

The weaponization of hunger: An analysis of food security in conflict and post-conflict scenarios

Militarización del hambre: aproximación a la seguridad alimentaria en escenarios de conflicto y posconflicto

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Abstract

Human civilization has evolved over millennia with a focus on developing tools and techniques for survival in challenging environments. From harnessing fire for warmth, protection and cooking to the transition to settled agricultural communities, humans have demonstrated remarkable innovation and adaptation. However, alongside these advances, the darker aspect of weaponizing hunger has emerged throughout history, using food scarcity as a tool for coercion or warfare. This article explores the dual nature of human innovation, highlighting how the same ingenuity that propelled societies forward also held the potential for devastation through the deliberate imposition of famine. It reflects on the ethical implications of manipulating abundance and scarcity in human history, shedding light on the complex interplay between sustenance and survival. Furthermore, the article examines international legal and regulatory frameworks established to prevent the weaponization of hunger in conflict and promote food security. It discusses the evolution of these frameworks, key provisions, and mechanisms for enforcement, emphasizing the importance of upholding humanitarian principles and ensuring sustainable access to nutritious food for vulnerable populations.

Keywords: weaponization; conflict; food security; post-conflict; human security

Resumen

La civilización humana ha evolucionado a lo largo de milenios en el desarrollo de herramientas y técnicas para la supervivencia en entornos hostiles. Desde aprovechar el fuego para obtener calor y protección y para cocinar hasta la transición a comunidades

agrícolas asentadas, los humanos hemos demostrado una enorme capacidad de innovación y adaptación. Sin embargo, junto con estos avances, ha surgido el aspecto más oscuro de la militarización del hambre a lo largo de la historia al utilizar la escasez de alimentos como herramienta de coerción o guerra. Este artículo explora la naturaleza dual de la innovación humana y destaca que el mismo ingenio que impulsó a las sociedades hacia delante también contiene en su seno el potencial para la devastación a través de la imposición deliberada de la hambruna. Reflexiona, así, sobre las implicaciones éticas de la manipulación de la abundancia y la escasez en la historia humana y arroja luz sobre la compleja interacción entre el sustento y la supervivencia. Además, el artículo examina los marcos legales y regulatorios internacionales establecidos para prevenir la militarización del hambre en conflictos y promover la seguridad alimentaria. Se discute la evolución de estos marcos, las disposiciones clave y los mecanismos de cumplimiento enfatizando la importancia de defender los principios humanitarios y garantizar un acceso sostenible a alimentos nutritivos para poblaciones vulnerables.

Palabras clave: militarización; conflicto; seguridad alimentaria; posconflicto; seguridad humana

1. Introduction

For millennia, civilization has been meticulously shaped with a single purpose: to develop tools and techniques that ensure our survival in what was once a formidable and unforgiving environment (Rodríguez, 2016). The myth of Prometheus the bringer of fire embodies the ingenuity of our ancestors. This story, transcending the bounds of mere legend, symbolizes the harnessing of the spark of life that guided us through darkness. It highlights one of humanity's earliest technologies, the capture and preservation of fire, which set our species on a path to dominance.

The control and use of fire by early humans was a seminal achievement. Evidence suggests that the use of fire dates back to between a million and a million and a half years ago. Fire offered warmth, protection against predators, a means to cook food—making it more digestible and its nutrients more accessible—and a source of light to extend the day (Ellul, Wilkinson and Merton, 1964). The remains of ancient temples and sacred spaces such as the Temple of Vesta in the Forum in Rome, where the Vestal Virgins guarded the sacred flame, and the Atashkadeh in ancient Persia, where Zoroastrians worshiped in the presence of their eternally burning sacred fires, echo the profound reverence our ancestors held for fire. These structures stand as silent testaments to the critical importance that the protection and maintenance of fire represented in ancient societies.

Before the dawn of these advances, the Neolithic Revolution marked another turning point in human history—the shift from nomadic hunt-

er-gatherer societies to settled agricultural communities. This transformation, occurring around 10,000 years ago, was predicated on the domestication of plants and animals, fundamentally changing human interaction with the natural environment (Green and Guinery, 1994). Agriculture enabled the production of surplus food, which in turn supported larger, more stable populations, led to the rise of cities, and fostered the development of trade, social hierarchies and specialization of labor. The advent of farming laid the groundwork for the complex societies and cultural achievements that followed, setting the stage for civilizations to flourish (Rodríguez, 2016).

