

# EMBARGOES, SANCTIONS, & FOOD AS A WEAPON

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## COERCIVE USE OF FOOD

- As old as recorded history itself
  - Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III laid siege to Canaanite City of Megiddo 15<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E.
- Armed parties seek to starve opponents into submission
  - Target food supplies & means of production
  - Technology to carry out such destruction has improved greatly over time
- In 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, food embargoes & sanctions are prominent foreign policy tools
  - Adjunct to military action
  - Peaceful substitute for war
  - Effectiveness?
  - Who wins & who loses?



## **EMBARGOES & SANCTIONS**

# EMBARGOES

- Key constraints:
  - Grain markets thin
  - Alternate suppliers available
  - Most grain consumed in producing country, so offers only a small stick
  - Domestic interests & bureaucratic allies seek to maintain export markets
  - Ethical concerns about denying food to civilians

## US FOOD POWER, 1970S & 1980S

- A bushel of wheat for a barrel of oil rhetoric vs. OPEC
- Embargo vs. Soviet Union following invasion of Afghanistan, 1980
  - Argentina filled in gap
  - Grain traders facilitated continued sales, avoiding losses due to suspended US exports

## EMBARGO VS. QATAR, 2017

- By Saudis & others
- In opposition to Qatari support for Arab Spring movements
- Similar to US embargo vs. Soviets, availability of alternate suppliers undercut exploitation of Qatari import dependence

# SANCTIONS

- Transnational companies play a pivotal role in global food trade
  - May facilitate circumvention
  - Opaque, oligopolistic, unaccountable actors
- Elites find ways around sanctions
  - Illegal activity
  - Repression
  - Strict control of access to food
  - E.g., Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq
- Effects on civilians
  - Poverty, malnutrition, ill health, heightened mortality
- "Smart sanctions"
  - Target elites, minimize civilian harm
  - Allow access to food & medicines

## SANCTIONS (2)

- Cover more than trade
  - Arms embargoes
  - Finance
  - Travel
- Combined measures more effective, but with increased risk of negative impacts on civilians, e.g. food insecurity
- Sanctions promoted between world wars as alternative to warfare
  - Hurt nontarget civilians
  - Ineffective in changing target state behavior, e.g., Italy in Ethiopia

## SANCTIONS (3)

- Debate over whether duration of sanctions increases effectiveness
- Need for cooperation among sanctioning states
- Mitigating civilian harm
  - Ex-ante assessments
  - Monitoring implementation
  - Smart sanctions
  - Non-economic measures (arms embargoes)



## **FOOD AS A WEAPON**

## MODERN WEAPONIZATION OF FOOD

- By the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, technological developments made control of food key to prevailing in war
- In both World Wars, all parties used food as a weapon, to devastating effect
- Religious precepts permit siege warfare, but not unlimited civilian harm
- International law from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century on likewise seeks to minimize negative effects on civilians
- In contemporary conflicts armed parties use food to recruit supporters & starve enemies
- Famines result from political & policy choices, not natural hazards

## ANDREA GRAZIOSI

- Political/military use of hunger common in 20<sup>th</sup> Century war and genocides
  - World War I
  - Armenian Genocide
  - Russian civil war
  - Holocaust
  - Holodomor
- More recently in Ethiopia, Sudan, N. Korea famines
- Hunger as a weapon will remain a key feature of warfare

## RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

- Siege warfare is permissible, but avoid starving civilians
- Avoid destruction of means of food production (cf. Sun Tzu in *Art of War*)
- A just war does not justify unjust acts
- Noncombatants must have access to food, water, medicine, & sanitation
- Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism all share these views

## INTERNATIONAL LAW

- Prohibits deliberate starvation of civilians and destroying their means of subsistence
- But allows sieges and armed parties' efforts to starve one another
  - Creates huge tension
  - Issues of enforceability lead to impunity
- Countering starvation crimes
  - Right to food & humanitarian assistance (Messer & Cohen)
  - Principle of distinction between combatants and civilians (Tognocchi)
  - Treating as "malum in se" (pure evil)
  - R2P: can it challenge sovereignty in practice?

# WORLD WAR I

- Germans, British, Czarist Russia, Turkey all used starvation vs. enemies
- Instances of systematic rape and ethnic cleansing as well in e.g. Armenian genocide
- Postwar use of food as a weapon
  - Stalin in Ukraine
  - US (Herbert Hoover) vs. Hungarian Soviet Republic

## WORLD WAR II

- Starvation was leading cause of death
- Requisitioning of colonial crops by Japanese, British, French, and Italians
  - Left colonies in food insecurity & even famine (Bengal, India)
- US Operation Hunger destroyed Japanese food supplies and mined harbors key to food imports
- Most Chinese prisoners starved
- Germany extracted food from Soviet Union, occupied territories

## COLD WAR

- US became preeminent global food power
- Used food to help rebuild Europe & Asia
- Bolstered allied regimes in e.g. Indochina
  - Lack of internal support meant repressive, corrupt allied regimes fell anyway in South Viet Nam & Cambodia
  - Khmer Rouge used food as a weapon against own citizens, with 700,000 deaths from starvation, disease, & forced labor

## CONTEMPORARY FOOD WARS

- Especially in Africa & the Middle East
- Armed parties
  - Destroy crops & livestock
  - Destroy infrastructure
  - Mine farmland
  - Seize relief supplies
  - Kill aid workers
  - Keep fighters loyal with full bellies
- Civilian harm
  - Malnutrition
  - Disease
  - Forced migration
  - “Excess mortality”

## RECENT CASES

- Yemen
- Syrian civil war
- Sudan
  - Worst humanitarian crisis in world
  - Famine declared
- Gaza
  - Explicit denial of food, water, energy
  - War crimes & genocide
- Ukraine
  - Crops destroyed by Russia
  - Harm to global purchasers of food & fertilizer
- Iran
  - Global fertilizer markets affected