

# How Food Aid can help Maintain the Status Quo

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May 2, 2022

## Introduction

The current Russian conflict in Ukraine has caused a global food shortage in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), exacerbating these countries' already poor conditions caused by drought and famine.

The list of countries includes Algeria, a country experiencing soured relations with the United States because of foreign policy decision by the Trump administration to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara; a region both Algeria and Morocco claim. Algeria has ties to Russia and has not denounced Russian actions in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

The United States should specifically address the food shortage by creating a targeting aid package for Algeria, with the goal of improving Algerian relations and lessening the chance of Algeria supporting Russia if a further conflict arises out of the Ukrainian dispute.

## Current Geopolitical Relations

In December 2020, President Trump formally recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the region of Western Sahara. Since 1970, when Spain began to decolonize the region, both Morocco and Algeria have claimed Western Sahara.<sup>1</sup>

The administration's decision to recognize Western Sahara as a part of Morocco reversed a non-partisan US position of neutrality in the dispute and challenged the continuous UN-mediated negotiations efforts.<sup>2</sup>

So far, the Biden administration has not overturned the previous administration's foreign policy decision concerning Western Sahara.<sup>3</sup> However, in March, Secretary of State Antony Blinken took a three-nation tour of the Middle East and North Africa and urged Algeria to limit ties with Russia and look to improve relations with Morocco.<sup>4</sup>

### Algerian-Russian Relations

Since its independence from France in 1962, Algeria has had close economic and political ties with Russia, including debt-forgiveness and economic agreements over natural gas.<sup>5</sup> Notably, Algeria purchases a significant amount of its weaponry from Russia.<sup>6</sup> Algeria has been among the states consistently voting no or abstaining from motions in the UN to condemn Russia for its actions in Ukraine and does not have an official stance on the issue.<sup>7</sup>

## War in Ukraine

The entire global order currently faces the repercussions of Russia's actions in Ukraine in every aspect.

- Political: The Russian invasion of Ukraine reflects a known desire of President Vladimir Putin to reassemble the Soviet state and establish a new world order with Russia as a superpower. Putin's offensive actions in Ukraine threaten the United States and the current US-maintained world order by creating instability and an imbalance of global power.<sup>8</sup> The United States must work harder to maintain the status quo.
- Economic: The global economy has begun to feel the effects of slower growth and faster inflation due to disrupted trade caused by the conflict in Ukraine. The prices for natural gas and grain, two major exports of Russia and Ukraine, have skyrocketed. United States and European sanctions on Russia have also contributed to the current economic state.<sup>9</sup>

## Food Shortages

The war in Ukraine has caused massive food shortages globally but has especially disrupted the production and distribution of grain.

- 50% of the grain bought by the WFP, the food-assistance branch of the United Nations, comes from Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>
- Belarus and Russia both export fertilizer products used globally.<sup>11</sup>
- Russia has actively prevented grain exportation in Ukraine, blockading Ukrainian ships full of grain from leaving the port.<sup>12</sup>

This food shortage disproportionately affects the import-dependent countries in Africa and the Middle East. Prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, food prices in the region substantially increased and availability decreased thanks to climate change, inter- and intra- state conflict, and COVID-19.<sup>13</sup> For example, the worst drought on record has affected the agricultural yields of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia<sup>14</sup> and the upcoming election in Somalia has caused further political upheaval.<sup>15</sup> The tense relations between Morocco and Algeria have also caused instability.

Many international organizations warn that food shortages will aggravate the current conditions and issues in the Middle East and Northern Africa and lead to conflict.<sup>16</sup>

In response, the G-7 leaders promised to increase contribution to the World Food Program and other international institutions to help countries with acute food insecurity.<sup>17</sup> As of a few days ago, President Biden officially drew on emergency funding powers, providing \$282 million of food aid to six African countries; Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen.<sup>18</sup> The African Development Bank (AfDB) has also announced a \$1.5 billion emergency food plan for Nigeria specifically.<sup>19</sup> As of right now, food aid has not expanded outside the horn of Africa.

