

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Defence and Climate Change, HC 179

Monday 6 March 2023

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Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Sarah Atherton; Robert Courts; Dave Doogan; Richard Drax; Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck; John Spellar.

Questions 134-153

Witness

I: David Beasley, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme.

Written evidence from witnesses:

Examination of witness

Witness: David Beasley.

Q134 Chair: Welcome to this Defence Committee hearing on 6 March 2023. We will be continuing our discussion and inquiry into defence and climate change. Today, I am delighted to welcome David Beasley, Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme and the former Governor of South Carolina. David, thank you very much indeed for your time. You have been at the World Food Programme since 2017, and I think you are coming towards the end of your tenure. Thank you for joining us this afternoon.

I will invite a few opening comments, but to place the challenge of climate change and security into context, this crisis is the test of our times. It seems to be unfolding in slow motion, and it is as acute as it is existential. Time seems to be running out, and we are now waking up to how fragile our planet is, but our turnaround to repair seems to be measured in decades, and a lot could happen in that timeframe up to 2050, when we hope to become carbon neutral. We are coming to terms with the prospect of more of our world becoming uninhabitable and of global food production and access to fresh water suffering. Those in their own right are important aspects to study, but we are focusing on the cumulative impact on security. Arguably, this is the single existential threat that humanity now faces.

My opening question, therefore, is: do you agree with that statement? Are we doing enough to meet the challenge?

David Beasley: It is great to be with you, Mr Chairman. There is no doubt in my mind that, first, we are not doing enough and, secondly, it is an extraordinary challenge and, quite frankly, it is going to get a whole—excuse me—hell of a lot worse as to what we are facing out there.

Let me give you some context first, because this is extremely important. There is not just one factor out there that gives great alarm. When I took this role about six years ago—I didn't want it; I got talked into it. In fact, Trump had gotten elected in the United States and was going to cut international aid. I had no interest in taking a job in the United Nations, in the Trump Administration or in any Administration—I was in the private sector—but several of my friends came to me and said, "If you don't take this role, he's going to cut strategic international aid." I said, "Well, let me work on that, but I don't want a UN job; I'm not that kind of guy."

Anyway, I got the US Senators and Congressmen to commit to overriding the Trump budget if he did not get talked into strategically understanding



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what we were facing over the next few years. Tobias, quite frankly, here is what happened, and this is very relevant to defence interest: I talked to General Mattis, General McMaster and many of the other military leaders, and we put together—friends put together—an extraordinary letter to Trump signed by 120 or 130 senior military officials to say, “If you cut strategic international aid, prepare to buy more ammunition.” That was six years ago. So, when I began talking to the Trump Administration, including President Trump and his senior officials, they got it right quick and understood the significance of strategic international aid—I emphasise, strategic, effective international aid.

At that time there were 80 million people on planet Earth marching to starvation. Chronic hunger is a different discussion—that is a lot larger number—but I am talking about those with severe food insecurity. These are the people who do not know where their next meal is coming from. They are the most likely to end up in famine, mass migration, destabilisation and that kind of thing. That was 80 million. On taking this role, I thought, “Well, I could put the World Food Programme out of business.” That was my goal and my objective, only to find that we started having conflict, conflict, conflict, coupled with climate shocks, and the number went from 80 million to 135 million people marching towards starvation and not knowing where their next meal was coming from. This was right before covid.

Covid then comes along, on top of climate shocks that were increasing exponentially around the world along with the conflicts, and the number went from 135 million to 276 million. This was before Ukraine. So, 135 million to 276 million people marching towards starvation—think about the math of that. These are not just numbers; these are people in countries that create the instability that we are so familiar with. Of course, with covid came economic deterioration, mass deaths in African countries—just devastation around the world: supply chain disruption, etc. I could get into the weeds and details of that, because we were the supply chain system for moving most of the covid supplies, because of our supply chain operations.

Then comes the Ukraine crisis, on top of Afghanistan and Ethiopia, and the number jumps from 276 million to 350 million people marching to starvation. Within that are about 45 million to 50 million people in 40 to 50 countries knocking on famine’s door. If you want to know which 40 to 50 countries might have destabilisation or mass migration on top of famine, those are the first 40 to 50 to begin to look at. When you take those 40 to 50 and do overlays with debt, ISIS and al-Qaeda—extremist groups—and many other factors, you begin to see, geographically, which of those countries have an extraordinary interest in terms of your national security interest, or any other country’s, for that matter. That is where we are.

Just when you think it can’t get any worse, with the Ukraine crisis—because Ukraine grows enough food to feed 400 million people. It is the breadbasket of the world. Russia and Ukraine alone grow about 30% of



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the global supply of wheat and 20% of the global supply of maize—I could go on and on. Well, 2022 was bad enough in terms of production inside Ukraine, but they had fertiliser in 2022; it was already in the warehouses before the war started. Well, they don't have those fertilisers now. Compounded with fuel costs, fertiliser costs, the droughts that we face around the world, and flash flooding, as I said last year, expect a food pricing problem for 2022, but expect the probability of a food availability problem in 2023 and toward the end of 2023.

