GLOBAL TRENDS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

A BACKGROUND PAPER
FOR STUDENT DELEGATES
TO THE
THIRTY-FOURTH ANNUAL
WORLD AFFAIRS INSTITUTE

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
NOVEMBER 10, 2004
Introduction

Terrorism... Anti-Americanism... Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction... HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa... Youth boom in the developing world... Religion and violence... Water shortages in the Middle East... Rising oil prices... Environmental degradation... New developments in technology and scientific research... U.S. jobs outsourced to India... China’s growing economy... Civil conflict... Challenges to the United Nations and other international institutions....

With so many issues competing for policy attention, U.S. decision-makers must equip themselves with the knowledge to understand the nation’s vital interests in the context of global trends and act to ensure U.S. credibility, legitimacy, and influence within the world. How the U.S. addresses the global challenges of the 21st century will determine the future of its superpower status and shape U.S. relations with its allies, rivals, and enemies.

To understand the nature of these challenges, it is important to examine those broad trends that will shape the world of the future and influence U.S. policy. These trends include shifting demographic patterns, the state of natural resources and the environment, developments in science and technology, and the effects of the global economy and globalization.

These trends are interrelated. Demographic change, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and resource strains collectively pose a severe threat to societal structure and stability. Economic disparities can also be a destabilizing force as globalization provides wealth and opportunity to some while excluding and alienating others. These trends are particularly strong in certain regions of the world, but have a global impact on long-term security and stability.

Many countries do not have the resources to plan for and respond to rapid change. The inability of states to cope with such change may result in popular resentment toward the government, leading to civil conflict. Gaps in national resources often lead to increased involvement of international organizations, private corporations, and non-governmental agencies. The roles of non-state actors have expanded significantly—for both good and ill—and they have become key players in understanding both opportunities and threats. In worst-case scenarios, where little or no support was available, weak or failed states have become havens for terrorist groups and criminal networks that threaten global stability. Such potential threats require today’s world leaders and future generations to look ahead and develop solutions to prepare for global trends and challenges of the 21st century.

As the leading world power, and in its own national interest, the U.S. bears a burden and responsibility to consider these obstacles to global stability and prosperity. U.S. foreign policy priorities will inevitably shape international relations for years to come. The goal of this paper is to discuss some key global trends, their resulting implications for international relations, and the role of the U.S. in addressing potential conflicts.

Demographics

According to the Population Reference Bureau, an organization providing information on U.S. and world population trends, the world’s population is projected to increase from 6.4 billion in 2004 to 9 billion in 2050. The Seven Revolutions Project, developed by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington, DC-based think tank, explains that the developing world is the site of most of this growth, outpacing the developed world. “Eight countries—Bangladesh, China, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the United States, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—will account for one half of all world population growth through 2050.” Over half of the world’s population currently resides in Asia, primarily in highly populated China and India. High population growth provides labor resources to fuel the rapidly expanding economies of these two countries. It also creates strains on infrastructure, government services such as education and health care, and natural resource materials required for a growing economy. Such pressure can result in government dissatisfaction, and in many countries this discontent is highly destabilizing.

A related key trend is urbanization. As populations grow, people migrate from rural areas—where there is less and less work—to the cities, in search of education, employment, and greater opportunity. In China, this migration flow numbers in the tens of millions of people each year, and a similar pattern is emerging in India as educational and professional opportunities expand, especially in the information technology sector. This increases strains on infrastructure, education, health care, and government services. It also marks a cultural shift for those migrating populations, as people move out of a traditional village structure that they have known for generations and perhaps find themselves alone, poor, without job or home, among people with different values, and disillusioned when they do not find the opportunities that they expected. The resulting sense of alienation often becomes political discontent—fruit for radical groups who may also turn to violence.

Another demographic trend is changing age distributions, a trend that works differently in developed and developing countries. In the U.S., Western European countries, and Japan (and, soon, China, as well), populations are becoming older as birth rates decline and people live longer. In all of these countries, there is some form of “safety” net—such as Social Security and Medicare in the U.S.—to ensure that elderly populations have access to health care and other social services. As the balance between younger and older population shifts, there are fewer people to shoulder an increasing financial and social burden. This demographic shift also means that the number of people in the labor force in developed countries may actually decrease, as people retire at a rate faster than younger people join the workforce.

