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Navigating Green Corridors In Ukraine

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Cover Photo: People flee the military offensive in Ukraine, seeking refuge in Moldova or transiting the country on their way to Romania and other EU countries. Photo by UN Women on Flickr.com.

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Executive Summary

Purpose

This paper examines how humanitarian corridors and volunteer networks effectively facilitated evacuation in Ukraine and thereby enabled voluntary displacement and reduced civilian casualties early in the fighting. It highlights types of humanitarian corridors, civilian outcomes, and how civilian volunteers assumed responsibility for safe evacuations as negotiations failed.

All parties to a conflict must avoid causing displacement; however, as a last resort, displacement is an important means for civilians to protect themselves during armed conflict. This paper seeks to inform U.S. military decision-makers, planners, and forces about options they may have to negotiate humanitarian corridors, facilitate noncombatant evacuation operations, and encourage civilians to leave during large-scale combat operations between conventional armed forces.

Key Takeaways

- Humanitarian corridors **effectively minimized civilian casualties** along the contact line in the Donbas and during the early months of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.
- Humanitarian corridors are **most effective when battle lines are not fixed**. The first months of the war saw the highest number of humanitarian corridors, evacuating the most people. Once Russia faced military setbacks, their willingness to negotiate or agree to humanitarian corridors decreased.
- **Sustained corridors have the safest outcome for civilians**, with only a 1% chance of violence occurring, followed by interim corridors, where the likelihood of violence increases to 18%. However, sustained corridors are relatively rare. Interim corridors require regular adaptation to conflict dynamics and are a more realistic option to pursue.
- Unilaterally pursued and coercive corridors are more likely to lead to negative outcomes, including violations of international humanitarian law, such as violence during transit, forced displacement, and arbitrary detention.
- **Sustained corridors may be most effective in the maritime domain**, with existing mechanisms that limit search and seizure. International organizations, such as the International Maritime Organization, insurance regulators, and adjacent countries can act as guarantors.
- **Only 1.5% of evacuations from Ukraine's eastern regions took place through a humanitarian corridor**. The vast majority made use of private vehicles or volunteer groups that filled an essential gap in the response, but understanding such activity requires further development and standards.

Introduction

When the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation launched a ground invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, an estimated 18.7 million people left their homes; in so doing, they crossed frontlines and the paths of advancing armies.¹ That 18.7 million constituted 60% of global displacement due to conflict in 2022 and added to the 854,000 people displaced since the Eastern Ukraine conflict began in 2014.² Both Russia and Ukraine sporadically agreed to humanitarian corridors, known locally as green corridors, and mobilized volunteer networks to evacuate civilians from areas of conflict. What made for successful humanitarian corridors, and how else did civilians navigate exit from areas of conflict?

This report examines key lessons and challenges for successful evacuation of civilians during large-scale combat operations between conventional armed forces. It is based on an examination of 2,121 cross-frontline movements between September 2015 and July 2023, compiled from publicly available data from Ukraine's Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as 44 interviews conducted during June-August 2023 with officials from the United Nations (UN), United States (U.S.) Government, and frontline responders operating in Ukraine. The report analyzes green corridors in Ukraine in five steps. It reviews the conditions of civilian harm that prompted evacuation, details types of negotiated corridors, examines why both sides agreed to humanitarian corridors, and discusses community-led evacuations. Finally, it lists implications and recommendations relevant for future military operations in the Indo-Pacific region.

Figures 1 through 7 provide snapshots of the stages of the Ukraine conflict.³

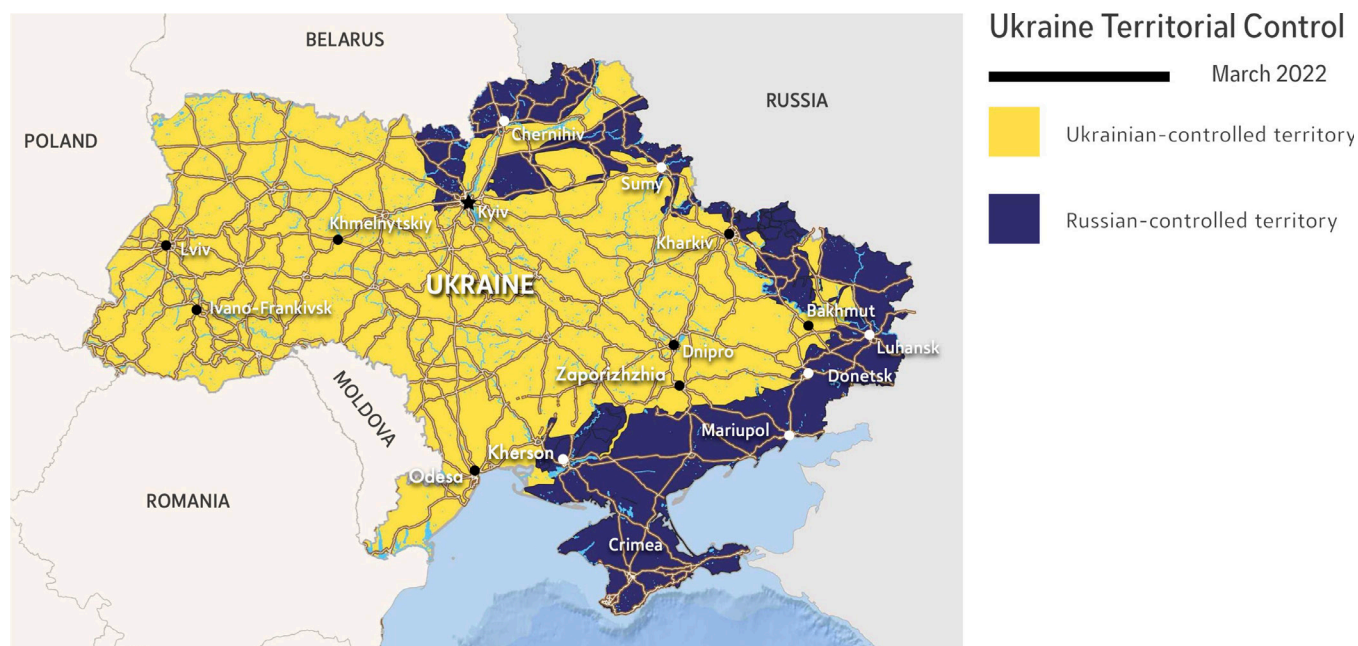


Figure 1: Territorial control of Ukraine in March 2022, the month with the greatest number of green corridors, also when Russia controlled the largest amount of territory.

Sources: Author generated from DeepStateMap.Live, World Food Program, and Humanitarian Open Street Map



Figure 2: 27 February 2014 - Covert Russian forces seized Crimea. On 7 April 2014, fighters from the People’s Republic of Donetsk and the People’s Republic of Luhansk took Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv cities and parts of their surrounding oblasts. On 15 April 2014, the Government of Ukraine launched the Anti-Terrorist Operation to retake territory.

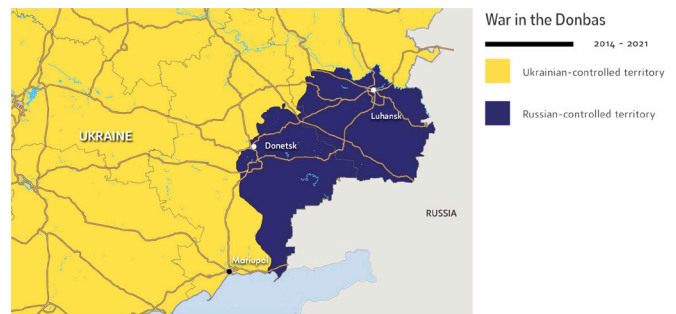


Figure 3: 2014-2021 - Fighting concentrated along the Contact Line. The Government of Ukraine and the People’s Republic of Donetsk and the People’s Republic of Luhansk signed a series of ceasefires in Minsk from 2015 to 2021. On 20 February 2018, the Government of Ukraine launched the Joint Forces Operation, but fighting did little to change territorial control.



Figure 4: 24 February 2022 - Armed Forces of the Russian Federation launched electronic warfare attacks, cruise and ballistic missiles, and airstrikes on Ukraine’s air defenses, and then entered Ukraine from three axes. Russian forces successfully seized Melitopol and Kherson and placed Chernihiv, Mariupol, and Kharkiv under siege.

