In today’s chaotic world with numerous conflicts and unprecedented numbers of displaced persons, food security has emerged as an issue of critical global importance. Food is both a strategic weapon of war and a smart investment to foster peace. It is also a powerful political commodity. Political instability and conflict are often fueled by food-insecure populations; price volatility can spark unrest among urban communities unable to afford basic staples. When the United States takes steps to reduce global hunger and poverty in the developing world, we are protecting our own security and national interests. In fact, it is one of the most effective ways we can combat radical extremism.

This week President Barack Obama signed into law the Global Food Security Act of 2016, marking an important and profound statement about the importance of U.S. leadership on food security. Passed by Congress on a bipartisan basis in a particularly contentious political year, the new law makes clear that addressing global hunger and poverty is—and should remain—a top foreign policy and national security objective. In his announcement at the White House Summit on Global Development, the president emphasized that “development isn’t charity. It’s one of the smartest investments we can make in our shared future, our security, our prosperity.”

It is no coincidence that countries that are the least stable are also the most food insecure: Yemen, Syria, Sudan, and Nigeria, to name a few. The unrest in these countries has disrupted agricultural production, damaged critical infrastructure, and caused billions in losses, creating a causal cycle between food insecurity and conflict. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad is waging a starvation campaign as a war tactic, purposely cutting populations off from humanitarian assistance. The Islamic State is using food as a recruitment tool, luring in weak citizens desperate for food and then folding vulnerable young men into their ranks.

The risks of economic and food insecurity in the world are likely to escalate with the impacts of climate change, population growth, and urbanization. To curtail those risks, and particularly to support conflict-affected populations who are most susceptible to food insecurity, we must recognize and address the nexus between food insecurity and political instability. When food insecurity increases, so does the chance of urban riots and regional unrest. It was the food price spikes in 2007–2008 and ensuing riots and civil unrest across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean that sparked a resurgence in commitment to food security by the United States and other major donors.

Improving global food security is a long-term effort that requires multiyear strategies, strong local leadership, and innovative partnerships with the private sector. The Obama administration has invested $5.6 billion over the past five years in global food security through its Feed the Future effort, engaging 11 U.S. agencies and focusing on 19 countries. And while progress has been commendable, the initiative needs more congressional oversight and time in order to reap benefits. The Global Food Security Act signals congressional support for ongoing food security work and means that Feed the Future is no longer a presidential initiative, a step that was essential to ensure continued American leadership in this area.

In an environment of limited resources, the United States must make long-term strategic investments where our interests are strongest. Investing in programs that increase agricultural production, foster technological innovation, engage the private sector, and improve nutrition is a smart move that will serve a greater good. It will also bolster our diplomatic efforts by winning us friends at local and national levels.

The United States is and should remain a leader in addressing global food security. Our leadership not only represents American values of shared prosperity, but also advances our security and strategic interests.