

MSC Food Security Task Force

Joint Statement: Resilience of Food Systems as Forward Defense

Munich, February 13, 2026

We, the MSC Food Security Task Force, convene as a group of fifteen senior stakeholders drawn from five continents, representing a uniquely diverse coalition across national security and defense communities, governments, development actors, multilateral institutions, and the private sector. Brought together by a shared recognition that food security is a cornerstone of global stability, human security, and economic resilience, the Task Force reflects a cross-sectoral and cross-regional perspective on one of the defining challenges of our time. United by our respective professional expertise and experiences, we seek to elevate food security as a strategic priority and to advance coordinated, actionable approaches that respond to its growing implications for security, peace, prosperity, and international cooperation. We make this case at a critical time, when important pillars of the multilateral, humanitarian, and development systems are facing severe political and financial pressures, requiring fundamental reforms and renewed commitments to partnerships in order to ensure that the systems can deliver effectively in the future.

Food security is foundational to human dignity, economic development, and geopolitical stability. Yet around the globe, access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food is increasingly threatened – not merely by climate related shocks and growing water scarcity, but also by conflict, strategic competition, economic coercion, and emerging technological risks. The destabilizing effects of food insecurity are no longer peripheral; they are of strategic relevance as central drivers of instability, conflict, displacement, and inequality. Addressing these effects demands a comprehensive rethinking of global policy frameworks, economic systems, and – most importantly – current security paradigms.

Food Insecurity Drives Instability and Conflict – and Vice Versa

Many multilateral organizations have documented that conflict remains the primary driver of acute food insecurity in the modern era. Large segments of the world's population are trapped in a vicious cycle in which violence destroys agricultural livelihoods, displaces farmers, disrupts markets, reduces humanitarian access, and drives hunger.

In turn, decades of evidence demonstrate that when populations cannot reliably access food, social cohesion frays and political instability grows. Rising food price inflation, scarcity of staples, and the collapse of supply chains have repeatedly triggered civic unrest, protests, and in some cases, armed conflict and the collapse of governing structures. This is not merely a humanitarian or economic issue; it is a matter of (inter)national security. It can impact local, national, regional, and ultimately global stability. Investments in food security at home and abroad are therefore investments in national security.

Food is Weaponized in Different Ways

In 2018, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2417, marking a critical recognition of the nexus between armed conflict and food insecurity. It stresses that conflict-induced food insecurity is not only a passive outcome: It can also be wielded as a method of warfare. Parties to conflict have at times systematically targeted food production, agrifood infrastructure, and supply chains, blocked humanitarian access, and weaponized scarcity to prevail on the battlefield or subjugate populations. This transforms food into a tool of coercion, with devastating humanitarian and strategic consequences.

At its core, food weaponization refers to the deliberate manipulation of food supplies, access, or quality, with the purpose of gaining military advantage, at times by seeking to alienate civilian support, eroding their will to fight, or seeking to subdue a segment of the population. Traditional conceptions of conflict-related food insecurity must now be expanded beyond starvation in war to reflect the multitude of food weaponization methods.

While some cases do not fit neatly into one category, often because food is weaponized in multiple ways in one context, the following forms of food weaponization can be identified:

- **Manipulation of food access:** This includes blocking of food supply routes and food aid – a method employed by states and non-state actors, using bureaucratic or violent means. It is considered an effective tool to change conflict dynamics. It is often used as a repressive tool to target women and marginalized groups with detrimental effects on their health and economic security.
- **Food access as a tool for recruitment and retention:** This method includes exploiting existing food insecurity and creating artificial scarcity, and it is often used by insurgent groups as part of their asymmetric warfare. Groups target potential recruits when they are unable to meet the basic needs of their families and use food for initial recruitment, as well as to retain members and supporters.
- **Strategic targeting of agricultural infrastructure:** This tactic involves the deliberate manipulation and destruction of any elements of modern and traditional agrifood systems, ranging from destruction of crops, harvests, or livestock, bombing of farmland, water-systems, and storage facilities, and hoarding or poisoning of water bodies and agricultural products. Beyond seeking military advantage, extensive strategic targeting can seek to impair the economic and social viability of an opponent, beyond the battlefield.
- **Food as a “long-range weapon”:** This entails the targeting of agrifood supply chains, where attacks in one place are intended to have effects far beyond the immediate battlefield or geographic area of combat. It means that control over food systems, supplies, and agricultural dependencies can be leveraged as a tool of geopolitical influence. Pressure on global food prices and supply chains can be manipulated to achieve strategic goals at great distance, shape political outcomes, and exert pressure on states, populations or specific communities.
- **Economic coercion:** Trade restrictions on agrifood trade and food-dependent economies that undermine the purchasing power of countries and disrupt food markets can in certain instances also make food an instrument of economic coercion. This includes border closures, strategic embargoes, as well as discriminatory trade practices to create scarcity and inflate prices.
- **Cyber threats:** Attacks on critical agricultural data systems, logistics platforms, interconnected resource installations, or digital marketplaces can paralyze modern supply chains, manipulate price information, and disrupt distribution networks. This can also include attacks on early warning systems or on the credibility of the institutions responsible for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data relevant to food crises
- **Biothreats:** This emerging dimension involves biological agents that target crops, livestock, or food-processing systems with the intention of undermining food production, blurring the lines between food security, public health, and national security.

