

Executive Summary

Food and Foreign Policy:

Options for the UAE and Other Import-Dependent Countries

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- In the 21st century, **food has risen to become an important area of foreign policy**, prompted by global population growth, limited scope for agricultural expansion, concentration of food exporters and environmental change. These drivers put pressures on global food markets, on which a number of countries depend.
- Similarly to many of its neighbouring countries, the United Arab Emirates can be described as a high-income developing country that is dependent on food imports. It relies heavily on a trade-based approach to food security, which is buttressed by oil income-enabled fiscal reserves. **For import-dependent countries like the UAE, food security policies need to have a strong focus on the external, alongside the domestic, side.** Domestic production, even if socially and psychologically important, equates to only a tenth of the country's food supply.
- **The best-known food security policy options in the external environment include foreign investments, preferential trade agreements, strategic reserves and measures to secure vital trade routes.**
- There are, however **other options**. This working paper identifies the following ones:
 - (i) Promoting an **international regulatory environment** that is favourable to a country's food security interests;
 - (ii) Supporting **regional cooperation** on food security;
 - (iii) Managing **bilateral ties** with a country's export partners through **balancing trade** and **diversifying the number of partners**, including through agro-investments; and
 - (iv) Taking a **more strategic foreign policy approach** to food security. Such an approach would conceive of food trade and investments, and food in development cooperation, as part of a **broader foreign policy framework** that is segmented by regions and countries.
- Foreign policy can play a role in supporting a country's food security strategy. Equally, international food trade, food investments and food-related development assistance **can support a variety of other domestic and foreign policy goals**, including economic growth and diversification, and a stable regional environment. Such an approach should be underpinned by a broad, unified and coherent **national food governance model and policy**.