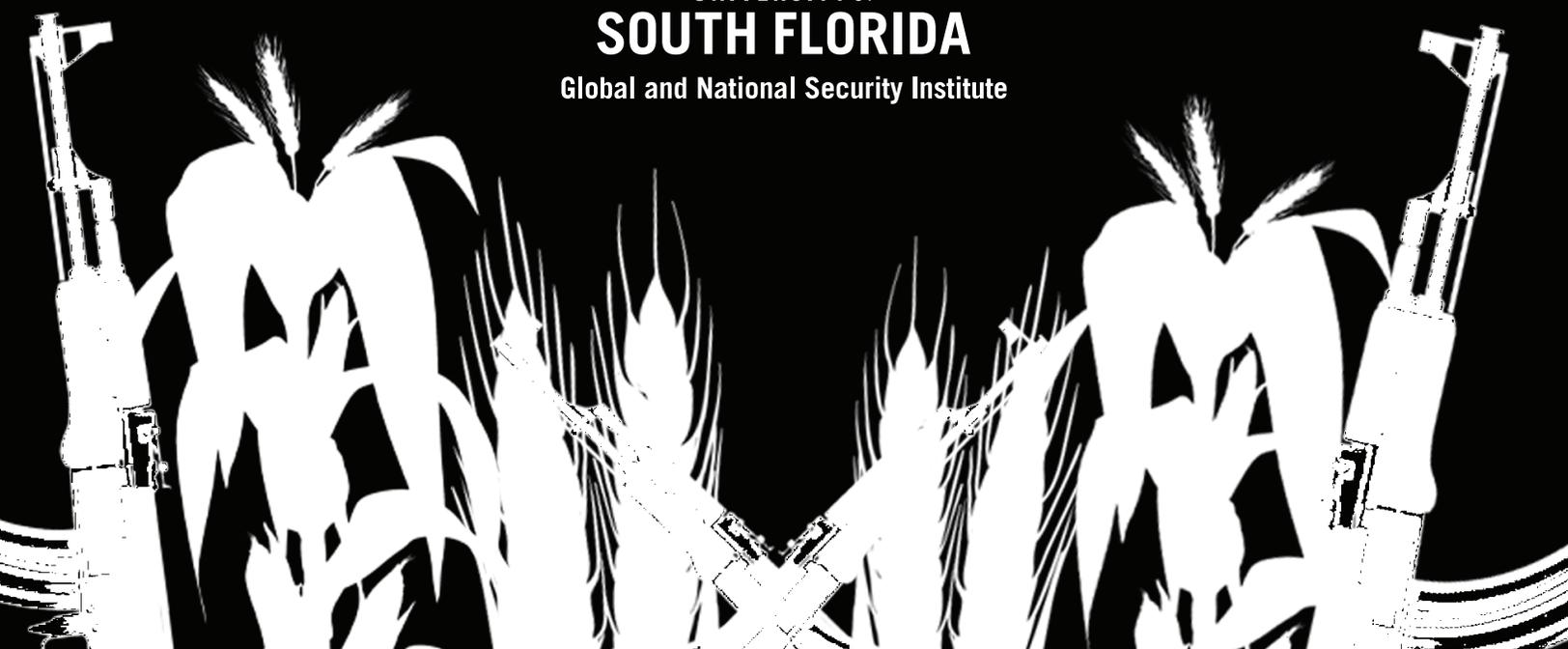




UNIVERSITY of
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Global and National Security Institute



— **CONFERENCE REPORT** —

GNSI POLICY DIALOGUES: HUNGER AS A WEAPON

First GNSI Policy Dialogues Conference

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The 4-Star Review

*Insights and observations from General McKenzie, who served from 2019 - 2022 as
Commander of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM)*

Food insecurity leads to conflict and conflict leads to food insecurity. Hunger is both caused by and contributes to instability and conflict, in what is – at best – a vicious circle of starvation or – at worst – a vicious spiral that plunges a population or region into complete desolation.

The use of hunger as a weapon is as old as history itself. Homer's Iliad describes the siege and starvation of Troy. The Russian scorched earth policy against Napoleon in 1812 helped repulse his invasion. General Sherman's March to the Sea in the American Civil War in 1864 left utter devastation, and little food, in its wake. Recently, as part of their invasion of Ukraine, Russian forces destroyed grain crops as it sat in ports, waiting to be shipped.

The official rejection of such tactics has been slow to materialize but has picked up momentum over the last 5 years. In 2018, the United Nations acknowledged weaponization of hunger for the first time ever and unanimously passed a resolution condemning the use of food insecurity and starvation as a tactic of war. Both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have passed resolutions condemning the use of hunger as a weapon.

Yet, the unyielding connection between hunger and war remains. Rising food prices and lack of access to affordable, nutritious food play a significant role in shaping social and political dynamics, particularly in vulnerable and unequal regions. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa face agricultural productivity challenges, contributing to food insecurity and social tensions. The Arab Spring uprisings were often sparked by perceived unfairness and violence often linked to food insecurity.

