

Report from the Center for

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## Plowshares into Swords: The Political Uses of Food

To make its research easily available to a broad audience, the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy publishes a quarterly newsletter: *QQ—Report from the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy*. Named after the abbreviation for “questions,” *QQ* summarizes and supplements Center books and working papers and features other selected work on public policy questions. Articles in *QQ* are intended to advance philosophically informed debate on current policy choices; the views presented are not necessarily those of the Center or its sponsors.

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The United States produces and exports more food than any other nation, in a world where over a billion people are chronically malnourished and half a billion eke out an existence on the edge of starvation. Only a handful of nations produce more food than they consume, and the United States is chief among these, dominating the world’s food supply to a greater extent than all the nations of OPEC combined dominate the world’s oil. Such a vast productive capacity set against the rest of the world’s desperate need places the United States in a position of awesome power to determine whether its neighbors eat adequately or go hungry.

In recent years, the United States has freely wielded its “food weapon” to further both its own security and economic interests and the broader goals of world prosperity and peace. Presidents from Eisenhower through Carter and Reagan have used American food aid and sales to achieve their own foreign policy objectives, whether rewarding anti-Communist regimes for capitalist solidarity or punishing repressive regimes for human rights violations. Food exports have been manipulated to stifle criticism of the American military intervention in Vietnam, to chasten the Soviet Union for its military intervention in Afghanistan, and to forge peace accords for the embattled Mideast. The frankly political use of food aid is sanctioned by American law: Title I of Public Law 480 authorizes the use of food aid to develop foreign markets for American agricultural commodities and to complement U.S. foreign policy objectives; Title III links food aid to development programs (in contrast to Title II, which grants aid almost exclusively on humanitarian