



34/2022

18/05/2022

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Starvation as a weapon of war

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Abstract:

In this working document, man-made famine will be defined as a war crime, the purposes it serves will be explained, and the example of the current invasion of Ukraine will be used to see how this terrible phenomenon, far from being diminished, extends its effects to distant places and times.

Keywords:

Hunger, starvation, weapon of war, Ukraine.

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Papers** are the responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

El hambre provocada deliberadamente como arma de guerra

Resumen:

En este documento de trabajo se definirá el hambre, provocada por el hombre, como crimen de guerra y los propósitos a los que sirve, se utilizará el ejemplo de la actual invasión de Ucrania para ver cómo, este terrible fenómeno, lejos de estar paliándose, extiende sus efectos a lugares y tiempos lejanos.

Palabras clave:

Hambre, hambruna, inanición, arma de guerra, Ucrania

Cómo citar este documento:

PALACIÁN DE INZA, Blanca. *El hambre provocada deliberadamente por el hombre como arma de guerra*. Documento de Análisis IEEE 34/2022. https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA34_2022_ENG.pdf y/o [enlace bie³](#) (consultado día/mes/año)

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUALISATION

In the collective imaginary, the cause of the existence of starvation may be more associated with climate change-related disasters. However, of the current famines, only in the one in the Horn of Africa has climate change played a very prominent role. In April 2022, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that up to 20 million people may go hungry there because of the current drought.

Elsewhere, it is political actions, in some cases alongside climate change and in others not, that play the predominant role in famines. Climate change will undoubtedly cause fluctuations in food production and will particularly affect the poorest. The fundamental factor that leads to famines is political¹.

According to Alex de Waal², the risk of starvation has generally decreased over the last 30 years thanks not only to humanitarian efforts, but also to the decline of political attitudes that consider human beings as expendable.

To contextualise what we mean when we talk about hunger as a weapon of war, it is useful to define the terms we are going to use in this document.

1.1. FAMINE AND MASS STARVATION

- Famine: Hunger is both an outcome and a process. Consequently, starvation means deprivation of food until death. As a process we are referring to the man-made famine explained in the next point.

- Wilful man-made mass famine or large-scale starvation: Here, we are not referring to famines caused by disasters or natural phenomena such as droughts and earthquakes. The man-made famine that is the focus of this paper is generally a long, cheap, silent process. In it, leaders with the necessary power and means impede the ability of the people they have targeted to obtain the means necessary to survive, especially food³. This crime serves political, war and economic interests.

¹ DE WAAL, Alex. "Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine", Polity, 2018. pp. X, XI.

² Ibidem.

³ CONLEY, Bridget and DE WAAL, Alex. "The Purposes of Starvation: Historical and Contemporary Uses". Journal of International Criminal Justice, Volume 17, Issue 4, September 2019, Pages 699-722. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqz054>

The means to cause this process range from the denial of entry of humanitarian actors into a given area, to the closure of roads, ports or other means of transport to prevent food distribution, to the destruction of crops and wells or other water access systems, and so on.

This is a crime considered a weapon of war under international law⁴: *"Intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including by wilfully preventing relief supplies as provided for in the Geneva Conventions"*. However, judging these actions is complicated not only by the difficulty of proving intent, but also by the fact that their definition is often a political issue. For example, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, has often condemned the Syrian government for using starvation as a method of warfare, but has not made this accusation in the undeniable case of Yemen⁵.

1.2. INANITION

We must include forced mass starvation in the definition of famine. The word starvation does not mean that all deaths are directly due to hunger, since the biggest killers are the diseases that result from it.

The Darfur famine and drought of the 1980s not only starved a large part of the population to death, but also caused collateral damage to the economy and the social fabric, especially population movements, overcrowding and internment in IDP camps⁶.

1.3. KILLED BY HUNGER: "TO STARVE"

First of all, the verb to starve should be understood as a transitive verb to emphasise that some powerful people starve others with less power, leaving them to die of hunger, disease or exhaustion. Mass starvation has a wide range of causes, from recklessness to the will to kill or genocide⁷. It is a silent form of violence⁸ that is very effective for the purposes pursued, which we shall see below.

⁴ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Article 8(2)(b)(xxv). 1998

⁵ DE WAAL, Alex. Op. Cit. p. X.

⁶ Idem, p. 9.

⁷ Ibid. p.6.

The term "silent violence" was first used by Michael J. Watts in his book "Silent violence: Food, Famine & Peasantry in Northern Nigeria" published by the University of California in 1983.

