

Food Security: An Element of National Independence

By Elias Aoun

“Would food be considered an instrument of national power?” This statement is attributed to a report issued on Dec. 10, 1974 by the U.S. National Security Council under Henry Kissinger: “National Security Study Memorandum 200: Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests.” The study falsely claimed that population growth in the so-called Lesser Developed Countries was a grave threat to U.S. national security. This stance was in line with the Club of Rome’s 1972 “*Limits to Growth*” aimed at “stabilizing” the world’s population. To deal with the “population growth problem”, measures pursued were birth control, abortions, wars, famine, and curtailing food supplies.

On May 23, 2003, President Bush proposed an Initiative allegedly to End Hunger in Africa using genetically modified (GM) foods. The message was part of a master plan that had been crafted by certain biotech companies determined to control the world’s food supply within fifteen to twenty years – and are using the government to help get GM foods into the marketplace quickly before resistance could get in the way. Monsanto executives described a world with 100 percent of all commercial seeds genetically modified and patented. (*“Seeds of Deception”*, by Jeffrey M. Smith)

According to two independent sources, one hidden U.S. objective to stay in Iraq and Afghanistan is to contribute to circumstances that would continuously send inflation higher (as is currently taking place), causing a rise in food prices and the people to cry out for cheap food. As a response to the manufactured food crisis, a “solution” is then presented: bio-engineered crops. Both the United Nations and the World Bank have pushed GM food or encouraged countries toward GM development.

How food is intended to be used as an instrument of power? The answer lies in pointing out one fundamental difference: The farmers need not continuously buy natural seeds, while GM seeds have to be bought every year. The reason is that natural crop preserves or produces seeds for future harvest, while GM crop is “sterile” and does not produce seeds for the next generation.

By making natural seeds virtually extinct, farmers would have to continuously purchase new GM seeds from the companies that 'manufacture' them – and, as a result, the world becomes permanently reliant on corporations for survival.

A country dependent on GM seeds could be easily forced to pursue any policy dictated upon it. Otherwise, its supply of seeds will be cut-off – and, thereby, food becomes a lethal instrument of power.

Several weeks ago, *The Guardian* reported on a “confidential” World Bank analysis attributing the rise in food prices to biofuel production. In an interview with *Le Monde*, United Nation’s top food adviser, Olivier de Schutter, blamed the shortage on “20 years of mistakes.”

Are we to believe that they did not expect grain for food shortages when they diverted grain away from food for fuel, or when they set aside agricultural land for biofuel production? How did they expect the food deficiencies created by these measures to be overcome?

Even if one is to assume that this plot for food control is inaccurate, why would a country place its food security totally in the hands of foreign biotech giants? Certainly, that would not be consistent with its genuine national security and independence.

What can be done to overcome this plot toward food control? The short answer is to expose the plot, remain outside the realm of corporate control or foreign dependency, give more attention to the agricultural sector, and pursue constructive measures.

Proposed Solutions

In the pursuit of solutions, many writers focus on food availability – such as to increase food production to meet demand. That is a short-sighted approach. Availability could be met, but it does not mean that what is available is healthy. A more accurate approach must involve both food availability and quality. The most secure availability is locally-grown, and the best quality is organic (if done properly).

Public Awareness and Education

In promoting a solution, the first priority is public awareness about the negative impact of GM foods on consumers’ health and the need to shift to organic agriculture. GM foods (and GM feed to animals) are inherently hazardous to health. Their approval was based on politics, not science or safety. Geneticist David Suzuki stated: “any politician or scientist who tells you these [GM] products are safe is either very stupid or lying.”

Do Arab governments conduct any tests or research before accepting GM seeds or foods, or do they simply accept what is being offered them and downplay (or worse, ridicule) any concerns for safety?

In addition, GM products require increasing amounts of toxic chemicals which pollute the food, water, and soil – and cause various illnesses.

Biotech companies would not have been able to get away with their products if they were not part of an agenda. Whatever “benefits” some may argue for GM crops, those benefits could be achieved through other means.

To counter this campaign toward food control and the poisoning of people and environment, the best method is a policy based on (1) organic agriculture and (2) localized food systems.

