Center for Strategic and International Studies

The Humanitarian and National Security Crisis in Yemen: An Update and Path Forward

Featuring:
Senator Todd Young (R-IN)

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KIMBERLY FLOWERS: Good afternoon. The Center for Strategic and International Studies welcomes you to a conversation today on “The Humanitarian and National Security Crisis in Yemen.”

I’m Kimberly Flowers, and I direct two programs here at CSIS. One is on global food security, which examines U.S. leadership in addressing global hunger, poverty, and malnutrition through development assistance. The other program I direct is called the Humanitarian Agenda, and it looks specifically at humanitarian access constraints and protracted conflicts.

So today’s conversation is a blend of my two worlds. Our event could not be more timely. Yesterday, at the end of peace talks held in Sweden, Yemen’s warring parties agreed to a ceasefire in the port city of Hodeidah, and while some may be cautiously optimistic about this truce, many others see it as a major breakthrough. I see it as a critical step in the right direction, particularly in terms of delivering life-saving humanitarian assistance to millions that are on the brink of famine.

Today, just a few hours ago in fact, U.S. policymakers in the Senate voted to end our support for the war in Yemen. While the legislation may have been sparked by the horrific murder of Jamal Khashoggi, it is also a response about our role in creating the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

Last week Foreign Policy reported that Yemeni civilians, particularly in rebel-controlled cities, are enduring famine conditions. Upwards of as many as 20 million Yemenis are food insecure. These number are alarming; they are kind of hard to comprehend because they are so big. And we should be outraged. The United States cannot segregate security alliances and humanitarian consequences. We need to hold our allies accountable for their actions, and I would say likewise we need to hold ourselves accountable. The United States has the leverage to end this civil war, which is costing millions of lives.

Today we welcome back to CSIS two leaders who have been working incredibly hard on this issue. I very much am honored, and humbled, and look forward to listening to them and talking to them about this with all of you that are here with us in person and to, I know, the many hundreds that are watching us online right now.

We’ll start with remarks from Senator Todd Young from Indiana. He is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he has held a two-year – or led a two-year campaign to address the ongoing civil war in Yemen. He is a veteran, he’s a conservative, and he’s one of the most powerful advocates on the Hill about the need to end this conflict.

Senator Young has introduced multiple pieces of legislation on this topic to assert political pressure on our foreign policy with our Middle Eastern allies. His efforts have raised awareness within this administration, among American people, and in the international community, and the Yemeni people. He reminds us that we care. Last year Mercy Corps awarded Senator Young the Humanitarian Hero Award.

Senator Young and I are going to be spending a lot of time together next year. He is the co-chair – along with Senator Cory Booker – of the CSIS Task Force on Humanitarian Access that I will be leading, and I have no doubt that he will bring his passion and his leadership to that position as we think through together policy recommendations so that aid can reach the most vulnerable.

Senator Young, over to you. (Applause.)
SENATOR TODD YOUNG (R-IN): Thank you. Well, thank you, Kimberly, for that generous introduction. Thanks so much for your leadership of the Humanitarian Agenda and Global Food Security Project here at CSIS. I really admire and I appreciate your persistent focus on global food security and on a related topic, the impacts of food insecurity on U.S. strategic interests.

I also of course want to thank CSIS. We have collaborated on a number of different foreign policy initiatives. As Kimberly just mentioned, we’ll continue that effort as we look to the future.

Now when my team and I realized that Executive Director Beasley might be in town and this event might be possible, my staff immediately reached out to Kimberly. That was on December 5th, so it’s quite impressive, I have to say, that CSIS was able to pull this event together so quickly, but it has been characteristic of their efforts in the past.

I do apologize for the last-minute change in timing of this event, everyone who’s here today and everyone who might be watching, but we’ve been a little busy today. So I am pleased to report that my amendment was adopted by a vote of 58 to 41 within the Senate and Senate Joint Resolution 54 as amended was adopted by a vote of 56-41.

So this is a significant victory for U.S. policy towards Saudi Arabia and towards Yemen, and I would also add it’s a significant moment in history as we reflect on Congress’ Article I responsibilities. I think the strong attendance here today is explained primarily by two factors: the depth of concern regarding events in Yemen and the importance of the gentleman who will speak next.

