begin, cross-border aid deliveries via crane (one-off distributions) (WFP 2016)
November - December 2016	Number of displaced people at Rukban estimated at 85,000 (Rainey 2016) Resumption of limited humanitarian assistance by the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, UNICEF, and WFP (UN 2016). The UN begins construction of health clinic near Rukban on the Jordanian side of the border (Alejandria, et al. 2022)

December 2016	Syrian regime retakes Aleppo, giving the regime control over Syria's four largest cities (BBC News 2017) Explosion at an aid distribution center at the edge of the camp (AI12).
May 2017	ISIS claims responsibility for two car bombs in Rukban, killing at least six people (Reuters Staff 2017)
July – October 2017	Cross-border humanitarian aid is halted as Jordan advocates for crossline assistance from Syria (Hajzmanova 2017)
January 2018	UN undertakes aid delivery based on exceptional approval by Jordanian government (UN 2018)
October 2018	UN relief convoy fails to reach Rukban via Damascus (Parker 2018)
Mid 2018	Regime regains control over most of southern Syria (AI6). Reported diplomatic signs of rapprochement of relations between the Government of Jordan (GoJ) and the Syria regime (Ibid)
November 2018 - February 2019	Two UN/SARC aid convoys reach Rukban via Damascus (OCHA 2019) The UN conducts an intentions survey (to understand camp residents' desire to return to regime-held areas) during the second convoy (Ibid)
2019 – 2020 (ongoing)	Evacuations of Rukban residents to regime-controlled areas begin (AFP 2019)
September 2019	After 10 months of negotiation following the first two convoys, two further UN/SARC convoys reach Rukban via Damascus (AI11; OCHA 2019)
October 2019 – 2020	No aid delivered via Damascus (Chistou 2021)
March 2020	UNICEF clinic on Jordanian side of the border shut down due to COVID-19 (The New Arab 2020)
April 2020	Jordan stops delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance citing COVID-19 risks (Omari 2022)

As the timeline highlights, humanitarian access to the Rukban camp, while always restricted, has fluctuated, underpinned by access negotiations that varied in terms of participation and even location, shifting from Amman in 2014 to Damascus from January 2018. The table hints that broader political and military trends intersected with practical access realities. Further, the timeline critically sheds light on extended periods during which the population went without international humanitarian support. Deepening understanding of how this context and these events influenced the humanitarian space(s) of the camp, the ways humanitarian actors responded to and shaped this space, and what this illuminates about humanitarian space and micro-space theories is the remainder of this dissertation's focus.

5. Findings and discussion

This section first details findings from 20 semi-structured interviews with humanitarian actors involved in the Rukban response during the study period. It discusses the extent to which findings strengthen or reduce support for humanitarian space and micro-space theories, and tensions between the two frameworks. Findings and related analysis are grouped according to the two research questions (RQ) and organized according to key theoretical components.

On RQ 1, part 5.1 describes how humanitarian actors balanced humanitarian principles and political, operational, and security realities at the field-level, while part 5.2 explores this at higher-levels of negotiations. On RQ 2: part 5.3 discusses the development of distinct yet overlapping and shifting humanitarian micro-space(s) in Rukban, part 5.4 examines their competitiveness and exclusivity, part 5.5 considers the continuous negotiation strategies and relationships required to maintain them, and part 5.6 summarises result implications for humanitarian negotiations in conflict contexts and for the specific population of IDPs.

RQ1: How did humanitarian actors navigate the humanitarian space of Rukban camp from 2014 - 2020 to provide protection and assistance to IDPs?

5.1. Field level: flexibility in operations and negotiations

Interviewees indicated that navigating the complex humanitarian space in Rukban required logistical flexibility and compromise regarding the physical and security environment, but particularly to balance humanitarian principles with political realities and their influence on access and operations at the field-level.

5.1.1. Logistics

Respondents identified logistical adaptations reflecting Rukban's physical environment, remoteness, extreme temperatures, and security context. The lengthy journey from Amman to Rukban, for example, included hours on unpaved, rocky tracks, creating transportation and programmatic costs (AI6; AI2; AI 4; AI 8; AI 12; AI 16). Ultimately several UN agencies and INGOs established more proximate service delivery and temporary field offices in nearby Ruwaished town or mobile clinics near Rukban (Ibid).

Humanitarian relocation closer to Rukban created its own challenges and required adjustments (AI3 AI4; AI8; AI12). For example, when providing medical services, one respondent noted that while certain procedures were non-negotiable (such as temperature-control requirements for vaccine storage), other compromises were acceptable, such as JAF's requirement for night-time medical resupplies due to security risks (AI3). One interviewee noted the logistical compromises of operational flexibility: "we could only do what we physically could without any access to these people or data about them" (AI10), while others discussed their principled implications: "we were strictly instructed about what we could do and how…this was not independent" (AI5).

Staffing and protection protocols were adapted to the context (AI2; AI12). This was critical for local staff working with INGOs in Syria, where cooperation with rebel factions is illegal (AI2). Operational strategies for ensuring confidentiality and security are not detailed in this research for the same security reasons.

5.1.2. Partnerships

Humanitarian organisations responded flexibly to official restrictions on local partnerships (AI4; AI5; AI6; AI9). In Jordan, several respondents shared frustrations at GoJ's restrictions preventing partnerships with more diverse national and local organizations (AI4; AI9), while others cited the drawbacks of working with government-approved (often security affiliated) private contractors with misaligned incentives (AI1; AI12). Some stressed the utility of partnering with groups like Syrian pro-opposition civil society movements and tribal authorities, who had better camp access, while recognizing possible limitations considering different actors' distinct objectives (AI1; AI2; AI6). One interviewee noted challenges of working with SARC, given its reputation as an "auxiliary arm of the [Syrian] regime", which risked undermining trust with camp residents (AI2). One mitigating tactic was holding community meetings without SARC when requested and feasible (Ibid).

Despite this tactical flexibility with partners, respondents described the need for clear "operational redlines" for such engagements (AI1; AI2; AI16). For example, if adequate aid monitoring was not provided, including in relation to principled and impartial aid delivery, relationships were terminated (AI1; AI2).

5.1.3.   Field-level negotiations

Respondents noted that field-level negotiations required understanding of the local context of Rukban, and Jordan and Syria more broadly (AI2; AI5; AI9). For example, knowledge of different tribes and their locations at the site, their prior Syrian locations, intra- and inter-tribal relationships, and tribal standing in relation to security stakeholders involved in the camp, was vital, especially in planning and delivering aid (AI2; AI8).