Even the United States – a perceived land of abundance – is not immune. Over 35 million people in the U.S. experience food insecurity. Most alarmingly, that number includes approximately 16% of enlisted families within the military. Food insecurity acts as a significant stressor, impacting individuals' psycho-

social and psycho-emotional well-being. Food insecurity compromises human development and hinders overall societal progress and national development.

Two prominent political scientists, John Mearsheimer and Hans Morgenthau, emphasize that only a mentally sound and physically healthy population can guarantee the progress of a country, both of which require food security and healthy nutrition as prerequisites.



General (Ret) Frank McKenzie,
Executive Director, GNSI

Addressing the availability, accessibility and affordability of nutritious food options is crucial to improve food security. Peace and stable environments are paramount to maintain the physical aspects of the food system and creating an enabling environment for sustainable agricultural practices.

To solve food insecurity and put an end to the vicious circle of hunger as a weapon, we must create a comprehensive security enterprise that includes non-traditional challenges like food insecurity. All the food in the world won't help anyone if it cannot be secured. Governments and international organizations need to prioritize investment in sustainable agriculture, research, and technological innovation in the world's food ecosystem. This includes climate-smart practices and supporting small-scale farms and vulnerable communities.

The United States must develop a national food strategy that maximizes efficiency, eliminates redundancy, and focuses on shortening the food supply chains – decreasing the distance between food sources and consumers. This includes diversifying food sources and promoting local and regional food systems.

August 2, 2023

Hunger as a Weapon

GNSI Policy Dialogues May 24, 2023

Introduction

On May 24th, 2023, the [Global and National Security Institute \(GNSI\)](#) held its inaugural "[Policy Dialogues](#)" at the University of South Florida's Tampa Campus. The event brought together experts for two thought-provoking panels: "Global Hunger: Generator of Social, Economic, and Political Instability" and "Food Insecurity in the United States: A Domestic Policy Challenge." The discussions shed light on the far-reaching implications of hunger and food insecurity and their relationship with conflict. Former and current officials, including General (Ret) Frank McKenzie, former commander of US Central Command, and Cindy McCain, executive director of the World Food Program explored the relationship between hunger and conflict and its effects at the national and international levels.

Food Insecurity and its Causes

Food insecurity remains a pressing issue, afflicting communities worldwide, where individuals and families struggle to access sufficient, nutritious food for their well-being. The consequences of food insecurity are extensive, impacting physical health, the ability to work, educational development, and overall welfare. Addressing this challenge necessitates collective action and innovative solutions.

[Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, PhD](#), emphasized the importance of food security, defining it as regular access for individuals to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that supports normal growth, development, and a healthy lifestyle. He also stressed the significance of obtaining food through socially acceptable means as part of the measure of food security. Reinforcing Pérez-Escamilla's points, [David Himmelgreen, PhD](#), provided a definition of food insecurity as "the lack of access to safe, nutritionally adequate, and socially acceptable food." [Joseph Dorsey, PhD](#), added to the discussion by defining hunger as the persistent state of regularly being unsatiated, emphasizing the urgency of addressing this ongoing problem. He described how persistent hunger (food insecurity) can lead to malnutrition, illness, lethargy, poverty, and even criminality. The hunger relief organization, Feeding America, notes, "The USDA defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life" and "Hunger is the feeling someone has when they don't have food." Hence, food insecurity deals with the overall issue of access to food while hunger is the resulting feeling of the individual lacking sustenance.

[Pérez-Escamilla](#) shed light on the profound psychological and emotional toll of food insecurity and hunger on individuals stating, "Food insecurity is an incredible psycho-social, psycho-emotional stressor." He highlighted the essentiality of access to sufficient and nutritious food for human capital, which ultimately drives social capital and national development. Moreover, [he drew](#) attention to the negative repercussions of compromised human development due to food insecurity, impacting overall societal progress. This means that food insecurity does not only hinder the development of the individual suffering from hunger, but of the community, nation, and globally as well.

Many factors can affect the availability of food. [Thomas Mantz, CEO of Feeding Tampa Bay \(FTB\)](#), highlighted the challenges faced post-COVID-19, specifically the weakened



capability of households due to the pandemic's impact. The coping strategies necessitated by the pandemic have depleted the resources of many families, while the cost of goods has significantly increased. This rise in costs further strains families already struggling to cope, making it increasingly difficult for them to meet their basic needs. Moreover, financial constraints may drive individuals towards unhealthy food choices that are cheaper and more readily available, allowing them to maximize their limited resources during times of economic instability. Echoing Mantz's view, [Laurie Beyranevand, JD](#) drew attention to the intersection of national security and the food system, referencing lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts such as the war in Ukraine. She emphasized the need to consider how national security impacts the food supply chain, citing President Biden's acknowledgment of the significant disruption caused by conflicts. This highlights the importance of ensuring the sustainability and adaptation of the food system to mitigate potential threats to food security.

