



Weaponization of Hunger: Food Insecurity and Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza during the Israel–Hammas War

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of food deprivation and shortage in Gaza conflict which can be observed as a direct or indirect weaponization of hunger including various tactics like border closure, siege, or limitations on civilian aid. This report explores the humanitarian impact of food insecurity particularly for vulnerable groups like children, women and older persons who are suffering from malnutrition and health related risk. To achieve these objectives, the study has adopted the qualitative approach including policy papers, academy papers, institution reports and credible international publications. This report has analyzes the role and response of international humanitarian aid and their challenges in delivering aid assistance to civilians in Gaza. Existing literature indicates that damage to local food production system and restrictions on aid have significantly weakened the food insecurity which increases the dependency on external aid for civilians leading the population towards vulnerability. The findings suggest a critical case about food insecurity that it is not only an impact of armed conflict but also functioning as a strategic tool that intensifies civilian suffering in Gaza. The paper calls out for urgent recommendations regarding civilian protection, and implementation of legal frameworks to limitize the further deterioration of humanitarian situation in Gaza. The report concludes by urgent need for international attention and sustained actions to address the food insecurity and reducing the risk of human catastrophe in Gaza.

Keywords: Food insecurity, Humanitarian Crisis, Gaza, Palestine, Food, Israel-Hamas War, Hunger, Middle East Geopolitics.

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Introduction

Food has been used as a tool of war throughout the history. There have been various cases that parties involved in any conflict deliberately limit or restricted the food in order to control, weak, suffer and punish the civilian population like during the World War 2, the siege of Leningrad to the Ethiopian famine of 1980's. These practices often regarded as 'weaponization of hunger'. It includes the willingly use of starvation for warfare but in back years, this concept has gained the renewed attention in the context of legal and scholarly in conflicts of Yemen, Syria and most recently in Gaza (Mohamed Buheji, 2024). The conflict of Gaza which has accelerated by Hamas attacks on 7 October, 2023 and following attack of Israel against Hamas. These military responses from both sides lead to unprecedented scale of humanitarian crisis in Gaza. In response to this crisis, food insecurity emerged as a most critical dimensions in Gaza.

The Gaza strip is densely populated located in Palestine. It is present in coastal territory covering approximately 365 square kilometers. This area has been subject to Israeli- Egyptian blockade since 2007 and has limitize the mobility of people and goods. These restrictions had placed the significant pressure on Gaza's economy, agriculture, local food supply system and access to imported goods even from the Gaza conflict. The existing challenges become more severe following the events of 7 October, 2023. The government of Israel has implemented the sheer siege and suspending entrance of food, fuel, water, medical supplies in Gaza (Migdad, 2025). The international pressure led to the opening of international humanitarian aid but deliveries remained insufficient. These actions restricted the ability of people to access basic resources.

The humanitarian impact has been devastating in Gaza. The leading international authority on food security IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) reports in 2024 that 2.23 million individuals was confronting food insecurity which has a level of crisis in Gaza. Approximately 576,000 individuals were classified in Gaza refers as the most severe level according to Phase 5 of IPC and refer as destructive hunger condition. This depicts the largest ratio of any population that is ever recorded in Phase 5 by the IPC. The famine

condition has emerged in northern Gaza following the acute malnutrition, deaths and the near-total destruction of local food markets (WFP, 2024). This situation has raised the concerns about humanitarian impact, protection of civilians and role of food deprivation in modern warfare.

The implementation of military practices political strategies employed during the Gaza conflict has resulting in food crisis which places the issue in mechanism of international humanitarian law. The Article 54 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva convention and Article 14 of Protocol II shows that the use of hunger against people as a tool of war is considered as strictly illegal (ICRC, 2010). The Rome Statute of the ICC portrays the usage of hunger for people is considered as a war crime in every military conflicts. Food insecurity is simply not a consequence of war but that military and political decisions that playing the direct role in worsening the crisis and then using hunger as a weapon of war.

Literature Review

Hassoun et al. (2024) examines the 2023-2024 Gaza war effects on the area's food supply chain finding that due to damage to agriculture, fishery resources, and infrastructure, there is lack of usage, availability, and stability of food. Breakdown of food production in Gaza has left the area heavily dependent on outside help.