2. HISTORICAL PERIODS OF FAMINE

We have already stressed that wilfully causing hunger is not a new phenomenon. In the history of great famines and calamities we can distinguish 4 major periods:

1. Colonialism
2. Total war and totalitarianisms
3. Asian communism
4. Civil wars in Africa that have led to minor famines.

One of the world's leading hunger researchers, Alex De Waal (cited throughout this article for his relevance), argues that populations are becoming less vulnerable to famine, but that the convergence of several factors, which may be economic, climatic or political, creates new risks. He also argues that the greatest threats to causing new famines are endless wars, fighting wherein human life has no value, and counter-humanitarian actors. These factors may cause a turnaround in the trend of the last decades of declining famines⁹.

3. WEAPON OF WAR

Like other war crimes, such as sexual violence used as a weapon of war¹⁰, mass starvation has traditionally been regarded as a natural phenomenon or as inevitable collateral damage of conflict. As a result, the number of victims and the victims themselves have been consigned to oblivion and the perpetrators of this crime have gone unpunished. The two above mentioned weapons of war share some similar traits, such as their low cost, their silent destructive action and the fact that they are not new phenomena, but nonetheless their elimination is not being achieved. They also share other characteristics such as the fact that they are only considered weapons of war if there is a tactical will to use them in the conflict, that the aftermath affects several generations and that, as mentioned above, they are crimes that often go unpunished. They also share common objectives, which we will explore in more detail below, such as the displacement

⁹ Idem. p.13.

¹⁰ For more information on this crime see: PALACIÁN DE INZA, Blanca. "Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War", IEEE Analysis Paper 07/2013. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2013/DIEEEA07-2013_ViolenciaSexualArmaGuerra_BPI.pdf

of populations, their extermination, and so on. What is more, they are often co-existing phenomena. To this effect, to understand how the voluntary promotion of hunger can constitute a weapon of war, one cannot only look at the reduction or disappearance of food, but must broaden the approach to other actions that are rarely excluded from the equation: direct violence, sexual violence, population displacement, destruction of livelihoods and infrastructures¹¹.

Along these lines, these and other actions, such as ecological and health system degradation, must also be assessed as potential constituent factors in the crimes of man-made famine. However, a serious impediment to alleviating these dire situations is the fact that humanitarian action is subordinated to political negotiations¹².

As noted above, this is not a new tactic. There are many historical examples such as the siege of Leningrad, the application of sanctions before and during the Gulf War in the early 1990s, food restrictions in the Bosnian War, Biafra, Syria¹³, Yemen¹⁴, South Sudan¹⁵, and their use by terrorist groups¹⁶. Referring to the case of South Sudan, Dannenbaum introduces a very interesting concept: *weaponization of starvation*¹⁷.

4. PURPOSES OF THIS CRIME

If we sum it up in one word for the sake of simplicity, the purpose is clear: extermination. But again, we must take a broader view because, among the various purposes that the commission of this crime can have, we can highlight not only this but others:

¹¹ CONLEY, Bridget and DE WAAL, Alex. CONLEY, Bridget and DE WAAL, Alex. Op. Cit.

¹² DE WAAL, Alex. Op. Cit. p. IX

¹³ DELATTRE, Maëlys. "L'utilisation de la famine comme arme de guerre dans les conflits armés non internationaux: les revers de l'assistance humanitaire dans le conflit syrien". Faculté de droit et de criminologie, Université catholique de Louvain, 2017. Prom.: Van Steenberghe, Raphael. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2078.1/thesis:12774>

¹⁴ ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM. "La faim utilisée comme méthode de guerre au Yémen, selon les experts", 04/09/2019. Available at: [La faim utilisée comme méthode de guerre au Yémen, selon les experts \(actioncontrelafaim.org\)](http://actioncontrelafaim.org)

¹⁵ INFO CHRÉTIENNE. "La famine comme " méthode de guerre " au Soudan du Sud : "Ces violations peuvent constituer des crimes contre l'humanité", 08/10/2020. Available at: [La famine comme "méthode de guerre" au Soudan du Sud : "Ces violations peuvent constituer des crimes contre l'humanité" \(infochretienne.com\)](http://infochretienne.com)

¹⁶ NACIONES UNIDAS. "Terrorist groups use hunger as a weapon, but we can prevent it. 23/03/2018. Available at: [Los grupos terroristas utilizan el hambre como arma, pero podemos evitarlo | Noticias ONU \(un.org\)](http://un.org)