While the pandemic and other factors contribute to food insecurity worldwide, human conflict remains the primary cause of hunger. The World Food Program report called "Dangerously Hungry" clearly points this out, noting, "According to the 2022 Global Report on Food Crises, 193 million people in 53 countries were affected by severe acute hunger in the year prior. Approximately 70% of these people faced crisis levels of hunger because of human-made conflict while the remaining 30% were primarily affected by the

climate crisis or economic shocks.”ⁱⁱ With these figures in mind, examining the relationship between conflict and food insecurity could achieve the most impact when addressing the issue of hunger.

The Vicious Cycle of Hunger and Conflict

Throughout history, the ominous relationship between hunger and conflict has left lasting scars on societies. The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 serves as an example in which food scarcity enflamed ethnic tensions, fueling the conflict.ⁱⁱⁱ Currently, in Yemen, the ongoing armed conflict has decimated agricultural infrastructure, pushing millions to the brink of famine.^{iv} Both examples serve as stark reminders of the urgent need to break the vicious cycle between hunger and conflict, ensuring they can no longer entangle their destructive forces. [Pérez-Escamilla](#) highlighted the interconnectedness between food insecurity and conflict, stating, "Food insecurity leads to conflict, and conflict leads to food insecurity..." He drew attention to this cycle in which the lack of access to adequate food can fuel or worsen conflicts, while conflicts, in turn, disrupt food systems, leading to increased food insecurity.

Regarding the relationship between war, conflict, and food insecurity, [General \(Ret\) Frank McKenzie](#) asserted, "Hunger is often a byproduct of war, whether it be between states or

between non-state entities. Conversely, war and conflict are also often a byproduct of food (in)security. They're intertwined. There's a vicious circle. It's actually the very opposite of a virtuous circle, a vicious circle that accelerates these crushing problems." He suggested, "If we can attempt to resolve some of the issues of food security and basic human need, we can

“They're intertwined. There's a vicious circle”

take a step... towards reducing the root causes of many of conflicts that we confront today." Drawing from his experience as commander of US Central Command, [McKenzie](#) expanded on the broader security concerns related to food security. He asserted that ensuring food security extends beyond traditional considerations of national security, with implications for the United States, its allies, partners, and the world at large. McKenzie advocated for a comprehensive security enterprise that encompasses nontraditional challenges, including those associated with food security. By acknowledging these challenges and integrating them into the conversation, we can adopt a more holistic approach to security. He stated, "I believe it's absolutely necessary for the conversation surrounding the security enterprise to expand beyond the traditional issues that have commonly been associated with it, and include an entirely new set of nontraditional challenges, ones that have been too frequently overlooked or simplified."

[Cindy McCain](#), Executive Director of the World Food Program, stressed, "We know well that food security is a fundamental requirement for national security. All too often hunger is caused by and contributes to instability and conflict." [She explained](#) the unfortunate reality that tens of

millions of people are displaced each year due to conflict, as observed most recently in the war in Ukraine, where they are forced to seek out safety, food, and shelter. She further emphasized that conflicts and humanitarian crises do not remain contained within national borders, but their impacts are felt globally, necessitating global awareness and collaborative efforts to effectively address these challenges. Building upon this perspective, [Chase Sova, PhD](#), underscored the importance of considering food security in a broader context, arguing that while food insecurity itself may not directly cause instability and conflict, understanding the presence of such instability requires a comprehensive examination of individual motivations and various influencing factors. [Sova](#) emphasized that not all hungry individuals are violent, and not all violent individuals are driven by hunger. This crucial distinction calls for nuanced discussions surrounding the relationship between food and instability, recognizing the multifaceted factors that contribute to conflicts beyond mere food insecurity.

Considering these thoughts from Pérez-Escamilla and Sova, it becomes evident that food insecurity has far-reaching implications beyond the individual level. It affects not only personal well-being but also social cohesion and broader societal development. Acknowledging the need for a comprehensive understanding of these factors and how they contribute to conflicts and food insecurity. This understanding can lead to addressing the key aspects of affordability, availability, quality and safety, sustainability, and adaptation to effectively combat food insecurity and promote peace.

[Ellen Messer, PhD](#), highlighted two key points regarding food production and its connection to social instability. Firstly, she noted that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa face challenges in terms of agricultural productivity and food production, which contribute to food insecurity. Their food



production and supply is challenged by limited access to resources, inadequate infrastructure, and impacts from climate change. These issues exacerbate food insecurity, leading to social tensions and unrest. Additionally, [Messer](#) emphasized that during the Arab Spring, uprisings

were often sparked by perceived unfairness, structural violence, and human rights violations. The trigger issue, however, that ignited the protests was frequently related to food insecurity or the anticipation of future food insecurity. Rising food prices and lack of access to affordable and nutritious food became powerful drivers of social and political movements. This underscores the crucial role that food-related issues play in shaping social and political dynamics, especially in regions where vulnerability and inequality are pervasive.