Several respondents flagged, however, that having local staff with pre-existing knowledge about and relationships in the camp was not a turnkey solution for effective field-level analysis or negotiation (AI9; AI12; AI2). One respondent asserted that local security advisors were hired purely for their JAF connections, despite many lacking remote risk-management experience (AI12). Another international staff member highlighted that local staff members' networks were as important as their technical skills, and ability to leverage those relationships was critical for progressing frontline negotiations (AI9). Further, they felt that INGOs inadequately supported field-level staff, including on documenting and sharing lessons learned (Ibid).

5.2. National and international level negotiations and advocacy

Respondents reflected that the power imbalance between humanitarian stakeholders and governments felt most extreme during national or international negotiations (AI1; AI9; AI5; AI6): "you have absolutely no power…you are coming and asking for something, begging even" (AI1). Certain negotiation strategies and tactics were considered more effective than others; both are detailed below.

5.2.1.   Effective strategies and tactics

Jordan-side respondents noted that high-level advocacy was *always* most effective via a "back-door" or "behind the scenes" approach (AI1; AI6; AI9). This often meant simultaneously following "proper procedures" and "etiquette" with formal institutions while finding "the right people" to affect change (AI5; AI9). "I would go to the official meetings, and put in my requests, but I knew that this would not do anything…I needed to go meet people one to one" (AI1). Only in these more private

contexts did humanitarians feel comfortable making stronger appeals to government counterparts, including warnings of reputational risks associated with their inaction (AI9).

Many interviewees emphasized political "acumen" required to conduct strategic and contextual analysis to guide high-level negotiations (AI2; AI5). For example, according to one Syria-side respondent, decisions about aid convoys were ultimately taken by "the security apparatus in Damascus, in coordination with Moscow" (AI2). They also noted the importance of an "operations mindset" (AI2; AI12; AI16) and of backing arguments with data (AI5; AI6; AI9) and even personal anecdotes (AI1; AI2). Capacity to efficiently assess logistical feasibility and communicate effectively to high-level political audiences was therefore crucial for developing a convincing case for assistance (Ibid). Again, intersections and interdependences between field and high-level negotiations were stressed.

Respondents indicated the importance of redlines for such high-level negotiations, while also understanding the constraints on their counterparts (AI1; AI5; AI6): "security was a legitimate concern for them [GoJ]…if you went into a negotiation without truly understanding and acknowledging that, and everything Jordan had done for refugees, the discussion would fail" (AI5). Interviewees noted that leveraging these redlines could support the implementation of more principled assistance (AI1; AI2; AI3). For example, one respondent spoke about the UN's leveraging of regime pressure to support returns of Rukban residents to other areas of Syria, to negotiate another aid convoy with an accompanying 'intentions survey' about potential returns (AI2). The UN used resulting information to urge the regime to provide safer return environments (Ibid). This example demonstrates intersections between high-level negotiations and practical field-level access realities, and how the latter can influence the former, and even other humanitarian spaces outside of Rukban.

5.2.2. Ineffective strategies and tactics

While there was less discussion of ineffective practices than successful ones, several interviewees were candid in acknowledging limitations of long-term, sustainable negotiation strategies: "I can't say that anything has worked because the situation has not improved, and we have been talking about it for years" (AI15).

On the Jordan side, the most widely discussed ineffective negotiation strategy was "naming and shaming" the GoJ (AI1; AI6; AI5; AI9; AI11). This included taking a "stance of attack" in

negotiations, particularly when grounding arguments in humanitarian principles and IHL (AI5). Respondents working from both sides also noted the risks of pressing too hard in discussions. These included "access harassment…like being shut out of project approval cycles" (AI9). One respondent remarked that with such access fragility in Syria, humanitarians had to tread lightly when discussing Rukban to avoid risking access elsewhere (AI2).

Another lesson was that repetition caused an argument's relevance to fade for key audiences, (AI1; AI6; AI9). One international donor respondent noted that repeated advocacy limited the ability to raise other points or issues with host government counterparts (AI6).

RQ 2: How do humanitarian actors' strategic and tactical responses challenge or confirm humanitarian space theory, specifically the conceptual development of a humanitarian 'micro-space'?

5.3. Distinct yet overlapping and shifting humanitarian spaces

Negotiating humanitarian access in Rukban from both sides of the border was described as consistently restricted, but *all* respondents indicated that access oscillated between 2014 and 2020 and differed in nuanced ways between Syria- and Jordan-sides. This section discusses how such fluctuation created distinct yet overlapping and fluid humanitarian spaces in Rukban: a Jordan micro-space and Syria micro-space.

5.3.1.   Jordan micro-space

Following a period when IDPs could cross into Jordan to receive services from aid organizations located near the border, Jordan-side interviewees working from 2014-2016 noted progressively more constrained access as the camp grew and GoJ insisted on more infrastructure to ensure "security and crowd control" (AI5). According to one interviewee, it was only after donors agreed to support GoJ's demands for greater security measures around 2015 that access discussions gained traction and the space for humanitarian action expanded (Ibid).

Several Jordan-side respondents highlighted 2016 as a critical year. One the one hand, more INGOs were operating diverse services remotely near Rukban and a "breakthrough opening" (AI9) saw approximately 20,000 IDPs relocated into Azraq camp to seek asylum (Ibid). Shortly thereafter, however, an ISIS-claimed bombing at the border led to "the door slamming about

discussions on access" (AI9; AI15). Negotiations between the UN and GoJ continued in "fits and starts" through 2017, until it felt like a "truly closed issue" by early 2018 (AI9).

At the higher-level, security was overwhelmingly cited by GoJ for its restrictions (AI5; AI9). The main implication of security-related challenges (perceived and actual) cited by Jordan-side interviewees was being unable to directly access affected populations (AI1; AI3; AI10: AI12). Eventually this led to a "truck and chuck approach" (AI9), whereby humanitarians would bring aid trucks to the border, and then use indirect means to transport aid across, including through private contractors or by lifting supplies into Rukban using cranes (Ibid). For those in need of urgent medical assistance and approved to cross into Jordan, the security paradigm "created a convoluted vetting process…that either denied people [services] by default or was so difficult that they stopped trying" (Ibid). This indicates how humanitarian responses to security conditions contributed to humanitarian space evolution on the Jordanian side of Rukban, and specific ways in which affected populations accessed and experienced services there.

Multiple local and international respondents highlighted that international funding had both positive and negative effects on humanitarian space (AI6; AI9; AI12: AI16; AI17). An increase in annual US aid to Jordan from $660 million to $1 billion in 2015 was cited as key to unlocking the Rukban conversation, particularly on transfer of asylum seekers to Azraq camp (AI9). Around this time more INGOs received approval to engage at Rukban (AI12). One interviewee noted there was "always a pretty unabashed transactional narrative in these conversations" (AI9). However, others felt funding influxes, combined with domestic and border security risks, meant that attention ultimately shifted away from smaller, acute humanitarian situations like Rukban, as INGOs began winning awards for large resilience projects in Jordan viewed more favorably by GoJ (AI11). These "prickly situations…got lost in the funding narrative" (Ibid).