I could go on and delve into the weeds of this, but let me stop right there, because I have given you the global context to understand that it is very fragile. Remember, during the crisis of 2007 and 2008 in north Africa, etc., there were 48 countries that had riots, protests and civil unrest. The economic indicators and factors today are much, much worse than then, so expect to see more civil unrest, protests and riots over the next eight to 12 months, along with the fact that smallholder farmers cannot afford the fertiliser and the fuel, or cannot get it, and therefore this is going to really complicate matters in the next six to 12 months. Let me stop right there, Mr Chairman.

Q135 Chair: David, thanks very much indeed. You paint a very sobering picture, which will provide a lot of food for thought. We visited Odessa not too long ago and we saw the backlog, if you like, of the silos being full. You are now saying that the absence of fertiliser means that you cannot even get the crops to grow for future harvesting. Is that correct?

David Beasley: Exactly. Fifty per cent. of the world's consumption of food is based on fertiliser. If you get almost 8 billion people and cut out fertiliser, you will have a 50% reduction in food production. Regardless of your views of fertiliser—I have said this on global television, whether it is the BBC, CNN or Fox—I don't care if you love or hate Russia; you've got to have their fertiliser right now so that you have alternative sources of fertiliser production, from a long-term perspective. That is just the reality. If you want to have hell on earth, don't take their fertiliser. Anyway, you can imagine the gravity of not having enough food.

Q136 Chair: Just clarify the percentage of global fertiliser that Russia is responsible for.

David Beasley: Say that again.

Chair: Can you just clarify what percentage of the world's consumption of fertiliser Russia is responsible for?

David Beasley: Oh my gosh. It is a high number. I don't want to say 40%, but it is way up there. It is a serious number. And also the base product that makes fertilisers, compounded by gas, ammonia—these basic fundamental products—because of the fuel crisis. I want to be careful what I say here, being a neutral figure in the United Nations, but in private I would probably make a more striking comment about this. I think the European community has not been wise in how it has handled some of the fuel matters. To a certain degree, it has almost played into strengthening

Russia's hand with regard to fertilisers and fuel. But that is a different discussion for another day.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q137 Mrs Lewell-Buck: Hi David. You spoke in your opening comments about climate shocks, covid and the war in Ukraine increasing severe food insecurity. I want to explore that with you a bit further. What are your main concerns regarding the impact of climate change on the work of the World Food Programme?

David Beasley: I have said to a lot of my friends who question certain aspects of climate, "Well, you might debate what causes it all day long, but let me just be very clear: I'm out there in the reality seeing the impact of shifting climate, whether it is in the Middle East or the Sahel or Pakistan"—I could go on and on. To give you an idea, in the last couple of years more people have been displaced from climate than from conflict. We have not seen that before. In the last couple of years, 25 million or 30 million were displaced because of climate, and the UN and the World Bank are projecting perhaps over 200 million being displaced by 2050 because of climate.

What I have been trying to help the leaders of the world understand is, "While you're debating mitigation, you'd better well get your focus on adaptation so that many of these countries that are poor can at least have the tools, techniques and programmes they need to stabilise the population while you resolve the bigger issue of mitigation—what's causing the climate to change." In the meantime, people have to survive in many of these countries. We can get into the weeds of that. If they cannot get food, they will migrate, and that compounds things in places like the Sahel, for example. You have the Sahara moving down every year, then you have the pastoralists and the farmers clashing, and then you have ISIS or al-Qaeda or other extremist groups exploiting that division. As you can imagine, that creates destabilisation of regions, if not countries, which results in migration, infiltrated by extremist groups, into the European community in particular.

I could really get into the weeds of anecdotal evidence, because I go to the Sahel quite a bit. Where we rehabilitate land with the farmers or the pastoralists and have programmes, it is amazing the impact that it has. We will get into that, I hope, in the next hour.

Q138 Mrs Lewell-Buck: David, you said there that the focus should be on adaptation. Is anyone doing that? Are people listening? Have you seen any changes in your time at the World Food Programme?

David Beasley: It is starting to change—I don't want to say a day late and a dollar short, but many of the donor countries are beginning to respond. Germany, for example, is beginning to respond, and the United States. The EU is slow to act, as you can imagine. But there are lot of these old silos that were developed 50 years ago; there is humanitarian aid and then there is development aid. The systems and the problems that we have today are so different from 50 years ago. We now have



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protracted conflict and protracted climate issues. With a short-term disaster like a cyclone or an earthquake, we come in and do what we do, and we are in and out, usually in three to six months, but that is the exception to the rule now. Now we need to take development dollars and humanitarian dollars and merge them together to be more strategic to rehabilitated land.

Let me give you an example; I have a simple one right here. I can go into a village in Chad with 350 people and spend \$50,000 a year to feed them—general food distribution—or I can come in with \$37,000 for a solar pump irrigation system and a borehole, and put down irrigation lines. That is \$37,000 one time, so do the math. If I do it for 20 years at \$50,000, that is \$1 million, versus that one-time expenditure. When I do that, with the flexibility of the funding, the people start taking care of themselves. It is absolutely remarkable.