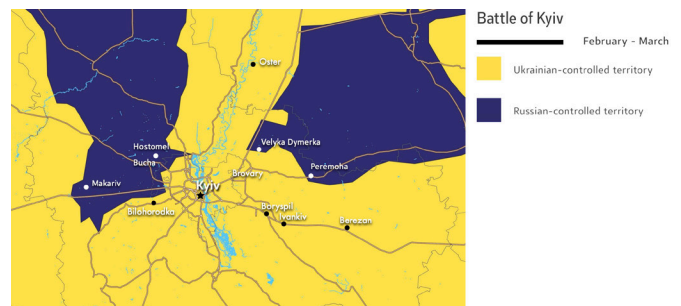


Figure 5: February-March 2022 - Tactical prowess by the Armed Forces of Ukraine stalled the Russian advance on Kyiv, while the Russian offensive from Chernihiv slowed. When it became clear they would not reach Kyiv, the Russian forces attacking the city withdrew in March 2022 to concentrate on the east.



Figure 6: April 2022-May 2023 - Armed Forces of the Russian Federation focused on destroying the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Donbas by pressing its advantage in Mariupol (May 2022), Lysychansk (July 2022), and Bakhmut (May 2023), while Ukrainian forces recaptured Lyman (October 2022), Kherson (November 2022), and much of Kharkiv region.



Figure 7: June 2023 - The Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant was breached while under Russian control; the released waters flooded much of Kherson oblast. On 8 June 2023, the Armed Forces of Ukraine launched a counteroffensive focused on Zaporizhzhia and southern Donetsk region; that counteroffensive continues at the time of writing.

Figures 2-7 Sources: Author generated from DeepStateMap.Live and UN OCHA

I. Deciding to Leave

2014-2021

Millions of Ukrainians left their homes because many of them believed the consequences of staying were worse than the risks on the road. Between 2014 and 2021, at least 1.7 million people were displaced, with the largest number leaving in November 2014 when the Government of Ukraine withdrew pension payments to residents of Non-Government Controlled Areas and when fighting escalated in Mariupol in January 2015.⁴ An estimated 2.6-3 million people chose to stay in areas close to active combat, although they faced the risks of being caught in artillery crossfire, arbitrary detention, and forced disappearance by a myriad of security actors, from Russian and Ukrainian services to militia aligned to each side.⁵ Civilians also faced indirect harm as the contact line separated rural areas under Ukrainian control from city centers under Russian-aligned control, and this separation placed severe stress on the healthcare and education systems that nevertheless continued to operate during the fighting. For example, laboratory facilities, pharmacies, maternity facilities, and major schools were cut off from city centers.⁶ Explosive remnants of war also caused injuries and deaths from the frontline all the way to the Russian border, 90 kilometers (55 miles) away. An area dependent on agriculture was left significantly impoverished.⁷

There is no data available on the harm faced by civilians during the 2014 evacuation, but incidents between 2015 and 2021 show landmines, shootings, and shelling impacted those that moved across frontlines at designated Entry-Exit Checkpoints. Choosing to leave was not necessarily an easy one. Russian-speaking Ukrainians, those predominantly from the East, faced discrimination as they migrated westward, and surveys indicate that, as the war progressed, only 20% of Ukrainians accepted Russian-speakers as family members.⁸ By 2016, less than half of the displaced people, most of them members of displaced families, had regular employment, and they were dependent on social protection mechanisms.⁹

“And what can I do if I travel back and forth? My house in Donetsk has been completely destroyed. I have nowhere to return. And what can I give my children now, what kind of future? Where will they live, where will they marry? Now I have no inheritance for them.”

– Displaced man, 2017

2022 - 2023

In the first month of 2022, 6.5 million people were displaced from frontlines in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Zaporzhzhia to city centers in their respective oblasts, while 3.1 million people left the country as refugees to Poland, Russia, Germany, and several other countries.¹⁰ After the first wave of displaced people had left in cars, trains, and buses, journeys became fraught with shootings and bombings on roads. Advancing armies set up checkpoints and rationed gasoline, and many fleeing people were forced to depend on trains and buses that separated families by prioritizing women and children.¹¹ Even when the displaced arrived at a place of refuge, the air war meant there was no sanctuary to be found, and about one-third of displaced people reported having to displace a second time.¹²

About 35.3 million people chose to remain, and they faced the direct threat of fast-paced conflict and summary executions alongside indirect harm from collapsing health systems and fragile local economies. The escalation in 2022 killed more civilians in the first month of the war (3,918 civilians)

than the previous eight years of fighting combined (877 civilians).¹³ The main driver of civilian casualties was explosive weapons with wide area effects, largely artillery fire in urban areas.¹⁴ This situation may have arisen because military tactics in the war focused on defeating the opponent's precision capabilities, which could include Russian electronic warfare that degraded Ukrainian targeting systems or the use of a smoke grenade to disrupt laser designators that improved the accuracy of a strike. Russian ground forces also depended on widespread artillery fire before advancing and formed consolidated artillery batteries, and the proliferation of unguided shells resulted in hits in civilian areas.¹⁵ These factors meant civilians had few measures they could take to protect themselves when near fighting, and many left as fighting intensified.

Civilians also faced direct targeting. During the initial Russian advance in February-March 2022, Russian forces systematically conducted summary executions of an estimated 441 civilians in 102 towns on the outskirts of Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy. Most notably, Russian forces killed 73 civilians in Bucha, outside Kyiv; many were killed during attempts to evacuate by car from the city. Health structures also faced direct targeting by Russian airstrikes in Izium, Mariupol, Ovruch, Volnovakha, and Vuhledar. Civilians were dependent on rushed medical procedures in basements and had to deliver babies in haphazard operating rooms, as was particularly the case in Kyiv. Russian forces also seized Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plants and damaged renewable energy facilities; these seizures drastically reduced power generation at the height of winter with temperatures averaging 0-5oC (30-40oF).¹⁶

The Russian withdrawal from some areas in April 2022 prompted an estimated 2.8 million people to return to their homes in and around Kyiv and in Kharkiv. About half of those returnees came from far away - outside their oblast or Poland, Germany, and Italy. These returns increased to 5.9 million people by October 2022.¹⁷ However, they arrived to find destroyed housing and infrastructure, collapsing local commerce, and disrupted transport systems, most severely in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Kyiv oblasts.¹⁸

II. Types of Humanitarian Corridors

Humanitarian corridors are **temporary suspensions of hostilities in defined areas**, with **specific terms**, to allow safe passage for civilians to evacuate and to facilitate the delivery of goods. This research primarily focuses on humanitarian corridors for the evacuation of civilians, which has several names. If negotiated with a cessation of hostilities, militaries will refer to them as ceasefires or civilian egress, or as noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) refers to them as humanitarian corridors, the OSCE calls them windows of silence, and in Ukraine they are commonly known as green corridors. These agreements are more likely when military control is more fragmented (no direct, clear frontline) and there is a great power disparity between actors, such that more powerful actors may negotiate terms that benefit their own objectives.¹⁹

This research identifies four kinds of humanitarian corridors in Ukraine: **sustained corridors** with unique, detailed agreements between Russia and Ukraine with specific security arrangements that last multiple days, **interim corridors** without specific arrangements that last a matter of hours and must be re-negotiated among parties each day to remain in effect, **unilateral corridors** when one party to the

conflict declares a corridor without the adversary’s agreement, and **coercive corridors** that amount to the codified surrender and transfer of territory (see Figure 8). The majority of the humanitarian corridors in Ukraine appear to have been sustained corridors that facilitated daily crossings, and they included the eight agreements negotiated through the OSCE as part of the Minsk process, the safe passage from Mariupol negotiated through the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the Black Sea Grain Initiative (see Figure 9). However, during the invasion, interim corridors or green corridors were the most common in the early months of 2022. There are several instances of unilateral corridors, though their effect was limited, and one instance of a coercive corridor in Ilovaik.

Types of Humanitarian Corridors in Ukraine	
Sustained	Detailed agreements with specific security arrangements that last multiple days <i>Examples: Minsk, Mariupol Safe Passage, Black Sea Grain Initiative</i>
Interim	Short-term arrangements without specifics that require daily renegotiation <i>Examples: Windows of Silence, Green Corridors</i>
Unilateral	One side declares a corridor that does not require the adversary’s agreement <i>Examples: Contact Line Phone, Black Sea corridor</i>
Coercive	One side declares a corridor does not require the adversary’s agreement <i>Examples: Withdrawal from Ilovaik</i>

Figure 8: Types of Humanitarian Corridors in Ukraine

Successful evacuation in the context of Ukraine places civilian agency first and foremost. The choice to leave lies with civilians themselves; civilians should not be forced to leave their homes, and they must be allowed to travel to whichever side or location they deem as safe. Evacuation is a last resort, and civilian safety should be protected by all sides of the conflict. These tenets are the basis by which the dynamics and results of each type of negotiated corridor will be explored. The following lessons come from an assessment of the different types of humanitarian corridors.

