



CENTER FOR CONFLICT AND
HUMANITARIAN STUDIES

Report

Regionalising Siege and Humanitarian Response in WANA

The Regional Reverberations of the US/Israeli
War on Iran (November 2025 – June 2026)

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

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Second Report of the
Beyond Borders, Beyond Crisis Initiative:
Reimagining Humanitarian Responses to Displacement Under Siege in the
WANA Region

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the second workshop of the *Beyond Borders, Beyond Crisis (BBBC) Initiative: Reimagining Humanitarian Responses to Displacement Under Siege in the WANA Region*. Convened in May 2026 under Chatham House Rules, the workshop brought together researchers, humanitarian practitioners, policy specialists, and regional experts to examine the implications of the US/Israeli war on Iran and its wider regional reverberations for populations living under conditions of siege across Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, and Syria.

Building on the findings of the first BBBC report, *Humanitarian Access and Protection Under Siege* (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2026), this report argues that recent developments should not be understood as a rupture or as an entirely new phase of crisis. Rather, the regional escalation has intensified existing dynamics of displacement, deprivation, restricted mobility, humanitarian constraint, and political marginalisation. The report therefore argues that siege is increasingly operating both through territorial enclosure, and also through interconnected regional systems that shape circulation, mobility, humanitarian access, finance, and governance.

Across the five contexts examined, participants identified three major regional reverberations of the US/Israeli war on Iran. First, humanitarian attention and funding have been diverted away from ongoing crises, further marginalising contexts already experiencing severe humanitarian need. Second, disruptions to airspace, maritime routes, energy systems, and supply chains have increased operational costs and constrained humanitarian action. Third, the normalisation of exceptional security measures has further restricted humanitarian access and reduced opportunities for civilian protection.

The report demonstrates that these developments have contributed to the intensification of physical, political, financial, and operational barriers for people and communities across Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, and Syria to access and receive international support, protection and engagement. While these effects manifest differently in each context, they collectively point to the emergence of an interconnected *polycrisis* environment in which pressures across logistics, finance, energy systems, food production, displacement, and governance reinforce one another. Humanitarian crises are therefore becoming more interconnected, more prolonged, and increasingly shaped by processes operating across regional and global scales.

The report also identifies significant transformations within humanitarian practice itself. Humanitarian organisations are operating under conditions characterised by restricted access, financial uncertainty, shrinking civic space, and heightened political pressure. Adaptations including remote management, localisation, flexible delivery models, and regionalised procurement systems have become more common. However, the report argues that adaptation should not be mistaken for transformation. Many of these developments enable humanitarian actors to continue operating under conditions of siege while leaving the structures that produce those conditions fundamentally intact.

The workshop further identified a deepening crisis of humanitarian financing, accountability, and legitimacy. Funding reductions, shifting donor priorities, and intensified competition are contributing to increasingly uneven humanitarian responses. The report argues that humanitarian financing should be understood as a question of resources, but also as a mechanism through which visibility, legitimacy, and access to assistance are distributed across crises. It also identifies growing concerns regarding the erosion of accountability mechanisms, the selective enforcement of international legal frameworks, and the limited capacity of existing institutions to provide effective protection or justice. Under conditions of regionalised siege, accountability itself becomes unevenly accessible, with opportunities to seek redress, influence decision-making, and secure protection distributed unequally across populations and contexts.

At the same time, the report emphasises that affected populations are not passive recipients of these pressures. Across all five contexts, communities continue to mobilise diverse forms of care, solidarity, mutual support, and survival. These responses highlight the importance of recognising locally embedded and Southern-led infrastructures that operate alongside, beyond, and sometimes in tension with formal humanitarian systems.

In response to these challenges, the report proposes a historically grounded and transformative research agenda focused on regionalised siege, displacement under conditions of constraint, humanitarian adaptation, accountability, knowledge production, and alternative models of response. Across all themes, participants emphasised the importance of research that is multi-scalar, people-centred, policy-relevant, and grounded in the lived experiences of displaced and conflict-affected populations.

Ultimately, the report argues that contemporary humanitarian challenges in the WANA region cannot be understood through isolated crises or territorially bounded analyses alone. Rather, they must be situated within the context of the wider systems through which siege, displacement, vulnerability, and response are co-produced across interconnected regional and global contexts. The challenge facing humanitarian actors is therefore more than how to adapt to conditions of systemic pressure: it is how to contribute to more equitable, accountable, and transformative forms of humanitarian response capable of addressing the structures that produce and sustain siege itself.

Introduction

The first workshop in the *Beyond Borders, Beyond Crisis (BBBC) Initiative* examined the structural failures of humanitarian, legal, and political systems operating under conditions of siege across the WANA region. Convened in the context of the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza, it provided a critical entry point for analysing humanitarian access and protection in Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. The discussions, and the subsequent report *Humanitarian Access and Protection Under Siege* (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2026), advanced a central argument: siege is neither a military tactic nor a temporary condition. It is a multidimensional system of violence that is politically produced and governed. As the first report demonstrated, siege operates through intersecting legal, economic, bureaucratic, logistical, and informational controls that generate displacement, restrict mobility, undermine livelihoods, and erode accountability.

Since the first BBBC workshop convened in Doha in November 2025, the regional and global landscape has changed significantly. The second BBBC workshop, held online in May 2026 under Chatham House Rules, took place amid the ongoing US/Israeli war on Iran and its wider regional repercussions. Developments across the region had altered realities on the ground in each of the five contexts at the heart of the BBBC Initiative. Yet the workshop proceeded from a central premise: the present moment should not be interpreted as an absolute rupture. Throughout the discussions, participants repeatedly emphasised that recent developments have intensified and accelerated existing pressures, including displacement, restricted humanitarian access, donor retrenchment, economic instability, and protracted conflict.

The US/Israeli war on Iran has deepened war economies while generating new disruptions across humanitarian logistics and systems of access. Energy infrastructures, food systems, maritime corridors, and financial networks have all come under increasing strain, exacerbating existing forms of poverty and inequality. These developments have also contributed to new and overlapping patterns of internal and cross-border displacement. In spite of the scale and speed of these changes, far from representing a dramatic break with the past, the evidence underpinning this report confirms that the current period has intensified processes that were already underway and exposed connections that were previously less visible.

Patterns of visibility provide a particularly clear illustration of this dynamic. During the first BBBC workshop, Lebanon occasionally appeared at the margins of discussion, as attention was understandably concentrated on the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the genocidal violence unfolding in Sudan, including the massacres perpetrated in El Fasher in North Darfur during October 2025 (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2026). The prominence of Gaza and Sudan in the first workshop reflected the urgency of events on the ground. It also reflected broader hierarchies of visibility that shape humanitarian, policy, and media agendas. Some crises command sustained international attention; others remain comparatively peripheral (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; 2020).

Developments in Lebanon during 2026 brought this unevenness into sharper relief. The displacement of more than 1.3 million people by June 2026, driven by ongoing Israeli occupation and bombardment, rapidly repositioned Lebanon within regional and international debates. This shift did not signal the emergence of a wholly new crisis. Instead, it reflected changing patterns of attention. Visibility, like humanitarian funding and political engagement, is unevenly distributed. Crises move into focus and out again according to shifting political, diplomatic, and media priorities.

Donor behaviour exhibits similar continuities. Donor fatigue, reprioritisation, and the politicisation of aid have long shaped humanitarian responses. The reorientation of the Gulf states towards domestic energy, infrastructure,

and economic concerns following the US/Israeli war on Iran should therefore be situated in the context of longer historical trajectories. Reductions in funding from traditional Western donors form part of the same pattern. These developments point towards evolving configurations of humanitarian financing rather than a wholly unprecedented departure from previous trends.