I want to get in a lot of these details on what we are doing in the Sahel in general. Because of what we have done just in the past few years in the Sahel, when the Ukraine crisis on food pricing and fertilisers hit, we were literally able, because of what we had done in advance, to save half a million people from needing humanitarian aid. Do the math: if we feed half a million people per day for 50 cents, give or take, that is \$250,000 per day. Times that by 365 and it is \$91 million. So why do we not do this type of stuff?

To give you a little more anecdotal evidence, over the last six or seven years, in the World Food Programme, with our beneficiaries, we have rehabilitated—I say “we”; I mean our beneficiaries—over 4 million acres of land that otherwise was not productive. There are videos I could show you that would make you say, “Oh my gosh, why in the heck are we not doing that everywhere?”

We have also built, with our beneficiaries, 85,000 km of feeder roads; 28,000 km, give or take, of water canals; 111,000 holding ponds, small dams and reservoirs; and 350,000 community gardens. When we come in with aid and create that sustainability and resilience, and if I overlay that with a school meals programme, like in the Sahel, here is what happens: migration drops off the chart, teen pregnancy drops off the chart, the marriage rate of 12 and 13-year-olds drops off the chart, and recruitment by ISIS and al-Qaeda drops off the chart.

I have had more mothers tell me, “My son” or “My husband didn’t want to join ISIS”—or al-Qaeda or whatever—“but we hadn’t fed our little girl or our family in a couple of weeks. What were we supposed to do?” When we are there with strategic aid that stays in the hands of the beneficiaries—that is a whole other discussion, and we are very strategic about that—it is a significant saving versus what we did in Syria 15 years ago, when we waited until it was too late.

Germany did a short study on this. For example, 1 million refugees that ended up in Germany over five years cost \$125 billion. Do the math: that is €70 a day, versus 50 cents a day if we are in Syria. Fifty cents a day or



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€70 a day—which one do you think the taxpayer wants to fund, and which one do you think the Syrian would like? They do not want to leave home, but if they do not have food or any degree of peace, they will move and do what any mom and dad would do. Our surveys show that they will move two, three or four times inside the country of conflict before they will eventually leave their homeland.

If we can come in with strategic food security programmes independent of Government, which is a whole other discussion, families are less vulnerable to the politics and can take care of their own families and make decisions more independent of the politics, the Government and so on. Let me stop right there; I probably went a lot longer than I should have.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I was going to say, David, that I think we need to let my colleagues in, but thank you very much for that. It was really interesting stuff. Your maths is definitely better than mine, but I got the point.

Chair: David, you spoke of strategic aid. I am reminded of a visit to Lashkar Gah in 2009. I went to the Helmand river and saw the irrigation systems that the United States had put in in the 1950s. The USAID stamp was on all the irrigation pumps and so forth. That allowed Lashkar Gah to become the breadbasket of not just Afghanistan, but the region itself. What a shame we didn't learn those lessons over the last 20 years that were in Afghanistan, but that is another story. Let us turn to more global security and stability issues.

Q139 **John Spellar:** I have a couple of observations on the previous exchange.

Q140 You referred to the south of the Sahel. I wonder what the balance is between climate change and the exponential increase in population growth taking place down there, which is adding to those pressures on existing resources. You rightly mentioned bringing in effective aid. I wonder whether you have any comments about the role of off-grid electricity in achieving that—in educational terms, in entertainment terms and in providing for pumps and so on, rather than transporting in kerosene or diesel.

My key point is that it's fine bringing in the supplies, but that requires a reasonably stable security environment. For example, we saw in Yemen that food was being shipped in, but it was essentially being expropriated by the Houthis to supply their troops and generate funds, rather than dealing with the hunger situation of a considerable part of the population. Similarly, world transport supply chains are recovering to an extent, but they are still pretty erratic. To what extent is that an issue? It is partly a security issue, but we are finding out about very strained, just-in-time supply chains, even on the supermarket shelves of Britain. It is even more of an issue in these hunger-affected areas in other parts of the world.

David Beasley: On supply chains, as you well know and as we learned during covid, supply chain systems are critical. Even the most developed nations in the world—the United Kingdom and the United States— had



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supply chain system problems at the height of covid. If that was happening in the most sophisticated supply chain systems in the world, what do you think was happening in Chad, Yemen, Niger and places like that? It is a very serious issue. When you compound that with blockades, sanctions or whatever it might be in a particular country, that really makes it a complicated matter.

For example, in Yemen, I was pretty hard on the coalition back in 2017 because of the blockade. I don't remember the exact percentage, but as you well know, 85% to 90% of the food in Yemen comes from the outside world. The supply chain system is critical there. It is one thing to move the food in, and another to move it and get it to the right people from a United Nations and humanitarian perspective. I had quite a number of fights with the Houthis when I jumped pretty hard on the coalition about the blockade. We did a big "60 Minutes" story. Anyway, we got the blockade kind of unblocked so we could move in supplies. Well, the Houthis loved me. They said they were so proud of me and thanked me. I told them, "I didn't do this because I like you. I did this because it was the right thing to do." I said, "Let me be very clear with you: when you cross that line, I'll bust your butts too." Or I said that kind of thing; I can't say exactly what I said to them in a parliamentary Committee.

