**Fourth Annual Summit on Global Food Security and Health**

**“Integrating Global Food Security and National Security: Problems, Progress, and Challenges”**

**Global Food Security Project**

**Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University**

**Founders Hall Auditorium**

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According to a recent report on food security and nutrition by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in 2016 the number of chronically undernourished people in the world was estimated to have increased to 815 million, up from 777 million in 2015, yet still below the 900 million in 2000.[[1]](#footnote-1) World Food Program Executive Director, David Beasley, has noted that most of this increase is due to conflict-oriented food insecurity.[[2]](#footnote-2) Such acute needs require a collaborative response from all parts of government. In the past, the humanitarian and defense sectors have worked independently, operating on separate and often overlapping mandates in times of conflict. Such a dearth in communication has produced recognizable inefficiencies, hindering the potential of the whole of government. Moreover, in times of intractable conflict the lines have blurred between what we mean by humanitarian assistance versus medium to long term development. It is precisely this “space in between” that has presented a challenge to those in both the development and security sectors who are confronting ongoing turmoil in so many of the world’s poorest countries.

Food insecurity and violent conflict coexist at a volatile intersection teetering on societal instability. Food shortages and poor allocation of resources historically presuppose societal discontent, economic downturn, and political change, all of which are known triggers for conflict. At the same time, sustained violence consistently fuels the same shortages and famines. Improving food security regimes is the ultimate preventative medicine for conflict, and the best prospect for sustainable peace.

On November 15th, members of academia, think tanks, government, and international organizations convened at the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University to attend **“Integrating Global Food Security and National Security: Problems, Progress, and Challenges”**, an event sponsored by the Schar School of Policy and Government and the Henry L. Stimson Center. The day-long event consisted of four panels covering distinct, yet intimately related aspects of food security, as well as the prospect for sustainable health, nutrition, and access to suitable resources. The goal of the fourth annual summit, in conjunction with additional research efforts, is to produce a comprehensive report with recommendations to be submitted to the U.S. government and appropriate relief agencies outlining suggested and best practices to increase collaboration, combine resources and reach, protect vulnerable communities, provide efficient and effective aid, and mitigate the cost of disaster.

The conference began with a series of introductory remarks which laid out current gaps in food security initiatives, such as a lack in proper terminology when integrating new sectors, and the growing scope of global health problems fueled by instability. **Phil Thomas**, director of the Global Food Security Project at the Schar School of Policy and Government, suggested that solutions to the food security issues the globe faces require the intertwining of national security and food security policy and application. He also noted the need for an increase in public-private partnerships to help produce sustainable results. He urged assembled speakers and audience to engage in a frank discussion of key institutional barriers that prevent effective policy and program integration. He also urged them to seek out constructive alternatives. He closed his introductory remarks by dedicating the Summit to the memory GMU Schar School Professor Paul Posner and GAO Assistant Director for Food Security Joy Labez who passed away during 2017. Both had distinguished careers dedicated to public service and will be sorely missed. **Brian Finlay**, president and CEO of the Stimson Center, warned of the increasing number of conflicts fueled by famine and food insecurity, and the necessity for “unusual alliances” in various sectors united by a common goal – to leverage and ensure stable access to resources. In her keynote speech, Director of the International Security Program at the Schar School of Policy and Government **Ellen Laipson** celebrated the accomplishments of Chef José Andres, who had worked in the hurricane recovery efforts in Puerto Rico, and serves as an example of the impact non-state actors can have in providing food aid. Laipson also reminded the audience of the preference for militarization over development evident in the Trump administration, and the importance of using military resources without over-stepping into a harmful “big brother” role. It is therefore important to build bridges between security structures, while recognizing that the defense element will not always see food security as a priority they can address. Both the potential and limitations of partnering organizations need to be fully assessed, as realistic goals are the most likely to produce results.