Against this backdrop, the second BBBC workshop and the present report, which builds upon the Initiative's activities to date, examined how the escalation of regional conflict is reshaping humanitarian action, displacement, and protection across Gaza, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Yemen. The objective was to avoid isolating the present moment from its historical antecedents, instead situating contemporary developments within longer histories of humanitarian practice under conditions of systemic pressure.

A recurring theme throughout the workshop was the need to move beyond narratives of rupture. The language of crisis often privileges moments of apparent discontinuity, obscuring the longer trajectories through which vulnerability, displacement, and humanitarian need are produced. Participants consistently emphasised continuity alongside change. Current pressures are more intense, more interconnected, and more deeply embedded within regional and global systems than before. Understanding these developments therefore requires attention both to immediate disruptions and to the historical processes through which crisis, displacement, and humanitarian response have been shaped over time.

This report reflects a collective effort to engage with these realities. Drawing on contributions from workshop participants, it examines the transformation of humanitarian systems under conditions of intensified and interconnected pressure. It also explores the implications of these transformations for future research, policy, and practice. Alongside the immediate challenges facing humanitarian actors, the report directs attention towards the wider regional and global systems through which crises are produced, circulated, governed, and unevenly experienced.

The discussions reported here extend the relational approach to siege developed in the first BBBC report. Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Iran are often analysed as distinct crises unfolding within separate national contexts. In the context of this report, greater attention is given to the interconnected processes through which violence, displacement, resource allocation, and humanitarian governance are organised across the region. Viewed from this perspective, siege emerges as a relational system whose effects are distributed unevenly across populations, infrastructures, and territories.

This observation provides the point of departure for the report's central argument. Developments since November 2025 suggest that siege must be analysed through a wider lens than that developed in the first BBBC report. Territorial enclosure remains important. However, the conditions shaping life under siege increasingly emerge through regional systems of circulation, finance, logistics, governance, and knowledge production. The sections that follow develop this argument by examining how humanitarian crises across the WANA region have become progressively interconnected, and how these interconnections are reshaping humanitarian practice, displacement dynamics, and the broader politics of survival.

From Territorial Siege to Regionalised Systems of Circulation and Survival

This report builds on the analytical foundations established in *Humanitarian Access and Protection Under Siege* (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2026), which conceptualised siege as a politically produced and politically governed system operating through multiple and intersecting forms of control. The first report argued that siege should not be understood solely as a military tactic or territorial condition, but as a mode of governance shaping civilian life, humanitarian action, displacement, and protection across Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. The present report extends this analysis by arguing that developments since November 2025, particularly the regional reverberations of the US/Israeli war on Iran, require a wider analytical framework. Siege remains territorially enacted, but its contemporary operation increasingly depends upon regional systems of circulation, infrastructure, and differentiated exposure to constraint.

The central analytical shift developed in this report concerns the governance of circulation. Conventional accounts of siege focus on enclosure: restricting movement and limiting access to food, water, medicine, and humanitarian assistance. In turn, this diagnosis often leads to a central humanitarian question: how can aid be delivered in contexts of siege? However, while territorial containment remains central to contexts such as Gaza and parts of Yemen, Sudan, and Syria, it is insufficient to capture how contemporary systems of coercion operate. Across the WANA region, control is simultaneously exercised through enclosure and restriction, but also through the regulation and modulation of flows, including the movement of people, commodities, energy, finance, humanitarian assistance, data, and knowledge.

In this sense, siege extends beyond the denial of access to a place and its resident population. It also shapes the terms through which connectivity itself is organised across multiple scales. Maritime routes, airspace, border regimes, customs procedures, sanctions architectures, financial compliance systems, insurance markets, and humanitarian logistics platforms collectively influence who and what can move, under what conditions, at what cost, and with what broader consequences. The disruptions associated with the US/Israeli war on Iran, including ongoing instability affecting the Strait of Hormuz, changes to shipping routes, increased transport and insurance costs, and the rerouting of supply chains, have made visible the extent to which these systems of circulation are simultaneously regional, global, and deeply interconnected.

This points to a broader process which I conceptualise in this report as the regionalisation of siege. Rather than operating as discrete and isolated phenomena confined to particular territories, siege conditions are increasingly produced and sustained through interconnected political economies, regulatory systems, donor architectures, and security environments spanning multiple contexts and conflicts. Disruptions in one location, such as maritime insecurity in the Gulf, can generate cascading effects across humanitarian operations in Gaza, Yemen, Sudan, and Lebanon through shared infrastructures of constraint. Similarly, overlapping sanctions regimes, border controls, and counter-terrorism frameworks create layered restrictions that shape humanitarian action across multiple contexts simultaneously. From this perspective, siege is best understood as a set of interconnected systems of vulnerability, dependency, and constraint, rather than as a series of separate territorial conditions.

Importantly, these dynamics do not affect all populations equally. On the contrary, they produce differentiated and stratified geographies of constraint. Populations, institutions, and places experience varying forms and intensities of restriction depending upon their position within regional and global systems. Gender, age, disability, class, legal status, access to mobility pathways, proximity to humanitarian infrastructures, and inclusion within financial and

logistical networks all shape how siege is experienced and navigated. Within the same broader system, some people experience near-total immobility and deprivation, while others retain limited access to movement, resources, or support through humanitarian, diplomatic, or market-based channels. These inequalities are not incidental; they are constitutive of contemporary siege formations and reflect broader dynamics of power, eligibility, and exclusion.

One implication of this perspective is the need to rethink humanitarian access itself. Rather than focusing solely on entry into crisis zones, greater attention must be paid to the infrastructures, regulatory systems, and financial mechanisms that shape humanitarian possibility. Shipping and aviation networks, customs procedures, sanctions compliance systems, insurance markets, digital coordination platforms, banking systems, and visa regimes all influence how aid is authorised, transported, and delivered. The regional escalation associated with the US/Israeli war on Iran has underscored the fragility and interdependence of these systems, demonstrating how disruptions in one domain rapidly constrain humanitarian operations elsewhere.

Any analysis of siege must also decentre international humanitarian systems and foreground what I conceptualise as Southern infrastructures of survival, solidarity, and care. Across Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon, populations affected by siege rely upon diverse locally embedded and transnationally connected practices, including mutual aid networks, community-based care systems, faith-based organisations, informal economies, and diasporic support networks. These infrastructures should not be understood as compensatory responses to humanitarian failure. Nor can they be reduced to “coping mechanisms”: they constitute alternative forms of response, governance, and social reproduction through which life is sustained under conditions of protracted constraint. As highlighted in both the first BBBC report and in wider scholarship on Southern responses to displacement, these systems frequently operate alongside, beyond, and at times in tension with formal humanitarian frameworks (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2025a; 2025b; 2026; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Carpi 2025).

Siege shapes temporal experience as profoundly as it shapes space. Contemporary sieges generate layered temporalities characterised by chronic emergency, cyclical crisis, repeated displacement, suspended futures, and recurring shocks. The regional escalation associated with the Iran conflict has intensified these dynamics, producing conditions in which volatility and permanence coexist. Acute disruptions are layered onto already protracted forms of instability, creating situations in which populations experience both immediate crisis and enduring uncertainty simultaneously.