¹⁷ DANNENBAUM, Tom. "A Landmark Report on Starvation as a Method of Warfare". Just Security, 13/11/2020. Available at: <https://www.justsecurity.org/73350/a-landmark-report-on-starvation-as-a-method-of-warfare/>

4.1. EXTERMINATION OR GENOCIDE

To qualify as genocide¹⁸ the result need not be death by starvation but rather that the perpetrator(s) intended to harm a certain part of the population on racial, political, religious or gender grounds. Demonstrating this intentionality or even carrying out the degree of lethality to be able to speak of extermination or genocide is not frequent. However, we can highlight clear examples such as:

The Holocaust. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, they began stripping Jews of all their property, freedoms and rights under the law. By the end of 1941, they had killed 500,000 people, and by 1945 they had murdered some two million, of whom 1.3 million were Jews¹⁹.

The case of the Herero and Nama in 1904 in present-day Namibia. In this genocide of the Herero and Nama, the perpetrators used the proximity to a desert. The extermination of the Herero and Nama is a paradigmatic case of colonial genocide by starvation. The Herero were ordered to be driven to the edge of the Kalahari Desert and sealed off from access to water. An estimated 65,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama died²⁰.

The Armenian genocide in 1915 and 1916. This was the massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I, officially considered a genocide by Armenia and other countries but which Turkey, while acknowledging the suffering of the victims, describes as “the events of 1915” and justifies by the historical logic of the time. The truth is that a hundred years later, resentment still commands relations between the two countries, with important consequences for the security of the South Caucasus²¹. Before this genocide, the Armenian population numbered two million people, but by 1922 there were less than four hundred thousand. The rest, about one and a half million, died in this genocide²².

¹⁸ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Article 6. 1998

¹⁹ “Liberation of Auschwitz: how this concentration camp became the centre of the Nazi Holocaust” BBC, 27/01/2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-51216979>

²⁰ Whitaker, Benjamin (1985). On the question of prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Revised 1986. United Nations Document E / CN.4 / Sub.2 / 1985/6.

²¹ RUIZ GONZÁLEZ, Francisco J. “Primer centenario de la masacre armenia y sus consecuencias para la seguridad del Caúcaso Sur”. IEEE. Opinion paper 41, 2015. p. 1. Available at: https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2015/DIEEEO41-2015_Centenario_Masacre_Armenia_FJRG.pdf

²² SADURNÍ, J.M. “The Armenian genocide”. National Geographic, 22/04/2021

The great famine of 1932-1934, called Holodomor²³, in Ukraine. The forced collectivisation imposed by Stalin condemned some seven million people across the Soviet Union, particularly in Ukraine, to a cruel death by starvation. The state apparatus requisitioned crops and food and fenced off entire villages so that no one could leave, sentencing their inhabitants to certain death²⁴. This is a clear example that perpetrators, intent on destroying a group through starvation, require a well-developed organisational capacity. This is usually an advanced security apparatus, such as those found in authoritarian regimes at the height of their power. In the specific case of Ukraine, which is again suffering horror today, Stalin was able to implement impossible living conditions by imposing policies that prevented population movement, ordered the seizure of food and agricultural supplies, blacklisted entire villages and restricted trade.



Monument to the victims of the Holodomor in Kiev, Ukraine.

Nazi Germany's HungerPlan 1941-1945 against Soviet prisoners of war and the elimination of Ukrainian "useless eaters". In this case, the chilling transparency of intentions is striking in both the name of the plan to be implemented and in the naming of the Ukrainian people. It was a genocidal economic plan designed to be implemented in

²³ In Ukrainian Holodomor means "death by starvation".

²⁴ SADURNÍ, J.M. "Holodomor, the Great Ukrainian Famine". National Geographic, updated 18 January 2021. Available at:https://historia.nationalgeographic.com.es/a/holodomor-gran-hambruna-ucrania_15338

the Soviet Union so that its production would be used to feed Germany at the expense of the Soviet population and prisoners of war²⁵.

4.2. GAINING CONTROL OVER A POPULATION

When the social bonding of a population is weak and it is easy to play one against the other, these differences will be exacerbated in times of famine, especially if it is wilfully caused by part of the population.

In this respect, as Santé Abal points out:

"The wise combination of a vindictory political discourse with the social discourse of difference inevitably stimulates conflict, but the concurrence of other agents and circumstances, [such as wilfully caused famine], can make this stimulation much faster and deeper than those who stimulate it expect.

