

VICTORY IN UKRAINE = FEEDING THE WORLD

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This year, food rose to the top of the geopolitical agenda as Russia backed out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the United States made food security a top priority when chairing the U.N. Security Council. Access to and control of food has always been a matter of war and peace. But as global populations continue to grow and climate change accelerates food challenges, it will take its rightful place as a top national security challenge with global implications.

To date, the food security discourse is largely defined by production on land, but over the horizon another food challenge emerges – that of “blue foods,” – food from marine and freshwater ecosystems.

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Political attention to and funding of blue foods initiatives remain significantly under-prioritized in national and global food discussions. But make no mistake, blue foods are essential to the health of people, prosperity of economies and stability for societies around the world. Blue foods are among the most traded global commodities, supporting over 800 million jobs. And they are a significant source of animal protein, vital micronutrients and cultural identity for nearly half the people on Earth.

Access to fisheries is also a geopolitical flashpoint. According to one study, 25 percent of military conflicts between democracies during the Cold War were over fisheries—and these conflicts are set to escalate. Climate change is causing fish to move, and one in four fish stocks will cross from one national territory to another before the end of the

decade. This will create newly fish-rich and fish-poor places that will face increased conflict and disruptions to food and job security. But there is still time to act.

At the top of the list of solutions must be both assessing and providing early warning of where fisheries’ conflict hotspots are expected to appear, so the international community has time to take bold, collaborative action on conflict prevention, including conservation measures that are an important part of the path forward.

This is why World Wildlife Fund-US and partners are launching the Oceans Futures platform that integrates, visualizes and provides actionable data to pinpoint 20 future fisheries conflict hotspots. The platform is based on robust climate and fisheries modeling that enables policymakers, the national security community, economic development agencies and conservation organizations in the public and private sectors to understand where and why fisheries conflicts will happen. This will help address the issue before it escalates by directing conservation, economic development, national security and private sector resources where they are needed most.

Predictive capabilities enabling early warning are one foundational piece of the solution. Fortunately, we also know how to build holistic remedies to stop blue foods conflict; these ideas now need appropriate resources to mitigate and manage this dangerous issue for nature and people. The solution rests on four major pillars.

First, we need increased resources from national security, defense and intelligence communities flowing to law enforcement and greater deterrence of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing.

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Second, we need deployment, at scale, of conservation and economic development solutions including support for blue foods systems. Third, we need to build a new generation of diplomatic collaborations to counter IUU fishing from a multilateral perspective. And fourth, we need to accelerate work with the seafood industry to enable a conflict-free fisheries sector.

The geopolitics of nature is here, and it is here to stay. Food, including blue foods, will be an important part of the dynamic, and we need to increase our appetite for identifying new and innovative solutions, and for replicating and scaling solutions that already exist.



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