Siege also shapes the production of knowledge. Across the WANA region, restricted access, political sensitivities, insecurity, and logistical barriers contribute to forms of epistemic fragmentation in which data, documentation, and analysis are unevenly produced and distributed. As highlighted in the first BBBC report, these dynamics include restricted access for researchers and humanitarian actors, growing reliance on remote methodologies, the securitisation of information, and the systematic targeting and killing of local journalists and other knowledge producers. Siege therefore extends beyond the governance of territory and movement to encompass the governance of what can be known, documented, witnessed, and acted upon.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that siege in the WANA region is best understood as a regionalised system of circulation, stratification, temporal disruption, and epistemic constraint, within which multiple crises are interconnected through shared infrastructures of control and survival. This requires moving from an understanding of siege as a condition affecting particular places, towards an understanding of siege as a system co-produced across sites. Within this framework, Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon are not discrete “cases” of siege, but interconnected contexts linked through shared infrastructures, donor systems, regulatory frameworks, political

economies, and logistical networks that shape mobility, displacement, humanitarian action, and everyday life across the region. Recognising these interconnections is essential both for analysis, and also for fostering the forms of regional learning, collaboration, and collective rethinking of humanitarian response that lie at the heart of the Beyond Borders, Beyond Crisis Initiative.

I. Regional Reverberations of the US/Israeli War on Iran: Intensifying Siege Across Contexts

The US/Israeli war on Iran and its regional reverberations have had profound and uneven impacts on civilians, including on internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and populations already living under conditions of siege across Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. While these impacts manifest differently across contexts, this report proceeds from the premise that these developments must be understood as an intensification and expansion of siege-like dynamics operating across interconnected regional and global systems, rather than as discrete or wholly new developments.

In this sense, the war on Iran and its regional reverberations have not introduced siege to new locations so much as they have deepened, extended, and interconnected existing modalities of control, deprivation, and exclusion. Siege is thus produced and governed both within territorially bounded spaces, as highlighted in the first BBBC report, and also across regional systems of circulation, displacement, and humanitarian governance. As multiple analysts, UN agencies, and regional monitoring bodies have noted, the escalation has acted as a regional accelerator, disrupting logistics, diverting diplomatic attention, and reinforcing security-driven restrictions on humanitarian access across the WANA region.

Across all five contexts, three broad shifts were particularly evident. First, humanitarian attention and funding were further diverted, as the impacts and broader reverberations of the US/Israeli war on Iran competed with ongoing crises for diplomatic focus and already constrained donor resources. Second, logistical disruption intensified, with airspace closures, maritime risks, and rising insurance and transport costs affecting supply chains. Third, exceptional security measures became further normalised, making it increasingly difficult to negotiate humanitarian exemptions or secure civilian protection mechanisms. Together, these developments do not simply illustrate a *transformation* of siege, but rather its *amplification* across interconnected domains. These developments can be conceptualised as part of an emerging polycrisis, in which humanitarian pressures simultaneously span logistics, finance, global markets, energy systems, and civilian infrastructure, extending beyond sites of armed conflict into the infrastructures that sustain life itself.

In this context, economic systems function as tools of warfare, particularly in terms of sanctions, market exclusion, and financial control. Rising energy prices following instability in the Gulf have generated cascading effects across humanitarian operations, contributing to increased transport costs, insurance costs, delivery delays, and reduced operational reach. Participants also highlighted the longer-term consequences of disruptions to fertiliser supply chains and agricultural production; in so doing, they underscored the longer-term effects of contemporary crisis dynamics. The analysis repeatedly pointed to the uneven temporal unfolding of the current crisis, with structural shocks reverberating through interconnected systems before their full impacts become visible on the ground.

Gaza: Entrenchment Through Political and Logistical Marginalisation

These dynamics were particularly acute in Gaza, where the regional escalation intersected with an already extreme and protracted siege. The effects were both political and operational. Diplomatic attention shifted away from Gaza at a critical moment, undermining pressure to secure humanitarian access, while logistical disruptions exacerbated already severe shortages.

As an extension and intensification of the devastation already unfolding in Gaza, humanitarian agencies reported continued constraints on access, including limitations on fuel, medical supplies, and water infrastructure. By mid-2025, over 86% of Gaza's territory was either under evacuation orders or incorporated into militarised zones, significantly restricting civilian movement and aid delivery (OCHA 2025). Despite the October 2025 ceasefire, over half of the Strip was under military control and continuing movement restrictions limited Palestinians' access to humanitarian assets, essential infrastructure, agricultural land, and the sea.

Repeated displacement orders have further fragmented humanitarian space, producing overlapping displacement patterns that have undermined the continuity of service provision. Around 1.9 million of Gaza's residents remain displaced, with repeated displacement continuing amid ongoing military activity (UNICEF 2026). By December 2025, all 2.1 million people in Gaza were assessed as requiring humanitarian assistance in 2026, while the destruction of 92 per cent of housing units has left an estimated 1.5 million people in urgent need of emergency shelter and essential non-food items (OCHA 2026b).

These dynamics are cumulative. Siege is intensified through broader geopolitical shifts that further restrict mobility, fragment supply chains, and erode already fragile systems of survival. If siege is politically produced and governed, as argued in the first BBBC report, developments since November 2025 demonstrate the intensification of constraints operating through systems of circulation. Supply chains have become more fragile, humanitarian delivery more uncertain, and the conditions required for everyday survival increasingly precarious.

Indeed, multiple forms of deprivation interact and accumulate over time, leading to the wider erosion of the social, economic, and infrastructural conditions required for life. The cumulative destruction of healthcare systems, housing, water infrastructure, livelihoods, and local markets means that the challenge extends beyond access alone. Rather, what is at stake is the continued dismantling of the conditions necessary for survival itself.

From a regional perspective, Gaza illustrates how interstate conflict can reinforce an existing siege by displacing political attention and constraining humanitarian leverage, thereby deepening conditions of isolation without fundamentally altering the underlying architecture of control.

Lebanon: From Chronic Vulnerability to Large-Scale Displacement Under Siege

In Lebanon, the US/Israeli war on Iran and its regional escalation produced the most significant spillover crisis outside Gaza. Israel's continued bombardment of civilian areas across Lebanon and its increasingly entrenched occupation of the south of the country led to the displacement of more than 1.3 million people, including both Lebanese citizens, many of whom had experienced previous displacement during earlier periods of occupation and conflict, as well as long-standing refugee populations, particularly Palestinians and Syrians.

Here, siege operates through a combination of territorial occupation, military violence, economic crisis, and institutional fragility. Mass displacement has unfolded within a context already characterised by economic collapse, governance failures, and the long-term marginalisation of refugee populations. The result has been much more than a "humanitarian emergency": it has entailed the consolidation of localised siege-like conditions characterised

by restricted movement, the destruction of infrastructure, and barriers to return. Many displaced populations remain unable or unwilling to return to their homes due to insecurity and uncertainty regarding ceasefire durability. Damage to housing, healthcare facilities, and public services further undermines recovery efforts. Developments in Lebanon must thus be understood as the deepening of existing and overlapping crises that have accumulated and expanded over many years.

Yemen: Intensified Economic Siege Through Maritime Disruption

In Yemen, the effects of regional escalation have compounded an already severe humanitarian context: in 2026, over 22 million people require humanitarian assistance, including 5.2 million IDPs, and 18.3 million people facing acute food insecurity (OCHA 2026a). Economic and logistical systems have been disrupted by heightened insecurity across key maritime corridors, including the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and routes linked to the Strait of Hormuz. These disruptions have increased transport and insurance costs, delayed imports, and restricted access to essential commodities. Given Yemen's structural dependence on imported food and fuel, such disruptions have had disproportionate humanitarian consequences. Fuel shortages have undermined healthcare provision, water systems, and humanitarian logistics, while rising costs have further constrained already under-funded operations.