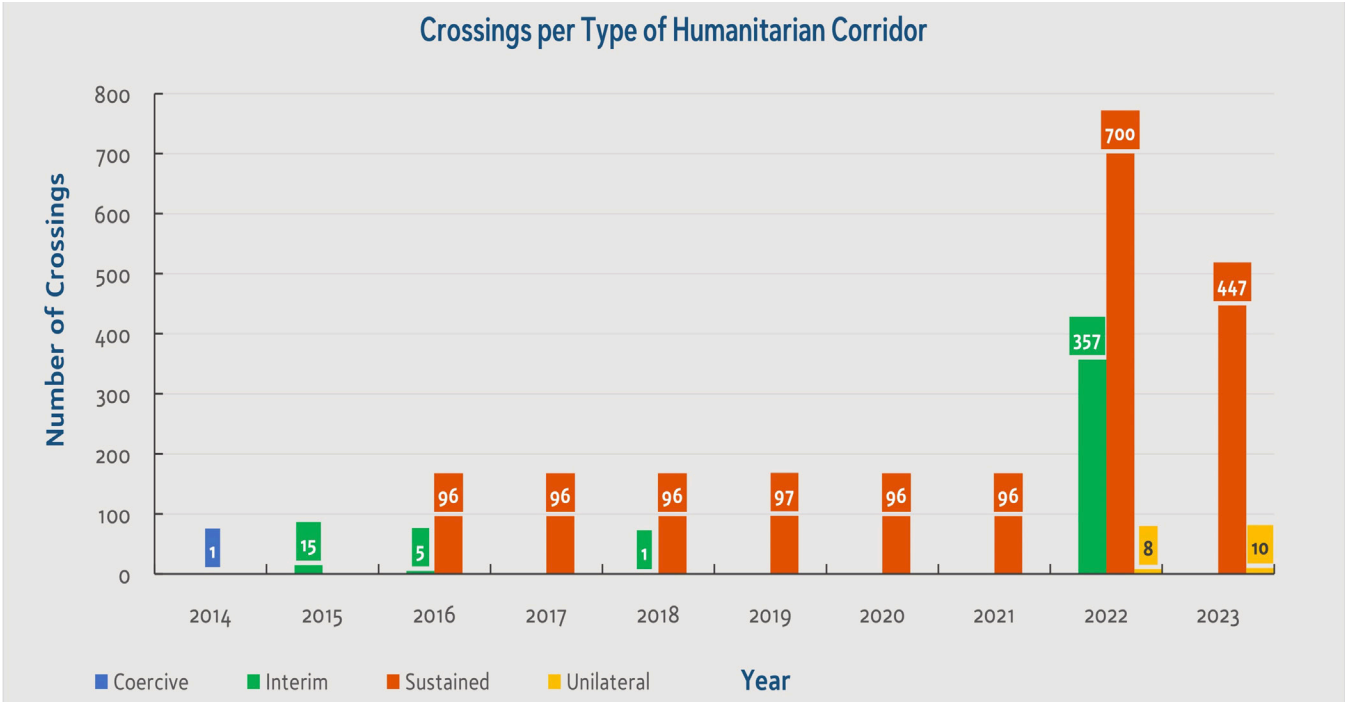


Figure 9: Number of Crossings per Humanitarian Corridor Each Year

Sources: Data compiled by author from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, OSCE, UNHCR, Government of Ukraine Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, Black Sea Grain Initiative, and local media sources.

Sustained Corridors

LESSON: Parties to the conflict agreed to sustained corridors when frontlines solidified, when both parties to the conflict want to boost their standing on the international stage, and when third-party guarantors can strengthen these mechanisms.



Figure 10: OCHA- and ICRC-Facilitated Safe Passage from Mariupol

Sources: Interview with OCHA Civil-Military Coordination, World Food Programme, DeepStateMap.Live, OCHA, Humanitarian Open Street Map

Sustained corridors are unique, detailed agreements with specific security arrangements that last multiple days. The UN-brokered safe passage from Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol in late April and early May 2022 was successful because it capitalized on public attention to convince Russian and Ukrainian militaries to allow the safe passage of 370 civilians, monitored by OCHA and ICRC (see Figure 10).²⁰ On 1 March, the Russians had isolated Mariupol and placed it under siege, and the heavy concentration of artillery fire, airstrikes, and assault groups over the next ten weeks destroyed much the city. Civilians that could evacuate left by green corridors on 15 March, while others took shelter in religious buildings, theaters, and bomb shelters underneath Azovstal.²¹ For many, the biggest obstacle to exiting Mariupol was the minefields that surrounded the town.²² On 16 March, a Russian airstrike killed hundreds of people sheltering in Mariupol's Donetsk Regional Academic Drama, although it had been clearly marked that children were sheltering there.²³ The event prompted an outcry, but the Russians ignored calls for ceasefire and took the rest of the city except for Azovstal.²⁴ By April, soldiers from the pro-Ukraine Azov battalion were also sheltering inside Azovstal, and they used internet delivered by Starlink to publish videos of dire conditions for civilians inside the plant on social media.

The public nature of the situation set the conditions whereby civilians could move out.²⁵ On 26 April, the Secretary-General of the UN, António Guterres, engaged directly with President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation to negotiate the humanitarian corridor; Putin agreed because the deal benefitted the Russian timeline as they wanted civilians out so they could intensify fighting and claim control of Mariupol by

"There is no escape from here. The children have not seen the sun in a month and a half."

– Mother inside Azovstal Steel Plant, 2022

their deadline of 9 May, Victory Day (which ultimately did not materialize).²⁶

The agreement specified that Ukrainian forces would demine the roads while Russian forces would demine a key bridge.²⁷ Once those tasks had been completed, on 1 May, OCHA and ICRC arrived in front of the plant, and people loaded onto buses and passed through a vetting check (filtration) where Russian forces arrested some of them. From there, they went through Russian-controlled territory to the Vasylivka crossing in Zaporizhzhia, the only remaining crossing, and they then proceeded to humanitarian collection centers.²⁸ On 2 and 3 May, OCHA and ICRC loaded people from other areas of the city onto buses, while others followed in cars, and they also crossed to Zaporizhzhia.²⁹ The effort was the single success of OCHA's crossline evacuation efforts, but from then onward, Russia proved unwilling to agree to crossline movements. For example, OCHA subsequently offered to evacuate the town of Oleshky after the Nova Kakhovka dam blast, but Russia refused.³⁰

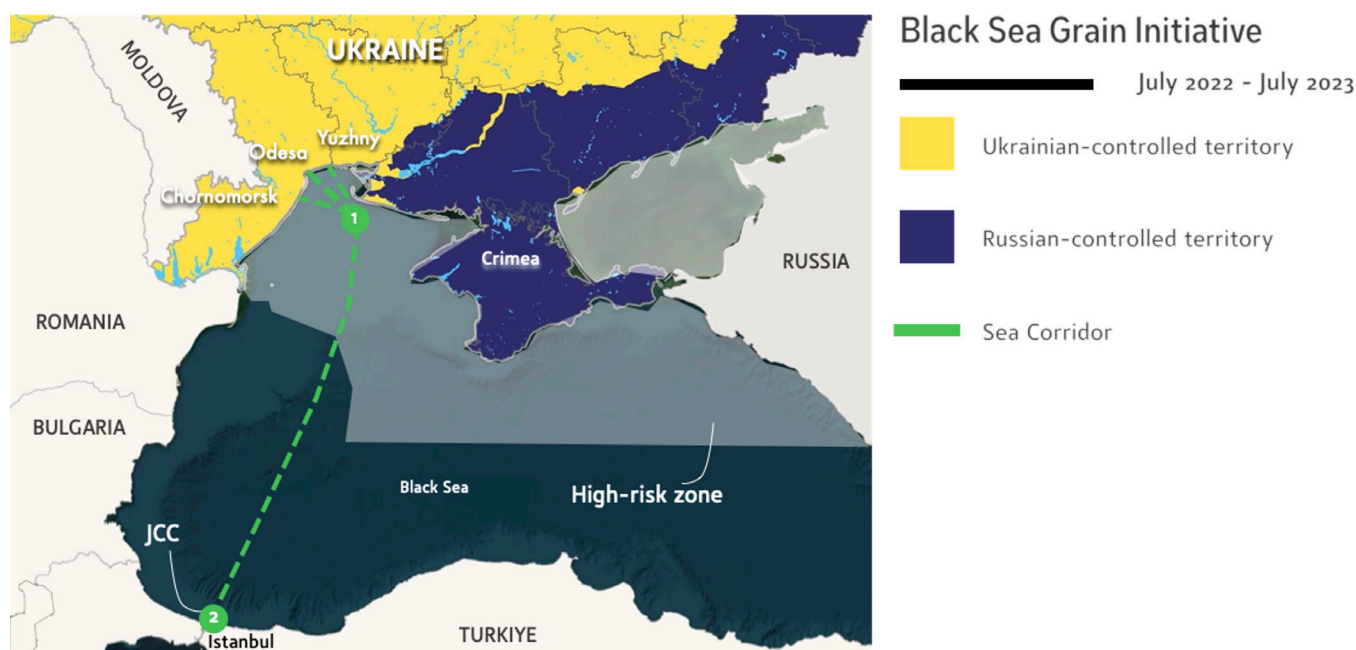


Figure 11: Black Sea Grain Initiative

Sources: Black Sea Grain Initiative, Joint War Committee, DeepStateMap.Live, OCHA, Humanitarian Open Street Map