A final cited driver of access fluctuations in Jordan was the overall direction of the Syria conflict, particularly Assad's retaking of southern territory (AI5; AI6; AI11). Interviewees felt that this advance enabled Jordan's emphasis that "Rukban was now a Damascus problem" (AI9). While the humanitarian space in Rukban from the Jordanian side was distinct in the many ways discussed, it was also overlapping with and dependent on events inside Syria.

5.3.2.   Syria micro-space

During the same access fluctuation period in Jordan (2014-2018), Syria-side respondents assessed that "access [to Rukban] wasn't even on the table" (AI2). While Jordan-side respondents highlighted an increasing downward trend in space for humanitarian action, other interviewees thought this closure of cross-border assistance created the necessary leverage to begin crossline operations from inside Syria (Ibid; AI3).

Geopolitical considerations were cited as the overwhelming determinant of crossline access at Rukban (AI2; AI5; AI6; AI9; AI11). One interviewee perceived that Rukban was used by the Russian and Syrian governments to "point the finger at the US" for failing to aid a population within reach of their military base, and delays in approval were in part to prove this point (AI2). The regime's eventual intervention in 2018 supported its political case to the international community that Syria was becoming more stable and worthy of reconstruction funding (Ibid). A Jordan-side respondent likewise assessed that infrequent Damascus convoys were used by both governments to underline the camp was a "Damascus issue", that assistance was possible from that side of the border, and therefore the GoJ was not responsible for, and should not, intervene (AI9). This again highlights close and shifting interdependencies between negotiations taking place around each of these distinct spaces in Rukban.

Once crossline assistance became an option in 2018 and 2019, Syria-side humanitarian space continued to fluctuate, including during the convoy trips themselves (AI2). One interviewee who managed negotiations for and participated in the two initial UN/SARC convoys from Damascus asserted that the first was notably more challenging (Ibid). After establishing in-person contact with camp stakeholders, better understanding first-hand the needs on the ground, and documenting lessons learned, the interviewee felt humanitarian space was expanded during the second convoy, ensuring a more effective operation (Ibid). Humanitarian action was therefore not passively constrained by humanitarian space, but actors in the convoy actively *created* space through continuous negotiation with varied security and civilian counterparts during their journey; and in doing so shaped space for future humanitarian action.

5.3.3.   Discussion

By assessing access shifts, drivers of these changes, and how they relate to each other on both sides of the border, it is evident that overall humanitarian space in Rukban shifted, notably from

Jordan to Syria in 2018, and overlapped in both distinct, yet interdependent micro-spaces, each rooted in their hyper-localized contexts – the first defining feature of the theoretical framework. Interviews also highlighted how the environment in and around Rukban was multifaceted and fluid, with many actors involved on each side respectively. They indicate that unclear legal frameworks, and how different actors leverage this ambiguity, drives micro-spaces' multifaceted nature. In this case, arguments rooted in claims of the population's internally displaced status, rather than as refugees as asylum seekers, had clear implications for the distinct methods and parameters of humanitarian action on each side of the border. Interviews thus affirm the conceptual claim that there is no single humanitarian space in conflict contexts, but rather a "patchy landscape" of different spaces (Kool, et al. 2021, 1494), experienced differently by affected populations, even within the same 55-kilometer geographic perimeter of Rukban.

5.4. Competitiveness and exclusivity

In general, respondents asserted that power over the Rukban situation was held by the Jordanian and Syrian governments on their respective sides of the border: "they controlled everything" (AI5). The humanitarian space in Rukban was thus by default exclusive. In both Jordan and Syria, respondents noted that outside of UN agencies and, in the Jordanian case, select INGOs, only "pre-approved" partners were permitted (AI17). Importantly, very few national organizations were involved in the response, and according to one local interviewee, no national organizations were "invited to the high-level negotiation table" (AI16). A local INGO staff member working in Jordan during 2014 also noted that in this context even INGOs were competing "to prove their relevance" (AI12). He believed this drove his organization's engagement in Rukban, despite internal assessments that found its services were not urgently required at the time, and that they faced heightened operational and safety risks due to their Christian public profile (Ibid).

With engagement inside the camp highly controlled, access to information drove competition amongst implementing agencies and organizations approved to work at Rukban (AI1; AI10; AI12). Only a minority of organizations had on-the-ground access to camp populations (AI12). In one interviewee's experience, those with more access did not act as coordination focal points with or in support of other actors (Ibid). This lack of cooperation affected security (Ibid). As an extreme example, the respondent shared that his organization's supply storage unit was attacked by ISIS, something he felt might have been mitigated by greater coordination and more "eyes and ears on the ground" (Ibid). The organization subsequently closed Rukban operations (Ibid).

This type of competition was perceived to be intensified by the prominent role of private contractors in cross-border deliveries (AI10). One respondent stated that during one period "the border was basically owned and run by a contractor who was ex-Jordanian intelligence with connections to the highest levels" (AI5). Another respondent working for a national contractor noted that "at the end of the day, this was a procurement competition...We were not comfortable sharing information with other organizations" (AI10).

There were also competitive tensions between Syria-side and Jordan-side organizations (AI2). One interviewee noted that according to SARC, INGOs providing cross-border aid were violating Syria's sovereignty and were perceived to be supporting opposition groups (Ibid). However, the UN and SARC in Syria relied on information provided from Jordanian organizations with more direct experience in Rukban, leading to a dependence of sorts on these counterparts (Ibid). Jordan-side respondents noted that some of the information competition was alleviated as coordination structures were established, such as the Jordan and Syria INGO Forums, founded in 2014 and 2013 respectively (AI9; AI11).

5.4.1. Discussion

Interviews thus mostly affirmed the second defining micro-space feature, demonstrated by both strong government control over humanitarian stakeholders involved, and in the organizational practices between those approved to engage. Interviews highlight how such competition led to trade-offs, in terms of the humanitarian partnerships developed and heightened organizational security risks within this unstable environment. However, in contradiction to the framework, some respondents, notably those in senior management positions more removed from frontline negotiations, believed the extreme difficulties of Rukban enhanced rather than deterred humanitarian coordination (AI1; AI3).

