

# How Food Security Became a Geopolitical Lever in North Africa and the Sahel

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## Context

Food insecurity in North Africa and the Sahel is accelerating — but not in isolation. As a **private roundtable at MEI on May 7** revealed, food systems are now deeply entangled with geopolitics, governance, and security. This is no longer just a humanitarian concern. **Climate shocks** and food crises are altering state behavior, expanding the influence of non-Western actors, and creating long-term risks to regional and global stability — risks that will impact US policy whether or not we engage.

## Why It Matters for US Policymakers

- **Food insecurity is reshaping diplomacy and migration.** It must be treated as a geopolitical issue, not a siloed humanitarian one.
- **Pulling back doesn't eliminate influence — it transfers it.** As the US assistance retrenches, **other actors** are stepping in. Congressional oversight can shape the consequences of this vacuum.
- **This region is a test case for the climate-governance nexus.** It offers early signals on how **food and climate crises** will shape global power dynamics.
- **Migration, instability, and regional realignment are unfolding now.** All have direct consequences for US interests and for transatlantic cooperation.
- **Strategic monitoring is critical.** With fewer US levers in place, tracking food-related trade, new alliances, and institutional vulnerabilities becomes key to understanding what's coming next.

## Key Insights

- **Food security is now geopolitical currency.** Regional governments are navigating scarcity through transactional partnerships — increasingly with China, Russia, Turkey, and the Gulf states. These often come with fewer conditions and are reshaping alignments.
- **Climate shocks are amplifying governance stress.** Erratic rainfall, drought, and flooding are overwhelming fragile institutions. In places like Niger, Tunisia, and southern Algeria, these pressures heighten the risk of unrest, migration surges, and non-state actor expansion.
- **Sovereignty-first strategies are changing the game.** Governments are prioritizing **food sovereignty** and rejecting traditional aid frameworks. Engagement must evolve accordingly — when engagement is even possible.
- **US visibility is shrinking — others are stepping in.** With foreign aid contracting, Washington's footprint is receding. **Strategic competitors** are using food and agriculture to entrench themselves and build long-term leverage.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Follow MEI's coverage of food security in North Africa and the Sahel [on our website](#).

Intissar Fakir is available to brief interested members or staff on the implications of these dynamics for US foreign policy, oversight, and legislative priorities. To request a briefing or advance access to upcoming publications on food security and other related issues, please contact: IFakir@mei.edu