About six months later, we had issues of diversion and many problems moving our food supplies to the intended beneficiaries because of their interference. I made the decision to literally cut off all aid in Sanaa for a month for 1 million people. You talk about a complicated decision, but it was bad. I would say I'm not your normal UN kind of person; I don't think they were used to that. We laid it out very clear. I said, "I don't have enough now to feed everybody I need to feed around the world, and the last thing I'm going to do is go into an area where I can feed people with 50% effectiveness, when I can take that same money and feed other people in other places." So they got it. They got in line and we worked it out. That was a tremendous improvement in supply chain systems, from fuel to foods, and in many systems that we put in place to ensure that the food wasn't going to feed soldiers or the Houthi military. That is just an example.

We run into those same issues in places such as Afghanistan, with the Taliban and things like that. I am usually pretty hard with whoever I am sitting down with, explaining to them that we will not tolerate interference and that we want to feed the people—the people who deserve it—no matter what.

Let me flip back to the Sahel and the grid, because a lot of these places don't have electricity. We can use solar panels in many of these places for water irrigation. I would love to send you a video on the way we do what we call zaï and half-moons. We are trying to do two-minute lifespan videos, because you aren't going to watch a 30-minute video. You can look at the before and after, and see the impact that has, and the cost is substantially lower. I try to use the example of leaking water lines in the ceiling, which would cost you \$1,000 to fix. You don't have \$1,000, so you



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don't fix the water lines. Well, a year later you've got to replace the mahogany table, the carpet, the chairs, the curtains and the whole nine yards, which will cost you \$10,000 versus \$1,000. It is a lot cheaper to go in and get it right, address the root cause and do it the way it needs to be done.

For example, the United States is facing a serious problem right now in this matter because of its southern border, as you well know. We are down near central America and south America feeding a lot of people, but the number of people now talking about migrating to the United States border is five times what it was just a year and a half ago, because of food pricing, inflation and so on. You can imagine the impact that is going to have on the politics locally, in the region and in the western hemisphere.

In addition, if that continues to bubble and exacerbate like it could with climate, you could see a movement of a lot of funds that the United States sends to Africa and the Middle East being moved away from there, which means somebody is going to have to pick up that tab. That is a subject we need to get into. I was able to convince my Democrat and Republican friends in the Senate and the House to put up \$7.4 billion in 2022—when I arrived it was 1 point something billion dollars—so if that money is moved, who is going to pick up that difference? That will create one hell of a problem for Europe, in my opinion, if those moneys are not replaced, because you will have destabilisation of nations and mass migration as a result.

Q141 Richard Drax: David, good afternoon. Can you rank the impact of climate change globally? Will it exacerbate existing tensions? Could it be the single largest driver of international instability and crises?

David Beasley: I cannot answer that with a definitive number, but it is definitely way up there. I would put climate at the top, with conflict and corruption: those three things right there. If you can solve corruption, and at the same time deal with climate—Even with climate issues, if we can end hunger and conflict and resolve some of the corruption issues in many of the countries we are talking about, because of adaptation there is no doubt that you have still got to deal with mitigation issues. What we are seeing is the compounding dynamic of climate.

I was down in Niger the day I got the phone call about the Nobel peace prize. I was literally in the middle of Niger and we were having a really hard conversation with the military there, because they were stopping our access into certain areas out of fear of Isis and al-Qaeda attacking us and the people. I said, "You have got to understand, if we don't reach these people, then they will be recruited by Isis and al-Qaeda". The dryness and the weather—the climate—was dramatically impacting people in Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad; you know what I am talking about. I was literally pounding the table, saying we had got to have access, because of climate issues because if we could rehabilitate the land, then we could stabilise the population. Then somebody busted down the door, hollering "Nobel peace prize!" And I was like, "What are you doing?" And they were like, "You've just won the Nobel peace prize."



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Conflict was a major part of that but, in my opinion, as bad as conflict is, climate is equally bad. I don't think the climate issue will diminish. I think the climate is going to continue to deteriorate. We have been predicting more complications, as you can imagine, from hurricanes and cyclones. There is obviously tectonic activity, as we just saw in Turkey and Syria. There is a lot of activity on the earth's ocean floor. In fact, if you go back and look at last year, about a year ago there was one of the biggest volcanic activities in a couple of hundred years, and there was very little news about it. It was under the ocean floor. It created more heat and waves, and you can imagine the impact that has on global atmosphere. There are a lot of things happening with mother nature right now; she is not very subtle, it seems.

I think that it is going to get worse, but we have solutions out there on the adaptation side, so that while it happens we can at least stabilise the populations. But the donors have to be more strategic, more comprehensive and more effective, so that we can scale up and stabilise these populations. Is it going to cost? Well, here is the cost if you don't do that. This is where we have to be strategic, and the UK, the United States, the Germans, the EU and the French, for example, have to come together and quit piecemealing these types of programmes. You have to scale up in a comprehensive way, because you have limited dollars.