5.5. Continuous negotiation and renegotiation and trust-based networks

As discussed in relation to RQ1, field level and national and international negotiations were critical for navigating the Rukban humanitarian space. The theoretical framework posits it is the *continuous* negotiation and *renegotiation* and the central role of localized trust-based networks, in expanding and protecting humanitarian space, that distinguishes micro-spaces. This dynamic was strongly affirmed by interviews. One respondent noted: "every actor we had to engage with had 100 reasons for opposing our convoy plan, including opposing it for the sake of opposing it. It was about going back and forth over, and over again" (AI2). In Syria, even once agreement was

reached in principle, "reality on the ground", including local authorities' security assurances, might slow progress (Ibid). Postponing operations became routine, while humanitarian actors continued advocating for their importance (Ibid). This was mirrored in Jordan. One respondent noted that "unending options" for service provision were provided to the Jordanian army (AI1). Some were preliminarily approved, and then rejected without reason, often within short timeframes (Ibid). This meant revisiting and proposing new options or returning to previous arguments in the hopes of their reconsideration (Ibid).

The role of localized trust-based networks in these ongoing negotiations, at both the field and national and international levels, was underscored (AI1; AI10; AI12). At the field level, this was primarily in relation to community and tribal networks inside the camp (Ibid). But networks were equally important in higher-level dialogues, and crucially, respondents noted it was important to build relationships at multiple levels simultaneously (AI1; AI5). For example, in negotiating access for the 2016 crane-drop, one Jordan-side respondent said he had to build relationships with ambassadors representing major government donors, and even with senior members of the Jordanian Royal Family to secure influence and approvals (AI1). At the same time, his relationship with the military brigadier overseeing the operation at Rukban was key to ensure the plan went forward (Ibid). It was through this brigadier that the respondent secured a drone borrowed from the military to oversee the operation, after a formal request to import the organization's own equipment was denied (Ibid).

5.5.1. Discussion

On balance, these findings support the framework's third defining feature. This was amongst the most discussed topics by respondents throughout the study period and on both sides of the border. The study thus further highlights the utility of a micro-level analysis to better understand the practical details of these dynamics, which were thought in some instances to depend even on the attitudes of specific individuals and their personal networks.

5.6. Implications of results: utility of the micro-space theoretical framework

In sum, research findings align with and build on Kool, et al.'s (2021) micro-space framework in several significant ways. They do not, however, uniformly, and comprehensively align with it. In certain instances, responses reflected elements of more traditional conceptualizations of humanitarian space. Evidence, for example, challenges the authors' notion that high-level

multilateral forums are irrelevant to humanitarian micro-spaces, which they instead assert are dominated by local conditions and bargains that enable access (Kool, et al. 2021).

Interviews did shed light on the critical and powerful role of frontline actors and context; yet in the deeply politicized situation in Rukban, higher-level advocacy, national contexts, and even geopolitics also played significant intersecting roles. Results thus suggest material interconnectedness between multiple layers of humanitarian space, including micro-level (field-level), meso-level (national-level) and macro-level (international and geopolitical) dynamics. In part this was due to the extreme exclusivity of Rukban micro-spaces, where national organizations were sometimes denied access altogether, while UN, INGO, and security actors were privileged. This aspect further highlights the utility of a micro-level study to understand the "mesh of diverse landscapes of conflict," dominated by security and political imperatives (Kool, et al. 2021; Pospisil 2022, 123).

To this end, interviews demonstrated how, far from being an "ungoverned phenomenon" (Kool, et al. 2021), humanitarian micro-spaces at Rukban were constructed by these politicized incentives, leaving IDPs caught between states of asylum and origin (Pasha 2018). Rukban demonstrates just how far-reaching government and military control can be during conflict, even while claims of weak or non-existent governance – in this case, the asserted existence of a "no man's land" (Christou 2021) – are used to abdicate responsibility and obligations under international law, rather than expand humanitarian access.

Finally, while findings show fluctuations of humanitarian micro-spaces, and thus contradict the idea of a single, linear shrinking humanitarian space, critically, interviewees did indicate an *overall downward trend* in their ability to engage and operate in Rukban from both sides during this study period. Findings thus highlight the limits to negotiating humanitarian solutions when "the humanitarian imperative and welfare of a people is rarely part of this calculation" (Kool, et al. 2022, 1499). This, in turn, points to the continuing need for political resolutions to these profound tragedies (Collinson and Elhaway 2012).

6. Conclusion

As humanitarian stakeholders navigate increasingly complex and protracted geopolitical conflicts (Chehayeb 2022) and the number of IDPs rises (IDMC 2021), this research aimed to elucidate how humanitarian actors concretely *respond*, strategically and tactically, to these challenges, and

the implications for affected populations. It used theory testing methods to highlight how specific humanitarian negotiations and operations, when analyzed at a micro-level scale, underline the utility of the emerging humanitarian 'micro-space' concept and challenge some of the dominant theories about humanitarian space.

On balance, primary research found that humanitarian space, particularly related to access, is multifaceted, exclusionary, and can indeed shift over time and vary depending on when, where, and by whom it is negotiated (Kool, et al. 2021) even within the same geographic area. Humanitarian micro-spaces were shaped by both operational and security realities, but also by the methods and functioning of a humanitarian system incentivized by donor funding and thus dependent on "the nature of the interests that motivate the behavior of governments" (Brett 2016, 3). As one respondent put it: "this is the greatest humanitarian compromise I have ever seen in my career" (AI11) a sentiment echoed by others (AI5; AI9).

This study's evidentiary support for humanitarian micro-space theory implies several consequences for humanitarian actors engaging in such spaces. First, as humanitarian stakeholders in conflict contexts are "always trying to carve out an insufficiently ideal humanitarian space," (AI2) they must reflect on the appropriate, shifting balance between principles and pragmatism. Second, findings demonstrated new skill sets that humanitarians need to engage in simultaneous and diverse levels of negotiation (Kool, et al. 2021) and with the different partners that the environment, and its governing actors, might mandate.

The analysis also extends micro-space theory by noting critical interconnections between micro, meso, and macro humanitarian spaces. Given the negotiated, exclusionary, multifaceted, overlapping, and shifting nature of each, humanitarian actors may be most effective by intentionally integrating efforts across all three levels. And most critically, the research and micro-space theory demonstrate that affected populations' experiences vary greatly, dependent on even their individual positioning within the physical and conceptual micro-spaces. Greater understanding of, and accountability to, these truly micro-level experiences may support more effective humanitarian action in complex crises, which increasingly require both cross-border and crossline operations (AI5; AI13).