Fakhri (2024) maintains that Gaza's level of hunger is not simply the unforeseen effects of war, but rather a result of systemic and policy-related choices. He argues that this situation brings International law into questionable situation, particularly the right to protect civilians in armed conflicts.

Bahour et al. (2025) examine the effect of the food security problem caused by the war directly on The wellbeing of Gaza's citizens. Food scarcity in Gaza has led to malnutrition, and higher deaths, especially for children. He further argues that the food deprivation in Gaza is a serious public health crisis, not only economic challenge.

Arab Center Washington DC (2025) highlights the barriers in delivering of humanitarian aid in Gaza which has been limitize by the political and military policies. The report argues over the politicization of humanitarian aid, affecting its effectiveness and persistence of food insecurity

across Gaza.

Rodríguez Álvarez (2024) explains that weaponization of hunger basically involves intentional strategies to disrupt the local food production and weakening the population to achieve the military and political objectives. His work aligns the Gaza case with historical examples. It demonstrates that utilization of hunger as a war tool is not only an isolated phenomenon but a recurring model in modern conflicts.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design with an analytical and interpretive approach to examine food insecurity in Gaza and how it relates to the concept of hunger as a tool of war. Secondary sources of data have been used to provide information for this study. Scholarly articles, books, policy reports, academic journals, official publications of international organizations, and reliable news and online databases has been carefully reviewed and critically analyzed to provide a clear understanding of the issue and to support well-informed conclusions. Due to Gaza's severe humanitarian crisis and its importance in security studies, this study focuses on it to better understand how hunger is created in war, using carefully selected, credible, and mostly recent sources from 2022 onward to reflect the current situation accurately.

Analysis

Israel-Hamas War on Food Availability and Access in Gaza

The intensified conflict between Israel and Hamas war has destructive effect on food availability and access in Gaza. This approach has transformed the already fragile food production system into total collapse. Gaza was heavily relying on the import due to this long-term blockade, limitations, and agriculture production before the 7th October 2023. However, after this, the conflict triggered these structural weaknesses and carried the civilian towards destructive levels of food insecurity. (Dawood, 2025). The region of Gaza has faced widespread political instability and conflict due to military movement from both sides since the 2005. These situations paved a way to prolonged poverty, unemployment, and

malnutrition. The severe damage to agriculture sector, irrigation system, and fisheries which represented the local capacity for production in Gaza. The destruction of agriculture land and fisheries has undermined the four levels food security involving availability, stability, access and utilization. When local food production system collapses and restriction on external food supply, the civilians of Gaza faced total dependency with no functioning pathway (Hassoun, 2025). The issue of both Palestine and Israel dates back to early 20th century. The various approach like Balfour declaration and Partition Plan for Palestine by UN involves suggestion of independent Jewish or Arab countries. The displacement has been faced by Palestinians, territorial loss, and severe humanitarian crisis. When Israel came into being on 1948, and subsequent wars in result to this, the territorial expansions and settlement remained deep issue in the conflict (Jayawardene, 2025). Israel military actions against civilians in Gaza involves the combined extensive military airstrikes and destruction of infrastructure has disrupted the food supply chain and increases the risk of famine across Gaza. Satellite analysis in Gaza by UN agencies depicts that Israeli strikes ground operations have ravaged agriculture including 70% cropland and approximately 90% of livestock leading to unusable condition (Burke, 2024). The use of heavy vehicle tracks, shelling and bulldozing have damaged the whole farmland area of Gaza virtually destroying the capacity to produce the food. Before the October 2023, Gaza cropland area met the needs of one-third of local food demand, but after the conflict the basic production has been collapse leading to total reliance on imports.

Blockades, Border Controls, and Aid limitations as a Tool of Food Deprivation

The framework of producing food insecurity in Gaza is consequences of deliberate policies rather than incidental impact of military conflicts. The policy choices including siege, border closing, stopping of aid and aiming airstrikes by Israel in Gaza has systematically militarized and weaponize the hunger. This has been used against the population of Gaza as a tool of pressure. Such practices have been restricted under Geneva convention (Nwotite, 2023). This demonstration highlights that issue of Gaza is not only

humanitarian but also the raises concern under international law.

