

THE IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICTS ON MILITARY FOOD SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

Armed conflicts represent one of the biggest challenges faced by food management systems within military forces. Disruption of supply networks, destruction of infrastructure and difficult terrain conditions can have a significant impact on the ability to provide safe and nutritious food for staff. This article explores how armed conflict affects food security in the context of military operations, looking at key challenges and innovative risk mitigation strategies. The findings emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach to guarantee food security and the health of fighting troops during armed conflicts.

KEYWORDS:

military food security, armed conflict, supply chain, risk management, resilience

1. Introduction

Ensuring access to safe and nutritious food is one of the highest priorities for armed forces during military conflicts. Disruptions in supply networks, destruction of infrastructure, and difficult terrain conditions can have a significant impact on the ability of military units to provide adequate food for personnel, jeopardizing the health, morale, and operational effectiveness of military troops. Armed conflicts can disrupt logistics links, block borders, and damage roads and transport infrastructure, severely limiting the ability to move food to needed locations.

In addition to supply disruptions, armed conflicts can directly compromise the quality and safety of food for military forces. The destruction of food production and processing facilities, as well as the theft or damage of stocks, can expose the military to risks of contamination and food

poisoning (ICRC, 2018). In addition, difficult conditions in conflict zones, such as lack of potable water, inadequate storage facilities and limited cold storage facilities, can favor the growth of pathogenic microorganisms and deterioration of food quality.

In the most severe cases, armed conflicts can lead to acute food shortages, threatening military units' access to enough basic food (FAO, 2017). Destruction of production and processing facilities, as well as theft or destruction of stocks, can create serious shortages of products such as grains, pulses and vegetable oils, etc. These extreme food shortages can have a devastating impact on the morale, combat capability and overall effectiveness of armed forces engaged in conflict.

Therefore, understanding how armed conflict affects food security in the military domain and developing effective strategies

to mitigate these risks are vital to ensuring the combat capability and resilience of armed forces. This study explores the key challenges and innovative solutions that can help military units maintain high standards of food safety and quality, even under the most difficult operating conditions.

2. Food Security – Definition and Implications for the Military

The concept of food security refers to the ability of all people to have physical, social and economic access to enough safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and dietary preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996). In the military domain, food security involves ensuring the availability, accessibility, quality and safety of food for personnel at all stages of operations, from training and exercises to combat missions in conflict zones (ICRC, 2018).

Disruption of food security during armed conflict can have serious consequences for fighting troops, including low morale, increased disease rates and even the death of personnel. Military personnel need a balanced, nutrient-dense diet to maintain optimal health, energy, and fighting ability. Lack of access to safe and nutritious food can lead to malnutrition, physical weakness and health problems such as dehydration, gastrointestinal diseases and vitamin and mineral deficiencies (FAO, 2017).

These health problems not only affect each soldier individually, but can also undermine the overall effectiveness of military units, reducing the mobility, responsiveness and resilience.

Ensuring food security among the armed forces is therefore essential not only for the individual well-being of the military, but also for maintaining operational capability and mission effectiveness during conflicts. Understanding how armed conflict can disrupt food access, food quality and safety is crucial to developing effective strategies

to manage risk and ensure the resilience of the military food system.

3. Disruption of Supply Chains

One of the most significant threats to food security during armed conflict is the disruption of food supply chains. Conflicts can disrupt logistical links, block borders and destroy transport infrastructure, severely limiting the ability of military units to access and transfer food to needed locations (FAO, 2017). For example, during the armed conflict in Syria, bombings and attacks on roads and airports severely disrupted food supplies to military bases, forcing units to rely on existing limited stocks (ICRC, 2018).

In addition to disrupting supplies, armed conflict can directly compromise the quality and safety of food for military forces. The destruction of food production and processing facilities, as well as the theft or damage of stocks, can expose fighting troops to risks of contamination and food poisoning (ICRC, 2018). For example, during the Yemeni civil war, bombings damaged several food factories, forcing military units to resort to compromised stocks, leading to outbreaks of diarrheal diseases among soldiers (ICRC, 2016).

In addition, difficult field conditions in conflict zones, such as lack of access to potable water, inadequate storage facilities and limited cold storage facilities, can favor the development of pathogenic microorganisms and deterioration of food quality (Boudreau & Davis, 2015). These food safety issues can expose military troops to serious health risks such as food poisoning, gastrointestinal illness and dehydration, severely affecting combat capability and operational effectiveness. These shortages can force military units to rely on limited emergency (combat) rations or poor-quality food, compromising the health and fighting ability of troops. For example, during the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the destruction of farms and warehouses of food led to an acute food

crisis among stationary military units, forcing them to rely on international food aid to avoid starvation (ICRC, 2018). These extreme situations of food shortages can have a devastating impact on the morale, fighting capacity and overall effectiveness of armed forces engaged in conflict.