Executive Director Beasley, it really is a sincere honor to see you again. You’ve become a friend and, really, I just have such admiration for your dedication to service and all the good you’ve been able to do around the world. Most of all, I thank you for our deep and continued partnership with respect to the issues in Yemen, for all that you have done through the World Food Programme mantle that you hold and that you’ll continue to do to prevent millions of innocent men, women, and children from starving to death around the world, including in Yemen. Since March of 2017, I’ve focused intently on this issue. Some of you, perhaps, might be curious why a senator from Indiana might have an interest in this matter.

So let me begin by laying that out for you. So just after starting my first term here in the Senate, there was a hearing on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It was a full committee hearing and the topic was the four famines. This was March of 2017. Humanitarian crises in Nigeria, in Somalia, and in Yemen and South Sudan have captured the attention and imagination of people worldwide.

But I have to say prior to that hearing, I wasn’t particularly knowledgeable about the scale or the implications of these humanitarian crises, and in that hearing director general of the International Committee for the Red Cross warned all of us senators that the world was on the, quote, “brink of a humanitarian mega crisis, unprecedented in recent history.” Unquote. He continued, it was “fast becoming one of the most critical humanitarian issues to face mankind since the end of the Second World War.” So this is why I entered the United States Senate. This is why I ran for office is to work on consequential issues like this.
But I didn’t want to simply study the problem. This could very quickly become an intellectual feast to a legislator. I see my prerogatives as trying to identify how we can make a meaningful difference in at least some of these areas.

Well, after performing some analysis about each of these four famines, my team and I determined that we should focus on Yemen for three reasons. Number one, the scale and scope of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen was the worst of the four countries. Number two, a leading actor in the humanitarian crisis and civil war was Saudi Arabia. They, of course, have long been a security partner of the United States and we have supported them in various conflicts and they provided different measures of support to us and I felt like the United States government had a real opportunity to wield some leverage vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. And then a third reason is we found in Yemen an especially strong intersection between the humanitarian crisis there and our core U.S. national security interests.

So let me elaborate on those three key points. First, the scale of the humanitarian crisis. If you look at Director Beasley’s testimony before my subcommittee on July 18th of 2017, the numbers for Yemen at that time were absolutely breathtaking and, of course, they remain breathtaking.

Seventeen million in Yemen without sufficient food. Six point eight million men, women, and children severely food insecure. And as the executive director will tell you next, those numbers are even worse today. Approximately 14 million people are now on the verge of famine.

When we hear these statistics we can sometimes fall into a dispassionate or clinical or intellectual discussion, lacking a sense of urgency and forgetting we’re talking about real men, women and children in dire need of help. But when you see pictures of children like Amal Hussein, when you see pictures like this, we realize these are real people, real human beings, beings created in the image of God, who are starving to death because of obstacles to humanitarian assistance in the continuing civil war. The people of Indiana care about this. The people of America care about this. In short, these children are dying from a lack of food, not because of natural disasters, but because of the acts of men, entirely preventable acts of men.

Secretary Mattis once said we don’t have a moral obligation to do the impossible. I agree. But when we see such suffering and we do have the means to do something about it, I believe we have a moral obligation to try.

In addition to the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the second reason I’ve focused on this country and the dire situation there is the fact that the leading actor in the crisis in Yemen is Saudi Arabia. And the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia afforded opportunities to exercise leverage to change behavior. I concluded that Congress, the Article One branch, should provide this administration maximum leverage that it could use to achieve our objectives in Yemen and to change Riyadh’s behavior.

Moreover, it was clear that Saudi Arabia was using our munitions, our fuel, our support to indiscriminately bomb civilians and to use food as a weapon of war, implementing a partial and then a full starvation blockade with our support.

When presented with these facts, I knew the people of my state, the people across America, decent people would conclude they don’t want their tax dollars being used to support such behavior. So over the last year-and-a-half, I’ve set about using every tool available to a United States senator to provide this administration leverage and to encourage the administration to use it. That’s included, for
example, a resolution passed by the Senate, legislation passed into law, subcommittee hearings, a whole host of letters, meetings, briefings, even a hold on the nomination of the top lawyer at the Department of State as Secretary Tillerson got his sea legs on this issue, and even my amendment on the floor of the Senate today.

Third, I’ve focused on Yemen because Yemen is not only the world’s worst humanitarian disaster, but it’s also a serious and unmitigated national security disaster for the United States. Let me underscore this. This is a compelling, incredibly compelling humanitarian disaster, but this is every bit as much a national security issue that should capture the time and attention and consideration and concern of national security hawks in this country.