However, as history progressed, the human ability to harness the natural world for sustenance and protection revealed a darker aspect. The weaponization of hunger and the deliberate withholding of food as a tool of coercion or warfare emerged as a stark contrast to the nurturing use of natural resources. This article seeks to explore the dual nature of human innovation in securing sustenance and survival; and how the very ingenuity that propelled humanity to new heights also harbored the potential for remarkable devastation through the imposition of famine and food scarcity. As we examine the manipulation of abundance and scarcity throughout history, we enter into a profound reflection on the duality of human history and ethics, contemplating the light and darkness woven into our collective legacy.

Additionally, this article seeks to provide a comprehensive exploration of the international legal and regulatory frameworks that have been established with the dual purpose of preventing the weaponization of hunger in conflict and of fostering the development of food security frameworks. The discussion will look at the evolution of these frameworks, their key provisions, and the mechanisms in place to uphold and enforce them. By examining the intersection of international law, humanitarian principles and food security initiatives, this article aims to illuminate the ongoing efforts to safeguard vulnerable populations from the deliberate use of hunger as a weapon and to promote sustainable access to nutritious food for all.

2. Context

2.1. The fear of hunger: Myths and the precarious balance between abundance and scarcity

At the heart of every civilization lies a fundamental concern: the provision of food for its people. This elemental need has given rise to a profound fear—one that has persisted through the ages—the fear of hunger

(Kropotkin, 1995). This dread of starvation and food scarcity is reflected not only in the history of our evolution and progress, such as the development of agriculture and the subsequent Neolithic Revolution, but also resonates through the mythical narratives that cultures around the globe have created (Frazer and Campuzano, 1951). These myths serve as symbolic reminders of the precarious balance between abundance and scarcity, and the underlying fear that the chain of food production, the lifeline of any community, could be severed at any time (White, 1984).

For example, in Greek mythology, the story of Demeter and her daughter Persephone poignantly encapsulates the vulnerability of agricultural cycles. Demeter, the goddess of the harvest and grain, plunges the world into famine as a reaction to her daughter's abduction by Hades. The resulting barren landscapes serve as a stark manifestation of her grief and anger. This myth not only underscores the dependence of civilizations on agriculture but also metaphorically addresses the fear of disruption to food supplies and the dire consequences that may ensue (Rose, 2004).

Similarly, Mesopotamian civilizations revered gods and goddesses associated with fertility, agriculture and the elements vital for sustaining life. Among them, Ninkasi, the goddess of beer and brewing—a craft deeply intertwined with the agrarian lifestyle—symbolizes the cultivation of crops and the societal importance of abundant harvests. The homage paid to such deities in myths and temples reflects the collective anxiety over maintaining a consistent food supply and the calamitous impact of famine (George, Oshima and Lambert, 2016; Kilmer, 1972).

The Celtic celebration of Beltane, marked by the lighting of bonfires, illustrates a communal invocation for the renewal of the fertility of the land. This festival acknowledges the fear of cold seasons that deplete stores, and the subsequent hunger that follows. Moreover, it underlines a collective plea for protection, for warmth, and for ensuring that the land will generously yield its bounty once again (Ellis, 1994; Monaghan, 2014; Squire, 2003).

Native American narratives such as the Cherokee legend of Selu, the corn mother, embody the intrinsic connection and reverence for the crops that sustain life. The rituals and tales surrounding the corn, a staple crop, illuminate the sacred bond between people and their sustenance, echoing a perennial concern for the safeguarding of this essential relationship against any form of disruption that could lead to scarcity (Alexander, 2012; Williams and Mitchell, 2004).

These myths articulate a shared human experience: an inherent understanding of the central role that food systems play in the survival of society and a collective fear of the consequences should this foundation be threatened. They also highlight the link between the veneration

of divine figures representing fertility and harvest, and anxiety over the fragility of food systems. The myths, along with many others, demonstrate that the fear of hunger—a driving force behind many societal and technological advances—also served as a catalyst for spiritual and mythological narratives that sought to make sense of and control the unpredictable nature of food production.

2.2. The ancient weaponization of hunger: Strategies of starvation through time

The intentional use of hunger as a weapon of war is a dark thread in the fabric of human history. Ancient civilizations understood the critical importance of food for survival, and often turned to the manipulation of food supplies as a strategic tactic in conflicts. This section explores historical examples of how the weaponization of hunger has been employed in conflicts throughout history, shedding light on the strategic significance of this cruel method of warfare.

2.3. Siege warfare in ancient Mesopotamia (c. 2,500 BCE)

One of the earliest recorded instances of utilizing hunger as a weapon can be traced back to ancient Mesopotamian city-states. During siege warfare, armies would encircle city walls, cutting off the flow of food and water to those inside. This tactic was not only a means to weaken the enemy through starvation but also served as a psychological strategy that aimed to enforce a quicker surrender (Kern, 1999; Melville, 2020; Gilibert, 2005).