Building upon this perspective, [Tad Schnauffer II, PhD](#), discussed the evolving relationship between hunger and warfare. [He emphasized](#) the relationship between conflict and food insecurity, stating, "Conflict causes food insecurity, and in peacetime, hunger and food insecurity can cause a conflict." This cycle underscores the interconnected nature of these issues, with each fueling and perpetuating the other. He further

emphasized that the impacts of conflicts extend far beyond the immediate areas of violence. Displacement, disruption of markets, and the collapse of infrastructure have ripple effects, leading to widespread food insecurity and economic instability. Similarly, [Daniel Sellen, PhD](#), emphasized the role of conflict in driving food insecurity. He highlighted how violence leads to the breakdown and exploitation of food production and distribution, the displacement of farmers, and the disruption of economic mechanisms. [Sellen](#) referred to this phenomenon as the weaponization of the entire food supply system. He underscored that conflict not only affects food security within the conflict zones themselves but also extends its impact to vulnerable groups such as refugees, internally displaced persons, and economic migrants, resulting in economic insecurity. Meanwhile, the economic insecurity resulting from disrupted food systems adds an additional layer of vulnerability and instability. [Laurie Beyranevand](#) noted the domestic impacts of the potential issues faced if the food supply chain experiences a significant disruption due to war or natural disasters, saying, "I think of the issues that we'd face if we experience that same level of significant disruption to the food supply chain due to war or even some other natural disaster." The ties between conflict and hunger go even deeper when one analyzes the use of hunger as a weapon.

The Weaponization of Food

The weaponization of food continues to be a distressing practice, one in which food is wielded as a weapon by belligerents, resulting in dire consequences. Governments and armed groups strategically control or manipulate food supplies, exacerbating vulnerabilities and perpetuating cycles of dependency. This deliberate act violates fundamental rights, undermines stability, and inflicts immense human suffering. To combat this abhorrent practice, it is essential to safeguard access to food as a universal right and hold accountable those who exploit food for destructive purposes.

In this context, [Messer](#) emphasized that hunger is a form of violence and stated, "Hunger is a violent act. Ignoring hunger is a violent act." She highlighted the profound impact of causing hunger as a deliberate tactic in warfare, stating, "I think we're all aware that causing hunger is a type of war tactic." Furthermore, [Sellen](#) discussed the use of hunger as a means to coerce people, potentially offering them weapons as a form of manipulation. He asserted that this act of using hunger as a weapon is also an act of war. It's apparent that hunger can be employed in various ways to exert control, exert pressure, and achieve strategic objectives within the context of armed conflicts. Continuing this argument, [Schnauffer](#) highlighted the historical use of hunger as a weapon in warfare, stating, "It was actually doctrine in many militaries... to use hunger as a weapon. It was part of their doctrine of how they took a city, how they took a fort, how they affected the battlespace." He emphasized that the use of hunger as a strategic tool has been prevalent for centuries, predating modern times. He highlighted various tactics employed throughout history to perpetuate and spread hunger in conflict zones. Actions such as the starvation of cities, destruction of

food crops, and obstruction of humanitarian aid as part of a deliberate strategy to weaken populations and maintain control. These tactics not only exacerbate food insecurity but also prolong conflicts and hinder prospects for peace. Regarding the weaponization of food security, [McKenzie](#) shared his observations, stating, "I've seen the weaponization of food security in Syria as a tool of the Syrian government." He highlighted the plight of a vulnerable and displaced population in Syria, who are at the mercy of the Syrian government's control over and restriction of international aid. [McKenzie](#) drew parallels to similar situations in Yemen, mentioning, "I've seen it in Yemen, and it has already been discussed in Russian actions and their unprovoked invasion of Ukraine." He emphasized that the repercussions of Russian decisions extend far beyond Ukraine, impacting vulnerable populations in Lebanon, Africa, the Middle East, and across the globe. In summary, his observations shed light on the weaponization of food security, its impact on vulnerable populations, and the broader geopolitical implications that extend beyond specific regions.

[Joseph Dorsey](#) furthered General McKenzie's points by arguing that food can be used as a weapon when people are denied their right to safe, healthy, and nutritious diets. He stated that governments and corporate entities can create food



insecurity through various tactics such as deprivation, sanctions, supply control, and manipulation of food supply distribution. Food insecurity can also contribute to civil unrest, riots, looting, and other social stresses, further exacerbating vulnerable populations, migrations, and refugee settlements. He described the use of hunger as a weapon as a form of structural violence within an economic system, aiming to exert political control over the conditions and well-being of targeted populations by limiting food availability.

Addressing the weaponization of food requires international efforts to protect the right to food, promote fair distribution and access to resources, and ensure accountability for those who exploit food as a weapon. By upholding the principles of human rights and social justice, societies can work towards a future where food is no longer used as a tool of violence and oppression.

The Changing Perspective of Hunger as a Weapon

[Tad Schnauffer](#) pointed out that the changes regarding the treatment of hunger in warfare within the Geneva Conventions and throughout the 19th century have been relatively recent developments. This suggests that the recognition and regulations regarding the impact of hunger and the protection of civilians from its use have emerged in more recent times. [Chase Sova, PhD](#), drew attention to the five-year anniversary of the 2018 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2417, which acknowledged the weaponization of hunger for the first time, and unanimously passed a resolution condemning the use of food, insecurity, and starvation as a tactic of war. According to [Sova](#), there are ongoing debates in the United Nations focusing on the protection of civilians during conflict.