These developments illustrate how contemporary siege increasingly operates through circulation choke points and economic systems, rather than solely through territorial encirclement. The workshop repeatedly returned to the observation that disruption has become embedded within the operating environment itself. Far from being an exceptional event, recurring disruption is experienced as a structural condition shaping humanitarian action across the region. Yemen therefore exemplifies the temporal layering of siege conditions, where immediate disruptions are compounded by delayed effects across supply chains, agriculture, and infrastructure, further entrenching long-term vulnerability.

Sudan: Deepening Isolation Through Attention and Resource Diversion

Sudan's crisis, already the world's largest displacement emergency (IOM 2026c), with around 9.1 million people internally displaced as of March 2026 (IOM 2026b), was significantly affected through secondary systemic effects: international attention shifted elsewhere at a time of escalating need, while humanitarian actors faced increased competition for limited funding and rising operational costs associated with regional disruptions.

In besieged areas such as El Fasher and, at the time of writing, El Obeid (Türk 2026), populations experienced intensified isolation as humanitarian capacity struggled to keep pace with escalating needs amidst restricted access and insecurity. Throughout the country, by March 2026, 54% of IDP households had received no humanitarian aid over a three-month period and 36% were experiencing restrictions on their movement (IOM 2026a).

Sudan therefore illustrates how regional conflict can produce indirect siege effects, whereby populations become increasingly cut off both through violence itself and also through the fragmentation, overstretching, and reprioritisation of humanitarian systems. In neighbouring South Sudan, the government repeatedly denied humanitarian organisations access to opposition-held areas, while its forces bombed hospitals in those same areas, producing a comparable pattern that left hundreds of thousands of civilians without healthcare services (MSF 2026).

Syria: Fragmented Access and Militarised Humanitarian Space

In Syria, long-established patterns of siege, sanctions, and protracted displacement continue to structure everyday life, with the regional escalation adding further layers of economic and political pressure. Despite large-scale

refugee and IDP returns since the fall of Assad's regime in December 2024, around 5.5 million people remain internally displaced and around 15.6 million, roughly two-thirds of the population, require humanitarian assistance in 2026 (United Nations 2026b). In this context, the primary impact of recent developments has been the further fragmentation of humanitarian space. Increased military activity by the Israeli armed forces in southern Syria has further heightened insecurity and constrained movement for both civilians and humanitarian actors (Qwaider and Wirtschafter 2026; Granville 2026; Reuters 2026).

While new displacement remains more limited than in Gaza or Lebanon, localised insecurity contributes to movement restrictions and service disruption. Humanitarian organisations face increased operational risks and interruptions to cross-border logistics in areas already characterised by complex governance arrangements and sanctions regimes.

The key effect transcends the emergence of new siege conditions, instead being characterised by the intensification of fragmented access regimes in which humanitarian operations continue to be shaped by overlapping political, military, and regulatory constraints.

The Strait of Hormuz and the Regionalisation of Circulation Crisis

Taken together, these context-specific dynamics point to a broader systemic phenomenon. While siege has historically been understood as spatially bounded, the current moment reveals how its logics are increasingly extended across infrastructures that connect, rather than isolate, different contexts of crisis. It is within this wider field of interdependence that developments affecting the Strait of Hormuz must be understood.

A key dimension of this expansion has been the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz and, with it, both the broader Gulf energy system and the Gulf aid system. As one of the world's most significant chokepoints for oil and gas transport, instability in and around the Strait has generated cascading effects across regional and global economies. The workshop highlighted how disruptions to shipping routes, heightened insecurity, and volatility in energy markets have contributed to rising fuel costs, strained supply chains, and constraints on industrial and agricultural production. These dynamics have directly affected Gulf countries themselves, many of which occupy a dual position as central nodes for both global energy infrastructures and major humanitarian donors.

In this sense, the Strait of Hormuz functions as more than a geopolitical flashpoint: it is a critical node within regional and global systems of circulation through which economic disruption is translated into humanitarian consequence. Developments affecting the Strait therefore illustrate particularly clearly how contemporary forms of siege operate beyond territorial boundaries and through interconnected infrastructures that shape mobility, trade, humanitarian access, and everyday life across multiple contexts simultaneously.

At the same time, the uneven visibility of these impacts has been particularly notable since the start of the US/Israeli war on Iran. International media and policy attention have frequently centred on the disruption experienced by European and North American expatriate communities residing in Gulf states, particularly in relation to evacuation concerns, security risks, and disruptions to economic life. While these experiences are undoubtedly significant, it has further compounded the relative invisibility of the much larger numbers of refugees, migrant workers, and displaced populations living both within Gulf countries and across the five contexts at the centre of this report (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2026; Refugees International 2026; Human Rights Watch 2026).

Such patterns of visibility and invisibility are not politically neutral: they reflect broader processes through which humanitarian priorities are established and maintained. Some forms of disruption become highly visible and rapidly

mobilise international concern, while others remain comparatively marginalised despite their scale and severity. From this perspective, visibility itself becomes an important dimension of contemporary humanitarian governance, shaping which crises attract attention, resources, and political engagement (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; 2020).

This uneven visibility is closely linked to broader processes of humanitarian prioritisation and resource allocation. As the Gulf states have confronted direct threats to infrastructure and growing economic pressures associated with energy market instability, there has been an increasing need to direct resources towards national priorities, including domestic stabilisation, infrastructure protection, and energy sector resilience. These developments have important implications for the longstanding role of the Gulf states as international humanitarian donors (Elkahlout 2020; Elkahlout and Milton 2024), contributing in some cases to reduced or reconfigured external funding flows and, in others, to a shift towards more strategic and highly visible forms of humanitarian engagement. For instance, Qatar's estimated reduction in state funding for overseas aid by around 85% by August 2026 exemplifies a momentous shift, especially given its position as one of UNOCHA's top five donors last year (see England 2026).

From the perspective of systemic pressure, these developments illustrate how war and siege are mediated through direct violence as well as through global infrastructures of energy, finance, trade, and mobility that reshape both humanitarian capacity and everyday lived experiences. The significance of the Strait of Hormuz therefore lies both in displacing attention from populations living under siege, and in demonstrating how their conditions are increasingly shaped by processes operating far beyond the immediate sites of conflict.

Box 1: Regionalised Siege and the Deepening of Humanitarian Isolation

One of the most significant consequences of the US/Israeli war on Iran has been the deepening of humanitarian isolation across multiple contexts in the WANA region. Humanitarian isolation does not refer solely to physical enclosure or restrictions on movement. Rather, it emerges through the interaction of political, logistical, financial, and institutional constraints that progressively reduce the capacity of affected populations to access protection, assistance, and durable forms of support.

Across Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, humanitarian isolation has been reinforced through several interconnected processes:

- the diversion of diplomatic and political attention away from existing crises;
- growing competition for limited humanitarian funding;
- disruptions to regional and global systems of circulation, including shipping routes, airspace, and supply chains;
- rising operational and transport costs;
- the normalisation of restrictive security measures; and
- the prolonged displacement of populations already living under conditions of constraint.

Importantly, humanitarian isolation is experienced unevenly and produces differentiated effects: its manifestations vary according to legal status, access to mobility pathways, proximity to humanitarian infrastructures, and inclusion within wider systems of circulation and support. As a result, humanitarian isolation produces differentiated forms of vulnerability across populations and contexts.

While analytically distinct, the concepts of *regionalised* siege and humanitarian *isolation* are deeply intertwined. Together, they highlight a central argument advanced throughout this report: contemporary siege operates not only through territorial enclosure, but also through the disruption and governance of the wider systems that enable protection, mobility, assistance, and survival. Understanding humanitarian isolation therefore requires attention to the regional and global infrastructures through which siege is increasingly produced, experienced, and sustained.