## **Consequences of Ignoring current Geopolitical climate**

Avoiding preventative intervention in Africa/Middle East will result in a negative ripple effect on the United States and other Western Powers. Problems with the current action include:

- Too General: While G-7 countries have taken the preliminary steps at providing aid to the Middle East and North Africa, the current generalized aid packages do not provide enough preventative measures to stop the war in Ukraine from destabilizing the region in the long run. The United States needs to create more individualized solutions for states to invoke effective change.
- Current perception of the United States in North Africa and the Middle East: Currently, the region does not look favorably on the United States, due to failures to follow through on intervention efforts. The decision to pull out of Afghanistan signaled to the region that the United States does not follow through on promises and may not be a reliable ally. Moreover, it has pushed these countries to seek allies more beneficial to them, such as the Taliban and other extremist groups.<sup>20</sup>
- Lack of diplomatic power: The current perception of the United States in the middle east and North Africa also weakens the US' diplomatic power in the region.<sup>21</sup> Exercises of soft power, such as diplomatic visits, do not achieve their intended goal because of a lack of US credibility. Therefore, Blinken's tour of the middle east and North Africa did not have any actual impact on diplomatic relations, or the Algerian stance on the Ukraine conflict.

Continuing down the current path of action, reliance on broad aid packages and diplomatic endeavors can generate a security threat for the United States.

The United States must make a larger gesture than just visiting Algeria to persuade the country to not support Russia. Russian success in Ukraine will give more power in the world order to Russia, and an incentive for the country to continue expansion. This expansion can include both physical expansion of Russian borders, but also the growth of Russian influence over other regions of the world.

### **Policy Recommendation: Targeted Food Aid to Algeria**

The United States should create a food aid specifically for Algeria, in addition to the expansion of diplomatic efforts, to make sure Algeria does not support Russia in the future and to maintain the current world order that the United States dominates.

Russia and its future actions in Ukraine remain the biggest threat to US security. At present many implications of the war are unclear, however, the United States has the insight and resources to address food insecurity. If orchestrated correctly, the United States can use the issue of food insecurity to prevent larger, more catastrophic security issues in the future.

Restores Credibility: Creating a food aid package specifically for Algeria will help restore US credibility in the middle east and North Africa by:

- Bettering relations with Algeria by providing needed aid to address the food shortage in the country.<sup>22</sup> Middle Eastern countries like the UAE are also taking this approach with Egypt.<sup>23</sup>
- Demonstrating US follow-through on actions, despite the pull out of Afghanistan which signaled otherwise.
- Providing more US security in the Middle East and North Africa through improved relations. This aspect is necessary in a region destined by its circumstances to face conflict in the future
- Preventing Russian involvement and expansion in North Africa and the Middle East. In an unstable region who could benefit from outside involvement, the United States must gain the favor of countries in North Africa and the Middle East to avoid them aligning with US adversaries. Russia, a country looking to expand its power, could use a conflict in North Africa/Middle East to its advantage and expand by either garnering support or backing countries in an internal conflict.

This solution considers the long-term implications of the war in Ukraine, by specifically addressing an issue causing current instability within a country. Action taken by the United States today will lessen the chance of greater instability in the future and allow the United States to begin to mend relations in the Middle East and Northern Africa.

## Conclusion

Despite Algerian claims that the country's grain supply would remain unaffected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine,<sup>24</sup> Algeria has experienced food shortages for years and conditions have worsened since February. In March, the country banned any export of food outside of the country.<sup>25</sup>

An inconsistency lies between the reports of Algerian government officials and statistics produced by international organizations. The United States has an opportunity to use this inconsistency to its advantage, and create a solution to Algeria's food shortage, while also improving relations in the Middle East and North Africa. Action toward Algeria serves as one direct way the United States can limit the damage done to the international system by the conflict in Ukraine and create a better outcome for the future.

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