This study had several limitations and highlighted important areas for further research. First, comparative analysis of Rukban with other besieged or "hard-to-reach" areas in Syria and

elsewhere would strengthen the micro-space framework's assertion that the concept provides unique insight into humanitarian spaces of contemporary conflict contexts. Further, limited attention in the literature as to how the profile of humanitarian actors might influence negotiation outcomes (Alsalem and Grace 2021), and this study's own limited inclusion of gender diverse participants demonstrates a need for additional studies to further deepen the vital understanding of humanitarian space in conflict contexts. Finally, greater incorporation of local partner and affected population perspectives would bolster findings about the interconnected relationship between localized negotiations and national or international dynamics, which can be critical to understanding rapidly shifting political and conflict environments (Pospisil 2022).

Appendix

Appendix A: Anonymized List of Interview Participants

Details removed for publication.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Topic	Questions
Relevant interviewee background	• Can you briefly describe your organization's role in relation to humanitarian action in Rukban? What were they trying to achieve in being involved? • To what extent and how were you involved in or aware of access negotiations for Rukban? • During what period (exact years / months) were you working on humanitarian aid / access in relation to Rukban? • Can you briefly describe your role within your organization while working on the Rukban response?
Context in Rukban	• Can you describe the situation at the camp during this period? What were the conditions you were working under? • Who were the main actors with whom you had to discuss access at the camp? How was this similar or different to other humanitarian situations you have worked in? • How difficult were those discussions? In what ways? Can you specify? To what extent did politicization impact those conversations and their difficulty?
Politics & humanitarian principles	• How were the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity tested as part of these negotiations? • To what extent were the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity upheld?
Strategies and tactics	

	• What were the specific practices and approaches that you think supported progress in negotiations/aid delivery? Which proved less useful? • How did you establish trust and build relationships in this context with different stakeholders involved in and granting access? • How did the insecurity and politicization of this space shape these practices? *(Expand: how dangerous was it? How important was confidentiality?)* • What risks did this politicization create for your operation and how did you manage those risks? (Security, privacy, reputational, fiduciary) • How did your own identity/positionality impact your ability to do this work? • What professional skills were required for this work? What skills did you have or wish you had had? • To what extent was qualitative and quantitative evidence influential in these negotiations? Can you give examples?
Temporality in the camp	• How did access to the camp evolve over time? What drove these changes (key events, issues)? To what extent were these changes driven by domestic and international political factors relative to other determinants? • Did you find that resistance to or cooperation with your work fluctuated? And if so, what local circumstances were involved? • How did you experience these changes? In what way did you/your organization adapt to these circumstances?
Coordination and partnerships *(Tailor questions depending on respondent profile, i.e., national vs. INGO or UN)*	• Did your organization partner with Syrian organizations (e.g., national and local NGOs, the Local Council in Rukban?) If so, how? OR: Did your organization partner with international organizations? If so, how? • Were you limited or restricted in your choice of partners? If so, what constraints were most salient?

	• What were the advantages and disadvantages of working with those groups? What were they able to achieve that your organization was unable to? • What goals were you unable to achieve because of any restrictions on your partnerships? • How did you coordinate with other humanitarian actors in this space? What were these dynamics like in practice?
Applicability to other conflict contexts?	• How much of your experience in relation to negotiation access in politicized context is transmissible to other parts of Syria or in other contexts? What did you learn from this experience that changed or could change the way you approach other humanitarian negotiations in conflict constrained situations? • How did this experience improve your tactical or strategic flexibility?
Snowballing *(Not Recorded)*	• Are there any partners or individuals, particularly from national organizations, that you think I should speak to and you would feel comfortable connecting me with?

Bibliography

Abdulrahim, Raja. 2013. "Humanitarian aid beyond the reach of many Syrians." *Los Angeles Times*, March 29.

Abild, Erik. 2010. "Creating Humanitarian Space: A Case Study of Somalia." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (UNHCR) 29 (3): 67-102.

Acuto, Michele. 2014. "Introduction: Humanitarian Puzzles." In *Negotiating Relief: The Politics of Humanitarian Space*, by Michele Acuto, 1-21. London: Hurst & Co Ltd.

Adesnik, David, LTG (Ret.) H.R. McMaster, and Behnam Ben Taleblu. 2019. "Burning Bridge: The Iranian Land Corridor to the Mediterranean." *The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD).* 18 June. https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2019/06/18/burning-bridge/.

AFP. 2019. "UN to 'facilitate evacuations from Syria desert camp." *France24*, August 30.

Alejandria, Maria Carrines P., Samuel T. Boland, Hank Brightman, Rob Grace, Adam C. Levine, Alexandria J. Nylen, David Polatty, and Zein Tayyeb. 2022. *Humanitarian-Military Relations in Complex Emergencies: Evidence, Insights, and Recommendations.* Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University.

Allawi, Yasser. 2017. "Inside Rukban Camp, One of Syria's Most Desperate Settlements." *The New Humanitarian, Refugees Deeply.* October 30. https://deeply.thenewhumanitarian.org/refugees/articles/2017/10/30/inside-rukban-camp-one-of-syrias-most-desperate-settlements-2.

Al-Mashareq. 2016. "Syrian refugees 'relieved' as Jordan resumes water delivery to al-Rukban." *Al-Mashareq.* July 21. https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2016/07/21/feature-03.

Alsalem, Reem, and Rob Grace. 2021. *The Humanitarian Leader: Diversity and Humanitarian Negotiation.* Burwood: Centre for Humanitarian Leadership.

Amnesty International. 2016. "Syrian and Russian forced targeting hospitals as a strategy of war." *Amnesty International.* March 3. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2016/03/syrian-and-russian-forces-targeting-hospitals-as-a-strategy-of-war/.

Amnesty International UK. 2021. *Syria/Jordan border: refugees at acute risk if returned to Syria under new UN plans.* September 10.

Arraf, Jane. 2016. "Syrian refugees suffering on Jordan's border." *Al Jazeera*, July 22.

Asharq Al-Awsat. 2018. "UN Aid Convoy Reaches Remote Rukban Camp in Syria." *Asharq Al-Awsat.* November 3. https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/1448276/un-aid-convoy-reaches-remote-rukban-camp-syria.

Associated Press in Washington. 2014. "Isis holding 26-year-old American aid worker hostage, family says." *The Guardian*, August 26.

Audemard, Julien. 202. "Objectifying Contextual Effects. The use of Snowball Sampling in Political Sociology." *Bulletin de Methodologie Sociologique* 145: 30-60.

—. 2015. "Syria crisis: Russian air strikes against Assad enemies." *BBC News.* September 30. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-34399164.

Berti, Benedetta. 2016. "Syria's Weaponized Humanitarian Space." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.* July 6. https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64023.

Brassard-Boudreau, Cynthia, and Don Hubert. 2010. "Shrinking Humanitarian Space? Trends and Prospects on Security and Access." *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance.*

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3: 77-101.