The very presence of a social discourse of difference is sometimes evidence of the presence of a traditional claim by a group, which can also be taken up in a political discourse that initially lacked it²⁶."

Terrorist groups have made and continue to make use of this weapon. A recent example is Burkina Faso, where hunger is spreading dangerously due to the rise of jihadist violence²⁷. Hunger is soaring in the conflict-torn country as a result of increased terrorist violence, which has killed thousands of people and displaced millions, preventing people from farming. Some 3.5 million people are food insecure, and nearly 630,000 are forecast to be on the brink of starvation, according to the latest food security report by the government and UN agencies. This represents an 82% increase over last year in the number of people facing the hunger emergency.

These groups also use hunger to gain followers. Al Shabaab, for example, is currently, and not for the first time, seeking to strengthen its support in the drought-affected regions

²⁵ RUNGE, Carlisle Ford and GRAHAM, Linnea. "Hunger as a weapon of war: Hitler's Hunger Plan, Native American resettlement and starvation in Yemen", Food policy 2020 v.92 p. 101835. doi: 10.1016/j.foodpol.2020.101835

²⁶ SANTÉ ABAL, Jose M.^a. "Culture of Peace?", IEEE Analysis Paper 10/26. p. 5. Available at: https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2016/DIEEEA10-2016_Cultura_de_la_Paz_JMSA.pdf

²⁷ MEDNICK, Sam. "Hunger grips Burkina Faso due to increasing jihadi violence". AP News, 26 April 2022. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-islamic-state-group-ouagadougou-burkina-faso-business-b40b1270fbd8f90afa6c9aaada4fde82>

of Somalia by providing livelihood assistance²⁸. According to a spokesman for the group, Sheikh Ali Dhere, the group has formed a special committee consisting of seven of its leading figures, which has already travelled to several of Somalia's most drought-affected regions to deliver food to the population.

4.3. GAIN FULL CONTROL OVER A TERRITORY

The Ethiopian famine of 1983-1985 is another case that combines multiple types of crimes related to the wilful provocation of hunger. The famine itself overlapped with actions in counter-insurgency areas in the northern province of Tigray and neighbouring northern Wollo. The main counter-insurgency tactics included burning crops and food shops, aerial bombardment of markets, restriction of local trade and migration.

In addition, three waves of forced resettlement were carried out, the first (1984-1985) taking place at the height of the famine. At least 80,000 people died as a direct result of the government's policies, due to disease, lack of food, shelter and water, and the absence of tools and seeds needed to sow the fields²⁹.

"The parties to the conflict often use crops as a military tactic by applying a "scorched earth" policy or by assiduously stealing livestock. One of the first military targets in a war is communication routes, thus disrupting the supply of entire populations. Farmers are also unable to sell their produce in environments threatened by violence."³⁰

Today, the few international voices that have information about this closed and civil war-torn country claim that the Ethiopian government is using this strategy, and there is even talk of genocide, against the Tigray population. The blockade of the region has led to an increase in malnutrition that is beginning to claim the lives of the most vulnerable of the population, mainly children under five years of age. Moreover, for more than a year now, the children of Tigray have not been able to go to school because the educational infrastructure has been rendered practically unusable. Crops have failed in most rural

²⁸ EUROPA PRESS. "Al Shabaab seeks to bolster support in Somalia's drought-affected regions with aid deliveries", 26/04/2022. Available at: <https://www.msn.com/es-es/noticias/internacional/al-shabaab-busca-reforzar-su-apoyo-en-las-regiones-afectadas-por-la-sequ-c3-ada-en-somalia-con-la-entrega-de-ayuda/ar-AAWCizH?ocid=uxbndlbng>

²⁹ YOUNG, J. "Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: *The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991*". Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 146.

³⁰ HAFIDI, Meryem. "The Ethiopian government uses hunger as a weapon of war: UN warns of deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ethiopia". Atalayar, 24 January 2021.

communities and prices are steadily rising. The Tigray are also facing a severe supply crisis caused by the closure of borders and banks, in addition to a major health crisis³¹.

4.4. OTHER PURPOSES

Other possible objectives of famine provocation are clear from the examples given above. These are: the expulsion of a population group; the attempt to add militants to the dominant ranks through a policy of "If you don't join us, we will kill you"; punishment ("put them on a diet"); and gaining control over material resources or the exploitation of people. On this last point it is interesting to mention the term coined by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn³²: 'Human Raw Material'. And also the provisioning of the belligerents on one side ("Soldiers Eat, Peasants Provide").³³ Before industrialisation, but not only in those times, it was typical for armies to live off local communities, which often led to terrible famines.