2.4. The siege of Lachish by the Assyrians (701 BCE)

The Assyrian siege of Lachish represents a vivid example of ancient military strategy involving the weaponization of hunger. The Assyrian army under King Sennacherib besieged the city of Lachish, one of Judah's fortified cities. By cutting off the city's access to food and water the Assyrians leveraged starvation as a weapon to break the will of the defenders, a tactic depicted in the detailed reliefs found at Nineveh, which showcase the brutality of the siege (Dalley, 2017; Ussishkin, 1990).

2.5. Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE)

During the Peloponnesian War, both Athens and Sparta employed strategies that involved the destruction of food supplies. The Spartans

regularly invaded Athenian territories, burning the crops that were essential for sustaining the Athenian population. This scorched-earth policy (which will be repeated endlessly throughout history) aimed to starve Athens into submission. Athens, in contrast, leveraged its naval supremacy to blockade Spartan allies and cut off their grain supplies, demonstrating how control over food resources was a pivotal aspect of warfare strategy.

The ancient Greek historian Thucydides gives a detailed account of the Peloponnesian War, including the impact of scorched-earth tactics and blockades on the civilian population. The destruction of crops and the siege of cities led to famine and disease, contributing significantly to the hardships faced by those in besieged areas. The Athenian plague, partially attributed to the siege conditions, was a direct outcome of overcrowding and the breakdown of food supplies, and annihilated a large part of the population (Lazenby, 2003).

2.6. The siege of Jerusalem (70 CE)

The Roman siege of Jerusalem during the First Jewish-Roman War is another clear example of hunger used as a method of warfare. The Roman forces, under the command of Titus, besieged the city, leading to severe famine among the inhabitants. The starvation faced by those within the city walls was catastrophic, illustrating the devastating impact of siege warfare and the strategic use of hunger to compel surrender (Perry, 2022b).

Historical accounts, particularly by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in “The Jewish War”, describe the horrific conditions faced by the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the Roman siege. Josephus narrates the despair of the besieged, who resorted to eating belts, sandals and even dung. He also recounts instances of cannibalism as the famine worsened.

These historical instances demonstrate the cunning yet devastating use of hunger as a strategy in warfare. From ancient Mesopotamia to the classical period, controlling or denying access to food was a tactic employed with lethal effectiveness, underscoring the ancient and unbroken connection between sustenance and survival in human conflict. The weaponization of hunger reveals a harrowing aspect of warfare, in which victory was often achieved at the expense of innocent lives succumbing to starvation (Pareles, 2023; Perry, 2022a).

3. Modern times: Hunger as a weapon of suffering and survival

Throughout modern history, the strategic weaponization of hunger has wrought unspeakable suffering and devastation on civilian populations ensnared in the perils of armed conflict. Examining a series of harrowing examples highlights the tragic consequences of manipulating food supplies as a calculated strategy of warfare.

3.1. *The Holodomor: Infamy in Ukraine (1932-1933)*

The Holodomor, a man-made famine that devastated Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 during Joseph Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union, stands as one of the most egregious cases of hunger being weaponized in modern history (Kul'chyts'kyi, Olynyk and Wynnyckyj, 2008).

Context and Political Background: The Holodomor took place within the broader context of Stalin's policies of forced collectivization and agricultural collectivization in the Soviet Union. Stalin sought to rapidly industrialize the country and consolidate state control over agriculture, viewing Ukrainian resistance to collectivization as a threat to Soviet power. The Holodomor was a deliberate tool employed to break the resistance of Ukrainian farmers and quell any potential dissent (Bezo and Maggi, 2015).

Weaponizing Hunger: The weaponization of hunger during the Holodomor was multifaceted. Grain requisitions were ruthlessly enforced, resulting in the confiscation of food from Ukrainian farmers. The Soviet authorities imposed strict quotas that exceeded the available food supply, leaving peasants without enough food for themselves and their families. Food was used as a political instrument, with starvation and access to food used as tools to punish dissenters and enforce collectivization policies (Gorbunova and Klymchuk, 2020).

Impact and Human Toll: The human toll of the Holodomor was profound. Millions of Ukrainians perished due to starvation, malnutrition and related causes during this man-made famine. Families were torn apart, communities decimated and generations scarred by the trauma of hunger and suffering. Mass graves scattered across Ukraine stand as haunting reminders of the tragedy and loss that befell the Ukrainian people during this dark chapter of history.