Across all five contexts, the effects of the war on Iran converge in important ways. Existing inequalities are amplified, vulnerabilities deepened, and the conditions of displacement and humanitarian response fundamentally reshaped. Yet affected populations are not passive recipients of these pressures. Across the region, communities continue to mobilise diverse strategies of survival, care, and solidarity, drawing on local knowledge, mutual aid systems, community networks, faith-based initiatives, and long-standing practices of support (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2025b). These observations further reinforce the importance of humanitarian and policy frameworks that recognise, engage with, and learn from locally grounded responses rather than treating affected populations solely as recipients of assistance.

From both research and policy perspectives, these dynamics underscore the importance of multi-scalar, historically grounded, and people-centred approaches. Humanitarian responses must move beyond treating crises as isolated events and instead recognise the interconnected systems through which siege is produced, sustained, and experienced. This includes rethinking funding models, strengthening locally grounded forms of response in sustainable manners, recognising regional interdependencies, and reaffirming commitments to accountability, protection, and rights. Without such shifts, there is a risk that humanitarian systems will continue to adapt to conditions of siege while leaving the structures that produce and sustain those conditions fundamentally unchallenged.

II. From Context to System: Systemic Pressure Under Conditions of Siege

As the preceding analysis has shown, the recent regional escalation has intensified and interconnected existing conditions of siege rather than creating wholly new forms of crisis. The cumulative effects observed across Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, and Syria, including layered displacement, constrained mobility, infrastructural degradation, economic insecurity, and uneven humanitarian access, point to a shared structural condition in which crisis is no longer experienced as episodic or exceptional. Instead, it is continuously reproduced through interacting systems of governance, exclusion, and vulnerability.

Viewed from this perspective, contemporary humanitarian challenges cannot be understood in terms of a single crisis. In practice, disruptions across energy systems, supply chains, humanitarian financing, governance arrangements, accountability mechanisms, and political processes increasingly interact with and reinforce one another. The resulting pressures are experienced simultaneously across multiple domains, producing complex environments in which humanitarian actors and affected populations alike confront overlapping and mutually reinforcing constraints.

This provides a foundation for analysing both how humanitarian systems are adapting and where they are failing to uphold the rights, needs, and aspirations of affected populations. In this regard, the concept of systemic pressure offers a useful analytical lens through which to synthesise the developments examined throughout this report. Rather than displacing the framework of siege developed in the first BBBC report, the concept extends that framework across multiple scales. It highlights how the dynamics of restriction, control, exclusion, and selective allocation increasingly operate through interconnected systems of energy, finance, logistics, governance, and humanitarian action. What emerges transcends the identification of a regional crisis, and is instead recognised as a multi-scalar configuration of systemic pressure through which localised experiences are shaped by broader geopolitical, economic, and infrastructural transformations.

These dynamics point to the consolidation of a multi-system crisis environment in which disruptions across logistics, finance, food systems, displacement processes, and governance structures are mutually reinforcing. Importantly, such disruptions are both spatially distributed and temporally uneven. Rising energy costs, disruptions to agricultural production, and the long-term consequences of declining humanitarian funding often emerge gradually, with structural shocks reverberating through interconnected systems before their effects become fully visible on the ground.

In this sense, systemic pressure is multi-scalar and temporally stratified. It produces conditions in which the effects of crisis are deferred, diffused, and experienced unevenly across populations and locations. Contemporary crises are therefore characterised both by immediate disruption, and also by delayed and cumulative forms of vulnerability that unfold across months and years through deteriorating livelihoods, weakened public services, declining social protection systems, and reduced humanitarian support.

Viewed from this perspective, the developments analysed throughout this report point both to intensification and to structural transformation. What emerges is a configuration of pressure that is simultaneously spatial, temporal, economic, political, and infrastructural. Far from being exceptional, disruption appears as a constitutive feature of the operating environment. Humanitarian action is therefore becoming embedded within a regionalised and multi-system configuration of constraint in which crises unfold across interconnected domains and are experienced unevenly across both time and space.

This interpretation has important implications for humanitarian analysis and practice alike. If siege is increasingly produced through interconnected systems rather than solely through territorial enclosure, then humanitarian responses must similarly move beyond context-specific analyses and engage with the wider structures through which vulnerability, displacement, and exclusion are generated and sustained. Understanding contemporary humanitarian dynamics therefore requires attention to events unfolding within particular territories, and, simultaneously, to the regional and global systems that shape the possibilities and limits of response.

It is within this broader framework of systemic pressure, relational interdependence, and temporal stratification that the transformations examined in the sections that follow should be understood. The following sections therefore explore how these dynamics are reshaping humanitarian practice, funding architectures, accountability mechanisms, and future research agendas across the WANA region.

III. Humanitarianism Under Pressure: Adaptation, Constraint, and Uneven Transformations

Humanitarian practice across the WANA region is undergoing significant adaptation. Yet these changes are unfolding within structures of inequality, exclusion, and constraint that remain largely intact. Consequently, many emerging adaptations alter the modalities of response without fundamentally transforming the conditions within which humanitarian action takes place.

Operationally, humanitarian organisations are restructuring their activities around assumptions of restricted access, uncertainty, and prolonged disruption. Remote management, regionalised procurement systems, telemedicine, local partnerships, and flexible delivery models have become central components of contemporary humanitarian practice. In Lebanon, telemedicine is increasingly used to reach displaced populations. In Gaza, humanitarian delivery is now mediated overwhelmingly through Palestinian organisations and locally embedded actors. More broadly, humanitarian systems are now routinely designed around assumptions of restricted or absent international presence.

The significance of these developments extends beyond questions of operational adaptation. Humanitarian action is increasingly organised around conditions of permanent disruption rather than temporary emergency. Contingency planning, improvisation, and workarounds have become routine features of humanitarian practice. What were once exceptional responses to access restrictions now constitute the normal operating environment.

This should not be mistaken for transformation. Most of the adaptations discussed during the workshop and in the broader literature were driven by necessity rather than strategic redesign. Organisations are responding to constraints because alternatives are unavailable. Adaptation often reflects the absence of meaningful choices rather than the emergence of new humanitarian models. Viewed in this light, many current innovations function less as transformative reforms than as institutional coping mechanisms that enable organisations to continue operating within increasingly restrictive environments while not necessarily addressing the underlying conditions producing humanitarian need (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2026). Questions therefore remain regarding the sustainability, effectiveness, and long-term implications of normalising crisis management as a permanent mode of operation.

The pressures associated with siege are reshaping civilian practices as well. Across multiple contexts, risky survival strategies have become central to everyday life under conditions of prolonged constraint. Survival today requires engagement with environments that would previously have been considered unacceptable or intolerably dangerous. As one participant observed, the threshold of acceptable risk continues to rise as people seek to secure mobility, income, and access to essential services under increasingly restrictive conditions. These developments reveal how siege actively reorganises the conditions of everyday life, shaping not only access to resources but also the risks people are compelled to take in order to survive.

A similar dynamic is visible in discussions of localisation. While localisation remains a central aspiration within humanitarian reform agendas, the realities observed across Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen point towards a far more contested process. International organisations depend increasingly on local actors, yet authority, resources, and protection have not shifted in comparable ways. For instance, in South Sudan, when authorities denied humanitarian access to opposition-held areas, MSF-supported hospitals were left to be run for weeks by locally hired staff facing dwindling supplies and rising numbers of weapon-wounded patients (MSF 2026, p. 16). The result is what has elsewhere been described as “forced localisation” (Antaby 2025): a situation in which operational responsibility and exposure to risk are transferred downwards while decision-making power remains concentrated elsewhere.