Panel 1: The Many Dimensions of the Interrelationship between Global Food Security and National Security: Goals, Objectives, Approaches, Coordination, Integration; and Lessons-Learned

The event’s first panel, moderated by **Johanna Mendelson Forman**, distinguished fellow of the Food Security Program at the Stimson Center, investigated the existing relationships between global food security and U.S. national security. Mendelson Forman began the discussion recognizing the space for both sectors in the aid community, but allowed that current miscommunications and misunderstanding of operations prevents effective collaboration. **Rod Schnoover**, representing the National Intelligence Council, provided a working definition of national security, namely threats to the homeland, allies, U.S. power and resources. Schnoover noted that food insecurity has proliferated at a faster pace than expected, and is exceeding estimates made as recently as 2015, according to the National Intelligence Council. Moreover, food insecurity is directly linked to the expression of power; Civilians are more likely to protest or threaten governments over food shortages than they are facing other comparable scarcities, such as with water. Repressive regimes have also been known to weaponize food stores as a political tool of coercion; we see this happening in both Syria and Yemen. The nexus of food shortages, conflict, and patterns of migration are increasing; The international community must also address additional threats such as population growth, environmental degradation, and resource constraints, which threaten an already fragile system.

**Jeremy Konyndyk**, a senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development, emphasized that the intersection of food security and national security must be addressed at the policy level first to best utilize available resources. Konyndyk recognized messy joint operations in both food security and disaster assistance initiatives, and highlighted the need for a common lexicon of definitions and goals, as well as clearly outlined roles for partnering organizations. He cited relief to Haiti as an example, a case where the Department of Defense had and has continued to support the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). During the post-earthquake operation in Haiti USAID provided expertise and directed the efforts and resources provided by the Defense Department, all while maintaining a civilian face to the operation. Haiti was one example of the capability to build “institutional connective tissue” between organizations, both in government and in civil society, which includes not only joint operations, but also best practices, training and permanent inter-organizational liaisons. The key is to identify ways in which that experience can be replicated and integrated into common defense and civil practice.

**Dina Esposito**, vice president of Technical Leadership at Mercy Corps, provided the non-governmental organization (NGO) perspective. Bringing food aid out of the policy sphere, Esposito defined Food Security as sufficient access to resources (food) to meet the dietary needs for an active life. The line between food security versus insecurity can be assessed by correlating food availability, access, and utilization. NGO’s, unlike government allies, seek to address the multi-dimensional problems that are causing and are caused by food insecurity. From this point of view, the military should be guided by local oversight, and operate in support of local ambitions and projects. Esposito took a realistic stance on U.S. humanitarian assistance, recognizing that the expressed administrative priority is national security. Nevertheless, she stressed that concerned civilian organizations can be effective by relating food security to national security, thereby illuminating crossovers and contributions to general instability.

**Rick Leach**, president and chief executive officer at the World Food Program (WFP) USA, provided data from a new WFP USA report, *Winning the Peace: Hunger and Instability*, which summarized the evidence base on the link between food insecurity and global instability. Approximately 80 percent of food insecure states are considered fragile or extremely fragile, and moreover, food insecurity is rising for the first time in a decade. Humanitarian operations in developing states, shouldering the majority of the burden, are consistently underfunded, by as much as 50% in some cases. Due to fact that the aid community can recognize, predict, and mount effective responses to food security threats, terms such as “famine” suggest a failure on the part of the international community. The prevention and mitigation of disasters should be an important focus for concerned organizations in the government and in the non-governmental world. Development organizations and local NGOs can help support prevention of food crises—and prevent them from destabilizing nations— by addressing taking a comprehensive approach to food security including robust emergency assistance, long term agricultural development, proper nutrition, and building safety nets of governmental programs to help weather shocks to food supply chains.

The panel discussion and audience questions were devoted to methods of effective aid. Members of the panel agreed that many countries were willing to partner in the name of aid, but needed to prioritize prevention rather than taking a Band-Aid approach, i.e. *delivering resources after damage has been done*. The best means to providing capacity-building solutions and resources is by adopting an “international as necessary, local as possible” mantra. Another observation made was that the National Intelligence Council’s does not gauge food security in terms of hunger, but instead measures the impact of food insecurity as a driver of conflict.

The challenge today is to heighten the Department of Defense’s awareness of the on-the-ground drivers of food insecurity when conducting operations in remote areas, while also promoting an assistance role that adapts to local and international organizations with expertise in humanitarian crises. Does the political will exist for such a shift? The panel and audience remained divided. At the conclusion, Esposito remarked that the short-term/long-term aid distinctions have quickly blurred. The reality is, we have the technical capability and experience to implement effective interventions, but need concerted, bipartisan policy support if we are to apply them in a timely manner.