Quantitative Impact: Estimates of the exact number of casualties during the Holodomor vary, with figures ranging from three to seven million deaths. The famine's impact was felt most acutely in rural areas, where food scarcity was most severe. Survivors of the Holodomor carried the physical and psychological scars of hunger, trauma and loss for

decades, shaping the collective memory and identity of the Ukrainian people (Kul'chyts'kyi, Olynyk and Wynnyckyj, 2008).

3.2. *The siege of Leningrad: Starvation amidst struggle (1941-1944)*

In World War II, the siege of Leningrad from 1941 to 1944 marked an appalling chapter during which hunger was systematically used as a weapon of warfare (Barber and Dzeniskevich, 2005).

Context and Strategic Intent: The German siege of Leningrad, now Saint Petersburg, was a strategic maneuver to subdue one of the key Soviet cities during World War II. As German forces besieged the city, the deliberate starvation of its population was seen as a means to break the city's resilience and force surrender.

Weaponization of Hunger: The German forces encircled Leningrad, imposing a suffocating blockade that cut off supply lines and access to food. The blockade was part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at exhausting and demoralizing the population through deprivation. The intentional creation of food scarcity became a potent tool of psychological warfare, as starvation gripped the besieged city (Sparén *et al.*, 2004).

Impact and Human Toll: The consequences of the hunger-induced siege were catastrophic. The civilians trapped in Leningrad faced unimaginable suffering, as food supplies dwindled to meager rations and eventually ran out altogether. Malnutrition, disease and death became rampant, with civilians resorting to desperate measures to survive. The siege took a heavy toll on the physical and mental well-being of the city's inhabitants (McCarroll, 2018; Vågerö *et al.*, 2013).

Quantitative Impact: The Siege of Leningrad resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths due to famine, malnutrition and related illnesses. Exact casualty figures remain challenging to determine accurately due to the chaos and devastation wrought by the siege. However, it is estimated that approximately one million residents perished during the siege due to hunger and hunger-related ailments, making it one of the deadliest sieges in history (Barber and Dzeniskevich, 2005; Sparén *et al.*, 2004).

3.3. *The Biafran War famine: A tragic legacy of conflict (1967-1970)*

During the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970 (De Waal, 1993; Heerten and Moses, 2014), the Biafran War famine emerged as a tragic humanitarian crisis marked by deliberate tactics to weaponize hunger.

Context and Causes: The Biafran War was a conflict driven by ethnic and political tensions in Nigeria which escalated into a full-scale con-

flict between the Nigerian government and secessionist forces of Biafra. The deliberate imposition of blockades and restrictions on essential supplies aimed to coerce surrender and suppress rebellion, leading to dire consequences.

Weaponization of Hunger: The deliberate blockade imposed on Biafra by Nigerian forces was a strategic tactic to cut off food supplies and induce famine. By manipulating access to essential resources, the Nigerian government sought to weaken the resolve of Biafran forces and civilians, employing hunger as a means of coercion and control.

Impact and Human Toll: The humanitarian impact of the Biafran War famine was devastating. Civilians, predominantly women and children, bore the brunt of starvation and malnutrition as food supplies dwindled under the blockade. The humanitarian crisis exacerbated by famine led to immense suffering, loss of life and long-lasting trauma among the population (Hult *et al.*, 2010).

Quantitative Impact: The exact number of casualties during the Biafran War famine remains a subject of debate. However, estimates suggest that millions, primarily civilians, perished due to starvation and related causes during the conflict. The blockade-induced famine exacted a heavy toll on Biafra's population, leaving a legacy of tragedy and loss (Heerten and Moses, 2014).

3.4. *The Cambodian genocide famine (1975-1979)*

During the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, the Cambodian genocide famine (Kiernan, 2012) occurred as a tragic consequence of radical agrarian policies and ruthless tactics that weaponized hunger.

Context and Political Background: The Cambodian genocide occurred within the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge regime led by Pol Pot, which aimed to transform Cambodia into an agrarian utopia. The regime enforced the radical collectivization of agriculture, forced labor and social engineering, leading to widespread upheaval and devastation.

Weaponization of Hunger: The Khmer Rouge's agrarian policies and societal reorganization disrupted traditional farming practices, resulting in widespread crop failures, food scarcity and inefficient resource distribution. The deliberate dismantling of existing agricultural systems and the creation of forced labor camps contributed to a man-made famine that devastated Cambodian society.

Impact and Human Toll: The consequences of the Cambodian genocide famine were catastrophic. The civilian population faced starvation, malnutrition and disease as food shortages and forced labor exacerbated

ed existing vulnerabilities. The regime's policies prioritized the production of export crops over domestic food production, further deepening the crisis.