"We have to spend a little bit more time... thinking about international humanitarian law, international human rights law and really trying to implement Security Council resolution 2417," he stated. Additionally, [McKenzie](#) mentioned that the US House of Representatives and Senate had both passed resolutions within the past two years, specifically condemning the use of hunger as a weapon.

McKenzie cautioned, however, while there has been some progress, "there's still a long way to go in this fight." He believes the global pushback against the weaponization of hunger is still in the beginning stages, "but at least we've witnessed what you could charitably call the start." [McKenzie](#) then emphasized the need for continued efforts, indirectly urging the audience to maintain pressure on this issue, leveraging current global momentum to outlaw the weaponization of food, just as many previous actors have fought against global hunger over the past decades.

Addressing Hunger Across the World

Globally, the fight against hunger remains an urgent imperative, requiring concerted efforts to break its pervasive grip. To address this pressing challenge, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal #2 aims to achieve zero hunger by 2030^v. In pursuit of this goal, initiatives like the UN's World Food Program play a vital role in assisting crisis-stricken regions. For instance, WFP has been instrumental in addressing food insecurity in conflict-ridden areas like South Sudan and drought-affected regions such as Ethiopia^{vi}. These initiatives exemplify the collaborative efforts and innovative agricultural practices needed to build resilient food systems. Moreover, investment in sustainable development is essential. Beyond the traditional factors behind food insecurity, [Beyranevand](#) stressed the importance of not overlooking new, emerging causes and the impact of major events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, "It's one of the more recent examples, I think, that we've seen of a really major disruption."

[Patrick Hamilton](#) brought attention to the importance of adapting and updating the laws of war to align with the changing practices and technological advancements in warfare. Recognizing the need to integrate these changes into practical aspects and legal frameworks, he highlights the Red Cross and its partners' significant allocation of resources in various contexts. This includes providing vital assistance in Ukraine, Africa, and the Middle East, where prolonged violence has created immense challenges. These efforts underscore the necessity of a stronger response from humanitarian organizations worldwide in addressing the impacts of conflicts. Within the context of military operations, [McKenzie](#) emphasized the roles of USAID representatives and specialists within large headquarters like Central Command. These individuals are crucial in shaping the command's understanding and prioritization of humanitarian assistance and food security, throughout the unit, including the commander. "And so it comes down a little bit, frankly, to the personality of the commander," McKenzie said. "If the commander is interested in those things, then those things will be emphasized, and if you're the commander of Central

Command, you have to be vitally interested in those things..." This collaborative approach provides for a comprehensive response to humanitarian needs in conflict zones.

While the US Government is mobilizing its resources to resolve global hunger, according to the [Messer](#), China endeavors to form alliances by becoming a market for food products from developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Recognizing the limitations of their investments within China, Chinese officials have turned to importing a significant quantity of food products from these regions. Furthermore, China's investment in rice production serves dual purposes, meeting domestic demand and leveraging advancements in rice agriculture that can be shared as achievements. These efforts highlight the potential for collaboration and knowledge sharing to address global food security challenges.

The Domestic Food Situation in the US

It is vital to acknowledge that food insecurity and hunger are universal phenomena. In the United States, 33.8 million of individuals and families struggle to access nutritious meals on a regular basis^{vii}. This reality contrasts sharply with the country's perception of abundance, revealing a hidden vulnerability. Moreover, the problem is complex, rooted in systemic factors such as poverty, limited resources, and unequal distribution^{viii}. To address this pressing issue, comprehensive efforts are required. Firstly, social welfare reforms must be implemented to provide support and assistance to those in need. Additionally, community empowerment initiatives should be undertaken to foster self-sufficiency and resilience. Lastly, equitable access to affordable, nutritious food must be ensured for all Americans.

"...our food supply chain is extremely vulnerable"

[Chase Sova](#) raised concerns about the future of international food assistance provided by the United States. He pointed out the upcoming year is anticipated to be one of financial and fiscal austerity, which adds uncertainty to the support provided to vulnerable populations globally. The need for sustained funding and commitment to international food assistance programs becomes even more crucial in the face of these challenges. [Joseph Dorsey](#) supported this concern, pointing out the staggering number of 35 million hungry people in the United States and questioning how such a significant level of food insecurity exists in a country often referred to as the "land of plenty." While recognizing the United Nations' identification of food as a human right, Dorsey acknowledges the perception of rights can vary among individuals. This underscores the importance of addressing the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals in the fight against food insecurity.

[David Himmelgreen](#) supported Sova and Dorsey's arguments by referencing the #11 ranking of the United States in the Economist Impact's [Global Food Security Index](#). He noted its drop in position from the previous year, highlighting the

challenges in terms of availability, sustainability, and adaptation. Moreover, the absence of a strong policy framework addressing food security and access further compounds the issue. These findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms to address the root causes of food insecurity in the United States.