With the number of demands in the humanitarian world now, this is the way I put it: you have icebergs in front of the Titanic, and you have a broken wine glass on the bar and a broken tea glass in the ballroom. What do you think you ought to focus on right now? A lot of times, bureaucrats will have you focusing on the broken tea glass, and right now we need to be together and focused on the icebergs. We do not have enough money for everything, but food security is critical to the stability of every nation on the planet. Your discussion today is perfectly timed, because this is going to get worse in the next 12 to 24 months.

Q142 Richard Drax: Russia and China seem to be investing in a lot of third-world countries, with the hope, no doubt, of getting their resources in the future. Are we way behind the curve? Have we withdrawn from these sorts of programmes? I think that you are saying that we so far behind the curve that, in fact, we are nowhere near. You are emphasising that we need to get back into these countries, as Russia and China are doing, to turn them around. Would you agree with that?

David Beasley: In this position as a UN figure, I should probably be a little cautious about how I respond to that, but in a private discussion I would probably lay it out with great clarity in the way you would think. There is no doubt, in my opinion, that there is a lot of work and a lot of messaging that needs to be done to bring awareness and attention to many of the African leaders, for example, to understand how much is already being done that is not benefiting the image of the countries that are presently donating. These are serious issues right here. I finish this role on 4 April, and on 5 April I will give you a much more comprehensive response on that issue.



Q143 Sarah Atherton: David, can I correlate this geo-climatic discussion with UK defence and security? You have mentioned worsening climatic events, increasing food and water shortages, and mass migration, and with that will come increased political, security and social tensions. In your opinion, what does that mean for the MoD?

David Beasley: I think it is like General Mattis said: if you want to buy more ammunition, cut strategic international aid. That is where we are. Climate today is critically important. Some 80% of our operations are in war zones. Of the 20 areas of conflict that we are in, 14 are overlaid with climate impact, so you can imagine how that escalates the issues of concern. That escalates not just the question of famine or starvation, but the issue of mass migration and destabilisation. With the studies that have been done, for every degree or two of food pricing, this degree of potential destabilisation takes place—violence, protests, unrest. For every 1 degree in food pricing, although I cannot remember the exact number, there is a 2% increase—double that—in migration. I cannot remember the exact number, but it is something like that. In other words, common sense tells you that. This is extremely important. As I speak to Committees in the United States Senate and House, the Bundestag, France and so on, I say, “You must understand you cannot separate these issues.”

Now, when we come into a place, if you don’t have particular security, that has a whole other set of issues. You can imagine that where we are on the ground in areas of conflict, we see how it dissipates and messes up the communities and what we can do in many different places. We have to deconflict in a lot of these countries where you have Russian and Syrian forces, the United States, Kurdish forces—just name a country. We have to come in and deconflict to move food between combatants. As you can imagine, as in Ukraine, a lot of the time the battle lines are shifting—they are changing by the day, week and month, so we have got to be able to move food supply. That is a whole other issue and discussion, as you can imagine.

This issue of defence and military activities in relation to food security is so interconnected today. The Nobel peace prize committee, in my opinion, when they awarded us the Nobel peace prize two years ago, were clearly saying, “Without food security, you are not going to have peace.” It is that simple. It is more inextricably linked today than it ever has been before, at least in modern times.

Q144 Sarah Atherton: In 2021, the Ministry of Defence produced its global strategy, which set out three general aims—for Defence to fight and win in hostile environments; to reduce emissions, particularly from the defence estate; and to be global leaders. Do you think that is ambitious enough? In the last 18 months, have you seen the UK being a global leader with climate change?

David Beasley: I am not sure I am qualified to answer that. I have not delved into that; forgive me, but I don’t know. We are feeding 160 million people right now on any given day. I am trying to raise \$39 million a day, so I have been pretty focused on that. When I arrived, we were raising



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\$15 million a day, and now we are raising \$39 million a day. We are voluntarily funded, so I have been pretty busy on that front. Give me some time and I can maybe give you an opinion on that.

Q145 Chair: Perhaps I can ask the same question, but in another way. We have troops in Mali under a UN flag. What is the security mission in Mali? We have had troops there for a while; they are there to support the Government. There was a coup while our troops were there, so they ended up supporting the new Government. Therefore, what is the UN security mission in Mali?

David Beasley: I am not the UN security guy, but I am sort of like the canary in the mine. When you feed 160 million people on any given day, week or month—if I fed everybody in London every day for about two years, I would pretty much know what is going on inside London. We usually see things well in advance, as you can imagine. I want to be careful how I say this in this public forum, but it is like in Afghanistan—we saw two years in advance a percolation of this. We saw in north Mozambique what was about to happen. We have seen it in Niger and Mali.

When you go back and look at my speeches six, five, four years ago, we were warning, warning, warning our major donor nations, particularly nations with a military capacity, that, “You cannot neglect what is about to happen, because what is now a \$100 million fix is going to be a multi-billion-dollar fix if you continue to sit on the sidelines ignoring this problem.”