While not created to facilitate civilian evacuations, the negotiation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative between Ukraine and Türkiye and between Russia and the UN in July 2022 captures similar lessons about the role of third-party guarantors and public scrutiny (see Figure 11). The Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet moved to the Ukrainian coast in February 2022 to launch cruise missiles, and in the course of the fighting, six commercial vessels were struck. Lloyd's of London insurance then designated the Black Sea as a "high-risk zone" on 7 March, and all commercial traffic effectively stopped.³¹ As Ukraine and Russia are major exporters of grain and ferrous metals to markets in Africa, this halt caused prices to rise globally and prompted a visit to Russia by the African Union President to press for a deal.³² Türkiye, as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the country in control of the Turkish straits, and a major importer of Ukrainian grain, mediated between Russia and Ukraine to implement a UN monitoring mission for commercial shipping through the Black Sea. Russia entered into what became known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative because they sought sanctions relief and to expand the export of fertilizer, as well as to increase their standing among Middle Eastern and African nations.³³ Ukraine agreed because the deal allowed them to keep their ports open, and they implemented International Ship

and Port Security Regulations, which required inspections but limited Russia's right to unilaterally search and seize a vessel as they would under the Law of Naval Warfare.

A Joint Coordination Centre (JCC), based in Istanbul and staffed with representatives from Ukraine, Russia, Türkiye, and OCHA, conducted pre- and post-travel inspections of ships and established a specific shipping lane with a buffer zone 10 nautical miles wide. The agreement successfully brought down insurance premiums and encouraged 1,106 voyages and the export of 33 million tons of corn and wheat.³⁴ There was only one clear violation, on 29 October 2022, when Ukrainian naval drones attacked the Russian Navy in Sevastopol, and Russia quickly suspended its participation in the deal until it received assurances from Ukraine and Türkiye.³⁵ The initial agreement lasted for 120 days and was renewed three times, once for a further 120 days and twice for 60 days, but unfortunately the agreement collapsed on 17 July 2023 as Russia publicly and privately stated that they never got sufficient sanctions relief or export of ammonia. One of the reasons for the collapse was due to the structure of the negotiations – i.e., Russia signed a separate agreement with the UN, which never committed Ukraine to allow Russian fertilizer exports or Western nations to relieve sanctions. Russian attacks on Ukrainian ports in August 2023 left commercial ships stranded, and others were boarded, instances that highlight the effectiveness of the deal in preventing previous attacks.³⁶

LESSON: Sustained corridors have the safest outcome for civilians, with only a 1% chance of violence occurring, but they are relatively rare.

Based on data compiled by the author to build a comparison of reports of violent incidents during humanitarian corridors, sustained agreements were associated with fewer violent incidents, with under 1% of sustained corridors experiencing violence as compared with 18% of interim agreements (see Figure 12). They also facilitated more people to cross per single crossing, with a maximum of 588,205 people crossing by substantive agreement (an Entry-Exit Checkpoint in 2018) as compared with 20,000 by interim agreement (a green corridor from Mariupol).

The data shows that sustained corridors accounted for the bulk of population movement across frontlines from urban areas, particularly in the Donbas between 2018 and 2021.³⁷ Civilians established five crossing points across the contact line, known as Entry-Exit Checkpoints: Stanytsia Luhanska, Maiorske, Marinka, Novotroitske, and Hnutove, and three from Crimea - Kalachank, Chaplynka, and Chonhar - later formalized and administered by authorities on each side of the conflict (see Figure 14).³⁸ Close to 100,000 people transited each month,

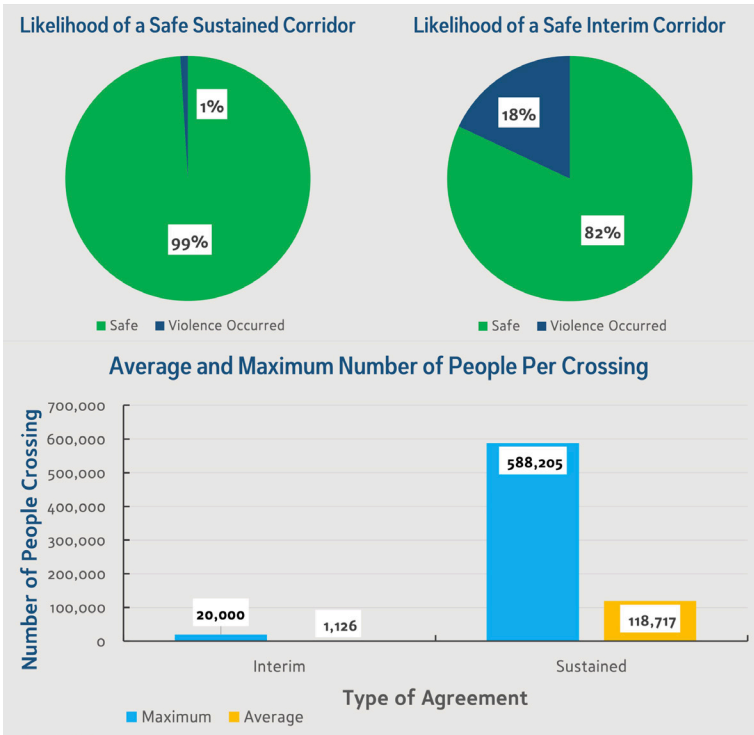


Figure 12: Civilian Outcomes by Corridor Type
Sources: Data compiled by author from the OSCE, UNHCR, Government of Ukraine Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, Black Sea Grain Initiative, and local media sources.

although both sides limited crossings during the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁹ Between 2014 and 2020, the Government of Ukraine and the Russian Federation negotiated eight ceasefire packages in Minsk under the auspices of the OSCE, and although the ceasefires lasted less than a day, there was a meaningful reduction in civilian casualties after their negotiation.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, Russia has increasingly withdrawn from multilateral humanitarian negotiations globally. On 11 July 2023, Russia vetoed re-authorization of cross-border aid to North West Syria and on 17 July, they withdrew from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The Humanitarian Notification System, established by OCHA to notify parties to the conflict of humanitarian movements and facilities, had operated 32 times without Russian acknowledgement, and in late July 2023, the Russian Federation formally withdrew from the mechanism.⁴¹ The prospects for continued sustained agreements are unlikely.

Interim Corridors

LESSON: Interim corridors, negotiated bilaterally between parties to the conflict, are most effective when battle lines are not fixed.

Interim corridors are **short-term agreements** (lasting several hours) **without specific arrangements** and that must be **re-negotiated each day**. Green corridors, negotiated primarily in March and April 2022 between the Government of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, were successful while Russian forces were advancing and believed they had the upper hand. For example, evacuations in Sumy took place in multiple stages (see Figure 13). Roads were open a few hours before the Russians took control, and negotiations between city and village councils and Russian troop commanders led to green corridors that successfully allowed thousands of people to leave, partly because neither side had complete control.⁴² By 8 March, Ukraine and Russian officials had held two rounds of talks in Belarus, and they agreed to a green corridor in Sumy on 9 March; it reportedly evacuated 5,000 civilians.⁴³