This distinction is critical. Local actors have always occupied central positions within humanitarian response systems, whether through formal organisations, community networks, or informal systems of care and mutual support. Their current prominence does not represent a new development so much as a more visible manifestation of longstanding realities. What has changed is the scale of international reliance on these actors and the degree to which responsibility is being transferred without equivalent transfers of resources, authority, or duty of care. Under these conditions, localisation functions less as a redistribution of power than as a mechanism through which the humanitarian system sustains itself under conditions of restricted access and heightened risk. Its transformative potential therefore remains far from certain.

A less visible consequence of protracted crisis is exhaustion. Across contexts such as Gaza and Lebanon, humanitarian actors reported growing forms of civilian and community fatigue, including disengagement from humanitarian messaging and outreach initiatives. Such responses point towards a broader erosion of trust and engagement under conditions of prolonged insecurity. Repeated exposure to violence, displacement, and crisis can generate forms of exhaustion that reshape how individuals engage with humanitarian actors and institutions.

The significance of siege therefore extends beyond restrictions on movement, livelihoods, or access to services. It also shapes emotional and psychological landscapes, influencing how people interpret, respond to, and navigate conditions of ongoing uncertainty.

At the same time, important alternative trajectories are emerging. Regionalisation, South-South cooperation, and partnerships extending beyond conventional humanitarian actors featured prominently in discussions of future practice. Organisations operating in Syria and Lebanon, for example, have begun repositioning supply chains on regional scales, while locally embedded networks across Gaza, Sudan, and Yemen continue to provide frontline support despite severe operational constraints. These developments confirm that some of the most significant innovations in contemporary humanitarian practice are continuing to emerge and develop outside formal humanitarian architectures, with locally grounded systems of care and South-South responses alike continuing to sustain populations under conditions of siege, often with limited visibility and support (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2025a; 2025b).

Such systems are more than coping mechanisms or supplementary responses: they constitute important infrastructures through which life, care, and social reproduction are organised under conditions of constraint. Recognising their significance requires broadening humanitarian analysis beyond formal institutions and international actors to encompass the wider ecosystems through which survival is sustained. Doing so draws attention to the diverse, decentralised, and often overlooked infrastructures of solidarity, care, and support that continue to shape humanitarian realities across the region.

The central question, therefore, is whether the ways in which humanitarian systems are adapting are capable of challenging the structures that produce siege, or whether they ultimately contribute to their normalisation. This question lies at the heart of contemporary debates regarding humanitarian transformation and provides a critical foundation for understanding the political economy, accountability challenges, and governance dilemmas examined below.

IV. Political Economy and Funding Crisis: Re-Stratification Under Pressure

The intensification of systemic pressure is particularly visible in the evolving political economy of humanitarianism. Developments across the region point to a deepening funding crisis characterised by declining resources, shifting donor priorities, and intensified competition. However, these dynamics are best understood as part of a broader structural transformation of humanitarian financing systems. While reductions in major funding streams, including the widely discussed consequences of cuts to USAID and other Western donor programmes, have had immediate operational effects, these developments reflect longer-term processes of contraction, reprioritisation, and the politicisation of aid that have been unfolding for several years.

From this perspective, the current funding crisis should be understood as structural. Rather than signalling a temporary downturn, it represents a wider reconfiguration of the financial architecture underpinning humanitarian response. Across the region, organisations are increasingly being required to operate in environments characterised by greater uncertainty, shorter funding horizons, heightened competition, and growing pressure to demonstrate visibility, efficiency, and measurable impact.

Reductions in major funding streams have already generated significant operational consequences. Programmes have been scaled back, staffing reduced, and certain sectors disproportionately affected. Protection programming, rights-based advocacy, gender-focused initiatives, and other activities that are often difficult to quantify through conventional donor metrics appear particularly vulnerable under current funding conditions. At the same time, protracted crises such as those in Yemen, Sudan, and Syria continue to experience chronic underfunding despite escalating humanitarian needs and growing displacement. For displaced populations, these funding reductions frequently translate into diminished access to health services, protection programming, education, livelihood support, and longer-term recovery initiatives, further deepening existing forms of precarity.

What is particularly notable in the current moment is the extent to which these dynamics are producing an increasingly visible re-stratification of the humanitarian system. Resources, attention, and institutional legitimacy are becoming more unevenly distributed across both sectors and geographical contexts. While inequalities within humanitarian response are not new, the current period is characterised by an unusually explicit and widely recognised differentiation between crises that attract political attention and funding and those that remain comparatively marginalised. In this regard, visibility itself functions as a determinant of humanitarian opportunity, shaping which crises attract resources, institutional attention, and political engagement.

Shifts in Gulf donor engagement further complicate this evolving landscape. While some participants initially characterised recent developments as a contraction in available funding, a more nuanced interpretation emerged from the evidence presented during the workshop. While many state donors are decreasing their overseas aid budgets, Gulf actors also appear to be reconfiguring their involvement through new modalities, including infrastructure-centred interventions, strategic partnerships, blended finance mechanisms, and initiatives that place greater emphasis on visibility, long-term investment, and geopolitical positioning.

Consequently, the key issue is the reconfiguration of Gulf engagement rather than its disappearance per se. Humanitarian funding is increasingly being embedded within broader political, economic, and strategic frameworks. This raises important questions regarding alignment between donors and humanitarian actors, the changing nature of partnership models, and the extent to which existing humanitarian architectures are equipped to engage with these evolving forms of support.

Participants also highlighted the need to diversify funding sources and explore alternative mechanisms, including climate finance, academic partnerships, philanthropic initiatives, and private-sector engagement. While such approaches may create new opportunities for sustaining humanitarian action, they also raise important questions regarding accessibility, governance, accountability, and compatibility with humanitarian principles, particularly in contexts characterised by complex political and regulatory constraints.

More broadly, the research underpinning the BBBC Initiative points to the importance of moving beyond funding volume as the primary measure of humanitarian influence. Responses to siege and displacement must also be examined through the wider political economy of response, including the contributions of regional, transregional, and Southern actors whose significance may exceed their financial scale. As previous research has argued, humanitarian influence is also shaped by forms of solidarity, legitimacy, proximity, trust, and long-term engagement (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2025a; 2025b; 2026).

At the same time, shrinking funding has intensified competition across the humanitarian system, contributing to increasingly fragmented and uneven response landscapes. Different sectors and contexts are affected unequally: health services, protection activities, gender-focused programming, and support for displacement-affected

communities were frequently identified throughout the workshop as areas facing disproportionate reductions. These trends reinforce broader patterns of inequality within humanitarian response and contribute to what may be understood as a competitive humanitarian environment, in which scarcity drives prioritisation, fragmentation, and uneven coverage.

As argued throughout this report, these dynamics are not simply financial. They are part of the wider processes through which regionalised siege produces differentiated forms of vulnerability and exposure. Funding scarcity does not affect all actors, organisations, or populations equally: it intersects with existing inequalities in visibility, political influence, institutional capacity, and geographical location. As a result, the current transformation of humanitarian financing risks reinforcing many of the same patterns of exclusion and stratification that humanitarian actors seek to address.

In this sense, the funding crisis is much more than a question of resource availability. It is ultimately a question of governance, power, and political economy. Understanding how humanitarian financing is being reconfigured is therefore essential to understanding how contemporary forms of siege are reproduced, navigated, and contested across the WANA region. Funding is more than a resource for humanitarian action; it is increasingly one of the mechanisms through which priorities are established, visibility is allocated, and inequalities are (re-)produced across humanitarian space.