4. Risk Mitigation Strategies for Ensuring Food Security during Conflict

To address the complex challenges of food security during armed conflict, the research identified several innovative strategies and best practices that can be implemented by military forces. These approaches include contingency planning, diversification of supply sources, use of real-time monitoring technologies, and staff capacity building.

One of the critical elements to ensuring food security during conflict is the development of robust continuity plans to enable military units to deal with disruptions in the supply chain. This involves identifying in advance alternative sources of food, back-up transport routes and ways of additional storage, to create flexibility and resilience in the military food system (ICRC, 2016).

For example, armed forces can develop strategic partnerships with local and regional food suppliers that can provide products if international supply chains are disrupted. Also, maintaining buffer stocks of essential foodstuffs such as canned goods, grains and oils can provide a back-up solution in emergency situations (Boudreau & Davis, 2015). Through proper planning and preparation, military units can be better supplied to deal with supply chain disruptions and ensure continued access to food for personnel during conflicts.

Another key strategy for mitigating food security risks during conflict is the diversification of food supply sources. Instead of relying on a single vulnerable supply chain, the armed forces should look to build a wider network of suppliers,

distributors and logistics routes (FAO, 2017). The network can include the purchase of agri-food products from local, regional and even global producers to create alternative options if some sources become unavailable due to conflict. Also, diversifying transport modes, such as using both transport by road, air or sea can help mitigate the risks of supply disruption. This multidimensional approach to the supply chain increases the resilience of the military food system, enabling units to maintain access to food even under the most difficult conditions of armed conflict (ICRC, 2018).

Implementing real-time monitoring technologies is another effective strategy to maintain food safety standards during armed conflicts. Sensor systems and advanced data analysis enable continuous monitoring of critical parameters such as temperature, humidity and contamination, providing early warnings when problems arise (Boudreau & Davis, 2015).

A pertinent example is the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), where military contingents have actively engaged in supporting food security initiatives amidst ongoing conflict. In collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNMISS has facilitated the protection and escort of humanitarian convoys delivering essential food supplies to displaced populations. The military's role in securing transport routes and providing logistical support has been crucial in ensuring that aid reaches vulnerable communities, thereby mitigating the risk of food shortages and associated unrest. This integrated approach underscores the importance of military involvement in safeguarding food distribution channels during complex emergencies (Bromley & von Uexkull, 2024).

Another illustrative case is the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), where military forces have implemented comprehensive strategies to bolster food security in conflict-affected areas. AMISOM

troops have not only provided security for humanitarian operations but have also engaged in civil-military cooperation projects aimed at rehabilitating agricultural infrastructure. These initiatives include the restoration of irrigation systems and the provision of agricultural training to local communities, fostering self-sufficiency and resilience. By addressing both immediate food needs and long-term agricultural development, AMISOM exemplifies a holistic military approach to enhancing food security in fragile settings (ONU, 2016).

5. Conclusions

Ensuring food security is a critical concern for armed forces during military conflicts, with crucial implications for the health, morale and operational capability of fighting troops. The results of this in-depth study highlighted how disruptions in supply chains, compromised food quality and safety, and the occurrence of acute food shortages can severely undermine the ability of military units to provide adequate food to personnel.

These complex challenges require a comprehensive and integrated approach by commanders and military food service providers. Contingency planning, diversification of supply sources, use of real-time monitoring technologies and staff capacity building have proven to be essential strategies for mitigating risks and ensuring resilience of the food system during armed conflict.

In particular, the development of robust continuity plans that allow access to alternative food sources and back-up logistics routes is crucial to dealing with supply chain disruptions. Also, building a diverse network of suppliers and modes of transportation can create flexibility and alternative options should certain channels become unavailable due to conflict.

At the same time, the implementation of advanced monitoring technologies, such as sensor systems and data analysis, allows continuous surveillance of food safety parameters, facilitating rapid interventions when problems arise. Investments in staff capacity building through comprehensive training and education programs complement these technological efforts, ensuring that military food service providers have the knowledge and the skills needed to maintain high standards of safety and quality, even in the most difficult field conditions.

In conclusion, the article highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach and collaboration to guarantee food security and troop health during armed conflicts. By involving all relevant stakeholders, from commanders to logisticians and from nutritionists to crisis management experts, armed forces can develop sustainable and effective solutions that enable them to maintain operational capability and accomplish their missions even in the most difficult conflict conditions.

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