This is one of my gravest concerns today in the world. It seems like so many decisions are being made based on social media and 24-hour news cycles. A lot of these problems out there are going to take hard decisions and long-term commitments, not just short-term reactionary decisions.

Chair: It makes me want to ask you, then, what is now coming over the horizon, but we will leave that for a little bit.

Q146 Dave Doogan: The UK Government’s 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy has put tackling climate change and biodiversity loss as its No. 1 international priority. Some would argue that it is very difficult to see any operational delivery against that policy, so what would your advice be on kick-starting a renewed effort to realise some delivery against these ambitions? And, recognising that the United Kingdom is just one seat around the table, how do we work strategically with allies and other nations around the world to ensure that we deliver something that is greater than the sum of our parts?

David Beasley: As you can imagine, we could talk from this wide to this narrow, but in the area of biodiversity, what we do and what Sarah was talking about in terms of our operations and greening up our operation, using less diesel fuel and less this and that—we are doing all those things. But there is a question now going forward with biodiversity. Some of the technology that is being developed now is quite remarkable. The ability



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going forward to use less fertiliser and less water because you have better seeds and better fertilisers, is more strategic to the soil-based geographical areas.

All these things are moving in a very good direction, and I would hate to see us back off, but—I don't want to say "but" at the same time—last year when I began meeting with leaders, particularly in Europe, in your area, I was saying that your climate goals are very good but we have to grow enough food next year because of this crisis. What do we need to do to be practical—not backing off the long-term goals, but what do we need to mitigate on a short-term basis? For example, if Ukraine was growing enough food to feed 400 million people and you are not going to be able to get food out of Ukraine, where are we going to pick up that food difference from? Do we need to put set aside lands back into production, at least on a short-term basis? What I was doing was just raising these issues with leaders, saying, "You've got to think about the situation. Here is your problem coming; what do you need to do now, based on the politics of your area? What are the solutions that you need to provide?" because if you run out of food, that's a whole different ball game.

I do think it, hopefully, increases the inspiration and the pressure to move forward harder and faster in some of these areas. For example, on grain production and food production, Russia is one of the largest fertiliser exporters in the world. You cannot just jump start a fertiliser-manufacturing facility—it costs billions of dollars and takes several years—but at the same time, you don't want to be vulnerable on a product like that, which is important to the future stability of your nation. So how do we think about these types of issues moving forward—not just better fertiliser, but generally just having fertiliser, whether it is potash, phosphorus, ammonia-based products, nitrogen-type products or others? I think we could get into that discussion all day on the biodiversity side, but I do think that it is a critical issue.

I am talking to some of the experts in the field. I have been talking to some of the most brilliant minds I have ever known in California over the past few months about the research and R&D we are seeing all over the world now. I think the world is ready for some breakthroughs in the next 10 years, but we've got to get there first.

Q147 Dave Doogan: Are any of those breakthroughs on genetically modified or genetically engineered seed?

David Beasley: Yes, definitely. I do not think that there is any question. There is more and better research in that area—I am not the expert in that field. I was on a trip two weeks ago with Syngenta, for example. I have been meeting and talking with many of your companies in the UK and the United States. That is not really our job per se, but I am painting the picture of what we are facing, so what are you doing out there to increase yield? The United States has done an amazing job in the last 50 years of increasing the amount of harvest per hectare—an incredible success story. How do we take even existing practices and existing seeds and get improvements? In many of the poorest of the poor countries, you



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have 500 million smallholder farmers and many of them are not getting the seeds that are currently out there that will increase productivity and are more heat resistant for droughts. I don't think the United Nations and the world are taking advantage of some of those things to the degree they could and should.

Q148 Dave Doogan: One final, very quick question from me. David, you spoke very powerfully about the fertiliser supply chain and the lack of plurality around the supply of fertiliser for the global agriculture sector. What can we learn, if anything, from what happened in Sri Lanka if we are looking for a window on to what a world with a scarcity of agricultural fertiliser looks like?

David Beasley: Sri Lanka should have been a wake-up call, not just to Sri Lankans but to the rest of the world. If you want to go in the direction of no fertiliser, that's fine, but you've got to plan it, and you have to do it in such a way that you don't end up totally destabilising a nation. As you can imagine, we were hands on the ground there when that happened. Of course, there were many of us warning Sri Lanka that this was going to happen if they didn't do it strategically.

You can't just go out there and be rhetorical about it. Everybody wants to green up the planet and do good things for the climate, but you've got to do it in such a way that we survive that transition. I think the rest of the world saw how Sri Lanka was poorly handled. How do you learn from those mistakes? Sometimes I question how much we have learned from our past mistakes. It seems like lately I have been questioning that more than I ever have.

Q149 Robert Courts: Thanks very much indeed for your evidence today, David. Here in the UK, our MoD is very keen on not only acting as a world leader but on being recognised globally for ensuring that climate change is fully recognised when it responds to global threats. As the Defence Committee, we are primarily looking at the role of the Armed Forces. What role do you see the Armed Forces playing in bringing security and stability to any region that is hit by crisis? Secondly, can you give us any good examples of where that been done effectively?