Within the developing world, the aging trend works in reverse—because of higher birth rates and lower life expectancy, populations are younger, with over 50
percent of the population in these countries typically under the age of 25. In this case, the burdens are much different. Each year, an increasing number of young people are entering a time in their lives in which they want education and work, but it may be very difficult to find either one. If they have access to education, it may be even more difficult to find the kind of work that they expect with such an education, since the economy may not be able to support employment for all these people. The potential is high that a significant population of young and restless people increasingly demand government solutions to the problems of rising unemployment and unsanitary living conditions in urbanized areas, products of the struggle to industrialize rapidly.

Because of this imbalance in demographic trends—older populations in the developed world, younger populations in the developing world seeking opportunity but not necessarily finding it at home—it is easy to see why there is such pressure for immigration into countries where the economy is expanding and opportunities are increasing. Of course, immigration is not always seen as a good thing. It brings diverse cultures into contact with one another—welcome to some, unwelcome to others. Although beyond the scope of this paper, immigration raises its own social, economic, and—in the wake of 9.11 in the U.S.—political and security issues, and serves as a sometimes locally visible reminder that the world is changing.

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**GLOBAL HEALTH AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY – THE ISSUE OF HIV/AIDS**

The worldwide HIV/AIDS epidemic reflects how demographic pressures, resource constraints, and health combine and become not only a humanitarian crisis but also something that both the Clinton and Bush administrations have characterized as an issue of global and national security.

Statistics about the spread and toll of the deadly disease are staggering. According to the AIDS Epidemic Update 2003, an annual United Nations report, “The global HIV/AIDS epidemic killed more than 3 million people in 2003, and an estimated 5 million acquired the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)— bringing to 40 million the number of people living with the virus around the world.” These numbers remain estimates, as experts contend that a large number of people throughout the world are unaware that they are carrying the virus, and are unknowingly spreading it to others.

Africa is undoubtedly the continent on which the virus’ effects have been the most economically, politically, and socially devastating, with over 3 million new HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa in 2003 alone, according to a recent Newsweek article by Geoffrey Cowley. HIV/AIDS has torn apart the social fabric in many areas, leading to instability and extreme anxiety. According to the National Intelligence Council’s December 2003 Commonwealth Conference: Focus on 2020, “Demography and disease, especially AIDS, coupled with poor governance, will continue to determine Africa’s future. By 2020 its population will be predominantly adolescent—50 percent under 15, including many orphans. The severe social consequences will include the breakdown of the stabilizing family structure, death of productive workers, increasing urbanization, and, consequently, grave strains on social services. Weak governance will exacerbate these problems.”

The global HIV/AIDS epidemic also has major economic consequences. The epidemic has immobilized a large portion of the population from all economic and employment sectors. According to the World Bank, about 14,000 new infections occur daily, and half of the new infections occur among people under the age of 25. Therefore, those most at-risk of contracting HIV/AIDS tend to be those of prime working age. The strain on families due to funerals, medical costs, and the burden of taking on children orphaned by the disease further paralyzes developing countries socially and economically. The threat of the spread of the epidemic is especially dangerous in the high population areas of China and India, and is also growing at an alarming rate in Russia. In China, for example, The Economist reported that even a leveling off of the epidemic at 2 percent of China’s women and 5 percent of its men would double the number of infected people worldwide.

There is no simple solution for dealing with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the problems are compounded by the lack of countries’ capacity to handle this problem on top of other challenges. Cowley highlights the difficulties of dispensing aid to those already infected, despite heavily subsidized foreign aid programs. “The trouble is, few of the countries winning those grants [for treatment programs] are ready to absorb them. Their health systems have withered under austerity plans imposed by foreign creditors. Doctors and nurses have left in droves to take private sector jobs or work in wealthier countries. And those left behind are overwhelmed and exhausted.”

Fortunately, numerous programs aimed at reducing transmission rates and treating victims have been met with varying degrees of success. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is one area of international concern where non-governmental and humanitarian agencies have been able to pick up some slack. The sheer scale of infection has prompted the development of grassroots organizations that ease the burden of doctors in administering care. Countries like Botswana, Uganda, Thailand, and Cambodia have succeeded in containing the disease, mainly through public health programs and the targeting of high-risk groups. The lack of women’s rights and cultural resistance, among other things, however, hinders the success of prevention campaigns in other countries.