Yemen is the headquarters for al-Qaida’s most dangerous affiliate, AQAP, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. They’ve repeatedly focused on trying to kill Americans and our allies, to terrorize us, our people, our way of life. ISIS is also in Yemen. The humanitarian crisis and the civil war have created space for these terrorist groups to operate, to grow and the flourish. As Marine Corps retired Lieutenant General Castellaw testified before my subcommittee in March, food crises grow terrorists.

Don’t just take it from me, don’t just take it from the general, who spent a career working on such issues. There’s a growing body of research from the World Food Programme to the United Nations Development Program to the World Bank to the United Nations and a whole host of individual scholars who have conclusively demonstrated the connection between food insecurity and instability.

Plus, the ongoing civil war and worsening humanitarian crisis has created increasing opportunities for Iran, the world’s leading state sponsor of terror, to threaten the United States, our partners, and our interests. As I said on the Senate floor, I’ll take a backseat to no one – to no one – as an Iran hawk. I studied the situation in Yemen as closely as anyone on Capitol Hill. And I believe the best way to oppose Iran in Yemen, and stop ballistic missile attacks on our partners, is to bring all parties to the negotiating table, end the civil war, and address the humanitarian crisis.

Famine and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians will only push more Yemenis toward Iran and its proxies. And if you’re not sure about this, ask yourself the following questions: Does Iran have more or less influence in Yemen now than it did when the civil war started? Will Iran have more or less influence in Yemen if the civil war continues indefinitely? Solely from an anti-Iran perspective, I think an objective assessment of those questions demonstrates the need to end the civil war, and the need to pursue an inclusive political solution that seeks to drive a wedge between the Houthis and Tehran.

Now, if you’re still not persuaded, consider the December 4 testimony of the Trump administration’s nominee to serve as our ambassador to Yemen. The video’s on my Twitter page. Watch his response to my question for yourself. Mr. Henzel testified clearly that the ongoing civil war has exacerbated the world’s largest food security emergency, created power vacuums that terrorists have exploited, facilitated Iran’s ambitions, and complicated our counterterrorism efforts. This man, who will become our ambassador, understands it. And that’s from the foreign service officer who has most recently served as our charge in the U.S. embassy in Riyadh.

Now, based on the failure to fully utilize all leverage, the civil war has continued. The world’s worst humanitarian crisis has deteriorated further. Iran’s influence has increased. And the Saudi crown prince has unfortunately been left with the impression that he can get away with almost anything, including murder. Some argue that all steps are being take and no additional pressure is
needed. And as I said yesterday on the Senate floor, I reject that argument. And here’s why. On October 30, Secretaries Pompeo and Tillerson called for a ceasefire in Yemen within 30 days. For those who are checking your calendar, those 30 days have expired. And in fact, they expired as of November 29th. Yet, the Saudi coalition has continued the air strikes.

Now, I have a hard time believing that if Secretary Mattis picked up the phone and told Riyadh to knock it off – knock off the air strikes, that the Saudis would ignore him. If that call hasn’t occurred, there may be a problem. If it has and the Saudis have ignored his demand, there may also be a problem. Either way, there may be a very serious problem here. It’s not in our national security interests to sit idly by as the Saudis ignore the clear demands of our secretaries of Defense and State. I want to support those gentlemen, and I want to support this administration. My question to Secretary Mattis and Secretary Pompeo is the following: Riyadh is ignoring your demand for a ceasefire. What are you and this administration going to do about it, and how can we help you? For my part, I’ve continued, and I will continue, to provide the administration leverage to accomplish U.S. objectives in Yemen.

Finally, I want to comment on the negotiations in Sweden. I am very, very pleased about initial reports coming out of the intra-Yemeni political consultations taking place. Let’s see what happens. It’s my understanding that the parties reached an agreement on Hodeidah Port and city, which will include a mutual redeployment of forces from the port and the city, and the establishment of governor – governorate-wide – we don’t use that word a lot in Indiana – ceasefire. (Laughter.)

Now, I also understand there’s a mutual tentative agreement – a mutual tentative agreement to ease the situation in Taiz, which could perhaps lead to the opening of humanitarian corridors. I, of course, look forward to reviewing all the details and monitoring compliance with the agreement from all parties, including the Saudis and Emiratis. But these are – these are really positive developments.

So I’m going to conclude here, blessedly for some of you. But I am so thankful for this opportunity that CSIS has given me, so thank you for hosting this event. I want to thank all of you for attending and for your interest in this very important topic.

