



Fostering Strategic Partnerships | Building Political Will | Creating Global Connections

# Hunger is a Defense and National Security Issue

Hunger and poverty contribute to instability at the local, national and international levels and pose national security risks for the United States and the international community. Programs which build food security and reduce poverty help create vital, stable and resilient communities here and abroad.

## Hunger and Malnutrition Affects Troop Readiness

- One-third of Americans between ages 17 and 24 are too overweight to serve in the military
- Obesity in the military rose 61% since 2002
- 1.5 billion a year from the Defense budget is spent on health care and recruiting replacements for those unfit to serve
- 85% of girls and 58% of boys are not getting enough calcium
- Nearly 50% of boys and girls are not getting enough vitamin D
- Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, “so that millions of students are now eating healthier school meals with more whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins.”

## Hunger Affects Members of the Active-Duty Military, National Guard and Reserves and Their Families

- Despite the creation of the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA) in 2001 in order to combat reliance on assistance programs such as SNAP for families on active duty, only 285 families received these benefits as of 2010. While the program’s benefit is up to \$1,100/month, lack of information about the program - and that it has more stigmas attached because applications have to clear commands -could be preventing more widespread participation.
- In 2014 more than \$84 million-worth of food stamp benefits were spent at military commissaries

## Hunger Affects Veterans

- Our nation’s veterans experience homelessness, hunger, and unemployment at alarmingly high rates.
- In 2011, over half million veterans 60 and older received either home delivered or congregate meals. As more and more Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 veterans turn 60, the need for nutritious meals will increase.
- The USDA estimates that in 2012, more than 1.5 million veterans used food stamps, or about 7 percent of all veterans



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## Hunger Contributes to International Instability

Support to sustainable development overseas and ending hunger and poverty is an important part of our national security strategy and expresses our nation's values and interests. Alliance members carry out programs on several continents which collaborate with and complement US government contributions to this effort. As former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates stated, "[T]he work performed by diplomatic and development professionals helps build the foundation for more stable, democratic and prosperous societies. These are places where the potential for conflict can be minimized, if not completely avoided, by State and USAID programs."

Without sustained progress, recurring price volatility and food shortages will contribute to political instability as witnessed by food riots and related events since 2008. Malnutrition likely will lead to mass migration and intensifying health issues. Diplomatic efforts to maintain peace will be far more difficult wherever food shortages contribute to extremism and conflict. The hopes of the United States and other developed nations for economic development in poor countries will continually be frustrated if populations are unable to feed themselves.

- From 2007 to 2008, the period when global food prices spiked, there were major riots in nearly 40 countries.
- Recent research suggests that an earlier drought was a key spark leading to the uprising against the Assad regime in Syria.
- Today a number of countries, even entire regions, face a triple threat of conflict, climate change and vulnerability to natural disasters which threatens the food security and income stability of millions.
- Lack of food security --whether caused by lack of jobs and income, natural disaster or conflict-- contributes to political instability and the reverse is also true.
- Food insecurity and political instability together can lead to exactly the kinds of displacement and ungoverned spaces that U.S. national security strategy seeks to prevent

For additional information please contact the Alliance to End Hunger at [info@alliancetoendhunger.org](mailto:info@alliancetoendhunger.org) or visit our website at [www.alliancetoendhunger.org](http://www.alliancetoendhunger.org)