[Laurie Beyranevand](#) drew attention to the reliance of the majority of individuals in the U.S. on distant sources for their food consumption. While this creates efficiency and relatively inexpensive food, it also exposes the vulnerability of the U.S. food supply chain to risks. Stating, "It could be very difficult to identify alternatives for production, sourcing, and distribution," she warned. "While that allows for us to have a tremendous amount of efficiency and relatively inexpensive food, it also means that our food supply chain is extremely vulnerable to risk." According to Beyranevand, in the event of supply disruptions or political factors, finding alternative production, sourcing, and distribution methods becomes challenging, threatening the stability of the food supply chain. Therefore, efforts must be made to diversify food sources and promote local and regional food systems to enhance resilience and reduce dependence on distant sources.

[Beyranevand](#) highlighted the issue of hunger in the United States, specifically the connection between food insecurity and the consumption of unhealthy foods. This link underscores the need to address not only the availability and accessibility of nutritious food options but also their affordability. By tackling these systemic issues, the United States can work towards reducing diet-related diseases and improving overall food security. Many countries have and continue to face food supply chain risks. At the height of World War II, Britain relied on imports for 70-80 percent of its food. This high dependency on foreign imports made the country vulnerable to disruptions in supply lines and heightened the importance of maintaining domestic food production capabilities. Rationing and other measures were implemented to manage the limited supply and ensure equitable distribution among the population.^{ix}

Even military families face this challenge. [McKenzie](#) shed light on the situation of food insecurity closer to home. He expressed concern that 16% of enlisted families within the military are food insecure. This alarming statistic underscores the challenges faced by these families in meeting their basic food needs, emphasizing the need for targeted support and interventions within the military community. Additionally, the high rates of food insecurity among veterans demands attention and action, as these individuals have served the nation and deserve support in their post-service lives.

Addressing food insecurity in the United States necessitates comprehensive efforts that prioritize social welfare reforms, community empowerment, and equitable access to affordable, nutritious food for all Americans. By recognizing the systemic factors contributing to food insecurity, society can work towards sustainable solutions that ensure food security and uphold the dignity of every individual and family.

Policies to Build Domestic Food Resiliency

The policies for the United States focus on domestic efforts to strengthen food security, emphasizing initiatives and regulations that promote sustainable agriculture, equitable distribution, and improved access to nutritious food.

Developing a National Strategy for Food Sustainability

According to [Kiki Caruson, PhD](#), there is a pressing need for the United States to address hunger both domestically and internationally, not just during times of crisis when donations tend to increase. She emphasized the importance of



developing thoughtful and strategic policies to tackle this issue sustainably. [Caruson](#) recognized that the demand for food often exceeds the available resources, and there is a need to address hunger in unexpected places where it may not be immediately apparent. She suggested

various options for outreach and awareness, including promoting agricultural production and supporting organizations like [Future Farmers of America](#), which aims to cultivate the next generation of farmers. [Caruson](#) believed that it is crucial for everyone to become more educated about the consequences of hunger and the challenges associated with compromised food supplies.

Eliminating Unnecessary Regulations on Farmers

Accompanying [Caruson's](#) point on the importance of assisting our domestic food suppliers, [Simon Bollin](#) stated, "It's a multifaceted problem. Farmers are one of the most highly regulated industries in the country." He highlighted the extensive regulations that farmers face, which may not be widely recognized by the public. He further explained, "To start a farm, you're dealing with the EPA, the Department of Labor, the Department of Health." [Bollin](#) emphasized the various governmental agencies and departments that farmers must navigate and comply with when establishing and operating a farm.

Expanding Small-Scale Urban and Community Farming

[David Himmelgreen](#) specifically emphasized the potential importance of community gardens and education. He mentioned a project called the Fifteenth Street Farm Nutrition



Education Program, which has received funding from the USDA. The project involves a collaboration between a small urban farm in downtown St. Petersburg and local schools. One of the key themes of this program is connecting children with soil, plants, and health. [Himmelgreen](#)

highlighted the importance of discussing the health of the soil, plants, and humans. Additionally, he mentioned the presence of a sustainability component within the program. He claimed that local food production holds great potential but emphasized the need to educate children. This also plays in the face-paced society of western culture in which eating out and ordering in has become commonplace. According to a 2018 CDC Report, "During 2013–2016, 36.6% of adults consumed fast food on a given day."^x People are less educated with little

experience in food preparation and cooking because they have outsourced those requirements to restaurants. In times of crisis, these families could face food insecurity as a result of the simple lack of culinary knowledge.

Diversifying the Food Production System

[Laurie Beyranevand](#) explained that the food system encompasses various considerations along the supply chain, including the economy, environment, safety, public health, and equity. She emphasized the need to address and mitigate challenges at different points along the supply chain. [Beyranevand](#) emphasized the need for strategic planning and coordination among different branches of government to effectively respond to food system challenges. She suggested that the National Food Strategy should provide mechanisms for coordination to maximize efficiency, eliminate redundancies, and prevent gaps. Similarly, she highlighted the importance of supporting urban agriculture, similar to the Victory Gardens during World Wars I and II, stating, “They could benefit greatly from increased support for urban agriculture under the farm bill.” Beyranevand believes improvements could be made to ensure the successful creation and growth of local and regional food systems, protect workers, increase safety, and revitalize communities across the country for greater resilience, prosperity, and safety.