The best post-industrial example was in Darfur in 2003-2005. In this case, the Sudanese government gave the militias authorisation to attack villagers with violence, systematic theft and destruction of water wells and agricultural reserves, leaving the civilian population with little option but to flee. Deaths would have been much higher had there not been a major humanitarian aid operation. For the government, this form of counter-insurgency offered several advantages: the militias could "pay for themselves" through expropriation and the government could argue that it had no direct control over the militias' actions³⁴.

5. UKRAINE 2022

The current war in Ukraine due to the Russian invasion deserves a special mention in its own right. Here too, hunger is one of the main players³⁵.

While there is no evidence of mass starvation deaths, there are voices claiming that Russian forces are guilty of the war crime of starvation. At this stage, it is difficult not to

³¹ MORA TEBAS, Juan Alberto. "Conflict in Tigray (Ethiopia): Possible "domino effect"? IEEE Analysis Paper 25, April 2022. Available at: [Conflict in Tigray \(Ethiopia\): Possible "domino effect"? \(ieeee.es\)](https://www.ieeee.es/Conflict-in-Tigray-Ethiopia-Possible-domino-effect/)

³² Cited in GOLFO, Alexopoulos. "Destructive-Labor Camps: Rethinking Solzhenitsyn's Play on Words". *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 16. 2005. p 510

³³ CRUMMEY, Donald (Ed.) *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*. James Currey Publishers, 1986. p. 142.

³⁴ DE WAAL, Alex. "Counter-Insurgency on the Cheap", 26 *London Review of Books* (2004). pp. 25-27.

³⁵ DE WAAL, Alex y MURDOCH, Catriona. "Russia could be guilty of starvation crimes in Ukraine. We must act". *The Guardian*, 29 March 2022. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/29/russia-could-be-guilty-of-starvation-crimes-in-ukraine-we-must-act>

doubt the Russian government's alleged intention to exterminate the Ukrainian population through this crime.

Of these voices we can highlight De Waall's, who points out that every element of the crime is involved in Ukraine today³⁶. Russian troops are reported to have razed farmland, destroying agricultural equipment and planting landmines in the soil where crops should be growing. Ukraine's traditional supply routes have been destroyed and its ports are now under Russian control. Humanitarian aid teams have not been able to get through to many places. As mentioned above, if there is no clear intention to exterminate, we could consider these actions as part of the tactics of war, without finding the features that define hunger as a weapon of war.

Another voice sharing this view on the use of hunger as a war crime is the European Union's. We refer to the statement of 23 March 2022 by the EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski: "The only interpretation is that [the Russians] want to create hunger and use this as a method of aggression". "It is a method similar to the one used in the 1930s by the Soviet regime against the Ukrainian people."³⁷

However, the examples we have found could be considered actions of war without the intention of exterminating a starving population. To this effect, at the end of April (date of writing), Russia bombed a railway bridge south of Odessa. This made it impossible to use trains to transport grain and metallurgical products to the Danube river ports, such as Izmail or Constanza, the latter in Romania³⁸.

However, if such a crime were to take place, which is a matter for the agents of international law to determine, it would be a global catastrophe, a fact that makes this case particularly relevant. However, even without a crime taking place, due to globalisation and other phenomena such as price speculation, the impact on crops is far greater than might at first be imagined.

On the basis that a war crime is not proven, the war alone gives this case a special uniqueness. This is because of the importance of Ukrainian exports and the impact this destruction of the means of food supply is having and will have in the coming months or

³⁶ DE WAAL, Alex and MURDOCH, Catriona. *Op. Cit.*

³⁷ Cited in WAX, Eddy. "The starvation of a nation: Putin uses hunger as a weapon in Ukraine: The specter of the Holodomor famine of the 1930s is haunting Russia's war". Political, 1/04/2022. Available at: [The starvation of a nation: Putin uses hunger as a weapon in Ukraine - POLITICO](#)

³⁸ FLORES, Félix. "Russia shells railway line serving Ukraine's exports". La Vanguardia, 28/04/2022. Available at: [Rusia bombardea la línea férrea que sirve a las exportaciones de Ucrania \(lavanguardia.com\)](#)

years on European markets and the rest of the world, especially Africa and the Middle East. It is no longer just the war actions and their impact on the direct food supply of Ukrainians. Notably, April is also the month when Ukrainian farmers usually start planting maize and sunflowers. This season, the fruits of which would be harvested in summer, will not be productive as there is no seed, fuel, fertiliser or labour, with workers having been forced to join the army³⁹.

