

Ending conflicts as a path to solve the war against hunger in Middle East

NATÁLIA GRÁSS

“The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.” (Antonio Gramsci)

The present analysis will focus on how food insecurity is affecting national security in Middle Eastern countries. Although it is a traditional subject of IR, International Security now has possibilities of cooperation and not escalation of conflicts. In addition, the international order present in the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is called into question, since this political tension can draw attention away from food crises caused by conflicts in the region. For a long time in human history, the concern for food in its sufficient availability and safety has been a central issue. Chinese emperors have even lost the right to the "Mandate of Heaven" for not being able to feed their people. Another more recent situation dates back to the Cold War, when the United States launched Food for Peace programs (EIRAN, E.; ELIAS, M.; TROEN, A., 2021).

This suggests that it is possible to understand that the importance of nutrition goes beyond its biological function. The relevance of combat is also present in the Sustainable Development Goal 2, proposed by the United Nations, which aims to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (HUNGER, 2021). In this sense, the analysis will address the reasons why food insecurity is considered a national security issue, as well as demonstrating how the lack of food availability in the Middle East during wars ends up being masked or seen as something less relevant by the International Community.

Why does food insecurity affect national security?

One of the main threats to food security can be understood as the challenge of getting supplies. In conflict situations, many borders are closed and with that the supplies do not reach all of those who need it most. An example of this

includes Bashar Al-Assad, current president of Syria, policy during the height of the war in Syria, the policy was "kneel or starve". Another threat can be captured by social instability, mainly because access to food at this time is a constant challenge. A third and final issue is the one that arises from the lasting conditions of limited supplies, which may be the result of weakened and inefficient governance, as well as aggravating the displaced or migrant populations in the region. (EIRAN et al, 2021).

Here the concept of national security is applied as the way in which a State implements its sovereignty. In addition, use its ability to project power to other countries, as well as obtaining measures that provide social and economic gains for the national population (COSTA, 2018). In this sense, it is possible to conclude that for a state to obtain full natural security, it is also necessary to guarantee quality of life for its own population.

A case study of Syria and Yemen

Most of the conflicts in the region since 2010 have affected the lives of a large part of the population (OMIDVAR, 2019). Especially when it comes to Syria, when the country suffered from a serious earthquake that devastated the north of the country. From the economic and social destruction, countries like Yemen and Syria were heavily affected. The results obtained in the Global Hunger Index pointed out that the regional situation is "extremely alarming", being more intense in Yemen (GARDUÑO; GARDUÑO, 2015). One of the main reasons behind famine in Yemen is due to reduced food production caused by unsustainable agricultural practices, which generates a great dependence on food imports. However, the country's economy is weak, which makes this process difficult and affects the availability and access to food for families.

Both Syria and Yemen are experiencing situations of political instability. In addition, crises related to climate change have a great weight on countries, since they affect the livelihoods of the population and are essential factors that contribute to food insecurity (OMIDAVAR, 2019). According to the United Nations (UN) report, about 17.8 million live in food insecurity (hunger, 2021). An aggravating factor is the number of children in this situation, as 1.8 million children are acutely malnourished (DUREAB, 2019).

In 2010, the World Food Program established stability as a dimension that guarantees food security, in economic, political and social terms (WFP, 2010). This allows us to deduce that the situation in Yemen and Syria, countries with a long history of wars, do not have the means to ensure food security and combat hunger. This already difficult context intensified after the isolation due to Covid-19. Since, with the wave of unemployment that followed, many families lost their income and entered the poverty level. Furthermore, the economic crisis that followed caused the food basket to increase from 20 to 50% (ZURYAK, 2020). Another extremely relevant factor is nutritional poverty, which is linked to the "triple burden", obesity, malnutrition, and undernutrition, which involve difficulty in accessing adequate food. In this sense, food insecurity is characterized as a kind of result of political conflicts in the country. Since malnutrition, when not accompanied by public policies to solve it, results in the union of complex problems such as hunger, climate change and catastrophes and consequently unstable policies

Possible solutions to regional hunger

According to FAO's regional director, Abdulhakim El Waer "Protracted conflicts and crises continue to be the main drivers of the degrading situation of hunger. The situation is also exacerbated by the region's food systems, which are failing to provide affordable, diversified, safe and nutritious food for all" (UNICEF, 2021). One of the proposals that would transform this reality is the adoption of sustainable and resilient food systems. This would allow, for example, future generations to consume healthy food, and thus have a life with less health risks.