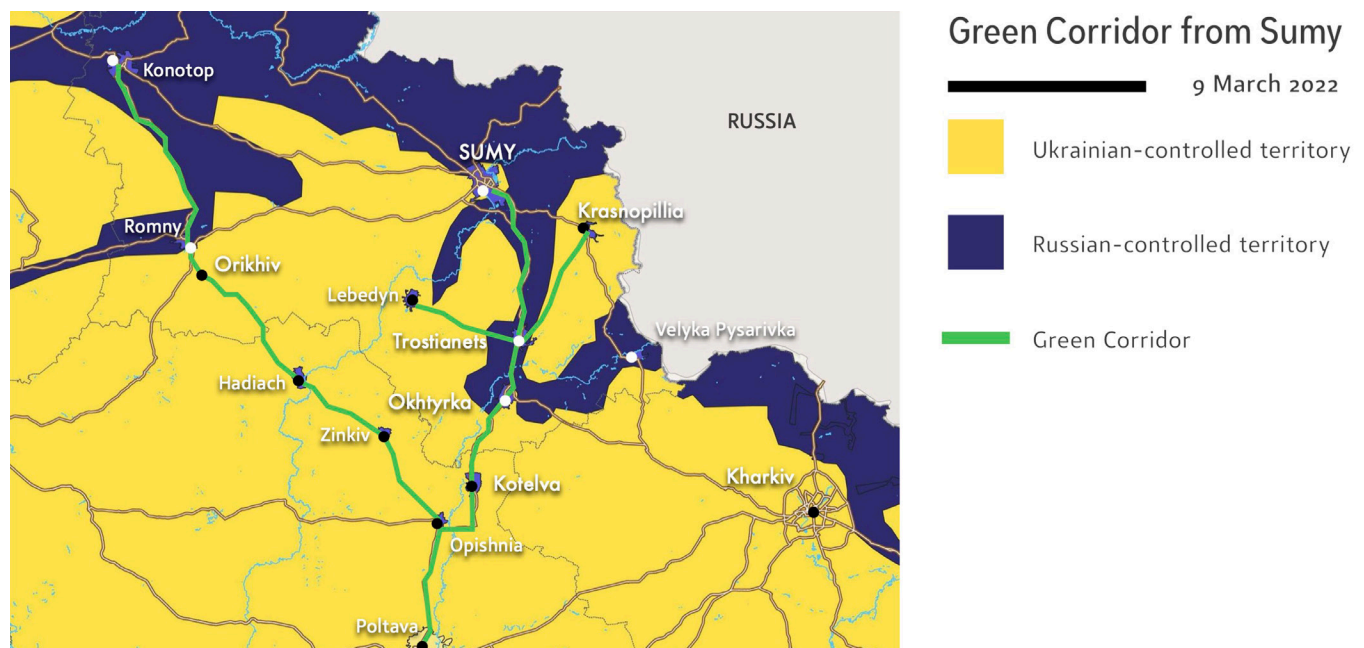


Figure 13: Green Corridor from Sumy

Sources: Interview with conflict analyst in western Ukraine, interview with Ukrainian IDP from Sumy, DeepStateMap.Live, World Food Program, OCHA, Humanitarian Open Street Map

By contrast, the siege of Mariupol in March 2022 had a similar number of stages, but each failed to achieve large-scale evacuation. Few civilians were able to evacuate before the implementation of negotiated corridors, and on 6 March, Mariupol authorities tried to unilaterally evacuate civilians on buses, but there were attacks on the buses.⁴⁴ On 7 and 8 March, the Russian Ministry of Defence offered two official routes for exit: a route to Rostov-on-Don in Russia and a route through Zaporizhzhia to territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine. On 14 March, Ukrainian forces offered evacuation routes for citizens in Mariupol, and although they offered buses and shelter upon arrival, most people chose to use private vehicles or move on foot.⁴⁵ Out of the 35 corridors opened up in Mariupol over the course of the war, 20% had incidents where Russian forces fired on evacuating civilians, and as the siege closed in on the city, it prompted the substantive agreements described above.⁴⁶

“Those of us in Sumy trusted international news more than national news. We made a plan and packed up ahead of time.”

—Ukrainian man who evacuated from Sumy, 2023

LESSON: Interim corridors were most successful when both parties to the conflict agreed to address specific challenges confronted by the civilian population.

In an example that predates Russia’s 2022 invasion, between 2014 and 2018, the OSCE’s “windows of silence” formed short ceasefires that capitalized on civilian demands for critical repairs to infrastructure when neither party to the conflict could find a way to do it themselves, and there were minimal negative incidents (see Figure 14). While the Minsk ceasefires rarely lasted more than a day, they served as a framework to enable OSCE to negotiate windows of silence directly between Russian and Ukrainian commanders in order to remove civilians stuck in no man’s land between crossings, to recover wounded, to repair electricity, and to exchange prisoners. In one instance, the arrangement allowed workers to clean out the sewage system of a pig factory. Once a task was set, OSCE officials negotiated for a halt to hostilities along a designated area in the contact line through the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination, a joint Russian and Ukrainian initiative, and they launched mirror patrols, with OSCE officials accompanying each commander to relay messages to each other indirectly. Sometimes,

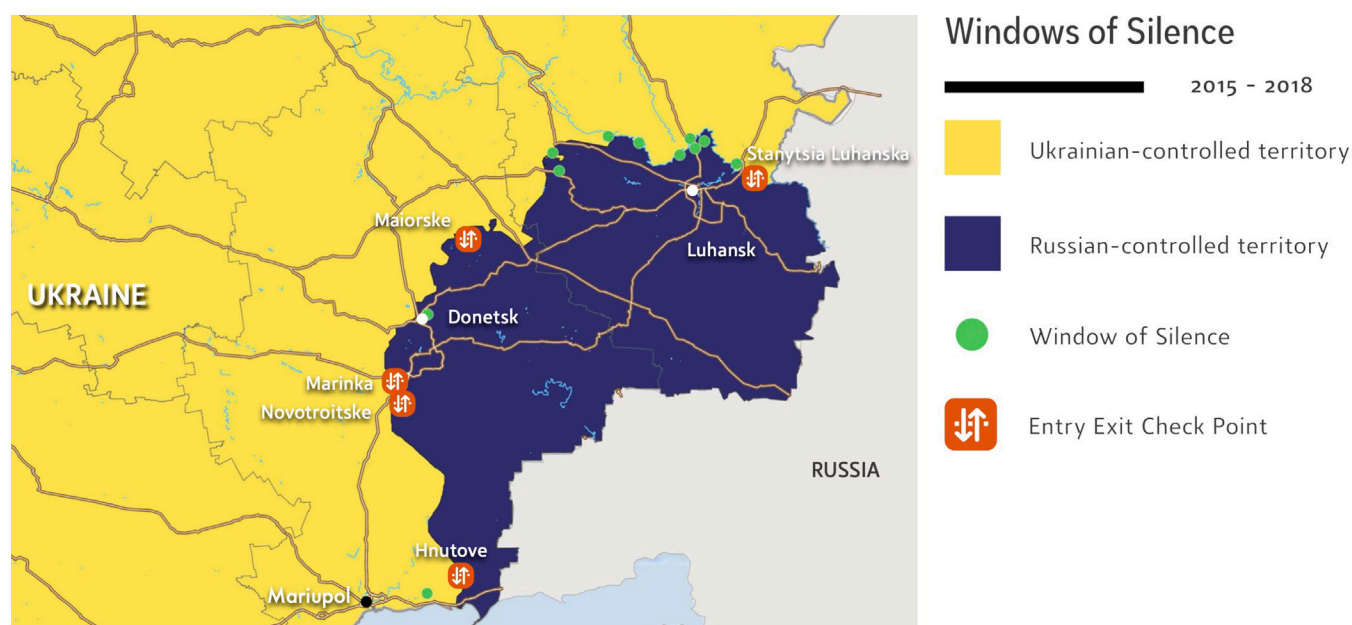


Figure 14: Windows of Silence and Entry Exit Checkpoints

Sources: OSCE, UNHCR, DeepStateMap.Live, World Food Program, OCHA, Humanitarian Open Street Map

negotiators even brought commanders from each side into the grey zone as a “diplomatic deterrent” to ensure the ceasefire endured.⁴⁷ There were 21 windows of silence, and 94% of them had no violent incidents.⁴⁸ The successes of the windows of silence lay in their ability to address indirect harm to the population by restoring electricity and running water to thousands of people living along the contact line. Repeated problem-solving at the local level built sufficient trust to enable the mechanism to proceed safely.

LESSON: Interim corridors had a meaningful effect in reducing civilian casualties in the early months of 2022.