Relying on Local and National Supply Chains

In addition to the food production sector, another aspect of our nutrition system that deserves attention is our food supply chain, as [Dorsey](#) stated, “The supply chain is under another threat that I believed we haven’t even started talking about yet, which is climate change.” He highlighted the occurrence of hurricanes and flooding in various parts of the country, along with rising temperatures leading to forest fires and subsequent flooding and drought conditions. Dorsey mentioned that any disaster related to climate change needs to be considered. In terms of future approaches, [Dorsey](#) suggested focusing on controlled environmental farming methods like vertical farming, hydroponics, and other techniques suitable for urban environments. He pointed out that over half the world’s population lives in urban areas, yet food production heavily relies on rural environments.

[Beyranevand](#) echoed Dorsey’s points on the importance of a shift from global supply chains to local and regional ones during the pandemic, noting, “One significant result from the pandemic that, I think is really instructive in this context is this shift that we witnessed from global supply chains to more highly localized and regional supply chains.” Eating locally will likely also mean eating less processed foods, creating a healthier diet that will improve overall wellbeing.

Policies for the International Community

The policies for the international community aim to address food security on a global scale, fostering collaboration among nations to implement effective strategies and initiatives that ensure access for all to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.

Prioritizing Investment in Sustainable Agriculture

Crafting effective policies for the future demands a holistic approach that addresses the multifaceted nature of food insecurity. Governments and international organizations must prioritize investment in sustainable agriculture, research, and technological innovation. Policies promoting equitable access to land, resources, and markets can empower small-scale farmers and vulnerable communities. Additionally, social safety nets, nutrition education, and support for climate resilience are critical components. By forging inclusive and forward-thinking policies, we can pave the way toward a future where food insecurity becomes a distant memory.

Policies Should Encompass Farming and Nutrition Education

In addition to investments in agriculture, policies should encompass social safety nets and nutrition education. These measures provide crucial support to vulnerable populations, ensuring that they have access to nutritious food and the knowledge to make informed dietary choices. Furthermore, policies must integrate climate resilience strategies to mitigate the impacts of environmental challenges on food production. By promoting sustainable and climate-smart practices, policymakers can foster resilience in the face of a changing climate. Daniel Sellen, PhD, emphasized the pivotal role of knowledge and information. “We think about knowledge as the key resource that drives everything,” he asserted. Educating people on how to cook and prepare food is better than simply giving food to them. Many people, particularly in the West, don’t know how to cook, relying, instead, on eating out or delivery meals. When supply chains are disrupted, these individuals are even more at risk for food insecurity because of their lack of education and self-sufficiency.

Achieving Food Security Requires Establishing Peace

Beyond the essential components of food (farms, distribution systems, etc.), the establishment of peace and security stands as an equally vital pillar for ensuring food security and sustainability. While the development and maintenance of robust food infrastructure, including farms, transportation networks, and storage facilities, are critical for ensuring sufficient food production and distribution, they alone are not sufficient to achieve long-term food security and sustainability. Peace and security play an integral role in developing a stable and resilient food system. In regions affected by conflicts or political instability, food production and supply chains are disrupted, leading to scarcity and food insecurity. Farmers may be forced to abandon their fields, crops may be destroyed, and infrastructure may be damaged or inaccessible. Furthermore, the movement of goods and resources necessary for agriculture, such as fertilizers, seeds, and machinery, can be hindered in unstable or conflict-ridden areas.

*“Ending
hunger has its
beginning in
first achieving
peace”*

[Rafael Pérez-Escamilla](#) underscored the extreme challenges faced during the acute phase of such crises, likening it to a situation where "all hell breaks loose." He argued for the

“very little that can be done ... while conflict is occurring”

immediate evacuation of individuals from a conflict's epicenter. [He expressed](#) his view candidly, "honestly, I think there is very little that can be done in that epicenter while conflict is occurring." He insisted, "In my humble opinion, we need to get people out of there... as soon as possible."

Peace and security are not only crucial for maintaining the physical aspects of the food system but also for fostering an environment that bolsters sustainable agricultural practices. Insecure regions often lack the stability needed for long-term planning and investment in agricultural technologies and techniques that promote sustainable farming practices. Additionally, peace and stability create opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and capacity building among farmers, researchers, and policymakers. This creates a virtuous circle of innovation and resilience in the face of climate change and other challenges.

In this context, [Tad Schnauffer](#) suggested, "Ending hunger has its beginning in first achieving peace." He further explained that once peace has been established, a lasting and secure environment must follow to allow the benefits of stability to prevail. He stated, "If you look at the end of World War II... the US ended up implementing the Marshall Plan because of fears of what? Hunger [and] instability. Obviously, there were other resources that were scarce across war torn Europe. Implementing the Marshall Plan, they [US leaders] also realized that security had to accompany it...leading to NATO. After...providing aid, you also [have] to provide the security to protect that aid, in [the Marshall Plan] case from the looming Soviet threat. [This security component] is something to keep in mind as we look at implementation processes [to combat hunger] ... in post-conflict consolidation."