Executive Director Beasley, thank you again for coming, for your leadership. I look forward to your comments.

Good evening to all. Thanks again. God bless. (Applause.)

MS. FLOWERS: Thank you, Senator Young.

I really appreciate the connection that you made between food and security and instability, which is something that we look at a lot here. I also appreciate your reminding us that this is about real human beings as much as it is about our national security.

As you mentioned, his dedication to service is very admirable – I’m talking about David Beasley, who I know have the pleasure to introduce. David is the executive director of the United Nations World Food Programme, or many of us know as WFP. He’s formerly the governor of South Carolina, and he merges his passion and his political savvy to ensure that an agency like WFP has the resources and the strategic direction that it needs to address and end hunger around the globe. His public service and business career spans four decades. And we’re so grateful that he is the leading
force behind such a critical agency, especially right now with global hunger numbers rising and the unprecedented humanitarian crisis that we’re facing today because of manmade crises.

He also – I was asking him before for his travel trips. He travels about 75 percent of the time. He spends a majority of his life talking to people who have been affected by war-torn areas and talking to donors to help them understand these crises. And that is one reason of many that we are so glad that he was able to build this into his schedule today to talk to us about this from his perspective.

David? (Applause.)

DAVID BEASLEY: Kimberly, thank you very much, and thank you for, everybody, putting this together.

And Senator Young has been a great friend not just to me personally, but to the American people and to people that are suffering, especially in Yemen. And the collaboration that we’ve been able to have has just been remarkable. And I’ll tell you – and I’ve been hard on the media in the last year because there’s so much suffering going on in the world, but when you turn on the news, if it’s CNN, it’s Trump, Trump, Trump, Trump, Trump; if it’s Fox, it’s Trump, Trump, Trump, Trump, Trump; and if it’s European television, it’s Brexit, Brexit, Brexit, Brexit. (Laughter.) You know, and no matter how you feel about those issues or those – about the president, the world’s not hearing about the tragedies that are taking place.

What is really striking for the first time in decades is the world’s severe hunger rate is spiking upwards. Just in two years, the severe hunger rate – these are the people on the brink of starvation – has risen from 80 (million) to 124 million. That’s before the new numbers just came out in Yemen.

We were feeding/assisting about 8 million people on any given day in Yemen as of weeks ago, but a new report has just come out saying that it has now doubled to 16 million people. These are not 16 million people that are going to bed hungry; these are 16 million people that are literally marching toward the brink of starvation.

Now, what you’ve got to ask today is: What’s happened in the war in the last few months that’s caused that spike? Because there really hasn’t been much difference in the campaign of the war in the last few months than the previous 12 months. So what’s happening now? And this is a very serious question, and I’m going to delve into some of these issues, and we’ll get into them even deeper a little bit later.

But here’s what’s happening. In the last three months, the increase has gone up 3.6 million. In the last 30 days, it’s gone up 1.6 million. Why? There’s no liquidity in the economy. Everybody has exhausted their resources. Eight million livelihoods out of population of 29 (million) to 30 million people have lost their livelihoods. At one point, 2 million civil servants have received almost no pay in the past couple of years and they support 8 million people with family members, et cetera. And guess what? Ninety percent of all of their supplies and food comes from imports. And no one wants to go in debt anymore with Yemen business men and women that may distributors of commercial commodities and supplies. There’s no money. There’s no jobs.

You see, we were supporting 7 (million) to 8 million people and the normal commerce was at least strong enough to maintain support for the rest of the Yemeni people. But now there’s a total collapse. But this is a country whose poverty was already striking before the war began. The rial has
been deteriorating for the past 20 years. It was 70-to-one 20 years ago. Let’s say the day before the war it was 215-to-one. I’m being technical here, but it’s important to understand the technical dynamics of what’s taking place.

When I was on the ground in Yemen just a few weeks ago – and I didn’t just fly into Sa’dah and do a picture or Aden. I went into the heart of Syria and we were on the road for hours upon hours in the war zones, going through the checkpoints down to the Hodeidah Port, which we’ll talk about. But when I was there, the rial was then at 720-to-one. You could imagine a mother, who may have a little bit of money, who goes to the store finding that just a little pack of butter beans is now up three, four times what it was, if there’s any available at all. So it is a calamity.