Panel 2: Private-Public Partnerships and a new Emphasis on Resilience in Food Security

The second panel of the day considered the role of the private sector in food security partnerships, reflecting on the benefits offered by such involvement. Moderator **Emmy Simmons** provided the definition of food security utilized by the World Health Organization, which includes the need for sustainable food production and distribution, adequate nutrition, and the importance of retaining human dignity when obtaining food resources. Simmons also recognized certain trends in U.S. food aid initiatives and focus, namely improving response to disaster and a new focus on building the strength and resilience of local communities. USAID provides much more than direct food provisions; they provide capacity and community building practices into their operations. Moreover, the integration of food security issues, ranging from the international level to the household, is slowly manifesting itself in policy and practice as the aid community benefits from new tools, greater public engagement, an energized youth base, and increased understanding of the link between agriculture, nutrition, and health.

The first speaker, **Paul Weisenfeld**, a former USAID assistant administrator and now executive vice president of International Development at RTI International, provided an overview of improvements to food security, which has been largely absent from the U.S. government’s long-term strategy until recently. Weisenfeld highlighted the continuing reform of development agencies as they align to best practices, the importance of funding agricultural research, and the necessity for developing monitoring and evaluations systems into existing programs such as Feed the Future. Weisenfeld identified one major challenge: How to integrate nutrition, health, education, disease prevention, and agriculture research and practice into a cohesive policy and programming. Further, Weisenfeld recognized areas of further research and understanding for the government, namely a more nuanced understanding of the rural labor market and landscape, and interrelated informal economies and labor structures. Overall, the government is often viewed as lacking agility, when it really needs to remain flexible to changing environments.

**Julie Howard**, also formerly with USAID as the chief scientist and senior adviser to the Administrator, began by recognizing the role of non-governmental organizations in imagining and developing Feed the Future, later implemented through government agencies. Howard recognized a governmental shift in mandate from 2006-2009, when the government flipped from relative complacency to prioritizing food security under the Obama and Bush administrations. Feed the Future serves as an excellent example of a successful bottom-up aid regime, adopting country-specific development initiatives, where funds are invested according to each country’s priorities, rather than a prescriptive approach. One of its key achievements has been the recognition of the need for scaling, which requires an understanding of humanitarian and business perspectives. Moreover, Feed the Future also considered the gendered implication of food security and nutrition, calling particular attention to the needs of women, children and other vulnerable populations. According to Howard, food security can be achieved by proper management of the youth boom in locations such as Africa. Youth present as much potential for instability as they do solutions to modern dilemmas. Feed the Future and future programs must enable and equip the youth with economic opportunity to feed not only themselves, but also their families. Empowering future entrants of the workforce can be an effective tool when attempting to ensure basic sustenance in a community.

**Beth Dunford**, who is both the assistant to USAID’s Administrator of Food Security and the deputy coordinator for Development at Feed the Future, addressed increasing resilience in insecure communities. In countries partnered with Feed the Future, USAID witnessed a 19% decrease in poverty and a 26% decrease in childhood stunting. Successes like Feed the Future helped pave the way for the 2016 Global Food Security Act, which promises increased collaboration and interagency integration, as well as a research focus on hygiene as it relates to food security and health. U.S. policy and programs help increase the resilience of affected communities by addressing the root causes of the crisis, thereby enabling the sustained escape from poverty or dire living conditions, reinforcing the adage: “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Improvement is needed to extend the reach to the private sector to support the full-funding and even expansion of programs, as well as de-risk the investment requested. On the other side, private industry needs to recognize the need and accept that risk.

The discussion after the presentations focused on mobilizing the full potential of the larger aid community. An immediate need identified was education; while USAID recognizes its importance, it lacks the capacity to implement educational programs. The U.S. government has also taken tremendous strides in bringing the private sector to the table and has recently adopted a model of constant engagement between sectors. Another question the panel addressed was the role of recognizing resilience in aid; is resilience the new prevention? Resilience and prevention go hand in hand; investment aimed at the root causes is a moral choice, and a preventative payment that saves lives. The international community must continue to build resilience both at home and abroad as a means of preventing massive shocks to the capacity of a state to provide for its citizenry. This must also be combined with the measurement of success in order to develop best practices.