Brett, Edwin A. 2016. *Explaining aid (in)effectiveness: The political economy of aid relationships.* Working Paper Series, No. 16-176, London: London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Department of International Development.

Callimachi, Rukmini, and Adam Goldman. 2019. "ISIS Kidnapped Her 5 Years ago. The Red Cross Thinks She May Still Be Alive." *The New York Times*, April 14.

Carter, Will. 2014. "Negotiation humanitarian access in souther Afghanistan: communication, complexity, and coordination." *Humanitarian Exchange.*

Carter, William, and Katherine Haver. 2016. *Humanitarian access negotiations with non-state armed groups: internal guidance gaps and emerging good practice.* Resource Paper from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme, Humanitarian Outcomes.

Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation. 2017. *Second Annual Meeting of Frontline Humanitarian Negotiators.* Final Report, Geneva: Frontline Negotiations.

Chehayeb, Kareem. 2022. "For Syrian survivors, Russia's tactics in Ukraine eerily similar." *Aljazeera*, March 16.

Chistou, William. 2021. *Stuck in No-Man's Land: A Snapshot of the State of Al-Rukban in its Seventh Year.* Gazientep: Operations & Policy Center (OPC).

Christou, Will. 2020. "US Envoy to Syria: 'No change in troop presence in Syria' whether Biden or Trump wins." *Syria Direct.* November 2. Accessed July 8, 2021. https://syriadirect.org/us-envoy-to-syria-no-change-in-troop-presence-in-syria-whether-biden-or-trump-wins/.

Clements, Ashley Jonathan. 2018. *Frontlines of Diplomacy: HUmanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups.* Docterate Dissertation, Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC.

Clements, Ashley Jonathan. 2018. "Overcoming Power Assymetry in Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups." *International Negotiation* 23: 367-393.

Cohen, Roberta. 2006. "Developing an International System for Internally Displaced Persons." *International Studies Perspectives* (Blackwell Publishing) 7: 87-101.

Collinson, Sarah, and Samir Elhawary. 2012. *Humanitarian Space: A Review of Tends and Issues.* London: Overseas Development Institute.

Collinson, Sarah, James Darcy, Nicholas Waddell, and Anna Schmidt. 2009. *Realising Protection: the Uncertain Benefits of Civilian, Refugee, and IDP Status.* London: Overseas Development Institute.

Cunningham, David E., Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan. 2013. "Non-State Actors in Civil Wars: A New Dataset." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 30 (5): 516-31.

Dalton, Melissa. 2017. "Addressing a Humanitarian Crisis in a Collapsed Region." By Rebecca K.C. Herman, 10-24. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Deardorff Miller, Sarah. 2017. *Political and Humanitarian Responses to Syrian Displacement.* Oxford: Routledge.

Dickson-Swift, Virginia A., Erica James, Sandra Kippen, and Pranee Liamputtong. 2007. "Doing sensitive research: what challenges do qualitative researchers face?" *Qualitative Research* 7 (3): 327-353.

Dieckhoff, Milena. 2020. "Reconsidering the humanitarian space: complex interdependence between humanitarian and peace negotiations in Syria." *Contemporary Security Policy* 41 (4): 564-586.

Doyle, Bernie, Vicky Tennant, and Raouf Mazou. 2010. *Safeguarding Humanitrian Space: A Review of Key Challenges for UNHCR.* UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service.

Duclos, Diane, Abdulkarim Ekzayez, Fatima Ghaddar, Francesco Checchi, and Karl Blanchet. 2019. "Localisation and cross-border assistance to deliver humanitarian health services in North-West Syria: a qualitative inquiry for the Lance-AUB Commission on Syria." *Conflict and Health* 13 (20): 1-10.

ECHO. 2022. "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations: Fact Sheet." *European Commission.* May 10. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east/jordan_en.

Ekzayez, Abdulkarim, and Ammar Sabouni. 2020. "Targeting Healthcare in Syria." *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 2 (2): 3-12.

Elkahlout, Ghassan, and Kareem Elgibali. 2020. "From Theory to Practice: A Study of Remotely Managed Localised Humanitarian Action in Syria." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 235-249.

Elkahloutu, Ghassan, and Kareem Elgibali. 2020. "From Theory to Practice: A Study of Remotely Managed Localised Humanitarian Action in Syria." *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 15 (2): 235-249.

Ferris, Elizabeth, and Kemal Kirisci. 2016. "The Consequences of Chaos: Syria's Humanitarian Crisis and The Failur to Protect." Brookings Institute Press.

Fradejas-García, Ignacio. 2019. "Humanitarian remoteness: aid work practices from 'little Aleppo'." *Social Anthropology* 27 (2): 286-303.

George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in Social Sciences.* Cambridge: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

Giesen, Peter, and Reinoud Leenders. 2015. *Review of the Netherlands' contribution to the humanitarian response to the Syria Crisis: 2011-2014.* Internal Inspection Humanitarian Assistance, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Gil, Gabriela. 2019. *Humanitarian Negotiations & Humanitarian Principles: The interaction between humanitarian negotiations for access and organizations' ability to adhere to humanitarian principles.* Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, SIT Graduate Institute.

Glaser, Max P. 2005. *Humanitarian Engagement with Non-State Armed Actors: the Parameters of negotiated Access.* London: Humanity Policy Group, Oversease Development Institute.

Gordon, Stuart, and Antonio Donini. 2015. "Romancing Principles and Human Rights: Are Humanitarian Principles Salvageable?" *Interantional Review of the Red Cross* 97 (897/898): 77-109.

Grace, Rob. 2017. "Humanitarian as Negotiator: Developing Capacity Across the Sector." Humanitarian Negotiation Working Paper Series Paper #2.

Grace, Rob. 2015. *Understanding Humanitarian Negotiation: Five Analytical Approaches.* ATHA White Paper Series: Harvard University.

Guttieri, Karen. 2005. "Humanitarian Space in Insecure Environments: A Shifting Paradigm." *Strategic Insights* 4 (11).

Haer, Roos, and Inna Becher. 2011. "A Methodological Note on Quantitative Field Research in Conflict Zones: Get Your Hands Dirty." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 15 (2): 1-13.

Haid, Haid. 2019. *Principled Aid in Syria: A Framework for International Agencies.* Research Paper, London: Chatham House.

Hajzmanova, Ivana. 2017. "Syrians at the Berm: Surviving in Nightmarish Conditions and With an Uncertain Status." *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.* October. https://www.internal-displacement.org/expert-opinion/syrians-at-the-berm-surviving-in-nightmarish-conditions-and-with-an-uncertain-status.