Overall, the negotiation of green corridors was associated with a decrease in civilian casualties (see Figure 15). Corridors took place most frequently in Mariupol, Severodonetsk, Lysychansk, Popasna, Rubizhne, and Melitopol, and they lasted an average of approximately eight hours each. There could be up to 17 green corridors negotiated per day, but these decreased over time to about six each day.⁴⁹ After the 2022 invasion, once the frontline solidified, Vasylivka crossing formed as a similar mechanism to the Entry Exit Checkpoints in Zaporizhzhia. Initially established as a green corridor on 25 March 2022, by June, Ukraine and Russia established Commandants Offices on either side to regulate travel with verification of documents, with an average of 100 people crossing each day. However, in October and again in December 2022, Ukrainian authorities halted crossings due to safety concerns while Russian authorities increased crossing restrictions.⁵⁰ By January 2023, both sides exchanged rocket fire at the Commandants Offices, and the crossing ceased to function.⁵¹

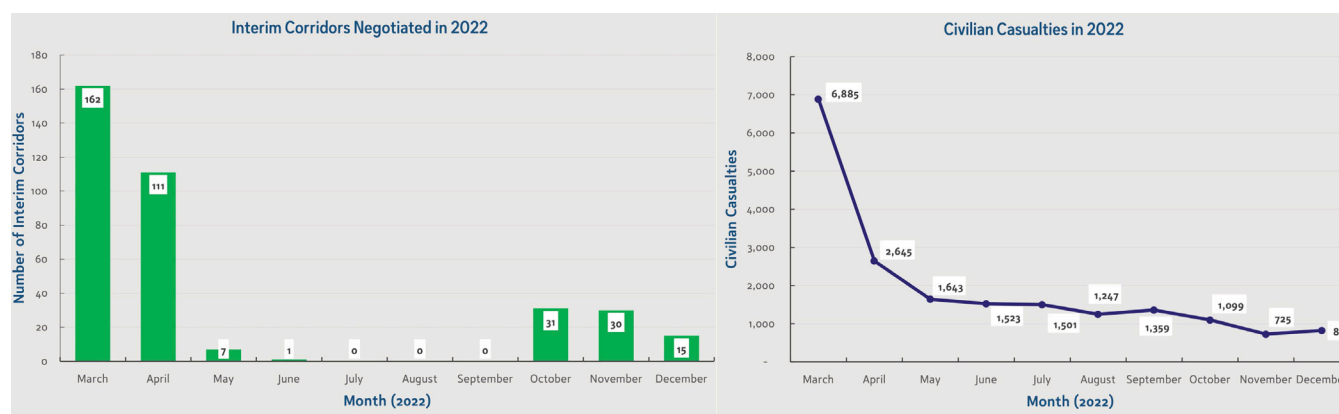


Figure 15: Civilian Outcomes for Interim Corridors (2022)

Sources: Data compiled by author from Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Attacks on green corridors increased by mid-March 2022, noticeably in urban areas in Donetsk and Kharkiv and then during the Battle of Kyiv. In one incident on 5 March 2022, Russian forces opened fire on civilian vehicles in Volnovakha, Donetsk; this action breached both the terms of the green corridor and likely deliberately targeted civilians.⁵² In another incident on 10 March 2022, Russian airstrikes targeted a green corridor in Mariupol, where they killed one civilian.⁵³ The Ukrainians have also been known to break the terms of the agreement, as in one incident that has not been independently verified; the Civil-Military Administration of Kherson reported that Ukrainian rocket launchers hit a minibus crossing into Dariivka, Kherson, on 7 October 2022 when four civilians were killed.⁵⁴ By 16 April 2022, Russia stopped agreeing to green corridors. It is not clear why, but it is

“My father-in-law left Hostomel, the Russians let him leave but as he was driving he saw burning cars with dead on the road.”
 –Ukrainian man, 2023

possible they needed people to live in areas they now controlled or they intended to refocus the fight on eastern Ukraine.

As negotiated corridors decreased in number, reports of filtration mounted on both sides. The Russians and Ukrainians implemented a “filtration process” to screen arrivals and ensure they were not armed combatants or saboteurs. This process involved physical searches of persons and belongings, collection of biometric data, and sometimes payment of fees. Russians implemented filtration checks in areas they controlled or whenever civilians crossed into territory under their control.⁵⁵ The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) deployed Temporary Operational Groups to areas under their control to divide up the population into five categories: (1) high priority targets who were leaders of Ukrainian nationalism; (2) those intending to support acts of resistance or associated with Ukrainian government, military, and law enforcement; (3) apathetic; (4) collaborators with Russian forces; (5) individuals essential for critical infrastructure. People they deemed to be threats received beatings or torture and were forced to comply.⁵⁶ People could wait for weeks, sometimes in tents in fields, before they were allowed to return to their shelters.⁵⁷

Both sides implemented filtration because civilians were directly involved in the targeting and kill chain. Ukrainian security services made use of large intelligence networks in Russian-controlled areas by using social media and phones to enable better artillery targeting.⁵⁸ Russian intelligence services had been recruiting pro-Russian Ukrainians since 2016; some recruits were as high up as a member of the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) and senior members of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the nuclear energy infrastructure.⁵⁹ Ukrainians blamed sabotage for many of Russia’s successes in 2014, and when territory changed hands, civilians faced consequences for collaboration.⁶⁰

Ukrainian filtration, which Kyiv referred to as “vetting collaborators,” identified hundreds of instances of treason and collaboration, with 268 legal cases and 53 sentences handed down by December 2022.⁶¹ Those found guilty face property seizure, 10-12 years in prison, and a 10-15-year ban on holding public office, and while accused can seek bail before trial, this request may be denied.⁶² Filtration can take place following recapture of territory, as in Mykolaiv, where security forces announced a two-day curfew in August 2022 and searched for collaborators.⁶³ Locals often demand harsher sentencing for collaborators than the government seeks, such as when the head of Malvi Vystorop village in Sumy only received a 34,000 UAH (US\$914) fine, and these locals will sometimes take matters into their own hands by forcing “corrective labor” (providing free labor to locals following recapture) or committing physical violence.⁶⁴ This filtration system disincentivizes people to leave Non-Government Controlled Areas for fear of prosecution, and such reticence potentially exposes civilians to more harm. Unfortunately, the longer civilians stay, the worse their situation gets as the suspicion of collaboration grows.⁶⁵

Unilateral Corridors

LESSON: Unilaterally pursued humanitarian corridors were more likely to lead to negative outcomes, including violations of international humanitarian law, such as violence during transit, forced displacement, and arbitrary detention.

Unilateral corridors occur when one side of the conflict **declares a corridor without the agreement** of the other party to the conflict, and these declarations often result in evacuation under fire. Since 2014, Ukraine and Russia both unilaterally declared evacuations and corridors, but the majority of them were not voluntary for civilians and resulted in harm. For example, in Mariupol, Armed Forces of the Russian

Federation and Donetsk People's Army forced civilians to evacuate to areas under their control before forcibly transferring them to Russia. In some instances, such as in Kharkiv, people were taken from filtration checkpoints and sent to Russia. Once in Russia, people stayed in temporary placement shelters, and ultimately many chose to leave Russia for Europe.⁶⁶ Many of these evacuations

"We felt like hostages. We were afraid they had some dodgy plans for us. Also, the toilet in the school building was just disgusting, the water was putrid and pretty much everyone was soon sick to the stomach and vomiting...One woman died there."

–Woman from Mariupol, 2022

came during Ukrainian attacks, such as in Kherson when people fled over the river into Russian-controlled areas amid Ukrainian artillery fire. Ukraine has also used unilateral corridors to encourage populations to leave on their own or to forcibly displace them. Most recently, on 10 August 2023, Ukrainian officials ordered the evacuation of 53 settlements in Kupiansk amid heavy Russian artillery fire; Ukraine set up bus routes to Kharkiv, organized volunteers, and required civilians to sign documents acknowledging the risk if they stayed.

Before 2022, the OSCE experimented with unilateral corridors. They developed the open phone method, with one side unilaterally declaring it would hold fire for a specific period of time. However, the method did not work because neither side using it trusted that the other side had heard, and they had no assurances that they would not be fired upon.⁶⁷ The OSCE swiftly abandoned this method and moved towards its windows of silence model.

Coercive Corridors

LESSON: Coercive humanitarian corridors were politically impossible agreements for the Government of Ukraine after Ilovaisk and executions in Bucha.

Coercive corridors amount to the codified surrender and transfer of civilians when territorial control has shifted between armed actors. Russia used coercive corridors extensively in Syria, where they were known as "reconciliation agreements," to capture territory from armed opposition groups. In Ukraine, the clearest instance was the 2014 Battle of Ilovaisk, which did not involve civilians but resulted in a negotiated retreat of Ukrainian forces. In May 2014, armed groups from the Donetsk People's Republic and covert Russian forces seized control of Ilovaisk, and in August 2014, the Armed Forces of Ukraine launched a military operation to recapture the city. By 29 August, Ukrainian forces were not successful and agreed to withdraw, and President Putin even publicly ordered a humanitarian corridor for them. During the retreat, Russian-aligned forces launched artillery and small arms fire and killed an estimated 366 retreating Ukrainian soldiers and captured a further 300.⁶⁸ This incident and later executions of civilians in Bucha (2022) and 73 other localities have made it politically impossible for the Government of Ukraine to agree to any loss of territory and have vastly complicated negotiations of coercive ceasefires.