V. Accountability, Governance, and the Crisis of Legitimacy

Accountability has emerged as a central concern across contemporary humanitarian scholarship and policy debates, including within the broader work of the BBBC Initiative (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2025b; 2026). Against this backdrop, the erosion of accountability emerges as one of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary humanitarian governance, reflecting both long-standing structural weaknesses and their contemporary intensification. The current moment can be characterised in terms of operational constraints, but also as a broader crisis of legitimacy, marked by the persistence of unpunished violations of humanitarian law and the limited capacity of existing institutions to uphold and enforce established norms. As one participant framed it, the humanitarian sector is facing an “ethical and financial collapse of the whole system”, highlighting the extent to which accountability failures are intertwined with funding pressures, political paralysis, and declining institutional credibility.

The analysis thus points to the continued failure of international humanitarian law to provide effective protection, alongside the limited capacity of existing institutions to enforce accountability. In contexts such as Gaza, the scale, visibility, and documentation of violations of international humanitarian law have drawn renewed attention to these shortcomings. In South Sudan as well, MSF-supported hospitals that were clearly marked and whose coordinates had been shared with the parties to the conflict were nonetheless struck from the air, without effective investigation or acknowledgement of responsibility (MSF 2026). Questions therefore remain regarding the capacity of existing accountability mechanisms to prevent, deter, or respond effectively to violations, particularly where powerful state and non-state actors face limited consequences for their actions.

At the same time, humanitarian organisations themselves operate within complex and often competing accountability frameworks. Obligations to donors, institutional mandates, host governments, and affected populations do not always align, particularly under conditions of restricted access, shrinking resources, and heightened political pressure. Beyond this lack of alignment, donor requirements, reporting structures, and compliance obligations

systematically shape organisational priorities in ways that constrain their responsiveness to affected communities. These dynamics raise fundamental questions about how accountability is defined, enacted, and experienced in practice. For displaced populations, these tensions are often experienced directly through limited opportunities to influence decision-making, restricted access to complaint and redress mechanisms, and the uneven distribution of protection and assistance.

As has been widely documented in both academic and policy literature, the accountability of humanitarian actors to affected populations frequently remains subordinated to forms of upward accountability directed towards donors and institutional stakeholders. This tension remains one of the defining characteristics of contemporary humanitarian governance. Funding requirements, reporting obligations, and performance indicators often exert greater influence over organisational decision-making than the priorities articulated by the affected populations themselves. This does not necessarily reflect a lack of commitment on the part of humanitarian actors, but rather the structural realities within which humanitarian organisations operate. For displaced populations, the consequences are significant, shaping whose priorities are recognised, whose concerns are addressed, and whose experiences remain marginal to humanitarian decision-making.

From a people-centred perspective, it is therefore essential to move beyond institutional understandings of accountability and to recognise its relational and contested nature. Across Gaza, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Yemen, besieged and displaced populations continue to develop their own mechanisms of response, critique, mutual support, and survival, even in contexts where formal accountability systems are weak, absent, or ineffective (see also Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2026). These practices highlight both the limitations of existing institutional frameworks and the importance of grounding analysis in lived experience and locally embedded forms of knowledge and practice.

Meaningful accountability cannot be reduced to reporting requirements, compliance procedures, or legal mechanisms alone. Rather, it must also encompass questions of voice, representation, participation, and power. This includes recognising the ways in which affected populations actively assess, critique, and respond to humanitarian interventions, as well as the extent to which humanitarian actors remain accountable for the broader political implications of their actions and omissions.

Viewed through the analytical framework developed throughout both this and the first BBBC Initiative report, accountability is best understood as a relational and situated practice shaped by the same systems of circulation, constraint, and differential exposure that characterise contemporary forms of siege. Just as access, mobility, protection, and visibility are unevenly distributed, so too are opportunities to seek redress, influence decision-making, and hold powerful actors to account. Accountability itself therefore becomes unevenly accessible under conditions of siege.

The crisis of accountability identified by participants is thus inseparable from the wider crisis of humanitarian legitimacy. As siege becomes increasingly regionalised and embedded within interconnected systems of governance, finance, and mobility, questions of who is accountable, to whom, through what mechanisms, and with what consequences become ever more urgent. Addressing these questions requires stronger institutional mechanisms, but also a willingness to confront the political structures through which impunity is sustained. Without such engagement, accountability risks becoming another domain in which humanitarian systems adapt to conditions of siege while leaving the structures that produce those conditions fundamentally unchanged.

VI. Towards a Transformative Research Agenda on Displacement Under Siege

The discussions across both BBBC workshops to date point towards a research agenda that extends beyond documenting humanitarian crises and responses. The analysis developed throughout this report suggests that understanding displacement under siege requires greater attention to the systems, relationships, and historical processes through which vulnerability, mobility, humanitarian action, and everyday survival are produced and governed.

The first priority concerns the regionalisation of siege. This report has argued that contemporary siege extends beyond territorial enclosure and increasingly operates through systems of circulation, including mobility regimes, logistics, finance, energy infrastructures, regulatory frameworks, and humanitarian access mechanisms. Understanding siege therefore requires moving beyond territorially bounded analyses and examining the wider systems through which vulnerability is produced, distributed, and experienced across the region. Future research should investigate how disruptions in one location reverberate across wider regional fields through shared infrastructures, donor architectures, supply chains, and governance systems. Such work can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how displacement, immobility, and humanitarian need are shaped through interconnected processes that transcend individual national contexts.

A second priority concerns humanitarianism under conditions of systemic pressure. As demonstrated throughout this report, humanitarian actors often operate in environments characterised by insecurity, restricted access, political constraint, shrinking civic space, and financial uncertainty. These developments raise important questions regarding the sustainability, ethics, and political implications of contemporary humanitarian practice. Further research is required to understand the long-term effects of adaptive strategies such as remote management, flexible delivery models, regionalised operations, and localisation. Particular attention should be paid to the extent to which humanitarian adaptation may inadvertently contribute to the normalisation of siege conditions when operational continuity is prioritised over accountability, protection, and structural change.

Closely connected to this is the need to examine the growing pressures facing humanitarian actors themselves. The first BBBC report documented the implications of shrinking civic space, increased securitisation, restrictive regulatory environments, and attacks on humanitarian personnel. The discussions in the second workshop reinforced the importance of understanding how these pressures shape organisational behaviour, advocacy strategies, institutional priorities, and operational decision-making. Examining the conditions under which humanitarian actors themselves operate remains essential for understanding the possibilities and limitations of contemporary humanitarian action.

A third priority concerns what this report conceptualises as Southern infrastructures of survival, solidarity, and care. Across all contexts examined, affected populations continue to organise responses through diverse networks of care, mutual support, and resource circulation. These include informal economies, community-based health initiatives, faith-based organisations, diasporic remittance systems, refugee-led initiatives, and transregional support networks. Such systems should not be approached simply as compensatory responses to humanitarian gaps. They constitute important forms of governance, protection, and social organisation through which life is sustained under conditions of prolonged constraint. Future research should therefore continue to decentre international humanitarian actors and engage more systematically with the diverse forms of knowledge, leadership, and practice emerging from communities directly affected by, and responding to, conflict and displacement.

A fourth priority concerns the temporal dimensions of siege and displacement. Contemporary crises unfold through overlapping temporalities characterised by protracted displacement, cyclical disruption, recurring emergencies, suspended futures, and cumulative forms of deprivation. As this report has highlighted, many of the consequences of conflict and displacement emerge unevenly over time. Disruptions to energy markets, supply chains, agricultural production, and humanitarian funding frequently generate effects that may only become visible months or years after the events that precipitated them. Future research requires analytical approaches capable of tracing these delayed and cumulative dynamics and examining how they shape both humanitarian need and humanitarian response.