Han, Aisha, and Rachel Rossie. 2018. "Whhy the situation in Rukban is deteriorating." *Atlantic Council, Syria Source.* December 5. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/why-the-situation-in-rukban-is-deteriorating-2/.

Hayes, Sarah. 2016. *Dismantling the Humanitarian Fortress: Presence, Access, and Risk in the 'Syria Response'.* Global Migration Research Paper, Geneva: Global Migration Centre, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

Herrero, Soledad. 2014. "Negotiating Humanitarian Access: Between a Rock and a Hard Place." *Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection (blog).* February 11.

Howe, Kimberly, and Elizabeth Stites. 2019. "Partners under pressure: humanitarian action for the Syria crisis." *Disasters* (Overseas Development Institute) 43 (1): 3-23.

Human Rights Watch. 2015. *Jordan: Syrians Blocked, Stranded in Desert: Satelite Imagery Shows Hundres in Remote Border Zone.* April 20. https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/03/jordan-syrians-blocked-stranded-desert.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center. 2021. *Global Report on Internal Displacement.* IDMC.

Ismail, Zinoba. 2018. *Humanitarian Access, Protection and Diplomacy in Besieged Areas.* K4D.

Jackson, Ashley. 2014. *Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Non-State Actors: Key Lessons from Afghanistan, Sudan, and Somalia.* Briefing Paper, London: Overseas Development Institute.

Jacobsen, Karen, and Loren B. Landau. 2003. "The Dueal Imperative in Refugee Research: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Social Science Research on Forced Migration." *Disasters* 27 (3): 185-206.

Jansen, Bram J., and Dorothea Hilhorst. 2010. "Humanitarian Space as Arena: A Perspective on the Everyday Politics of Aid." *Development and Change* 41 (6): 1117-39.

Kenner, David. 2012. "Assad's War on the Red Crescent." *Foreign Policy*, December 12.

Kool, Lisa Dorith, Jan Pospisil, and Roanne Van Voors. 2021. "Managing the Humanitarian Micro Space: the Practices of Relief Access in Syria." *Third World Quarterly* 42 (7): 1489-1506.

Kostovicova, Denisa, and Eleanor Knott. 2020. "Harm, change and unpredictability: the ethics of interviews in conflict research." *Qualitative Research* 22 (1): 56-73.

Kraft, Kathryn, and Jonathan D. Smith. 2019. "Between international donors and local faith communities: Intermediaries in humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon." *Disasters* 43 (1): 24-45.

Kvale, Steinar, and Svend Brinkmann. 2009. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing.* SAGE Publications, Inc.

Lucas, Scott. 2019. "Another Woman and Her Newborn Son Die in Syria's Rukban Camp." *EA Worldview.* June 7. https://eaworldview.com/2019/06/another-woman-and-her-newborn-son-die-in-syrias-rukban-camp/.

—. 2018. "Syria Daily: Trapped - the Pregnant Women in the Rukban Camp." *EA Worldview.* October 6. https://eaworldview.com/2018/10/syria-daily-trapped-the-pregnant-women-in-the-rukban-camp/.

Lay, Timothy. 2021. *ACLED 2021: The Year in Review: March 2022.* ACLED.

Lund, Aaron. 2018. *Blame Game over Syrians Stranded in the Desert.* The Century Foundation.

Macrae, Joanna. 1998. "Death of Humanitarianism?: An Anatomy of the Attack." *Disasters* (Overseas Development Institute) 22 (4): 309-317.

Macrae, Joanna, and Nicholas Leader. 2000. *Shifting sands: the search for 'coherence' between political and humanitarian responses to complex emergencies.* London: Overseas Development Institute.

Magone, Claire, and Michael Neuman. 2011. *Humanitarian Negotiations Revealed: The MSF Experience.* London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd.

Mahmoud, Zuhour. 2016. "Protests in Solidarity with Aleppo Spread Worldwide." *The New Humanitarian*, May 3.

Mancini-Griffoli, Deborah, and André Picot. 2004. *Humanitarian Negotiation: A Handbook for Securing Access, Assistance, and Protection for Civilians in Armed Conflict.* GEneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre).

Margesson, Rhoda, and Susan G. Chesser. 2013. *Syria: Overview of the Humanitarian Response.* CRS report for Congress, Congressional Research Service.

Margesson, Rhoda, and Susan G. Chesser. 2015. "Syria: Overview of the Humanitarian Resposne." *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 6 (3): 563-594.

McLoughlin, Paul. 2020. "Syria Weekly: Conditions worsen in Syria's forgotten refugee camp." *The New Arab.* April 26. https://english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/syria-weekly-conditions-worsen-syrias-forgotten-refugee-camp.

McHugh, G., and M. Bessler. 2006. *Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups: A Manual for Practitioners.* New York: UN OCHA.

McKernan, Bethan. 2019. "Syrian regime targets hospital and refugee camp, killing at least 22." *The Guardian*, November 21.

Meininghaus, Esther. 2016. "Humanitarianism in intra-state conflict: aid inequality and local governance in government and opposition-controlled areas in the Syrian war." *Third World Quarterly* 37 (8): 1454-1482.

Meininghaus, Esther, and Michael Kuhn. 2018. *Syria: Humanitarian Access Dilemmas.* Berlin/Bonn: Welt Hunger Hilde.

Metcalfe, Victoria, Alison Giffen, and Samir Elhawary. 2011. *UN Integration and Humanitarian Space: An Independent Study Commissioned by the UN Integration Steering Group.* London: Overseas Development Institute.

Mills, Kurt. 2013. "Constructing Humanitarian Space in Darfur." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 17 (5-6): 605-618.

Medecins Sans Frontieres. (2016). *International Activity Report.* MSF.

Neely, Billy, and Ziad Jaber. 2017. "ISIS Inflitrates the Rukban Refugee Camp at Jordan-Syria Border." *NBC News.* May 8. https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/isis-infiltrates-rukban-refugee-camp-jordan-syria-border-n750206.

Nowell, Lorelli S., Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules. 2007. "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods (SAGE)* 16: 1-3.

OCHA. 2019. *UN in Syria and SARC provide humanitarian relief to thousands of internally displaced Syrians in Rukban.* The United Nations.

Omari, Raed. 2022. "Jordan lets humanitarian aid enter Syrian refugee camp." *Arab News*, June 10.

Orchard, Phil. 2010. "Protection of internally displaced persons: soft law as a norm-generating mechanism." *Review of International Studies* 36 (2): 281-303.

Orchard, Phil. 2016. "The Contested Origins of Internal Displacement." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 28 (2): 210-233.

Parker, Ben. 2018. "Syria-Jordan: relief convoy fails to reach 'desperate' border camp." *The New Humanitarian*, October 26.