III. Why Agree to Humanitarian Corridors?

Each side agreed to humanitarian corridors because they both claimed to be protecting the fleeing population. After the discovery of Russian atrocities committed during the assault on Kyiv, it became politically unacceptable for the Government of Ukraine to surrender any populated territory, and this

shift prompted Kyiv to pursue more evacuation efforts.⁶⁹ A number of government offices were part of the negotiation process (see Figure 16). In Ukraine, the Office of the President was the final approval for green corridors, with negotiations in Belarus in March led by Mikhaïlo Podolyak, the adviser to the head of the President's Office, but at an operational level, most orders came from the Ukrainian General Staff and military intelligence.⁷⁰ Before 2022, the main objective of U.S. training for Ukrainian forces had been to delegate command of operations from the Ukrainian Commander in Chief, General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, to the Joint Forces Operation commander, General Serhiy Nayeiv; however, during the 2022 invasion, decisions immediately reverted back to Zaluzhnyi as the operational commander. Therefore, even a starred operational commander would likely need to ask for authority to negotiate a green corridor.⁷¹

Once negotiated, Ukraine's deputy prime minister and Minister of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, Iryna Vereshchuk, announced green corridors on news media, and local authorities announced them on their social media channels. On 24 February 2022, President Zelenskyy initiated and the Verkhovna Rada approved martial law across the entire country; this declaration placed all civilian administration under military control.⁷² Each town's mayor became a civil-military authority who answered to the military commander in the area. They arranged evacuation locations with civilians and coordinated with the Armed Forces of Ukraine's J9 - Civil-Military Cooperation Directorate (CIMIC). CIMIC was established in 2014 and grew from about 20 officers to more than 1,000, with individuals embedded in each brigade and each battalion.⁷³ CIMIC could make initial overtures to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation as they were responsible for the transfer of human remains.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, early in the war, the General Staff reassigned many CIMIC personnel and assets, and the directorate thereafter struggled to act as the link with the population they were established to be. Finally, the administration of Entry Exit Checkpoints and crossings from Russian-controlled territory was managed by the State Border Service of Ukraine, with involvement from the SBU.⁷⁵ The resulting process was highly centralized and likely too unwieldy to keep up with the demands of millions of citizens on the move.

The Russians likely agreed to humanitarian corridors as a way to boost their tactical influence and international standing. They do not view humanitarian ends as an objective on their own and instead refer to them as a form of hybrid warfare. In Russian doctrine dating to 2013, the Russian Chief of Staff, Valery Gerasimov, described humanitarian efforts as "military means of a concealed character."⁷⁶ The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation learned from experience in Syria, where they and the Government of Syria under President Bashar al-Assad placed opposition areas under prolonged sieges and then used coercive ceasefires, known as reconciliation agreements, to reacquire territory on the condition that fighters departed.⁷⁷ This experience indicates a transactional interest in the corridors.



Figure 16: Authorities Involved in Negotiating Humanitarian Corridors

In Russia, the process for approval is opaque, with either the Office of the President or the Ministry of Defence as the final authority on green corridors. The assistant to the President of the Russian Federation, Volodymyr Medinsky, led talks in Belarus in early March, but he was not viewed as having sufficient authority to negotiate.⁷⁸ From there, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation's Joint Coordination Headquarters for Humanitarian Response issued and approved green corridors, and Ministry of Defence representatives acted as decision-makers in Black Sea Grain Initiative discussions.⁷⁹

Russian-controlled areas also had military-civil administrations, and prior to 2022, the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic managed crossings, with input from the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (military intelligence – GRU).⁸⁰ It remains unclear to what extent incidents during negotiated corridors were government policy or were made more likely by poor command and control, but their frequency suggests the Russian military saw more value in creating the impression of a psychological attack at all times on the civilian population than it did in enabling evacuation.⁸¹

The United States was minimally involved in the negotiated corridors. The U.S. State Department did not participate directly in Minsk negotiations, though they met with key stakeholders before and after talks. United States training for Ukrainian forces did focus on civil affairs, and Ukrainian military members who had this training rotated in with other military officers to support CIMIC, which at one point was managed by an individual who was a former Ukrainian liaison officer to the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and a graduate of U.S. professional military education.⁸² However, it is not clear that U.S. officials or military planners had any close involvement in any of the green corridors, and they had only a backseat role in the Black Sea Grain Initiative; so the United States' influence to shape Ukraine's response to corridors in this setting is limited.

IV. Community Led Evacuations

Humanitarian corridors enabled only 1.5% of civilian evacuations, particularly after April 2022. The vast majority of civilian evacuations made use of private vehicles or volunteer groups that filled an essential gap in the response.⁸³ Estimates of movement based on Facebook location data in the first two weeks of the 2022 invasion suggest far more chaotic movement within and between oblasts, as in Kherson oblast where 528,000 people left by 14 March, then 522,000 returned by 17 March as the Russian advance blocked roads to other areas, then many displaced again once roads opened.⁸⁴ This kind of evacuation was at too large a scale to be managed by government-negotiated corridors. Before the conflict started, the Government of Ukraine anticipated the need to evacuate vulnerable civilians, and in 2013 and 2018, it passed legislation that required local governments to prepare lists of people deemed vulnerable and to prepare evacuation procedures for them.⁸⁵ While these lists may have contributed to the low civilian casualty rates between 2014 and 2021, they were not relevant to evacuations in 2022 when the scale of displacement was large and there was crowding on public transport and congestion on roads.⁸⁶ Some blame for this sudden, mass movement may be laid at the feet of the Ukrainian government, which, up to a few days before the 2022 invasion, was still messaging to the public that they were safe. This messaging led to the population being under-prepared and hampered timely civilian evacuation.

Luckily for civilians, during the first two weeks of the invasion, Russian aircraft did not specifically target the Ukrainian transport infrastructure (though it was often still impaired by collateral damage), and civilians were free to move on roads and trains that were largely

still functional.⁸⁷ In many rural areas, crossings were informal and people could walk across (sometimes without validation). Upon arrival, they often faced police checks and filtration processes, particularly if they were fighting-age males.⁸⁸ By April 2022, Russia began using Ukraine's railways in areas under Russian control to transport fuel, a factor that likely limited movement and increased targeting.⁸⁹

As green corridors increasingly fell apart, authorities turned to civilian volunteers to facilitate evacuation and provide last-mile delivery of services. Eastern Ukraine had a long history of social organizing, from the Orange Revolution of 2004-2005 to the Maidan protests of 2014. Some of these volunteer groups became militia and fought the Russian-aligned forces from 2014 onwards, and they ultimately became the Territorial Defense Forces. Others became civilian volunteers, and they worked with international volunteer groups that formed to conduct evacuations at great risk.⁹⁰

"I've never been anywhere that had that strong a civil society response."

– Interview with INGO manager in Kharkiv, 2023

"The best way to prepare is not to deny the invasion will happen."

– Interview with conflict analyst in Western Ukraine, 2023

The volunteer groups emerged in three waves.

Ukrainian civilian volunteer groups began responding immediately during the Russian invasion; they included the Ukrainian "Angels of Police," formed in Donetsk from former police officers, and SOS Vostok, formed

in 2014 in Luhansk. Faith-based organizations (largely Catholic, Protestant, and Ukrainian Orthodox) and Ukrainian-American mixed groups arrived in the second wave.⁹¹ Many of these new arrivals were veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and they had joined to conduct evacuations from Afghanistan in 2021.⁹² For many, the Ukraine war became the next adventure and purpose.⁹³ The third wave of humanitarian volunteers from across Europe arrived in April after the Russians withdrew from Kyiv and refocused on the East. One international humanitarian group began their operations in June 2022 during the battle for Lysychansk, and they could tell that the city would fall when the Ukrainian military stopped allowing civilian volunteers to enter. They then shifted operations mostly to the South and the North, as Russians dug in and it became harder to access populations in the East.⁹⁴

Unlike humanitarians, these volunteers are not impartial and explicitly want to do their part to support Ukraine's war effort. Some are funded by international non-governmental organizations (NGO), who provide fuel and meet other expenses, while others collect donations from home countries.⁹⁵ In Russian-controlled areas, there are several Russian NGOs working, and the Ukrainian government has sanctioned these groups.⁹⁶ It is unclear to what extent they coordinate with the Government and Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, but they appear to have a similar role to Ukrainian volunteer groups.

The process of volunteers coordinating civilian evacuations was simple and highly decentralized. The Armed Forces of Ukraine CIMIC officers coordinate with the Civil-Military Administrations of their assigned area as part of a local Joint Taskforce or Department of Civil Protection to reach out to citizens and select pickup points in city centers. Sometimes, volunteers advertise on social media or leave messages on doors.⁹⁷ Without coordinating with military authorities (and often with little coordination with each other), volunteers would drive cars and pick up civilians and then take them to the nearest hub with a train station or a shelter.⁹⁸ Although each trip could move 4-6 people at a time, the total numbers of people evacuated could be several hundred per organization.⁹⁹ The bulk of evacuations happened

in February-April 2022 and largely involved families. Another wave of evacuations took place in May, when people who thought they would wait out the conflict decided to leave.¹⁰⁰ To illustrate: by the period August 2022-May 2023, most pro-Russian Ukrainians had fled Kharkiv and left only pro-Ukrainians who were at risk should the Russians take the area. Luckily, they never did. Elsewhere, on the Kupiansk frontline during the Russian spring offensive in 2023, once fighting became more intense, Ukrainian officials planned to evacuate 60,000 people via buses and civil society organizations.¹⁰¹

This process is fraught with issues. According to experienced humanitarians and veterans, volunteers take risks that far exceed reasonable duty of care.¹⁰² During the battle for Bakhmut in the summer of 2022, there were several volunteers who died and likely had been directly targeted by Private Military Company Wagner. Those killed included Pete Reed of Global Outreach Doctors and Marek Mastarlez of the Inicjatywa Nehemiasz in February and March 2023, respectively.¹⁰³ The incidents were so high profile that military authorities in Bakhmut halted all civilian evacuations and began requiring authorization letters from the area commander.¹⁰⁴ Volunteers simply shifted from Bakhmut to Kherson.¹⁰⁵ In another instance, Brandon Mitchell of Ukrainian Hospitaliers Medical Battalion drove over anti-personnel landmines and, though injured, he survived.