So now there’s a two-tiered requirement, two pillars that are absolutely necessary to save lives of people inside of Yemen, notwithstanding ending the war. One is there must be a humanitarian response. We’re spending about a hundred million dollars per month to feed about 8 million people. We will get into the access issues in itself. But now we need to scale up to 12 million. That’s going to be 150 (million dollars) to $160 million per month.

But what about the rest of the people? Well, we’re not going to be able to address the rest of the country by humanitarian response alone, so there’s going to have to be an injection of liquidity. That needs to be determined how and the question next is, how much? Approximately 200 million U.S. dollars will be required to be injected into the economy on a monthly basis to bring the rial back down at least to a moderate level of 450-to-one that will give some semblance of economic activity.

Now, I was just in Yemen, but Senator Young remembers and many of you in this room remember a year ago I was actually pretty brutal on international television, whether it was CNN or CBS “60 Minutes” about the Saudis and the coalition and when they blockaded the Hodeidah Port, which 70 percent of all commodities goes through that port alone because that port is a critical lifeline to the people of Yemen. So when that blockade took place, it was absolutely just horrific. And coupled with the fact that the Saudis weren’t putting up any humanitarian dollars, it was just quite disturbing to me, so I was very vocal.

And because of friends like Senator Young and others, we were able to penetrate the news of only Trump or Brexit and the American people heard the message and responded. And guess what? We got the blockade removed. And the coalition stepped up with about $450 million for the World Food Programme alone. And as one of my senator friends, when asked about the Saudis, what can we do with Governor Beasley, he says there’s only one thing you can do and that’s do what’s right. If you do what’s right, then that’ll take care of him.

Well, the Houthis were so excited when I was jumping on the backs of the Saudis, as you can imagine. And I told the Houthis when I was on the ground with them inside Sana’a, as well as in Hodeidah, I said let me tell you this. I am not jumping on the Saudis’ back because I like you. The day you cross this red line with me, I’ll be on your back. So four weeks ago when I was in Hodeidah, three-and-a-half, four weeks ago, I met with the different – there are different factions of Houthis. Let me be very clear. It’s not a simple – they’re almost like Southerners, you know? They kind of come together when they need to. (Laughter.) Otherwise, they want the federal government and everybody to stay out of their lives, you know? (Laughter.)

But the Houthis have been a problem for us for access because they control most of the access areas throughout the countryside, where most of the people live. So as I met with them I said: Let me
be very clear. I am going to tell the world that unless you give us the access we need that these children dying are a result of you. And I will bifurcate the Houthis into two general groups: Those Houthis that are really responding and trying to actually work with us and provide better access – and that does not just mean geographic. It means equipment. It means people.

Because we’re going to have to scale up from the outside 50-60 internationals to come in with the right people, and then the nationals, in terms of scaling from 8 million to 12 million people. I mean, that’s just not an easy task to do. We need equipment. We need many different things. We need biometrics. We need to make certain that the food and all the money we supply get into the hands of the right people. And so one part of the Houthis are actually stating to respond a little bit. A year ago they didn’t care what the press said. They care now, because they want an agreement. Quite frankly, I saw an exhaustion from all parties that I talked to.

But there’s this other group of Houthis, hardliners, that honestly I don’t think they care what happens. And that’s a problem. The UAE – let me say very frankly, I have sat down with the leadership of the UAE for hours upon hours in the past few months and had extensive conversations. And their response has been remarkable in working with us, and not just providing funds but they actually called to say: Is there anything that we’re not doing right, or anything we can do better? I can’t begin to tell you – now, you can talk about the war’s a different issue. It’s a political issue.

Obviously what we want is the war to end. What we’re doing is providing, in my opinion, the truth about the consequences of this war, the realities on the ground, and then let the people, through the political leaders, make the decision about what needs to be done. But children are dying in this country at a rate of about one – about even 10 to 11 minutes, a child is dying in this country. This is strictly a manmade conflict. It’s heartbreaking. These are not, as Senator Young and Kimberly were saying, just numbers. I can tell you about the little girls and the little boys that I was in the hospital with just a few weeks ago. These are not isolated cases.

Let me just give you a couple real quick stories. One was when I was in the room with two or three children, and the administrator, who’s also the doctor, I said: How many children are you getting like this a day? And he said, about 50. And I said, well, how many can you accommodate in the hospital? He said, about 20. I said, what do you do with the other 30? He said, we send them home to die. And I remember one little child as I walked in, and I’ve been – I’m a father of four. And I’ve had four little children growing up. And, you know, when I walked in, there were two little feet sticking out a little blanket. And I thought I would tickle the little feet and get a little smile on the face. It was like tickling a ghost.