Pasha, Suraina. 2018. "Violence, Insecurity and the (Un)making of Rukban Camp." *LSE Blogs.* https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/02/19/violence-insecurity-and-the- unmaking-of-rukban-camp/.

Patel, Preeti, Kristen Meagher, Nassim El Achi, Abdulkarim Ekzayez, Richard Sullivan, and Gemma Bowsher. 2020. ""Having more women humanitarian leaders will help transform the humanitarian system": challenges and opportunities for women leaders in conflict and humanitarian health." *Conflict and Health* 14 (84): 1-15.

Pospisil, Jan. 2022. "Dissolving Conflict. Local Peace Agreements and Armed Conflict Transitions." *Peacebuilding* 10 (2): 122-137.

Rainey, Venetia. 2016. "Dire conditions for Syrian refugees on Jordan's border." *Al Jazeera*, December 24.

REACH. n.d. *REACH Resource Center, Syria.* https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/country/syria/theme/camp/cycle/27810/?toip-group=data&toip=dataset-database.

Reuters Staff. 2017. "Car bombs kill at least six in Syrian camp near Jordan border." *Reuters*, May 15.

Richardson Jané, Paula, and Yannick A. Meyer. 2021. *Upholding the Humanitarian Principles in Conflict Areas - Challenges and Compromises: The Cases of Syria and Afghanistan.* Doctoral Dissertation, Sweden: Lund University.

Rieffer-Flanagan, Barbara Ann. 2009. "Is Neutral Humanitarainism Dead? Red Cross Neutrality: Walking the Tightrope of Neutral HUmanitarianism." *Human Rights Quarterly* (The Johns Hopkins University Press) 31 (4): 888-915.

Roisin, Shannon. 2009. "Playing with Principles in an Era of Securitized Aid: Negotiating Humanitarian Space in Post-9/11 Afghanistan." *Progress in Development Studies* 9 (1): 15-36.

SACD. 2021. *Weaponization of Aid: Interference and Corruption, Syrian Regime's Methods of Control of Humanitarian Sector.* Syrian Association for Citizens Dignity.

Schenkenberg van Mierop, E. 2016. *The Challenges of Localised Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict.* Emergency Gap Series 03, Medecins Sans Frontiers.

Schenkenberg van Mierop, Ed. 2018. *Local Humanitarian Actors and the Principle of Impartiality.* Berlin: Centre for Humanitarian Action.

Schrepfer, Nina. 2018. "Protection in Practice: Protecting IDPs in Today's Armed Conflicts." *International Journal of REfugee Law* 30 (2): 292-306.

Security Council Report. 2022. "Syria Humanitarian Briefing." *Security Council Report.* May 19. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2022/05/syria-humanitarian-briefing-8.php.

Shannon, Róisín. 2009. "Playing with principles in an era of securitized aid: negotiating humanitarian space in post-9/11 Afghanistan." *Progress in Development Studies* 9 (1): 15-36.

Sida, Lewis, Lorenzo Trombetta, and Veronic Panero. 2016. *Evaluation of OCHA response to the Syria crisis.* UN OCHA.

Simpson, Charles. 2018. "Competing Security and Humanitarian Imperatives in the Berm." *Forced Migration Review* 57: 15-18.

Sparrow, Annie. 2016. "How the United Nations' OCHA Helped Assad and Hurt Syrians in Need." *Foreign Affairs*, February 1.

Stoddard, Abby, Shoaib Jillani, John Caccavale, Peyton Cooke, David Guillemois, and Vassily Klimentov. 2017. "Out of Reach: How Insecurity Prevents Humanitarian Aid from Accessing the Neediest." *Stability: International Jordan of Security & Development* 6 (1): 1-25.

Svoboda, Eva. 2017. *The anatomy of local negotiations.* Policy Brief, Humanitarian Policy Brief, London: Overseas Development Institute.

Svoboda, Eva, Veronique Barbelet, and Irina Mosel. 2018. *Holding the keys: humanitarian access and local organisations.* London: Overseas Development Institute.

Sweis, Rana F. 2016. "ISIS Is Said to Claim Responsibility for Attack at Jordan-Syria Border." *The New York Times*, June 27.

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. 2014. *Humanitarian Access in Situations of Armed Conflict: Practitioner's Manual.* Version 2., Geneva: Swiss FDFA.

Szybala, Valerie. 2015. *Slow Death: Life and Death in Syrian Communities Under Siege.* Syrian American Medical Society.

Tammi, Iida-Maria. 2022. "The Humanitarian Frame of War: How Security and Violence are Allocated in Contemporary Aid Delivery." *Third World Quarterly* 43 (5): 963-978.

Tarakji, Ahmad, Naser Almhawish, and Rohini Haar. 2021. "Opinion: A new type of accountability can help restore dignity for Syrians." *Devex.* April 7. https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-a-new-type-of-accountability-can-help-restore-dignity-for-syrians-99585.

Tennant, Vicky, Bernie Doyle, and Raouf Mazou. 2010. *Safeguarding humanitarian space: a review of key challenges for UNHCR.* Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The New Arab. 2020. "Coronavirus pandemic sparks fears in Syria's besieged Rukban camp." *The New Arab*, March 23.

UN. 2016. "The UN Humanitarian Coordinator In Jordan Announces The Resumption Of Life-Saving Humanitarian Assistance At The Jordanian-Syrian Borders." *United Nations.* November 23. http://un.org.jo/en/news/the-un-humanitarian-coordinator-in-jordan-announces-the-resumption-of-life-saving-humanitarian-assistance-at-the-jordanian-syrian-borders/163.

UN. 2018. *The UN undertakes aid delivery at the Berm based on approval by the Government of Jordan for exceptional delivery of assistance to Syrians.* January 2018.

UNHCR. 2022. *Syria: Flash Update on Recent Events.* The UN Refugee Agency.

UNICEF. 2021. *UNICEF Whole of Syria Humanitarian Situation Report: March 2021.* UN Children's Fund.

United Nations, General Assembly. 2016. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to the Syrian Arab Republic." A/HRC/32/35/Add.2.

United States Government Accountability Office. 2016. "Syria Humanitarian Assistance." Statement of Thomas Melito, Director, International Affairs and Trade.

University of Leeds. n.d. *Grey Literature: What is Grey Literature?*
        https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1110/resource_guides/7/grey_literature.

WFP. 2016. "Cranes Deliver Life-Saving Assistance to Syrians Stranded at Jordanian Border."
        World Food Programme. August 5. https://www.wfp.org/news/cranes-deliver-life-saving-
        assistance-to-syrians-stranded-at-jordanian-border-areas.