David Beasley: Being in the humanitarian sector, we try not to talk publicly too much about the military side, but obviously a lot of times it does go hand in hand. Countries can destabilise too quickly without the military component. For example, in Nigeria you've got Boko Haram, and in Niger and Mali you've got Isis and al-Qaeda elements. If we're about to do some significant development projects involving hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars from the United Nations and the international community, the last thing we want to do is invest in major water systems in an area of need if Isis, al-Qaeda or Boko Haram are about to take over in 12 months. I've seen that happen before. It is extremely important that we—what's the right word?—co-ordinate with military forces to understand what they are seeing and what we are seeing so we don't end up putting really good assets into the hands of militants and extremist groups.



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I really want to be a little more sensitive in answering that question publicly, because, as you can imagine, that is a sensitive area because of our neutrality and what we do, but there are a lot of places where there are joint military activities—for example, in Mozambique recently, even though that one gets a little tricky, with extremist groups, the Wagner Group and all that. Then you get more complexity, particularly in central and northern Africa with not just extremist groups but the Wagner Groups and the politics, whether it is the French or whoever it might be. As you can imagine, that gets pretty complicated. That's not our forte. Obviously, when we are moving supplies and we are seeing destabilisation take place, the military can play an extraordinary role; we both do. The nature of what we do and what the military can do is complementary, without us being joined with the military, so we maintain that neutrality. As you can imagine, it is extremely important for us to do that.

Other times, you clearly aren't neutral. When somebody is just killing people, killing people, killing people—I don't want to get into the details of that, but I have been pretty tough on some of the extremist groups. I have met with them before, and our teams are always negotiating access and explaining what we do, why we will not give them food and things like that, and why our military presence is to help maintain security in these particular areas.

Food can be diverted, as you well know. When you are moving hundreds of millions of dollars of supplies, we need to know that we can move it safely and that it does not end up in the hands of militant combatants, as you can imagine. We are a \$14 billion operation right now. As you heard, when I joined in 2017 my goal was to put the World Food Programme out of business,. We were a \$5.78 billion operation then; now we are \$14.4 billion. If anybody ought to be fired it ought to be me, because we have completely gone in the wrong direction because of climate, conflict and the issues we are talking about.

Q150 Robert Courts: I understand entirely your desire to treat the topic sensitively, given who you have to work with and where you have to work. Perhaps I could put it another way, though: if you were seeing a threat that was being exacerbated by climate change and greater instability as a result of that, what best practice tips would you give us to press for the UK Armed Forces to adopt?

David Beasley: This is not the forum to get into the particular type of country, but if we see—we have seen this before, and I have done this before—a country where, because of climate, the risk of destabilisation is increasing, we are seeing activity on the ground and extremist elements starting to exploit and move in, and activities taking place, if enough attention is brought early on, it saves hundreds of millions of dollars if the military can come in and stabilise an area. Normally, I will meet with Government leaders in a country and Government leaders who are interested in that country, and say, "Here's what we're seeing, and you need to understand that if this continues over the next 24 months, this country will be destabilised in this area and there will be a mass military operation."



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I am not going to get into the Afghanistan details and what we said two years in advance, but northern Mozambique was a classic case where we were saying two years in advance, "This is happening. This is what's not happening. You're going to have major conflict in this area. They are growing, they are increasing destabilisation, and it's going to cost a fortune, particularly if certain mineral deposit locations are exploited," and so on. We were seeing the displacement of people, and then what happened? The cost was a thousandfold more. But had it been addressed two years earlier, the cost would have been nominal. I can go from country to country to country with regards to this, given the reality, because when you are feeding everybody in the neighbourhood, you know what is going on.

Q151 **Chair:** David, let's finally turn to Ukraine. We have clearly been spending a lot of our time on this side of the Atlantic focused on what is going to happen in 2023. The emphasis has been on the operational side and what we are doing to support the Ukrainian people and their Armed Forces, but grain is a critical aspect of this, which I think you have been focusing on. This Committee visited Odessa, and it was sad to see many dormant cranes, with only a fifth of the grain getting out. Before we go into the details of the port of Odessa, what impact will it have on the rest of the world—on European inflation, for example—if we are able to somehow get a new United Nations deal to get closer to getting five fifths, rather than one fifth, of that grain out of Odessa?

David Beasley: This is an extremely important issue. When the war started, all the leaders in the world were focused on eastern Ukraine. If you remember, I jumped on a plane, flew over to Krakow and got in a car, and we drove all the way down to Odessa. I began jumping up and down, saying, "Look, what is happening in eastern Ukraine is terrible, but let me tell you what is going to be equally terrible if not even worse. This is the bread basket of the world, which usually exports 5 million metric tonnes of grain per month out of these ports." With that blockade of the entire coastline, first, we are shutting down the Ukrainian economy, because it is export based, and Ukraine without exports collapses economically; and, secondly, there is the impact it will have on the world, globally, in terms of food security. That is why I was trying at the beginning to give an overall picture of how bad it was five years ago, four years ago, three years ago, when we went from 80 million to 135 million to 276 million to 350 million. You can begin to see how this thing is growing and escalating in such a perfect storm, or perfect storms.