Organic Agriculture

Organic foods are grown without the use of conventional pesticides, artificial fertilizers, human waste, or sewage sludge, and that they were processed without ionizing radiation or food additives. Livestock are reared without the routine use of antibiotics, growth hormones, or feed additives. Organic produce must not be genetically modified. As far as possible, organic farmers should rely on crop rotation, green manure, compost, biological pest control, and mechanical cultivation to maintain soil productivity and control pests.

The most important benefit of organic farming is to maximize the health of the environment, the farmer, and the consumer. Organic farming is the only kind of farming that will rebuild the depleted soils, clean up the environment and provide healthy nutritious food for all citizens.

It is crucial to reiterate that organic farming must be done properly – responsible irrigation, organic fertilizer, etc. If done inadequately, it might lead to damaged crops.

Localized Food Systems

In proposing solutions, there is always a tendency to rely on a government or a politician to address an issue. The new trend, however, is personal initiatives: what an individual can do – whether that individual is acting alone, as part of an extended family or local community.

Individual actions are not by themselves intended to resolve the food crisis, but to show a level of individual responsibility and awareness. It is not permissible to consistently say what the government should or should not do without any form of personal ingenuity. A government has responsibilities that must be met, but it is not responsible for everything.

Individuals or families that own land could take an initiative to plant their own land or gardens with natural seeds and pursue organic farming practices, or hire a farmer to do so on their behalf. In this manner, citizens rely on themselves for at least some of their agricultural needs and have some control over the quality of what they are eating.

In certain situations, some individuals live in cities, do not own land, or cannot cultivate what they own. In this case, an option would be to start a co-operative project based on an extended family or a small-community level to make that family or community self-sufficient. Small-scale production using organic methods would increase yield.

Measures taken by any citizen could also include: (1) removal of GM foods from their diet; (2) buying only organic food; (3) conduct their own research and play a role in creating a better understanding of the issues; and (4) get information in the hands of those who can make a difference. Everyone should make an attempt to plant something. At the very minimum, the process would be an educational experience to them and their family members.

In addition to personal initiatives, a well-intentioned politician could take measures aimed at supporting agricultural production by small farmers. Such measures could include: ensuring access to quality seeds, access to markets for farmers' products, proper storage facilities, adequate supply of water, help farmers improve soil fertility, and initiate programs to train young people to farm.

The politician may also seek a cap on foreign ownership of land. In particular, no agricultural land must be sold to foreigners so that their use is not diverted for purposes inconsistent with a country's food production needs.

Although some river dams and rainwater collection systems have been built or installed, more of these may still be needed. In Lebanon, a massive amount of river water and melted snow flow toward the sea when they could have been diverted to various useful purposes.

The Politics

Sometimes, it is reported that a Lebanese minister meets with a U.N. official or representative from a foreign embassy and agree to "cooperate" in the area of agriculture or another sector.

These ministers should have been aware by now that "cooperation" in the minds of his visitors means "control". Most international organizations – such as the U.N., World Bank, IMF, WTO, etc. – aim at undermining national role in order to advance theirs. "Cooperation" with them means gradually surrendering national sovereignty to them.

If one understands the basics about the politics of food, it is easy to perceive the global trend to "squeeze out" small farmers – in the United States and any other country – to the benefit of major corporations. Certain governments are certainly an accomplice in the act.

According to an Arab-American author, the U.S. Foreign Aid Program insists that a portion of the aid money be in food supplied by American farmers. Since this is free food, the program was used to destroy the agricultural sector in many countries such as Egypt and Indonesia.

The author added that the U.S. government offers subsidy checks to American farmers so that they could undersell Third World farmers – thus making their efforts not worth the time, and prevent them from making the money needed to remain in business or upgrade their operations. In addition, the subsidy provided to tobacco farmers is aimed at making poor people addicted to smoking and buying American cigarettes.

One example about the steep cost of international and U.S. government policies could be witnessed in Mexico whose people subsist on maize (mostly in tortillas). Mexican farmers grew more maize than any other crop. Around 1994, Mexicans began to buy corn from American farmers who were subsidized and could sell corn cheaper. Inevitably, the price of corn fell by half. Unable to compete, 1.3 million small Mexican farmers abandoned their farms by year 2003.