The specific framework of food insecurity can be explored across various dimensions. First, includes the border closure and restrictive policies basically curtailed the food entering in territory of Gaza. From October 2023 to early 2024, the entering of number of aid trucks in Gaza fell to fraction of pre-war levels. Trucks faced the obstruction in their route even when they find the permit like delays of crossing in border, denial access of inspection points. Second, include targeting specific food production and distribution infrastructure further damages the civilian food supply areas. UN reports documented the collapse of various bakeries water plants, flour Mills, and food storages areas (OCHA, 2024). The scale of these attacks reflects policy driving decisions instead of accidental wartime destruction leading to raising of serious implementation for solving the issue of Gaza conflict under international law (Fakhri, 2024). Third, banning on fuel is a critical input for water pumping, food preservation and aid convoys functioning as an indirect way but high effective tool of food deprivation. The total cutoff of fuel in October period has caused the water facilitator, sewage and hospitals to stop working. This remaining polluted water becomes a cause of malnutrition and waterborne disease which has also increase the physiological impact of food shortage (Bahour, 2025). Fourth involves the political barriers towards aid delivery in Gaza. The aid has become politicized when it was documented with the concerns of security justification. These tactics has been using to delay the entry of humanitarian commodities. These barriers not only reduce the immediate assistance but also stop the functioning of humanitarian organization. Basic practices that could mitigate the hunger and food shortage have collapse. Out of 236 nutrition treatment centers, only 127 remain functional. The reporting of Marasmus and anemia among infants due to lack baby formula's is a result of border closing or restrictions of movement of good and people (WHO, 2025). The shortage of food not only cause of war but due to that restrictive policies that lead to near famine condition in Gaza.

Humanitarian Consequences of Food Insecurity on Vulnerable Groups

The humanitarian impact of food shortage in Gaza has serious implications especially on vulnerable groups like Children, women and old age individuals. Children suffer more from the war crimes by Israel in Gaza. The more deaths recorded among Children under Five, with the severe malnutrition (SAM). It is the most life threatening form which is analyze at levels exceeding emergency situation. In northern Gaza, the ratio of children facing the extreme thinness reached the critical levels. The raise of mortality rate especially among the vulnerable groups has been most. In May 2025 alone, children under five of about 5,100 has been admitted for acute malnutrition treatment. This was the 50% increase from recent month. There are more than 16,700 children needs treatment and medicine for malnutrition in January 2025 (UNICEF, 2025). There physiological effects of malnutrition in early childhood have far beyond. In nutrition science, research interprets that severe malnutrition in first thousand days of life causes the severe damaged to cognitive growth and immune system function. This acute experience of malnutrition in Gaza during this time will bring development impacts of this crisis throughout their lifetimes (Likhar, 2022). Hunger in Gaza has contributed malnutrition has sustained the assessment that in Gaza, the food insecurity not only does economic damage but also significant humanitarian public health risk and emergency. Pregnant and lactating women comprises the second category of extreme vulnerability. Due to food shortages, the several risks like the early birth, low weight of babies and maternal death has been increased in Gaza. Lack of nutrition and medical infrastructure increases the complications in women health. (Hamamra, 2025). Moreover, the older persons in Gaza faced severe humanitarian crisis with preexisting diseases which is more intensified by the displacement, mobility restrictions and collapsing for caregiving services. About 42% older people reports the health limitations as a barrier to reaching aid distribution points and suffering. Shortage of safe water and inability to wait in long queues has limitize their access to food aid. Moreover, the family separation and migration have prevented the support system leading to isolation of many older people. This has also limited their shelter and aid assistance (HelpAge International, 2026). The chronic stress of food scarcity and violence

produces the trauma and have a deep physiological impact. The mental health consequence of food insecurity remains unaddressed and is a significant dimension of humanitarian crisis.