Panel 3: Food Security, Nutrition, and Health Policy Implementation

The third panel, headlined by **Bonnie Stabile**, co-editor of the World Medical and Health Journal, centered on the implementation of food security initiatives and the degree to which international policy informs and shapes local food choice. **Bonnie Jenkins**, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, was the first expert to present. She provided an overview of the scope of the 2016 Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), which operates under a ‘whole of society’ approach to incorporate a wide variety of voices and issues. Overall, the GHSA 2016 is an attempt to ensure safety and security from global health threats posed by disease. From a definitional standpoint alone, the GHSA can and should be expanded to fully incorporate root factors and contributors to infectious disease as a means to ensure and maintain stability. Today, GHSA 2016 is a multi-sector effort with 55 countries partnered. The GHSA not only has mechanisms to prevent, assess, and respond to a variety of threats by developing 5 year plans, but also to provide oversight measuring the effectiveness of such plans. Maintaining a blend of immediate and long-term assistance, the GHSA also increases dialogue between partner states and organizations, makes and tracks commitments to aid, raises the attention of salient food insecurity to the highest level of governments, and helps to break a cycle of disaster-panic-assist by attempting to research and assess issues well before they reach drastic levels. The GHSA 2016, while essential to food security, is not sufficient since it fails to directly address future concerns such as climate change, explicitly labeling increasing food security, and changes to the environment.

**Asma Lateef**, executive director at the Bread for the World Institute, began her presentation stating the importance of nutrition, a topic which has all too often fallen in between the cracks of health and agriculture. Pointing to a common theme incentivizing government action, Lateef highlighted the role of civil society in bringing evidence to bear on malnutrition to Capitol Hill. The success of Feed the Future as both a nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive policy cannot be overstated. Nutrition remains the key element to any prevention initiative, as it provides the key resources for sustainment.

A parallel initiative, Scaling Up Nutrition(SUN), similarly consists of a network of networks joining multiple industries and stakeholders. The timeliness of these programs could not be greater given these factors: 1 in 3 people on the globe are malnourished, with no country escaping unscathed. The victory thus far from these programs lies in bringing health and nutrition conversations to the forefront of both civil society and government. Still missing, however, is the consistent resource flow capable of mitigating these statistics to significant degrees on a global scale.

**Alia El Mohandes**, representing the office for Civilian-Military Cooperation at USAID, concluded the panel by discussing the U.S. Department of Defense efforts to combat food insecurity. For the first time in 2016, the Defense Department identified food security as a national security issue; however, it remains unclear how that recognition will be integrated into Defense engagement. Recognizing the relationship between government and non-governmental aid regimes, the Civilian-Military department helps align and balance defense and development projects. The Department of Defense, which includes the military, is both well placed and well-equipped to help with food security measures, although the current limiting factor is efficiency. The root of the problem lies in organization and structure. The Department of Defense is hierarchical, operating under top-down mandates with clear measurable objectives. USAID, on the other hand, attempts community building through a bottom-up approach, which is both much harder to assess and operates on a longer timeline. Despite differences, changes are being made to overcome these challenges in mission. First and foremost, the exchange and incorporation of personnel between USAID and the Defense Department has resulted in significant strides in clarifying operational differences; however, a common lexicon and chain of command remain essential in order to effectively leverage Department of Defense resources and data collection towards developmental expertise.

The ensuing conversation attempted to shed light on a variety of issues recognized within governmental organizations. When asked about accountability within government initiatives, the panel responded positively, stating accountability across organizations has increased in the past 5-10 years. The panel also acknowledged the challenge in receiving better on-the-ground intelligence from local communities. Pertaining to food aid, it was also agreed that adolescents are a population in need of exposure to these programs. Similarly, the panel debated the implications of moving beyond simply providing resources to securing them as well. The consensus at the end of the conversation was that identifying and fostering reliable local leadership is the best means to safely implement programming.

Panel 4: Food Security Policy and Food Aid Issues

The final panel at the conference directly addressed the relationships between food security policy and challenges to food aid. **Asif Shahan**, an associate professor in the Department of Development Studies at the University of Dhaka, presented on the success of food security in Bangladesh, a country which transitioned from food insecure to food secure in just about a decade. Divided into four distinct phases, food security was established in Bangladesh through the slow, incremental introduction of government policy, partner organizations, and research to build protective programs. Far from perfect, the case study of Bangladesh highlights the successes of safety net programs targeting vulnerable populations and the incorporation of research on health and nutrition into policy.

**Stephanie Mercier**, an international food aid expert, spoke about Scaling Up Nutritionand the First 1,000 Days initiative, which have implemented nutrition standards for newborns and pregnant mothers. However, much work remains. A new focus of U.S. food aid programs has been on researching healthier alternatives with real and preferably local ingredients. Adequate calorie consumption as a standard is insufficient for populations, rather the focus needs to incorporate micronutrients, as well as healthy, cheap, and sustainable options. Furthermore, prioritizing local agriculture both spurs the industry and supports biodiversity. The U.S. helped 36 million people in 43 countries in 2015, yet would have been capable of much more if the programs were fully funded, expanded, and inclusive of country-specific needs.