Quantitative Impact: The Cambodian genocide famine resulted in the deaths of over a million Cambodians due to starvation, disease and forced labor. The exact number of casualties remains a subject of debate, but the widespread suffering and loss of life inflicted by hunger and deprivation during the Khmer Rouge regime remain undeniable (Brown and Millington, 2015; Tyner *et al.*, 2014).

3.5. Ongoing war in Ukraine: Urgency amid chaos (Started in 2014)

In the face of protracted conflict in Ukraine, the war-torn regions of eastern Ukraine continue to face acute humanitarian challenges, including food insecurity and scarcity. Disrupted supply lines and the destruction of critical infrastructure have exacerbated the plight of civilians, thrusting many into the throes of hunger and deprivation amidst the tumult of armed conflict.

Following the Russian invasion, international supply chains have been severely disrupted, resulting in some regions of Africa facing famine as a direct consequence of this conflict. This clearly demonstrates the fragility of the international supply chain and the need to create blueprints for alternatives such as China's creation of the 'New Silk Road'. (Karume, Mondo and Kiyala, 2024; Mhlanga and Ndhlovu, 2023; Nguyen *et al.*, 2023)

3.6. Current conflict in Palestine: Humanitarian crisis unfolding (Ongoing)

In the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel, the weaponization of hunger has become a pressing humanitarian concern. The blockade of Gaza and restrictions on essential supplies have precipitated a dire food crisis, plunging vulnerable Palestinian populations into acute food insecurity and malnutrition. The intentional disruption of food supplies serves as a devastating reminder of the enduring impact of hunger used as a tool of modern conflict (UNRWA, 2024).

4. Legal frameworks against the weaponization of hunger

The pursuit of food security is enshrined within a robust legal framework that champions the right to adequate food for all. From the Uni-

versal Declaration of Human Rights to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), international instruments and agreements underscore the imperative of ending hunger, promoting sustainable agriculture and enhancing nutritional well-being. Through the Committee on World Food Security and the Food and Agriculture Organization, concerted global efforts combine to break the cycle of food insecurity and drive progress towards a hunger-free world.

- The Right to Food: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognize the right to adequate food as a fundamental human right. This right has been further elaborated on in the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security.
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 2 of the SDGs aims to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.” The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for global efforts to address food security and nutrition issues by 2030.
- The Committee on World Food Security (CFS): The CFS is an inclusive international platform for all stakeholders to ensure food security and nutrition for all. It develops policies and recommendations to address food security challenges and supports the implementation of international instruments related to food security.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): As a specialized agency of the United Nations, the FAO leads international efforts to defeat hunger and improve food security worldwide. It provides technical assistance, policy advice and capacity-building initiatives to promote food security and sustainable agriculture.
- Global and Regional Agreements: Various regional bodies and agreements, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) in Africa and the EU Common Agricultural Policy, seek to address food security challenges through coordinated efforts at regional and international levels.

The first significant codification to address the use of hunger as a weapon can be traced back to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 (*The Geneva Conventions and Their Additional Protocols*, 2022). These conventions established the laws of war concerning humanitarian issues, including the protection of civilians, prisoners of war, and those wounded in conflict. While not specifically focused on hunger as a weapon, these conventions laid the groundwork for subsequent discussions and

legal frameworks that aimed to prevent the weaponization of hunger in armed conflicts.

Following the Geneva Conventions of 1949, discussions on preventing the weaponization of hunger continued within the scope of international humanitarian law. One significant development was the adoption of Additional Protocol I in 1977, which further expanded protections for civilians in armed conflicts.

It complements the Geneva Conventions and strengthens the legal framework against the use of hunger as a weapon.

Additionally, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, established in 1998, included provisions that criminalize the intentional use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. This marked a significant step towards holding individuals accountable for acts that involve hunger as a weapon. Specifically, Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Rome Statute identifies “intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare” as a war crime. This provision makes it an offense within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court to deliberately deprive civilians of food and other essential supplies as a means of warfare (ICC, 1998).

Furthermore, the United Nations Security Council has passed resolutions addressing the issue of conflict-induced hunger, such as UNSC Resolution 2417 (2018) most recently, which condemns the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and calls for improved access to humanitarian aid in conflict-affected areas (S/RES/2417(2018), 2018)

Another UN Resolution that addresses the issue of starvation as a method of warfare is UNSC Resolution 1556, adopted in July 2004 in the context of the Sudan crisis. This resolution condemns the deliberate targeting of civilians and the use of food as a weapon of war in conflict situations. (S/RES/1556 (2004), 2004)

Additional UN Resolutions that touch upon the issue of starvation as a method of warfare include UNSC Resolution 1265 from 1999 (S/RES/1265 (1999), 1999), UNSC Resolution 1296 from 2000 (S/RES/1296 (2000), 2000), and UNSC Resolution 1674 from 2006 (S/RES/1674 (2006), 2006). While these resolutions may not explicitly focus solely on the use of starvation as a weapon, they address broader humanitarian concerns in conflict zones, including the protection of civilians and ensuring access to essential supplies such as food and aid.