One little boy that I spoke with and looked at and talked with his mother, who had traveled 300 kilometers through warfronts and checkpoints, because she had no access hardly to anything, only to get there to see her child die. This little boy died two days later after I left, skin and bones. I could keep going on with story after story. It’s one of the few times – you know, I like to think I’m kind a tough guy. And I tell you, it’s not just seeing one child that breaks your heart, and that does, it’s the volume – the sheer volume, because these are little girls and little boys. And they could be your little girl and your little boy. And they deserve better than this. And it’s wrong.

So I’m hoping that this beginning of the peace process will be the march towards the finality of the war. We are prepared at the World Food Programme with regards to Hodeidah to manage the port if necessary. We’ve agreed, as many of you are seeing, all sides have said that they will allow only one entity to run the port, and that’s us. Obviously, we don’t want to do that, but we know how to do that.
We will do that, for the good of the cause and to move the path forward. But we’ll see. We have a lot of details to work out, and we’re in the process of working through those details as we speak. But this is a war that needs to come to an end. But until it comes to an end, it’s critical that we have the access and the funds we need because these children are not any longer just impacted for the next few years. You’ve got an entire generation of children that are stunted, that have been absolutely devastated.

And I can tell you is when you feel 90-something million people as we do on any given day, you learn a lot about what’s going on in the neighborhood and I could absolutely guarantee you this because I’ve heard more mothers tell me, Mr. Beasley, my husband didn’t want to join al-Qaida but we didn’t have any food for our little girl; what were we to do.

You see, when the United States steps up and provides that relief, the World Food Programme – we’re the first line of offense and defense against Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, al-Qaida, ISIS, and I could keep going on from country to country to country.

And so it’s great to be here. Let me just stop right here. I think we’re going to answer some questions. But Senator Young has been a great ally fighting the cause, bringing to the attention not just of the world but the American people what the reality is on the ground and that reality – you know, there are times when you watch the news media and you say, oh, they’re just sensationalized – it can’t be that bad, and there are times when I can assure you it’s worse than that and this is one of those times.

So thank you. (Applause.)

MS. FLOWERS: We don’t have a lot of time so I’m going to jump right into a few questions. I think my first question is going to be around the peace talks in Sweden.

Senator Young, you specifically addressed it already and said you were very pleased and let’s see what happens. My question to you, David – sorry, obviously call you Governor Beasley, which is fine, too. David, are you – how do you feel about the talks that happened? Are you feeling optimistic? Do you think it will hold? Or do you see the writing on the wall and that this may do a ceasefire around Hodeidah, but not elsewhere? What are your thoughts about what happened this week?

MR. BEASLEY: I think it’s a great first step forward. I mean, right now you’ve got to take anything you can get, and I think we’re optimistic. There’s a lot of details that have got to be worked through in each of these areas, whether it’s prisoner exchange or Taiz or particularly the port in Hodeidah itself, but it is a beginning of the process. I think the international community in every way it can needs to continue to bear down upon all parties involved on all sides of the conflict to move this ball forward. I’m sure there’ll be some snafus here and there. But we got to – we got to be reasonable. We got to keep pressing forward and I think on the humanitarian side we’ve got to continue to be outspoken about the realities on the ground because I think it’s the humanitarian tragedies, the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, as Senator Young was saying. I think as long as the people around the world know how bad it is, I think they will continue to pressure all parties to end this war in such a way that the people in Yemen have a future.

MS. FLOWERS: Mmm hmm. You just came off what you called a significant victory. Congratulations for –

SEN. YOUNG: Thank you.
MS. FLOWERS: – what happened today and I know very much of that has to do with your leadership and your voice. My question is what about the House and what about the 90 new members of Congress that are coming to this city in a month? Does that present an opportunity?

SEN. YOUNG: It does.

MS. FLOWERS: A challenge?

SEN. YOUNG: Yeah.

MS. FLOWERS: How do you feel about the conversations that are happening in the House and the conversations that will be happening next month with new leaders?

SEN. YOUNG: So I had some conversations today with well-placed Republicans in the House – friends of mine – people I’ve served with on the Armed Services Committee, people I’ve served with in other committees, and I’m trying to make sense of what occurred over there.