So I went down to Odesa to meet the military down there, Zelensky's team, and I began to tweet, saying, "Putin, you're going to bring famine to the rest of the world unless you open up these ports." Well, you can imagine the pressure. No one was thinking about the impact on food security in the initial invasion; they were focused just on military activity. I was saying very clearly, "You've got a hell of a storm coming, if we don't address the Black Sea." And of course, the Black Sea grain initiative was agreed. It is still very fragile, as you might imagine. The amount of food

coming out of the Black Sea grain initiative is not enough; it is better, but short for certain.

My concern, among many others in this region, is that with the lack of fertiliser in Ukraine, we could have a serious production problem in 2023 in Ukraine, in addition to rice production problems in the rest of the world, Argentina food production down and India down because of the heat. China is a little up and Russia is a little up, but generally food production in 2022 was down. That is a question. If we take Africa for example, 70% of all consumption of food in Africa comes from smallholder farmers, and they cannot afford the fertiliser even if they could get it, so that will be one heck of a pressure, just in Africa, on stabilisation, along with debt, inflation and all the issues that you are quite familiar with.

The fertiliser and food issue out of Ukraine is extremely important right now, because the commodities market is so fragile globally. That is one of the reasons why I wanted to get the Black Sea grain initiative moving—to help stabilise the commodities market. The people of the UK, the United States and Europe will be able to afford it, but—politically, this is already sensitive—imagine what is happening now for the average African, for example, and our beneficiaries. They live from hand to mouth every day. It is not like during covid, when they could go for a couple of weeks with a pantry full of food. If you disrupt the supply chain system, they will have riots, protests and then exploitation by extremist groups.

Q152 Chair: What I am puzzled about is that the absence of those grain ships departing Odessa to get the grain out is affecting not only Africa with the famine and so forth, but food prices across Europe, including here in the UK. So, my question is, why is the bully—Russia—still determining the United Nations deal on grain coming out of Ukraine? Why have we not advanced a new deal? Now that Russia has been pushed back, the situation on the ground has changed. Surely it is time for the United Nations to get together around the table, working with Turkey, to get all those grain ships going out, not just one fifth of them.

David Beasley: You are exactly right. That is what I know I am pushing for—to move it. It needs to be moved now, not waiting until the last minute. It is extremely important, because we don't know what Ukrainian production for 2023 will be. It is extremely important that those silos get emptied, that those ships get loaded and for politics to be thrown out the window, so that we can move those ships, because the humanitarian crisis we are facing is unlike anything we have seen since the second world war. Africa and not just Africa, but I can tell you, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, are very close to destabilisation if we are not careful right now.

We are feeding over a million Lebanese, not to mention the million Syrian refugees inside Lebanon. The situation in Syria is now exacerbated by the earthquake. If we don't address this Black Sea grain initiative strategically, in my opinion you will have another wave of Syrian refugees heading into Europe in the next 12 months. It is that serious.



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Compound that with Africa. While everybody's focused on the east of Europe, on Ukraine, you cannot forget about what's taking place south of you in northern Africa—I mean, the Sahel—as well as in the Middle East. It is very fragile. That doesn't even get into the Afghanistan issues and some other issues. I'm really worried that, if we have massive hurricanes this summer or this fall in the United States, we could see a massive diversion of funds from these communities, which would increase substantially the pressure on the European community and western nations to step up. I don't know if there is the appetite for it, but the question is: can you afford not to?

Q153 Chair: With that sense of urgency in mind, would you like to see the United States and Great Britain perhaps working together as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council but maybe bypassing the Security Council itself, because anything will get vetoed by Russia and China, and going directly to the UN General Assembly, where many of the countries represented there require the grain coming from Odessa, in order to see a new United Nations deal to get that grain out of the ports?

David Beasley: Whatever it takes. You know, I'm a pretty practical kind of person; if this vehicle's not working, you've got to find another way to resolve things. The world's too fragile right now; it's very fragile. Whatever it takes. I don't think there's any doubt that the United States and the UK—you and I talked about this while we were at the Munich security conference—and more and more leaders that think along these lines need to be talking strategically, practically and effectively, and then devising the plan and executing it to bring peace and stability around the world.

At the World Food Programme, we're neutral, and at the same time we've got solutions if we just get the support we need to minimise—I would like to put defence budgets out of business, too, but it ain't gonna happen any time soon.

Chair: It is because of the conversations that we had at the Munich security conference that you very kindly agreed to come and join our Committee here today.

We are really grateful for your time. It has been illuminating, informative and very sobering indeed to hear about the challenges that lie ahead, and the responsibilities that we have to answer some of these huge challenges that are coming over the horizon—and indeed that are with us here today.

David Beasley, Director of the UN World Food Programme, thank you for joining us this afternoon. That brings this Committee session on security and climate change to a conclusion today. Thank you to colleagues, staff and our special guest, David Beasley.