

Hezbollah's Transnational Hunger War Tactics

by [Astrid Mattar Hajjar](#) (September 2020)



Protester with sign "We Die Hungry/We Starve"

Throughout human history, conflict has been a source of hunger vulnerability. "Food wars" [\[1\]](#) perpetuate hunger in several ways. The deliberate use of hunger as a weapon is most evident in siege warfare tactics. However, there are recent and more insidious cases of conflict in which hunger is used intentionally as an instrument of social control. In his book, renowned Africa expert Alex de Waal called this "counter-humanitarianism," describing it as "a new political ideology and approach to conflicts that legitimizes political and military action that is indifferent to human life." [\[2\]](#) These cases result from a combination of repressive socialist government policies and transnational threats which converge

to deny or restrict access to productive resources and income, often the result of discriminatory practices associated with democratic breakdowns. Consequently, hunger becomes not just a symptom of conflict, but a weapon of war.

Venezuela, Syria, and Lebanon are conspicuous cases in point. During the last 20 years, their governments, in conjunction with non-state militias and criminal gangs, systematically and insidiously imposed economic policies specifically designed to cause starvation as a catalyst for conflict and, consequently, to ensure their domination. These countries were not considered cultural nor geopolitical natural allies, but this has changed in the 21st century. They are all now controlled at different levels by Iran's proxy, Hezbollah. In cooperation with Nicholas Maduro, the self-proclaimed President of Venezuela's narco-dictatorship, Hezbollah successfully imposed its tactic of systemic starvation on civilians in Venezuela as a weapon of war and an instrument of social control. Scholars commonly underestimate or fail to acknowledge the influence of Iran's proxy on Venezuela's demise and deteriorating food crisis.

Hezbollah grew from the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and has emerged as a political party in Lebanon. Founded in 1982 by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Hezbollah (Party of God) is the most powerful group in Lebanon thanks to a heavily armed militia that fought several wars with Israel. Over the last 35 years, it has established a worldwide network of supporters, fundraising, and training camps. Hezbollah took advantage of Lebanon's diaspora and the solidarity between compatriots in order to grow, especially in Central and South America, where nine million Lebanese are estimated to live. Over the past two decades, investigations have uncovered numerous terrorist plots planned and executed in Latin America; and the nexus between terrorism and criminal organizations involving Hezbollah is acute. While many analysts concentrate on terrorist activities in the Middle

East, the fundamental role that Latin America has played, geographically, has been glossed over. Latin America became a geopolitical paradise for Hezbollah's illicit activities and expansion. Maduro's allies, Russia, China, Cuba and Iran through its proxy Hezbollah continue to throw a lifeline to the Maduro regime in Venezuela.

This convergence of transregional threats in Latin America, especially in Venezuela, has resulted in the worst humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere. According to the United Nations (UN) Refugee Agency, people continue to leave Venezuela to escape violence, insecurity, threats, and the lack of food, medicine, and essential services. With over five million Venezuelan people living abroad, mostly in other Latin American countries and the Caribbean, this is the largest exodus in the region's recent history, and second only to Syria's worldwide. Additionally, ongoing political, human rights, and socio-economic developments in Venezuela compel growing numbers of men, women, and children to flee. It is estimated that by the end of this year, there will be eight million Venezuelan refugees, making the Venezuelan refugee crisis the largest refugee crisis in the world.[\[3\]](#)

Venezuela

During most of the decades following Venezuela's adoption of a democratic government in 1958 through the 1980s, the country was the richest nation in South America—until the arrival of socialism. The food crisis and exodus of Venezuelans are direct consequences of the socialist policies imposed over the last two decades by Venezuela's former President Hugo Chávez, and current self-proclaimed President Nicolas Maduro. There are three main policies implemented by Chávez since 1999 that produced the current crisis: Widespread nationalization of private industry, currency and price controls, and the fiscally irresponsible expansion of welfare programs.[\[4\]](#)

Chávez was elected president of Venezuela in 1999. He brought to Latin America what is considered 21st-century socialism. He was inspired by Cuba's Castro and the Iranian Mullah regime. One of his first actions was to nationalize the agriculture sector. His policies destroyed the market by imposing maximum prices on hundreds of food items. Renowned human rights scholar Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann writes: "When the official prices did not meet the costs of production and distribution, producers and distributors withdrew from the market...Chavez also nationalized large-scale food producers, handing over farms and ranches to citizens who did not possess the expertise of resources to cultivate them." [5] From 1999 to 2016, his regime robbed more than 75% in two decades while the country's population increased by [14]

<https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2016/0108/Starvation-in-Madaya-How-Hezbollah-role-in-siege-could-hurt-it-in-Lebanon>

[15]

<https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/blog/2016/10/impact-refugee-crisis-lebanon-who-needs-most-help-part-1/>

[16]

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/people-will-die-within-months-lebanon-heads-famine-pandemic/>