This is a perfect example of the true intent behind international organizations' and U.S. government's policies, "donations", "cooperation", or "assistance" – to destroy small farmers worldwide for the benefit of corporations. These policies could be defeated by simply reversing the trend – initiate LOCAL measures to encourage small farmers to remain on their land, and persuade citizens (when feasible) to engage in farming (even on a small level).

Cabinet Policies

Former Lebanese Economy and Trade Minister Sami Haddad once said that the government has every right to open the agricultural market to foreign competition. He added that consumers will be the first to benefit from unrestricted competition.

Such a policy would prove detrimental to Lebanon's agriculture and must be revised by the two new ministers of Agriculture and Economy and Trade. Extremist free-trade strategies lead to widening the gap between rich and poor.

No nation would survive without some form of protectionist measures. The well-being of Lebanon's farmers, and the preservation of Lebanon's small farmers, is more important than competitive prices. Money paid to these farmers will be re-invested in Lebanon and inevitably help Lebanon's economy. On the other hand, money paid to foreigners will go outside the country's borders, further indebt the nation, and undermine the country's standing on many levels.

If not done already, the new ministers must meet the farmers' demand for the reintroduction of the agriculture calendar, a process that bans the import of agricultural products in Lebanon during certain seasons.

In south Lebanon, in 2006, the Israeli military showered the area's agricultural fields with cluster bombs. The criminal aim was to destroy the agricultural

sector rather than achieve any military objective. Agriculture makes up a large percentage of the economy in South Lebanon and nationally.

While it is being reported that \$4.7 million is needed to continue mine clearance, that responsibility must be assumed by the Lebanese themselves, instead of soliciting funds from the U.S. Congress or government – the same source where these bombs came from and are maiming and killing Lebanon’s children. Let Lebanon’s political blocks (Opposition and Loyalists) each contribute half of the amount needed. It is Lebanese politicians who are responsible for Lebanon, not the U.S. Congress.

Furthermore, whatever role the United Nations is playing in south Lebanon’s agriculture, the sector must remain totally in the hands of Lebanese. In the meantime, any foreign “donations” of GM grains or livestock injected with hormones or raised on GM feed should be rejected.

Conclusion

Whenever faced with a problem, there is a tendency among certain Arab countries to seek “international assistance” such as through the United Nations, World Bank, IMF, etc. In reality, these “internationalists” have an agenda to expand their own role. They place conditions that ultimately undermine a country’s independence rather than assist it.

Regional or Arab solutions do exist. According to an Arab source, Arab countries import \$35.5 billion worth of agricultural products and have a population growth of 2.4% annually. To meet Arab agricultural needs and become self-sufficient, the Arab League presented a study to cultivate 2.5 million sq. Km. of agricultural land in Sudan to provide for all Arab nations’ agricultural needs. The project would cost \$20 million which is a miniscule amount compared to the \$800 Billion in estimated Arab crude oil revenues for 2008. In fact, utilizing all of Sudan’s agricultural land could provide enough food to feed not less than 30% of the world’s population.

In my view, the Arab League must not think just in terms of meeting food shortage, but also in terms of the quality of food being produced. It would be counterproductive if the land in Sudan, for example, is used to grow genetically-modified food, grown unnaturally (treated with chemicals and toxins), and are harmful to the consumer. Moreover, it would not be wise to rely on a centralized location – even if it is Arab – as the source for Arab-wide consumption. A better approach is local planning. Where possible, each small community, each country, must become self-sufficient.

In May 2008, Saudi Arabia made a \$500 million donation to a UN agency, World Food Program (WFP). That money would have better served the cause if

invested directly in agricultural projects within the affected nations. By making donations to an international organization, Saudi Arabia would be financing the control and centralization of food distribution – a measure that is contradictory to the long-term food security of any nation. In the long-term, locally-based solutions will work better than any centralized or international “solution.”

On this issue, as in any other, the media could play a vital role in informing the public and advancing constructive concepts. Every patriotic plan to preserve independence must include measures to advance public health, protect small farmers, and become self-sufficient in organic food.

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