

Weaponised food. The Gaza Famine

August 2005

As of 15 August 2025, Famine (IPC Phase 5)¹—with reasonable evidence—is confirmed in Gaza Governorate. After 22 months of relentless conflict, over half a million people in the Gaza Strip are facing catastrophic conditions characterised by starvation, destitution and death. Another 1.07 million people (54 percent) are in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), and 396,000 people (20 percent) are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Between mid-August and the end of September 2025, conditions are expected to further worsen with Famine projected to expand to Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis. Nearly a third of the population (641,000 people) are expected to face catastrophic conditions (IPC Phase 5), while those in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) will likely rise to 1.14 million (58 percent). Acute malnutrition is projected to continue worsening rapidly. Through June 2026, at least 132,000 children under five are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition—double the IPC estimates from May 2025.²

I see them every night on the news. Gazan children literally skin and bones, bloated stomachs, mouths stretched, huge eyes that look uncomprehendingly at the camera and their carers. I've seen children like this in non-conflict caused famines, victims of extreme drought or some other natural disaster.

I've been looking for a framework through which to look at the Gazan famine. I think that this one from Kemmerling et.al. works. Which uses 'four logics of how violent conflicts and war have an impact on food' how violent conflicts and war have an impact on food (in)security: a) destruction, b) conflict-induced displacement, c) control, and d) hunger as a "weapon of war".³

Destruction

Most food production areas have been destroyed. They are now covered with tents for displaced persons. There is limited emergency herb and vegetable cultivation in ruined urban areas. Poultry production has been eliminated.⁴

There are also the images of the destruction in places like Gaza city, buildings with gaping holes in them and rubble strewn on the roadways and people desperately trying to pull people out from under.

There is no infrastructure in the cities to manage movement or provide communication and other essential services.

Satellite images show massive amounts of destruction in several areas which Israel's military command claims to have under "operational control".

Large swathes of it have been caused by planned demolitions, both to already damaged buildings and ones that appeared largely intact.

¹ The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is an innovative multi-stakeholder global initiative aimed at enhancing food security and nutrition analysis to inform decisions. The IPC is by definition, the result and the function of a partnership which exists at global, regional and national levels. The IPC is thus founded on a strong governance structure that brings together governments, regional bodies and international agencies – and fosters rigorous processes, ownership and consensus-driven outcomes.

² *Gaza Strip: Famine Confirmed In Gaza Governorate projected to expand*. IPC 2025

³ *The logics of war and food (in)security*, Globe Food Security, Elsevier 33 2022

⁴ Private conversation with aid worker.

Verified footage shows large explosions unleashing plumes of dust and debris, as Israeli forces carry out controlled demolitions on tower blocks, schools and other infrastructure.⁵

Conflict – infused displacement

Again evening news shows scenes of Gazans walking with their goods in hand from one place in Gaza and back again as Israel moves its theatre of operation. As at January 2025 out of a population of 2.3 million, the UN estimates 1.9 million Gazans have been displaced.⁶

We are deeply concerned about the shrinking space for civilians in Gaza who are being forcibly displaced by the Israeli army from large swaths of territory. Since the resumption of its military campaign on 18 March, the Israeli army has issued 10 mandatory “evacuation orders”, covering large areas across all governorates of the Gaza strip.

These evacuations fail to comply with the requirements of international humanitarian law. Israel is not taking any measures to provide accommodation for the evacuated population, nor ensure that these evacuations are conducted in satisfactory conditions of hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.⁷

Control

Israel has control over food entering Gaza through border control. In February 2025 Israel closed the Rafah border crossing which before the war saw 25,000 people cross every month and was the way aid could be brought into Gaza.⁸

The United Nations and other humanitarian aid providers are sharply criticizing the decision and calling it a violation of international law. “A tool of extortion,” Saudi Arabia’s foreign ministry said. “A reckless act of collective punishment,” Oxfam said. Key mediator Egypt accused Israel of using “starvation as a weapon.”⁹

Since the beginning of the war Israel imposed a near-total ban on access to the sea. Before the war 5,000 fishermen operated off Gaza’s coast, there are barely 400. The industry’s current output is less than 2% of its normal capacity.¹⁰

Israel also controls the four food distribution sites operated by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) supported by the United States and Israel. This news report tells what happened at one of the sites.

THOUSANDS STOOD in the sweltering sun, watched over by an Israeli tank, in a long queue snaking south from the second-largest city in the Gaza Strip. They had walked for miles to reach a food-distribution centre on the outskirts of Khan Younis. As the crowd grew, the American mercenaries who guarded the entrance to the compound fired into the air. They began handing out cardboard boxes, each containing flour, pasta, oil, and other dry goods

⁵ *Israel levelling thousands of Gaza civilian buildings in controlled demolitions*. BBC 18 July 2025

⁶ *UN estimates that 1.9m people displaced from Gaza’s 2.3m population*, *The Irish Times* 17 January 2025

⁷ *Gaza: Deep concerns about the forced displacement of Palestinians*, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 28 March 2025

⁸ *What is the Rafah crossing and why is it so important?* 2 February 2025

⁹ *Israel has cut off all supplies to Gaza. Here’s what that means*. AP, 3 March 2025

¹⁰ *Gaza’s Fishing Industry Decimated Since Onset of Genocide*, International Middle East Media 17 June 2025

calculated to last a family for a week. Those who had received their boxes quickly emptied them into white sacks and left.

After a few minutes the guards tried to let a group of women join the front of the queue. The crowd surged forward and broke into the compound. When tear-gas grenades failed to stop the surge of desperate people, the guards stopped handing out boxes and closed the centre.

These scenes, observed by *The Economist* on July 15th during a short embedded visit to an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) observation post overlooking the distribution centre, have been recurring for nearly two months. Often, they have resulted in multiple casualties, many of them by IDF fire. The day after the visit, on July 16th, at least 20 people queuing for food were killed in a stampede at the same site.¹¹

The other scene shown virtually every night in the news is of crowds of men and young boys in a crush holding out a saucepan of some kind at a street kitchen to get some of what looks like a lentil puree. It is a scene of desperation with the young boys being crushed at the front.

Hunger As A Weapon of War

The three foregoing demonstrate the logics of war that lead to hunger being weaponised. Netanyahu continues to say that Israel has no policy of starvation. But you don't need a policy if your actions create starvation as they are doing in Gaza.

There are two significant international resolutions on the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

The UN Resolution

The (UN) Security Council today adopted a resolution (Resolution 2417 (2018), condemning the starving of civilians as a method of warfare — as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations — with members welcoming it as a landmark expression of unity on those critical issues.¹²

International Criminal Court Jurisdiction

In 2019 the International Criminal Court (ICC) the 122 countries voted 'unanimously to extend the Court's jurisdiction to the use of starvation as a weapon of war — a recognized war crime — in non-international conflicts.'¹³

¹¹ *A first-hand look at Gaza's controversial food-distribution sites. The Economist* 17 July 2025

¹² 'Adopting Resolution 2417 (2018), Security Council Strongly Condemns Starving of Civilians, Unlawfully Denying Humanitarian Access as Warfare Tactics', SC/13354 24 May 2018

¹³ 'Humanity vs sovereignty', Simona Beltrami, WORLD Food Program 2019