The Geoeconomic Case for Investing in Resilient Agrifood Systems

In recent years, global food systems have been strained by a confluence of geoeconomic pressures. Supply chains that once seemed robust – from fertilizer and crop production to maritime transport – have proven fragile in the face of conflict, strongman politics, climate change, and pandemic shocks. Geoeconomic competition between major powers over markets, resources, and strategic influence has implications for food security. Export controls, currency fluctuations, and trade disputes can all translate into food price inflation and decreased availability in import-dependent states. This disproportionately affects low-income countries and conflict-affected contexts, where food constitutes a larger share of household expenditure and where social safety nets are limited.

There is a strong business case for investing in resilient agrifood systems. Investments in less concentrated, diversified, and adaptive supply chains can reduce volatility, lower systemic risk, and create economic opportunities. Public-private partnerships in agricultural innovation, logistics, storage infrastructure, data and analytics, as well as digital market platforms can improve access and efficiency. Strengthening local and regional production – through climate-smart agriculture, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, agro-processing, and inclusive financing, including gender-intentional programs – builds economic resilience while reducing dependency on volatile international markets. It makes financial sense to invest in resilient agrifood systems and linked sectors even though it may require a greater risk tolerance. The costs for ad hoc emergency aid, health care, and the military to deal with the spillover-effects of hunger are much higher than those of transforming agrifood systems. FAO studies show a benefit-to-cost ratio of 7:1 for anticipatory action.

The Defense Case for Resilient Agrifood Systems

Robust, diversified, and resilient agrifood systems should be seen as a key element of effective deterrence and defense in a hybrid threat landscape. Countries should actively invest in strengthening the cyber and biosecurity of their critical food systems, while actively investing in risk monitoring, early-warning mechanisms, stress-testing their critical systems, and developing strong contingency planning for natural or intentional disruptions. These policies can mitigate the impact of adversarial food weaponization, and, in times of conflict or crisis, can ensure that both militaries and civilian populations are able to withstand food shocks. Adversaries can target agrifood systems as part of a wider campaign to destabilize a society, making the protection of these systems as critical infrastructure a strategic investment in national security and stability.

Towards a New Development Paradigm

The challenges of food insecurity cannot be divorced from broader development and governance frameworks. A new paradigm is needed – one that combines member states’ support for the global public goods provided by the UN and multilateral system, reactive humanitarian agencies and emergency relief, with proactive resilience building. This paradigm would integrate food security into peacebuilding, climate adaptation and long-term mitigation, economic development, and technology governance.

Key elements include:

- Prioritizing investments in humanitarian food security logistics, supply chains, needs assessments, early-warning systems, digital infrastructure, and market transparency to detect and mitigate shocks before they escalate. This should include empowering mechanisms like the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) and the Global Surveillance Advisory System (GSAS), which detects pest and disease outbreaks.
- Mainstreaming food security into national security strategies and international development agendas as a tool of forward defense.
- Enhancing global cooperation on trade, finance, and technology to ensure that food systems are not weaponized through economic coercion. This must involve stronger collaboration between public and private sector actors.

Forward Defense: Why Food Security Connects All the Dots

Food security is more than an isolated policy goal – it is a connecting thread that ties together peace, security, development, health, economic stability, and human rights. Without reliable access to food, human potential is constrained, social unrest grows, and geopolitical tensions rise. Addressing food insecurity can produce numerous positive ripple effects, such as reducing and preventing instability, strengthening economies, empowering vulnerable communities, and enhancing resilience against future shocks. In essence, food security is security – economic, social, and political. Therefore, investments in resilient agrifood systems are not charity – they are a strategic imperative for a more stable, equitable, and peaceful world.

This is a Joint Statement by the MSC Food Security Task Force

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