Now, I know procedurally what occurred. There was a vote provision in the Rules Committee that foreclosed any further – essentially, any further debate or action with respect to this humanitarian crisis and national security threat in Yemen from here until next Congress. I think it was ill advised. I made that clear, and but let’s look prospectively and let’s set aside politics and think positively. We have a number of fresh new faces coming into Congress, people who will be looking to make a difference, looking to identify issues that they can champion back home, things that they can do to really make a significant difference in the world.

What more significant could they do than become actively involved in the worst humanitarian crisis in the world and this terrorist threat that also involves the country of Iran. So I think this new crop of individuals, hopefully they will be looking to do what I’ve tried to do working with a number of my partners in the Senate on both sides of the aisle, which is provide this administration with as much leverage as possible so that future negotiations with our Saudi partners are constructive; so the Saudis are incentivized, when they it down to negotiate in Sweden or perhaps elsewhere – negotiate in good faith; and then press this administration to use all this leverage to good effect.

MS. FLOWERS: This might only be a question for you, although I’m interested to see if you want to respond. Both of you – I know all three of us talk a lot about manmade crises, right? That’s why we’re in – have so many protracted conflicts and why there is such a great humanitarian need today. And an underlying, you know, cause of that is fighting terrorism. So a question I have is how, as a policymaker, do you reconcile this need to fight terrorism, this need to implement a national security strategy with the inevitable human suffering that comes from war?

SEN. YOUNG: Oh, I think the best thing we can do is to avoid these situations altogether. You know, General McMaster, when he put together – along with the various departments of government – this national security strategy, this Trump administration national security strategy, talked a lot about preclusive defense; that is, avoiding conflicts altogether, consolidating gains when we do have our troops on the ground in particular geographies.

Let’s not be penny-wise and pound-foolish. If we can invest on the front end of making sure that people have enough food in their belly, supporting important initiatives like the one that David has
led at the World Food Programme, then we can prevent radicalization. We can prevent states from falling further into dysfunction, prevent state sponsors of terror from perpetuating their nefarious activities in other geographies and among other populations, and further threatening the American people. So I think we need to place a lot more emphasis on conflict avoidance, and that doesn’t come natural, I think, to all legislators.

I’m a U.S. Marine, so this focus on development assistance and diplomatic initiatives – though I did work for former chairman, Dick Lugar – is still somewhat new to me, but I’ve come to learn just how important it is. We can save lives, we can save treasure, and we can do good in the world all at the same time.

MS. FLOWERS: Yeah, amen to that. David, anything you want to add?

MR. BEASLEY: I mean, we’ve done the economic analytics, and we could tell you all day long the impact of war, and the costs, and the consequences. It’s about $14 trillion impact on the world today because of the economic impact from war. Now I could start breaking that down for you.

Now we can break it down also on the local level. Let me just give you an example. In Syria, for every 1 percent increase in hunger, there is a 2 percent increase in migration, and people don’t want to leave. They will move three, four times before they will finally leave their country.

For us to support a Syrian in Syria is about 50 cents; that same Syrian in Berlin or Brussels for a total humanitarian package is 50 euros per day. And they don’t want to be there. It doesn’t matter whether Syria, or Niger, or Mali, or Guatemala, or Honduras. We can either react afterwards and it will cost us a hundred-fold more because I can assure the people in those countries are no different than the people in our country. They love their homeland; they don’t want to leave. But they want to take care of their children, and if they don’t have food security, they will do whatever it takes.

And when ISIS moved out of Syria, by and large, let me tell you – they were going strategically into certain locations, and primarily into the greater Sahara region. They’re a partner with Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, and al-Qaeda to destabilize that entire region of 500 million people, from the Red Sea to the Atlantic. And they’re taking advantage of fragile environments and governments, so destabilization is their pride.

When we can come in with strategic food security programs, I can assure you it’s amazing what happens. And I’m not talking about handing out just food – food for us, it creates stability, sustainability. The migration rate drops. Teen pregnancies drops. Marriage rates of 12- and 13-year-olds drops. Conflict between farmers and herders drops. Recruitment by ISIS or Boko Haram, depending on what area you’re talking about, drops. You’re going to pay for it one way or the other. If you’re not going to do it out the goodness of your heart, then you better do it out of your national security interests.