These legal frameworks and discussions aim to strengthen protections for civilians during armed conflicts and prevent the weaponization of hunger as a means of coercion or warfare, even though, as we have seen in the previous sections, they have been unable to prevent the use of starvation during war, as most recently shown in the case of Gaza (UNRWA, 2024).

4.1. *International court cases*

The current legal frameworks relating to the protection of civilians during conflict and the international community's desire to prevent the use of starvation as a warfare strategy highlight the serious consequences of implementing starvation strategies. Even if such tactics may be perceived as efficient in achieving certain military aims, they are prosecuted by international courts due to the devastating humanitarian impact.

The following examples illustrate the potential legal consequences for those who employ such starvation strategies, even if not all cases have resulted in formal legal repercussions thus far:

1. *The Prosecutor v. Tadić* before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). In this case, the tribunal dealt with charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the use of starvation as a tool of warfare during the conflicts in the Balkans (ICTY, 2018).
2. *The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi* before the International Criminal Court (ICC). This case dealt with the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage sites in Timbuktu, Mali, including the targeting and destruction of food and water supplies as a weapon of war (ICC, 2015).
3. *The Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadžić* before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Radovan Karadžić, a Bosnian Serb leader, was charged with numerous war crimes, including genocide and crimes against humanity during the Bosnian War. The indictment included allegations of the deliberate starvation of civilians and using hunger as a method of warfare in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ICTY, 2016).
4. *The Prosecutor v. Laurent Gbagbo and Charles Blé Goudé* before the International Criminal Court (ICC). Laurent Gbagbo, former President of Côte d'Ivoire, and Charles Blé Goudé, a close associate, faced charges of crimes against humanity, including murder, rape and persecution, arising from violence following the 2010 election in Côte d'Ivoire. While starvation was not the central focus, the case highlighted the deliberate use of violence, which could include food insecurity as a method of warfare (ICC, 2016).

4.2. *Are current legal frameworks enough?*

While international legal frameworks have been established to prevent the weaponization of hunger in modern conflicts, unfortunately they

have not always been entirely effective in preventing this practice. Despite the existence of legal provisions criminalizing the intentional use of starvation as a method of warfare, instances of hunger being used as a weapon in conflicts persist. Numerous factors, including challenges in enforcement, lack of accountability and the complex nature of conflicts, can hinder the full implementation of these legal frameworks.

Additionally, the dynamics of modern warfare, such as asymmetric conflicts, the deliberate targeting of civilian populations and the use of siege tactics, pose significant challenges to preventing the deliberate deprivation of food as a weapon (Johnson, 2018; Scharre and Norton, 2018; SIPRI, 1976). While legal frameworks play a crucial role in setting standards and norms, their effectiveness ultimately depends on the willingness of states and actors to adhere to and uphold them, as often occurs with international legal instruments.

Efforts to address the weaponization of hunger require a comprehensive approach that combines legal mechanisms with diplomatic, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts. Enhancing compliance with existing legal frameworks, strengthening accountability mechanisms and promoting conflict resolution and prevention strategies are essential components in mitigating the use of hunger as a tool of war. Ongoing advocacy, monitoring and international collaboration are necessary to work towards a world in which the deliberate weaponization of hunger is minimized and ultimately eradicated in modern conflicts. Another problem associated with this topic is that in many cases, issues affecting food supply are more nuanced, falling into the category of food insecurity. As we will explore in the next section, this can be seen as an unintended consequence of the conflict itself.

5. Navigating the complexities of food insecurity

In analyzing the complexities of conflict-related food challenges, it is essential to distinguish between the weaponization of hunger and the broader concept of food insecurity (Pérez-Escamilla and Segall-Corrêa, 2008). While the weaponization of hunger entails the deliberate use of starvation as a tool of war to manipulate or punish populations, food insecurity encompasses a wider spectrum of factors leading to insufficient access to adequate nutrition. However, even when starvation is not employed as a direct weapon of war, conflicts can inadvertently give rise to severe food insecurity, with far-reaching global ramifications. As conflicts disrupt food systems, displace populations and destabilize economies, the unintended consequences of widespread hunger and malnutrition emerge. These indirect effects reinforce the interconnected

nature of food security and conflict, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive approaches to address the root causes of food insecurity in conflict-affected regions to prevent devastating global impacts (Delgado, Murugani and Tschunkert, 2021).