A fifth priority concerns knowledge production under conditions of siege. Across both workshops, participants drew attention to restricted access for researchers and practitioners, growing reliance on remote methodologies, fragmented data systems, and the uneven visibility of crises across the region. These dynamics raise important questions regarding how knowledge is produced, whose perspectives are represented, and how epistemic inequalities shape both policy responses and academic analysis. Future research should continue to engage critically with the politics of humanitarian knowledge, including the roles of access constraints, securitisation, funding priorities, and institutional power in determining what can be known, documented, and acted upon. It should also contribute to strengthening regional knowledge production and supporting researchers, practitioners, and communities directly affected by, and responding to, conflict and displacement.

A sixth priority concerns accountability, protection, and justice. The BBBC Initiative has clearly identified the erosion of accountability mechanisms as a defining feature of contemporary humanitarian crises. Future research should examine how accountability operates across local, national, regional, and international scales, while also investigating emerging approaches to documentation, advocacy, legal action, and protection. Such work is particularly important in contexts where formal accountability mechanisms remain weak or absent. Understanding how accountability is pursued, contested, and negotiated under conditions of siege offers important insights into the possibilities for justice, protection, and institutional reform.

Collectively, these priorities point towards a research agenda that is historically grounded, regionally embedded, and explicitly multi-scalar. They also highlight the need to move beyond crisis-driven, presentist approaches that isolate events in time and space. Contemporary humanitarian crises are shaped through interconnected systems of circulation, governance, finance, mobility, and knowledge production. Understanding these systems requires approaches capable of linking local experiences of displacement and survival with wider regional and global processes.

Equally importantly, the discussions across both workshops highlighted the need for research that combines conceptual innovation with policy relevance and practical engagement. The challenge goes beyond the need to generate new knowledge, and instead requires us to contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen accountability, protection, and humanitarian response. This includes identifying opportunities for regional learning, collaboration, and collective action, while exploring alternative models of governance, financing, and cooperation emerging from across the WANA region and beyond.

Ultimately, the research agenda outlined here is both an intellectual project and a normative commitment. It seeks to engage critically with the conditions that produce and sustain siege, while identifying pathways that move beyond adaptation towards more equitable, accountable, and transformative forms of humanitarian response. Grounded in empirical evidence and informed by commitments to justice, dignity, and human rights, this agenda thus aims to understand contemporary crises, whilst simultaneously seeking to contribute to efforts to address the structures through which they are reproduced.

Conclusion: Reimagining Humanitarianism Under Conditions of Regionalised and Systemic Pressure

The second BBBC workshop highlights a central conclusion: in the aftermath of the US/Israeli war on Iran and its wider regional repercussions, humanitarian systems across the WANA region are being reshaped under conditions of sustained and structurally embedded pressure. The developments examined throughout this report reveal an intensification and interconnection of dynamics that have long shaped the region, including conflict, displacement, restricted mobility, political marginalisation, economic instability, and uneven access to protection.

Viewed from this perspective, the significance of the present moment lies less in the emergence of entirely new forms of crisis than in the visibility it has brought to existing ones. Processes that are often analysed separately have become increasingly difficult to disentangle. Humanitarian access, displacement, donor priorities, energy systems, supply chains, and geopolitical conflict are now visibly interconnected. The result is the consolidation of a polycrisis environment in which pressures operating across logistics, finance, energy systems, food production, and humanitarian governance reinforce one another and generate complex patterns of vulnerability.

A central argument developed throughout this report is that contemporary siege can no longer be adequately understood through territorially bounded frameworks alone. Territorial enclosure remains important. Yet the conditions shaping life under siege emerge through wider systems of circulation, infrastructure, regulation, and governance. The regional reverberations of the US/Israeli war on Iran have made these interdependencies particularly visible. Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon remain distinct contexts with their own histories and dynamics, but they are also connected through shared logistical networks, donor architectures, regulatory systems, political economies, and humanitarian infrastructures. Disruptions in one location increasingly reverberate across others.

The report has also highlighted the extent to which humanitarian systems themselves are embedded within these dynamics. Humanitarian actors are operating under conditions characterised by restricted access, heightened securitisation, financial uncertainty, and political pressure. As one participant cited above observed, the cumulative effect is an “ethical and financial collapse” that challenges the ability of humanitarian institutions to uphold their stated commitments and principles. The pressures facing humanitarianism are therefore operational, political, ethical, and epistemic. They raise difficult questions regarding how humanitarian actors navigate systems that they seek to challenge while simultaneously operating within them.

These pressures are experienced unevenly. Access to mobility, resources, protection, and visibility remains structured by intersecting inequalities linked to legal status, geography, class, gender, age, disability, and proximity to humanitarian infrastructures. Yet the BBBC Initiative has also consistently demonstrated that populations living under conditions of siege are far more than mere recipients of humanitarian assistance. Across the region, communities continue to mobilise diverse strategies of survival, drawing upon local knowledge, mutual aid networks, faith-based initiatives, diasporic connections, and transregional forms of solidarity. These practices underscore the importance of recognising Southern infrastructures of survival, solidarity, and care as central components of contemporary humanitarian realities rather than as peripheral responses to humanitarian gaps.

The implications for research, policy and practice are significant. Understanding displacement under siege requires analytical frameworks capable of connecting local experiences to wider regional and global systems. It also requires greater attention to accountability, circulation governance, humanitarian financing, knowledge production, and the political economies through which vulnerability is produced and sustained. The research agenda outlined in this

report seeks to contribute to that effort by combining conceptual innovation with policy relevance and practical engagement.

Equally important is the need to move beyond narrowly operational concerns with access and delivery. Humanitarian responses cannot be evaluated solely according to their ability to maintain continuity under conditions of crisis. Questions of accountability, protection, equity, and justice remain central. Without ongoing attention to the structures that produce and sustain siege, including the politicisation of aid, the securitisation of humanitarian space, unequal funding architectures, and the erosion of international legal frameworks, humanitarian systems risk adapting to conditions of crisis while leaving their underlying drivers intact.

Yet the developments examined throughout this report also point towards possibilities for change. The growing prominence of local and regional actors, emerging forms of cooperation and solidarity, and increasing recognition of diverse forms of knowledge and expertise all suggest that humanitarianism remains a dynamic and contested field. The challenge is therefore not simply how humanitarian systems can adapt to systemic pressure, but how they can be reshaped in ways that more effectively address the needs, rights, and aspirations of displaced and conflict-affected populations.

Ultimately, the discussions across the second BBBC workshop point towards a broader challenge. Humanitarian actors, researchers, policymakers, and affected communities are operating in conditions of prolonged and interconnected crisis rather than responding to discrete emergencies. This recognition provides the starting point for a different conversation about the future of humanitarianism in the region. The task ahead extends beyond analysing the dynamics of regionalised siege and systemic pressure. It requires identifying practical pathways towards accountability, protection, solidarity, and institutional transformation that are grounded in empirical realities, informed by historical understanding, and guided by commitments to justice, dignity, and human rights.

The forthcoming BBBC workshop will build directly on these foundations. The first phase of the Initiative documented barriers to humanitarian access and protection under siege. The second has examined the regionalisation of siege and the systemic pressures reshaping humanitarian action. The next stage will focus explicitly on identifying what should change, which actors are best positioned to drive those changes, and how more equitable, accountable, and sustainable responses to displacement under siege can be supported across the WANA region. In this sense, the BBBC Initiative seeks to go beyond analysing the changing nature of humanitarianism under siege, to actively contribute to the collective development of alternative futures for humanitarian action in the region and beyond.

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Cover image: Gaza-Palestine Amid the massive destruction in Jabalia camp, a young man and his mother drive a cart through the camp's streets

Photo credit: Mohammed Ibrahim/Unsplash