And so Senator Young is right on line. I come from a conservative side, and I can tell you every conservative I’ve taken to the field with me they come back saying, wow, this is what we need to be doing. So one thing I do love and admire, I think Senator Young will tell you, they might be fighting down there on everything else, the Democrats and Republicans, when it comes to food security it’s amazing.

SEN. YOUNG: Yeah, we lock arms on this.
MR. BEASLEY: It is a beautiful thing. I mean, we use food as a weapon of peace. And it works in Congress, too. (Laughter.)

SEN. YOUNG: And that’s really something.

MS. FLOWERS: Yeah, it is. Let’s talk specifically about famine. One is, I know there’s been the recent ICP analyses. And we don’t have to get into too many details of that, but how in such a fragile context – like Yemen – are we able to get accurate metrics to try to reach that classification? And on top of that, what if famine – of course, we don’t want that, right? Your job is help to make sure that doesn’t happen. But if a famine is declared, because we’ve been talking about this for two years, you know, it’s on the brink of famine, does that help political pressures?

MR. BEASLEY: Unfortunately, it does. But it shouldn’t be like that, because once you’ve reached famine it’s too late. And this is where we don’t need to be technical because you’ve got 16 million people on the brink of starvation. When you look at the technical definition of famine, you know, it’s real technical. And so 16 million people on the brink of starvation. A child dying every 10 to 11 minutes. What else do you need to know? And so what I – in assuming this role, what we’re facing, as Senator Young was saying, Somalia, South Sudan, northeast Nigeria and Yemen, four countries facing famine, we were able to avert famine because of the support from the United States.

And I’ll never forget it, because if you remember back two years ago President Trump was talking about zeroing out international aid. And I kept telling friends – I said, if we can just get the facts before him, he’ll support international aid, because he’ll get it. Well, the good news is I had a good backstop. My Republican and Democrat friends were saying no matter what happens they’ll be standing strong. But in fact, in the World Food Programme, our support from United States government has risen from 1.78 billion (dollars) when I arrived there to now $2.5 billion. And it’s making a difference. It’s allowed us to avert famine.

And one of the messages I got from Senator Young, Senator Lindsey Graham, Corker, as well as – well, not Pompeo that one time. It was Tillis’ office, but Trump was: all right, we’re not backing down, we’re stepping up; now you go tell our allies in Europe and otherwise to step up, too. And Germany has actually stepped up, several hundred more million dollars. The U.K. stepped up, a couple hundred more million dollars. And the rest of the world is responding. And so the United States continues to lead, in spite of what you may read, in the international aid community, and that’s because of leaders like Senator Young.

MS. FLOWERS: I know you have tight schedules, and so we unfortunately are not going to have time from the audience. But I do want to turn back to Senator Young to see if there’s any other final comments you want to make or any other points, you know, for people who are new to this topic or who are following it because of the recent both legislative victories, but also current news on this.

SEN. YOUNG: Well, I’m just so grateful to be up here on this day when Congress asserted our prerogatives with respect to foreign policy. This is what the American people expect. On this day, when I think we made a meaningful step with respect to addressing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, let’s hope that this lays a predicate. Let’s hope that this prefigures further action by Congress on this front so we can support the good efforts of, you know, Governor Beasley and all the folks out in the field working for these international NGOs, all of our ambassadors and folks at the State Department.
I think over the years we have overmilitarized our foreign policy. And this is an object lesson in where we can sort of right the course and continue to fully fund our military, peace through strength, but also recognize we have other instruments of national power. Our alliance system, yes, that’s one of those important resources we need to continue to cultivate. Our values, which is certainly an instrument of power that needs to be brought to bear. And then this entire development and diplomatic enterprise. And we just need to nurture and cultivate and encourage that.

And rest assured I – working with my colleagues Republican and Democrat alike, and other stakeholders including CSIS – will continue to fight on this front. So thanks for this opportunity.

MS. FLOWERS: Of course. Any final words?

MR. BEASLEY: It’s great to be here, I think to bring a greater depth of understanding of what’s taking place. I think if I could ask you to continue to pray for the leaders around the world on this issue, but also keep in mind these little girls and these little boys. It’s tragic. As someone said, we’re are on the verge of catastrophe; I said, no, we’re not either. We’re well beyond the verge. We’re in the middle of a catastrophe. And we need to get – we need to get out of it. That’s all.

MS. FLOWERS: Thank you both –

SEN. YOUNG: Thank you.

MS. FLOWERS: – for your leadership, your generous time, and your continue efforts on this, very much. (Applause.)

(END)