Thus, in the evolving landscape of global challenges, the concept of food security stands at the intersection between human dignity, well-being and international cooperation. Rooted in ensuring the fundamental right to access reliable and nutritious food, the notion of food security transcends mere sustenance to embody a holistic vision of empowerment, resilience and shared prosperity for all individuals.

The concept of food insecurity gained prominence in the 1970s as a way to address the broader issues of hunger and malnutrition beyond just the absence of food. One of the primary foundations for framing food insecurity was the World Food Conference held in 1974 (Gerlach, 2015), which highlighted the need for a broader understanding of the factors contributing to hunger and malnutrition worldwide (Hawkes, 1974). This conference emphasized that food insecurity was not just about physical access to food but encompassed factors such as economic access, nutritional quality and food utilization (Pérez-Escamilla and Segall-Corrêa, 2008; Shaw, 2007).

The concept of food insecurity was further strengthened in 1996 with the publication of the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). This document emphasized that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996).

Today, the concept of food insecurity continues to guide global efforts to address hunger and malnutrition. It serves as a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the root causes of inadequate access to food and the complex interplay between social, economic, political and environmental factors that contribute to food insecurity. Policymakers, international organizations and NGOs use the concept of food insecurity to design strategies and interventions that aim to improve food availability, access, utilization and stability for vulnerable populations around the world. By recognizing food insecurity as a multidimensional issue, efforts can be focused on sustainable solutions that promote food security and well-being for all individuals and communities.

Examples of food insecurity as a clear consequence of conflict, alongside other negative impacts on civilian populations, include the following:

1. **Disruption of Food Systems:** In conflict-affected countries like Yemen, ongoing conflict has severely disrupted agricultural activ-

ities, leading to a significant decline in food production. This disruption has contributed to high levels of food insecurity, with an estimated 16.2 million people facing severe food shortages. Infrastructure damage in countries like Syria has also hampered food distribution, making it challenging to get food to those in need.

2. **Displacement and Loss of Livelihood:** The conflict in South Sudan has resulted in widespread displacement, with millions of people forced to flee their homes and land. Displaced populations often lose their income sources and access to food, and rely heavily on humanitarian assistance. In 2021, the UN estimated that 60% of the population in South Sudan faced severe food insecurity.
3. **Economic Instability:** In regions affected by conflict, such as Afghanistan, economic instability resulting from ongoing violence has led to food price inflation and limited access to essential goods. The World Food Programme reported that in 2021 about 17 million people in Afghanistan faced acute food insecurity due to conflict and economic challenges.
4. **Destruction of Food Infrastructure:** Conflict in countries like Yemen has led to the destruction of food-related infrastructure such as farms, markets and food storage facilities. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that the conflict in Yemen has severely disrupted food systems, leaving over 20 million people food insecure.
5. **Restrictions on Movement and Humanitarian Access:** In Syria, conflict has resulted in restrictions on movement, including sieges and blockades that limit the delivery of humanitarian aid and food supplies to conflict-affected areas. These restrictions have hindered access to food and essential services for vulnerable populations, exacerbating food insecurity (Delgado, Murugani and Tschunkert, 2021).

These examples illustrate how conflicts impact food security in various ways, causing widespread hunger, malnutrition and food-related vulnerabilities among affected populations. Efforts to address these challenges require a multifaceted approach that focuses on ensuring humanitarian access, rebuilding infrastructure and promoting sustainable food systems in conflict-affected region.

6. Nourishing Human Security for Sustainable Well-Being

At the heart of food security lies the fundamental principle of human security – the safeguarding of individuals' lives, livelihoods and dignity.

Adequate access to food is not just a question of nutrition, it is a cornerstone of human rights and well-being. In ensuring food security, we not only alleviate hunger but also fortify communities against vulnerabilities, empower individuals to thrive and foster societal stability.

The concept of human security was developed in the 1990s as a response to the evolving nature of security threats and challenges faced by individuals worldwide. It emerged from the Human Development Report in 1994 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and was further elaborated in the 1994 Human Development Report. The concept was articulated to prioritize the protection and well-being of individuals in the face of diverse threats beyond traditional military action.

Human security is a concept that places the individual rather than the state at the center of security concerns. It represents a shift from focusing solely on traditional notions of national security such as military defense to a broader and more inclusive approach that addresses the well-being and protection of individuals. Human security recognizes that threats to security extend beyond military conflicts to encompass various interconnected challenges, including poverty, disease, environmental degradation, human rights abuses and political instability.