**Barry Riley**, author of *The Political History of American Food Aid: An Uneasy Benevolence*, presented on a chapter of his book pertaining to the 1972-74 global food crisis. Riley provided a historical overview of the disastrous agricultural production, mismanagement of food stockpiles, and abandonment of food aid which characterized the U.S. government during these years. More concerned with the federal budget and national social issues, the White House drastically cut back international food, leaving developing nations and vulnerable populations to their own devices. Riley concluded his presentation by providing the 1972 food crisis as a warning to the aid community not to make the same mistakes if presented with similar challenges in the near future. He also touted preventative measures, which would mitigate the deadly results of resource shortages.

The concluding discussion of the fourth Summit on Global Food Security and Health reflected on the future of food aid. Aid organizations have been recently challenged with how to best utilize available food aid; purchase a smaller quantity of more nutritious meals, or more meals with less nutritional value? The ethics of these decisions could be debated, but the current tendency is to target malnourished children with the more expensive, nutritious option. The final question the audience and panel considered was the possibility of a future “food-less” food aid initiative. As the occurrence of famines reflects an inadequacy in preventative measures, aid organizations could focus on building capacity and resilience within communities, rather than providing post disaster food aid. Such measures could empower communities to withstand threats to safety and health, and minimize the necessity for direct food delivery.

Key Messages of the Summit

Food Security and National Security:Today’s unprecedented instability and conflict, fueled by climate change and poor governance, hampers the international community’s response to recurrent global food security crises, particularly as they affect fragile states. An increasing awareness and understanding of the intersection of resource scarcity and violent conflict is paramount to holistic prevention regimes. This demands an enhanced understanding and appreciation of the respective objectives, constraints, values, and terminology of the relevant military and civilian actors; and a mutual recognition of the need to collaborate in overcoming institutional barriers to respond to these crises. Recognizing the respective differences between military and civilian entities and harmonizing where possible, will enhance the efficacy of operations, minimizing loss and maximizing the restoration of society. In addition, increasing funding for global food and national security initiatives is critical to achieving these ends.

Increasing and Strengthening Civil Society and Government Linkages: Consistent with the goal of enhancing civil-military relationships in a national security context, a significant opportunity also exists to blend government resources and policy with on-the-ground initiatives. Improving emergency food security efforts without compromising the mandate of the respective agencies would be key to this enterprise. Given the potential for miscommunication, a common lexicon of key terms, goals and best practices, and the establishment of a compatible chain of command would streamline communication and integrate efforts.

Enhancing the Potential of Public-Private Partnerships:Over the last decade, and as demonstrated in the three Stimson-GMU fora held in 2017, there has been increased emphasis on the importance of the private sector in achieving the goals and objectives of global food and national security. Two initiatives, Feed the Future (New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition) and Scaling Up Nutrition, have shown the importance of not only private investment, but of private voices in the food security realm, as well as the value of private and public (government and NGO) collaboration. These partnerships have helped to extend the reach of investment by implementing and sustaining longer term projects and improving food security at multiple levels; however, there is a need to improve monitoring and evaluation of public-private food security projects to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of these hybrid efforts and incorporate lessons learned.

Nutrition Specific and Nutrition Sensitive Policy:There needs to be a push towards the establishment of a more holistic understanding of the relationship between health and consumption. Although there has been some improvement, there remains inadequate focus on nutrition as a key factor in both public health and food aid. Food security as a global concern must incorporate the nutritional needs of at risk populations to improve livelihoods and ensure the sustained growth of youth. This focus on resilience should be an integral part of national food security policy to ensure adequate food supplies and nutrition in the event of conflict or natural disaster. As a key component, nutrition specific policy would address gaps in the quality of food provided in assistance programs. Inadequate food aid and food security budgets, and minimal emergency food stocks exacerbate this vulnerability.

1. U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization et al., *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017: Building resilience for peace and food security* (U.N. FAO, 2017), ii. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “World hunger again on the rise, driven by conflict and climate change, new UN report says,” *UN Food and Agriculture Organization*, September 15, 2017, accessed November 16, 2017, http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1037253/icode/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)