Despite the requirement to reduce their visible footprint, volunteers are under no mission control, and there is little coordination. Some volunteers attempted to build coordination networks, but efforts fell apart.¹⁰⁶ There is no accountability for the money spent or the locations to which volunteers took civilians, and most volunteer organizations lacked or refused to adopt internal processes that may have slowed down evacuations but reduced risks; some of these requirements were for personal protective equipment, armored vehicles, radios, or risk assessment and forecasting.¹⁰⁷ Nor do volunteers ensure that people, once rescued, do not fall into human trafficking networks or filtration checks. Many churches that act as transit hubs have state figures who report and facilitate checks.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the volunteers did more to get civilians out of conflict areas than the amply-funded international NGOs and UN agencies, who had limited mobility due to heavy shelling at frontlines, severe risk aversion, and bureaucratic inertia.¹⁰⁹

At this point, it is likely that most of the civilians who wanted to leave have had the opportunity to do so, either from Russia-controlled Ukraine to Russia or across checkpoints. Nevertheless, millions of people are still near frontlines. Those that preferred to stay behind were often elderly, partly because they had no connections in

western Ukraine and faced discrimination there and partly because the methods for evacuation (long train rides) do not support their needs and disabilities.¹¹⁰ However, the longer people stayed, the more they fell under suspicion of being collaborators, some out of necessity, and movement to western Ukraine entailed risk of prosecution, prison, or worse; these risks, in turn, incentivize people to stay longer.¹¹¹ The cost is clear; even though 25% of the Ukrainian population is over 60 years old, as of May 2023, 32% of civilian casualties were from the 60+ age group.¹¹²

“Currently everyone who feels threatened has the opportunity to evacuate but people just do not want to leave. The will is not there.”

– Interview with United Nations official, 2023

V. Implications & Recommendations

Evacuation is a last resort, and armed actors should take all necessary measures to avoid conflict in populated areas and to limit strikes that harm civilian property and infrastructure. However, in dire circumstances, sheltering in place can be more of a risk to civilians than evacuation is, and civilians need a viable option to leave safely and voluntarily. During these crossings, parties to the conflict should avoid interfering with civilians' ability to reach safety and, in some instances, may actively facilitate evacuation.

Existing U.S. military doctrine and capabilities, including the Non-Combatant Evacuation (NEO), Personnel Recovery, and Joint Air Mobility and Sealift Operations, are focused on U.S. citizens.¹¹³ However, conflicts increasingly take place in populated areas, and the heightened risk to civilians may necessitate orderly and coordinated evacuation. Chaotic and risky evacuations can place lives in danger and have a lasting political effect, as imagery from the withdrawal airlift from Afghanistan in 2021 attests.

The following recommendations are the steps that the U.S. Department of Defense and armed forces will need to take in order to improve existing doctrine, establish new mechanisms, and support U.S. government agencies and allies and partners in preparation for facilitated evacuation during large-scale combat operations between conventional forces.

1. The U.S. military should build on existing military evacuation doctrine, establish new guidance for humanitarian corridors, and develop coordination and capacities to help facilitate evacuations to minimize risk to civilians.

- Modify existing guidance in Joint Publication (JP) 3-36 (NEO) to establish specific procedures for humanitarian corridors for foreign nationals with a particular focus on instances when the U.S. is a party to the conflict. JP 3-36 limits support to foreign nationals through their governments, and new guidance should delegate authority from the Secretary of Defense to combatant commanders to request NEO authorization for foreign nationals.
- U.S. Indo-Pacific Command J2 - Intelligence should include in its assessments the civilian environment, to include points of egress for the civilian population and temporary safe havens for their departure, including shelter outside the U.S. The Command's J5 – Strategic Planning and Policy should include these points of egress and safe havens when developing courses of action.
- U.S. Army Pacific and U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific Civil Affairs teams should establish direct contact with local task forces and civil-military bodies to coordinate movement to temporary safe havens and identify humanitarian corridors for the civilian population.
- Indo-Pacific Command should attempt to negotiate with adversary local commanders for humanitarian corridors. The OSCE's windows of silence were the most consistent and reliable method for interim corridors. Transfer of human remains is a potential opening topic for direct discussions.
- Indo-Pacific Command Public Affairs and Information Operations should use strategic communications to amplify messages regarding the necessity of humanitarian corridors and enforce their terms. The decision to abide by a humanitarian corridor is often political and can be influenced by public perceptions. Strategic communications can build an understanding of international humanitarian law among key constituencies and hold parties accountable.

- 2. The U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) will be critical partners in modifying guidance, negotiating evacuations with allies and partners, and improving risk management by civil society organizations.**
- Modify the Department of State's Emergency Planning Handbook and the Memorandum of Agreement between the Departments of State and Defense on the Protection and Evacuation of U.S. Citizens and Nationals and Designated Other Persons from Threatened Areas Overseas to include foreign nationals in specific procedures for humanitarian corridors, particularly when the U.S. is a party to the conflict. New guidance should delegate authority from the Secretary of State to the Chief of Mission to request NEO for foreign nationals.
 - Department of State and Indo-Pacific Command should establish a multilateral civilian evacuation cell for the Pacific area of operations to prompt potential adversaries to address the issue and the risk to their own citizens in-country. Direct bilateral negotiations between adversarial nations may not be possible after the outbreak of conflict. Make the issue multilateral by working with allies and partners to jointly prepare a plan for an emergency and establish lines of engagement with UN OCHA and ICRC to develop a process to negotiate corridors or evacuation.
 - Advance a dialogue with neighboring countries to better understand challenges around at-sea humanitarian corridors where relevant. A sustained negotiated corridor may be feasible in maritime environments with existing mechanisms that limit search and seizure, joint inspection teams, and the participation of the International Maritime Organization.
 - USAID and the Department of State can provide risk management skills, operational best practices, and international humanitarian law training to national and local NGOs and civil society organizations (CSO) with the potential to facilitate civilian evacuations. Most evacuations will likely be ad hoc and occur outside the framework of a negotiated corridor; so, the capacity of volunteer groups will be essential. U.S. embassies should map CSOs and NGOs with humanitarian capacity and strengthen capacity through training, peer-to-peer learning, and expert exchanges.
- 3. The U.S. can support its allies and partners to develop capabilities around preparing civil-military bodies, identifying temporary safe havens and points of egress, and supporting direct negotiations for humanitarian corridors.**
- Prepare civil-military bodies. Enhance training of civil affairs functions in allies' and partners' militaries and governments to develop local task forces, which can be activated in crisis in partnership with civilian agencies and civil society. Establish Ministry-level programs to manage evacuation efforts. Exercise these efforts through integrating deliberate evacuation scenarios into yearly exercises.
 - Preserve civil-military functions once fighting begins. The Ukrainian General Staff reassigned most of CIMIC's personnel to other aspects of the fight in a move that hampered their ability to coordinate evacuations at a critical juncture. U.S. security cooperation should provide funding and support for maintaining these capabilities.
 - Support partner implementation of safe havens, points of egress, and direct negotiations with adversaries to ensure civilians have the option to leave before conflict occurs in populated areas.

Conclusion

Protection of civilians during large-scale combat is possible, and it can be managed by parties to the conflict. Where they falter, civil society will emerge to evacuate civilians. Negotiations at the tactical level for evacuation are the most sustainable way to manage the movement of populations as large and dynamic as that of Ukraine, and these negotiations can have a meaningful effect in reducing direct and indirect harm. Future conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region will likely be even more precarious due to geography, the initial absence of third-party mediators, and the scramble for parties to the conflict to determine how and with whom to negotiate. Moreover, the U.S. will likely rely upon CSOs as well as capable and trusted local governments. Understanding the nature and capacity of these entities will be an important first step.

Caveats: The views expressed in this report are the author's own and do not reflect the views of his current and former employers.

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