The concept of human security emphasizes the protection of individuals from both internal and external threats that impact their daily lives, dignity and basic rights. It emphasizes the need to safeguard people from a wide range of risks that can undermine their security and well-being, such as economic insecurity, food insecurity, health crises, displacement and gender-based violence. By focusing on ensuring the safety, agency and resilience of individuals, human security aims to empower people to live with dignity, freedom and opportunity.

Human security is often approached through a multidimensional lens that considers various interconnected factors influencing the security of the individual. This includes aspects such as economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security and political security. By addressing these diverse elements and promoting a people-centered approach, human security seeks to create a protective environment in which individuals can flourish, participate fully in society and access the resources and opportunities necessary for a secure and fulfilling life.

Today, human security is implemented and promoted by various international organizations, and is integrated into international legal frameworks. International organizations such as the United Nations and its agencies, including the UNDP and UNICEF, actively work to advance human security through programs and initiatives that address multidimensional threats to the safety and well-being of individuals.

The implementation of human security principles is also supported by international legal frameworks, including human rights conventions, humanitarian law and peacebuilding efforts, which aim to protect individuals from various forms of insecurity and to promote their rights and dignity.

By incorporating human security approaches into their policies and programs, international organizations and legal frameworks seek to address the complex array of challenges that affect individuals, such as poverty, conflict, displacement and environmental degradation. They emphasize the importance of protecting individuals from harm, empowering marginalized groups and building resilience to diverse threats. Through collaborative efforts and a people-centered approach, human security continues to guide global responses to security challenges by emphasizing the interconnectedness of different forms of security and promoting the well-being and rights of all individuals in a holistic and inclusive manner.

Overall, the concept of human security underscores the importance of prioritizing the well-being and rights of individuals as the foundation for creating peaceful, inclusive and sustainable societies. It highlights the interdependence of different forms of security and the need for comprehensive strategies that promote the safety and empowerment of all individuals, particularly those most vulnerable to various threats and insecurities.

7. The responsibility to protect (R2P) and the weaponization of hunger

The responsibility to protect (R2P) is a principle endorsed by the United Nations that emphasizes the international community's responsibility to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Hunger, when deliberately manipulated to achieve political or military goals, becomes a weapon of war. In this context, the R2P framework provides a crucial lens for understanding and responding to this egregious violation.

How the weaponization of hunger violates R2P:

- Targeting civilians: Deliberately depriving civilians of food creates immense suffering and weakens them, making them more susceptible to control or manipulation. This violates the core tenet of R2P, which is to protect civilians from atrocities.
- Creating a humanitarian crisis: Food insecurity can destabilize entire regions, leading to mass displacement and increased vul-

nerability to violence and disease. This exacerbates existing conflicts and hinders R2P efforts to promote peace and security.

Applying R2P to address weaponized hunger:

- **Early warning and prevention:** The international community needs robust mechanisms to identify situations in which food is being used as a weapon. Early intervention can prevent a full-blown humanitarian crisis and protect civilians.
- **Humanitarian access:** Ensuring unimpeded access for humanitarian organizations to deliver food aid is critical. R2P can be used to pressure warring parties to respect international humanitarian law and allow aid to reach those in need.
- **Accountability:** Those who deliberately weaponize hunger must be held accountable for their actions. R2P emphasizes the responsibility of states to prosecute perpetrators of mass atrocities, including those who cause widespread hunger as a tool of war.

Challenges and considerations:

- **Sovereignty vs. Intervention:** There are ongoing debates about the limits of national sovereignty and when R2P justifies international intervention. Addressing weaponized hunger requires a delicate balance between protecting civilians and respecting national sovereignty.
- **Gathering evidence:** Attributing responsibility for widespread hunger in complex conflict zones can be challenging. Building a strong case for intervention requires careful documentation and evidence gathering.

As we reap what we sow in the realms of food security, our collective harvest speaks volumes about our shared commitment to human well-being, environmental sustainability and inclusive development. By leveraging legal frameworks, policy interventions and collaborative networks, we can cultivate a future in which food security flourishes as a pillar of stability, a beacon of hope and a testament to our collective resolve to ensure that no one goes hungry in a world of abundance.

Building legal frameworks alone is far from offering a solution, especially when those legal frameworks so often lack clear and enforceable measures. Instead, a grassroots approach to building food security and resilience, sustained by fostering community autonomy, is a necessary step. Only through the combination of law, policy and the development of clear mechanisms to bind and enforce them will we be able to build

food security for all at a time when the instability of the global supply chain, in combination with climate change and a rise in global conflicts, threatens the life of millions, especially those who are in more vulnerable situations worldwide.

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