Role of International Humanitarian aid in Reducing Hunger and Improving the Food Security During the Gaza Conflict

The international humanitarian aid faced the significant challenges in context of structural, political, and operational. One of the basic constraints is the limited distribution of aid to most affected areas due to ongoing hostilities and security risks. Aid convoys faced delays in reaching the destinations and limiting the relief efforts. Aid delivery in Gaza has been influenced by the political barriers which affects the neutrality and ratio of assistance. This approach has reduced the reliability of aid flows further increases the food insecurity (Elkahlout, 2025). The humanitarian agencies remain raises the concerns that already existing is insufficient in addressing the food insecurity. The international response was changing in depicting the situation in Gaza at normative or institutional level. The resolution 2720 passed by UN security Council has called for expanding the humanitarian aid, but the issue of compliance occur and enforcement remain unaddressed. The UNICEF, WFP and UNRWA has distributed food assistance to millions of people when access was permitted but it was only able to reach of about half of planned families and even rations were sometimes reduced. When war intensified again in 2024, humanitarian aid delivering to northern Gaza was dropped to zero. The international bodies like UN and other nongovernmental organization called for opening of borders but those requests have limited success. By late 2024, the United Nations requests has been successful in funding more than one million food rations in a single month but actual deliveries faced lower ratio then level of demand. There was a danger of famine if barriers were not removed. In the same period, aid operation intensifies like 613 deaths at distribution sites in June 2025. This shows that international humanitarian aid is itself facing the pressures. The distinction is present in food availability and accessibility or approach (Berry, 2025). The international aid may increase the quantity of food reaching the Gaza but there are structural barriers

and mobility issues while reaching the threshold demand. Therefore, humanitarian aid and assistance functions as a short-term survival rather sustainable solution.

Limitations

- The study relies on secondary data only due to lack of field access which is limiting the civilian opinions and perspectives.
- The study focuses on food insecurity and humanitarian consequences instead of detailed military or geopolitical analysis.
- The research does not provide the final legal judgements like accountability requires formal judicial investigation.
- The absence of direct surveys in Gaza population has restricted the information about individuals suffering.
- The study is more dependent on the evidences from international humanitarian organization whose access may also been restricted.
- Media restrictions and journalists access to affected area has created the gaps in data collection.
- The study focuses generally on Gaza and does not comparing the other conflict zones.
- There may be a problem of neutrality of data due to political and institutional biasness or prejudicial.
- Security concerns and travel restrictions have limited the independent verification of events in conflict areas.

Recommendations

- Legal accountability frameworks should investigate violations in Gaza like use of hunger as warfare tool.
- International legal bodies such ICC and ICJ should be engaged in ensuring the compliance of humanitarian law.
- There should be coordination among the UN agencies, NGO's and affiliates for efficient and smooth flow of humanitarian aid in affected areas.
- There should be increasing of emergency food aid for the affected population of Gaza.
- Malnutrition treatments and maternal health programs should be installed to rapidly address

the urgent needs.

- The starvation of civilians due to violation of international humanitarian law in Gaza should be investigated to promote the accountability.
- There should be development of long-term plans and reconstruction practices for sustainable food chains and economic progress.
- To reduce civilian suffering, the international actors should support the peaceful talks.
- Programs should be installed to reconstruct the Gaza's agriculture sector which has been badly destroyed due to conflict.
- There should be regular or transparent appraisal and evaluation by international organizations for improving food insecurity.

Conclusion

In Gaza, the hunger has become more than a side effect of war like acting as a looming catastrophe

that is linked to wartime policies. Destruction of infrastructure, and human lives is the result of total siege. This situation has pushed the Gaza to levels of famine risk. The evidence has been accumulated from UN agencies and humanitarian organization that highlights that conditions of deliberate measures is to starve the civilians. This situation has weaponization the hunger with the intermix of politics has violates the international law and poses the questions about the accountability mechanisms. The humanitarian impact of food insecurity has demonstrating that how food insecurity can be used as a byproduct and center core of wartime policies. The attempt of multiple actors and bodies have makes efforts to fulfilled the need of civilians but it faced the political barriers in delivering aid and restoration of food system. Ultimately, the conflict of Gaza has become a serious remainder for international community that food security id deeply associated with the peace, governance, and implementation of humanitarian law.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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