By placing hunger as a national security issue, it is necessary to recognize the 2018 Security Council Resolution 2417, which provides for access to food for individuals affected by conflicts. It is worth remembering that food is no longer a humanitarian issue that concerns periphery, but an environment and branch of global competition. In order to resolve the issue, a debate between the decision makers involved is necessary, and above all, a partnership in the world food system. This can include national governments, effective international trade, as well as large conglomerates in the food and agriculture sector (EIRAN et al, 2021).

Final remarks

After understanding the main causes of hunger and its relationship with the conflict, it is possible to understand that it is a difficult situation to resolve. One way would be the help of its neighbors, like Saudi Arabia and Iran, although these are in constant rivalry and local disputes. Another factor would be pacification through some Organization, or branch of the UN. But beyond the resolution, there will only be one possible way to cooperate: when the countries involved find common interests to be able to carry out mutual aid.

Finally, another point of reflection may be whether, in fact, solving the issue of hunger and food insecurity will change the reality of these conflicts? After the above, it is possible to conclude that hunger is a determining factor in the course of conflicts, since it generates a certain dependence between countries and relevant actors. In addition, the food issue is an aggravating factor to the other issues involved in the tensions between the countries. In addition, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and neighbors that are major regional players can contribute to reducing insecurity. Furthermore, even though the countries are completely different, would they not be willing to cooperate?

Referências

COSTA, Frederico Carlos de Sá. Sobre o conceito de “segurança nacional”.

In: *Tensões Mundiais*, [s.l.], v. 5, n. 9, pp. 123–140, 2018. DOI: 10.33956/tensoesmundiais.v5i9jul/dez.670.

DUREAB, Fekri, Eshraq Al-Falahi, Osan Ismail, Lina Al-Marhali, Ayoub Al Jawaldeh, Nazmun Nahar Nuri, Elvis Safary, and Albrecht Jahn. 2019. "An Overview on Acute Malnutrition and Food Insecurity among Children during the Conflict in Yemen" *Children* 6, no. 6: 77. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children6060077> Accessed on: February 12th 2023.

EIRAN, E.; ELIAS, M.; TROEN, A. No Bread, no peace, *Foreign Policy*, 2021. Available at: *Food Should Be Treated as a National Security Issue* (foreignpolicy.com). Accessed on: February 12th 2023.

GARDUÑO-DIAZ, Sara D.; GARDUÑO-DIAZ, Philippe Y. Food Security in the Middle East and North Africa. *International Journal of Nutrition and Food Engineering*, v. 9, n. 1, pp. 47–50, 2015.

HUNGER and malnutrition in the Arab region stand in the way of achieving Zero Hunger by 2030, UN report warns. UNICEF. Available at: *Hunger and malnutrition in the Arab region stand in the way of achieving Zero Hunger by 2030, UN report warns* (unicef.org). Accessed on: February 12th 2023.

OMIDAVAR, N., AHMADI, D., SINCLAIR, K. et al. Food security in selected Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries: an inter-country comparison. *Food Sec.* 11, pp. 531–540 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-019-00935-w>.

UNITED NATIONS. Adopting Resolution 2417 (2018), Security Council Strongly Condemns Starving of Civilians, Unlawfully Denying Humanitarian Available at: *Warfare Tactic*, 2018. Available in: <https://press.un.org/en/2018/sc13354.doc.htm>. Accessed on: February 10th, 2023.

WFP (2010). *Fighting hunger worldwide, Annual report*. World Food Program, 2010.

ZURAYK, R. (2020). Pandemic and food security: A view from the Global South. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, v. 9, 17–21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2020.093.014>. Accessed on: February 12th 2023.