The war itself is also having an impact on Russia's own food supply and exports. Both Russia and Ukraine are major exporters of foodstuffs such as wheat, soybeans and barley to African countries. Russia produces about 10% of the world's wheat, while Ukraine accounts for 4%. To understand the magnitude, let us bear in mind that the sum of the two is almost the same as the total EU wheat production.

In 2020, the combined value of this trade was estimated at \$6.9 billion. The disruption of this supply due to the fighting will drive up commodity prices and will undoubtedly exacerbate food insecurity across Africa⁴⁰.

In 2020, African countries imported \$4 billion worth of agricultural products from Russia. Approximately 90% of this was wheat and 6% was sunflower oil. The main buying countries were Egypt, which accounted for almost half of imports, followed by Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Algeria, Kenya and South Africa.

Similarly, in the same year Ukraine exported agricultural products worth \$2.9 billion to the African continent. Approximately 48% of this was wheat, 31% maize and the remainder included sunflower oil, barley and soya beans. However, as mentioned above, the impact of the war will be felt in other regions, such as the Middle East and Asia, which also import substantial volumes of grains and oilseeds from Ukraine and Russia. ⁴¹ Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan, Mauritania and Senegal depend on exports from Ukraine and also from Russia. Turkey imports almost 70% of its wheat from Russia.

For weeks, the FAO has been warning of the risk of serious social tensions in the Maghreb and the Middle East due to the expected wheat shortages in the coming months. "The

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ DIZOLELE, Mvemba Phezo. "How the War in Ukraine May Impact Africa". CSIS. 01/03/2022. Available at: [How the War in Ukraine May Impact Africa | Center for Strategic and International Studies \(csis.org\)](https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-the-war-in-ukraine-may-impact-africa)

⁴¹ The Conversation. "How Russia-Ukraine conflict could influence Africa's food supplies", 24/02/2022. Available at: [How Russia-Ukraine conflict could influence Africa's food supplies \(theconversation.com\)](https://www.theconversation.com/news/181111)

medium-term effects of the Ukraine crisis are just one more reason for very serious concern," says Petroc Wilton, spokesperson for the UN World Food Programme (WFP).⁴²

Ukraine is a major cereal producer and the Zelensky government has announced that there will be sowing and that efforts will be made to save the harvest in the regions least affected by the war. If things go optimally, that would mean saving 70-80% of production, but the transport problem will make it impossible to change what looks set to be the course of events. In addition to the aforementioned shelling that makes it impossible to use river ports on the Danube, Ukrainian ships and ports on the Black Sea are blockaded by Russia.⁴³

6. CONCLUSIONS

Starvation, or rather its wilful provocation, can be another tactic of warfare and is defined as such in international law. It coexists with other war crimes and weapons of war and can serve several purposes, including the expulsion of a population from a territory, extermination, control of a territory, its population or resources, and punishment.

It is not a new tactic. We can find examples from the past, but also from the present with different circumstances and implications. This paper has shown how, due to the current globalisation, with the invasion of Ukraine, the consequences of this possible crime, or simply the impact of war on production and prices, will not only be seen for a long time to come, but will also affect far away places.

The solution, or eradication of these situations, is complex because, like so many other war crimes, man-made starvation often goes unpunished despite international law. This legislation is indispensable, but unfortunately insufficient.

The complexity of this scourge, the interconnected workings of today's world and ever-changing geopolitics mean that we are limited to defining this terrible weapon of war without being able to offer any thoughts on a feasible solution. Like other crimes mentioned, man-made starvation will continue to exist and we can only rely on efforts to alleviate its disastrous results. And on this note, we would like to finish with a questions

⁴² Cited in: DAVIES, Lizzy. "How war in Ukraine is affecting food supply in Africa and the Middle East". The Guardian, 2 April 2022. Available at: [How war in Ukraine is affecting food supply in Africa and the Middle East | Global development | The Guardian](#)

⁴³ JULIANA, Enric. "Cereals". *La Vanguardia*. 27/04/2022. Available at: [Cereals, by Enric Juliana \(lavanguardia.com\)](#)

that gives food for thought. Are economic sanctions a solution or could they also be considered an act or response of war that causes starvation of the affected populations, including in this case Russia's?

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