Similarly, [Patrick Hamilton](#) argued that it is crucial for the international community to focus its efforts on achieving meaningful peace agreements as a foundation for long-term food security. He highlighted the importance of strengthening preparedness and response mechanisms for conflicts and humanitarian emergencies. Compliance with the laws of armed conflict and respect for international humanitarian law are essential in mitigating the impact of conflicts on food security. To address challenges comprehensively, [Hamilton](#) suggested facilitating multi-stakeholder discussions and implementing major structural reforms in global health, food, and security systems. Adequate humanitarian funding is also crucial to meet the escalating needs arising from conflicts.

The international provision of aid to Afghanistan is a good example of why peace and stability play such a vital role. In Afghanistan aid is wasted on those in power. A yet-to-be-released report prepared for the US government indicates that

the Taliban has effectively infiltrated UN aid delivery in Afghanistan, diverting billions of dollars to their control. This diversion tactic has grown in significance since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, as other illicit revenue streams dwindled. The report questions the ability of the UN and its agencies, particularly those present in Afghanistan, to control the flow of aid and notes that the Taliban, in fact, views the UN as another source of revenue. The document also challenges the idea that the Taliban could be pressured to reverse policies such as restricting women's rights. Additionally, the report reveals the Taliban's financial adeptness and raises concerns over the opaque allocation of their funds.^{xi}

Expanding International Law

[Ellen Messer](#) highlighted the significance of legal frameworks that condemn the abuse of starvation as a weapon. These frameworks serve as reference points for political advocacy and provide a basis for affirming the basic human right to food. [Messer](#) emphasized that frameworks of livelihood security and rights-based development, originating from individuals asserting their rights at the local level, are already in progress. These frameworks can guide policymakers in formulating policies that prioritize the well-being and rights of individuals, fostering a more inclusive and equitable approach to food security.

Establishing Ways to Ensure Aid Reaches Those Who Need it

As with the example of the current Taliban Regime in Afghanistan, aid often is intercepted on its way to those in need. Regarding how the US can enhance its contribution to resolving global hunger, [Messer](#) emphasized the need for greater attention to be paid to the destination of US aid, including food assistance and other forms of assistance, when it is channeled through national government agencies and leaders in developing countries. She pointed out that in both post-conflict and conflict-affected countries, aid distribution can often be unfair, exacerbating existing conflicts.

Messer stated that all these situations involve food insecurity and that it is crucial to remember that the people affected are not just statistics. They have their own stories to tell and ideas for escaping their circumstances. She asserted that it is important to give them a voice and the opportunity to share their experiences, as without that, they may resort to violence as a means of expressing their frustrations. [Messer](#) concluded by emphasizing the importance of empowering individuals and communities to prevent such outcomes.

The BIG 3 Takeaways

- 1) In conflict zones where fighting is taking place, food aid is most often wasted. Instead of food aid during hot conflicts, the world community should rather focus on diplomatic aid and pressure to establish a cease-fire or peace. Then that peace should be reinforced with a form of security to allow stability to break the cycle of hunger and war.
- 2) All nations should continually improve their food resiliency when possible. Once a crisis strikes, whether a pandemic or war, it's too late to establish a viable food supply chain. A program like this begins with individual and family unit self-sustainability through community gardens, food and cooking education, and minimal waste.
- 3) As the engagement of non-state actors in conflicts and their use of hunger as a weapon increases, the need for establishing an international response system grows. Traditional means of enforcing accountability, such as diplomatic condemnation and sanctions, are not applicable to them. Therefore, we must pave a new framework to hold such actors accountable.

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GNSI Policy Dialogues -- Hunger as a Weapon

May 24th, 2023 (Conference Video available at GNSI YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skeMCnQwMPY>)

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Speakers

Cindy McCain, Executive Director, World Food Program

Prasant Mohapatra, PhD, Provost and Executive Vice President, University of South Florida

General (Ret) Frank McKenzie, Executive Director, Global and National Security Institute and former commander, USCENTCOM

Laurie Beyranevand, JD, Director of Center for Agriculture and Food Systems, Professor of Law, Vermont Law and Graduate School

Panel 1: Global Hunger: Generator of Social, Economic, and Political Instability

Moderator: Tad Schnauer II, PhD, Analyst / Planner, Global and National Security Institute, University of South Florida

- Ellen Messer, PhD, Tufts University
- Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, PhD, Yale University
- Daniel Sellen, PhD, University of Toronto
- Patrick Hamilton, Head of Regional Delegation for the United States and Canada, International Committee of the Red Cross
- Chase Sova, PhD, Senior Director, Public Policy and Thought Leadership, World Food Program USA

Panel 2: Food Insecurity in the United States: A Domestic Policy Challenge

Moderator: Kiki Caruson, PhD, Vice President, USF World

- Thomas Mantz, CEO, Feeding Tampa Bay
- David Himmelgreen, PhD, Center for the Advancement of Food Security and Healthy Communities, University of South Florida
- Joseph Dorsey, PhD, University of South Florida
- Simon Bollin, Agribusiness Development Manager, Hillsborough County (Florida)

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