Although the U.S. concern with HIV/AIDS involves a genuine interest in helping control a humanitarian disaster, such a destabilizing force must also be considered as a security threat. The security implications are summarized by a U.S. Institute of Peace study explaining that “the HIV/AIDS epidemic will simultaneously increase absolute and relative deprivation, increase perceptions of government ineptitude and illegitimacy, and erode state capacity. This equation will increase the probability of internal collective political violence against the state, or violence by the state against its own population, and thus increase the probability of state failure.” Though this quotation references the case of Zimbabwe specifically, the model of the path to state collapse can be applied to many of the nations worst hit by the epidemic. As will be examined, state failure is a threat to not only regional, but also global, stability.

In recognition of these potential threats, the U.S. has begun to provide new funds independent of the efforts of international organizations to assist with HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs. The Bush administration’s President’s Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS Relief (called the PEPFAR plan), while pouring $15 billion in aid into Sub-Saharan Africa, is controversial for its promotion of specific policies that may not fit with those countries’ strategies to fight the disease. Despite criticism of the PEPFAR plan, this financial commitment demonstrates that HIV/AIDS, along with other demographic concerns, is a global trend in need of immediate and consistent attention, given the inherent dimension of human suffering, combined with broader social ramifications and security concerns.
Closely tied to the problems of a demographic shift are the continuing depletion of natural resources and environmental degradation. The basic needs of the global population—food, water, and energy—each face shortages and distribution issues. Furthermore, the combination of technology, rapid industrial development, and lack of binding consensus and cooperation result in continued pollution and destruction of the environment. The choice between conservation and exploitation, therefore, has global consequences.

“Sustainable Development” has become a watchword of conservation and preservation efforts, adopted by both environmentalist groups and national governments when laying out efforts to maintain global environmental integrity. This concept emphasizes the need to maximize productive, healthy use of the environment while minimizing exploitation and waste of resources. In 1992, a major United Nations Conference on Environment and Development formulated Agenda 21, a document meant to encourage examination of the major issues and suggest productive courses of action. Chapter 5 of Agenda 21 outlines the link between demographic trends and sustainable development, claiming that they have a “synergistic relationship.”

The document further asserts that “[t]he growth of world population and production combined with unsustainable consumption patterns places increasingly severe stress on the life-supporting capacities of our planet.” Agenda 21 exemplifies the globally recognized need for all nations to provide for their populations without exhausting future resources. Also, because a healthy environment and access to adequate resources are global commodities, efforts to address these issues have developed, perhaps more than any other trend, a transnational character that leaves more room for the role of non-profit organizations, multinational corporations (MNCs), and monitoring groups. Assessments of population demands on resources vary from region to region, and nation to nation, and such assessments have considerable implications for the direction of international relations.

The main categories of resource distribution are food, water, energy, and the environment. While food productivity has grown worldwide due to improved methods and revolutionary technologies, distribution remains the core obstacle to providing adequate nutrition to millions of starving people. Poor national infrastructure, political instability, chronic poverty, repressive governments, and war (both internal and external) all result in malnourishment and famine, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Water presents a different dimension of the problem, as, unlike food, shortages are possible and likely in the near future. The National Intelligence Council’s Global Trends 2015 report predicts that in ten years nearly half the world’s population will live in “water-stressed” countries. In many areas, water is being used in an unsustainable way for agriculture (mostly in developing nations) while in other areas, despite advanced purification efforts, water pollution is the main problem (mostly in developed nations, though water unfit to drink is an enormous health hazard in developing nations). Already unstable regions, such as Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and northern China, that are water-stressed, could eventually be involved in the first armed national conflicts over water.

Energy itself is a dynamic and growing field with many promising developments in energy-efficient technologies. The availability and cost of energy, however, are inhibiting factors in the spread of sustainable energy policies among governments and industries. As the developing world attempts to “catch up” to developed nations, the demand for and price of natural gas and oil increases. The Persian Gulf region remains the principal source of oil, but it is also the focal point for much of the potentially explosive instability, tension, and conflict in the world.

Finally, environmental degradation, in the form of air and water pollution, land exploitation (deforestation, desertification, poor irrigation systems, etc.), and industrialization are increasingly familiar areas of discussion. The cost of these occurrences pose a serious global health risk in the form of greenhouse gas emissions (depletion of the ozone layer) and a more acute health risk in the developing world where industrial standards are more relaxed and health care systems are underdeveloped. Nevertheless, there has been a shift towards less energy-intensive economic development, with the development of service industries over manufacturing as seen in the technology booms of China and India. International agreements on environmental practices, such as the Kyoto Protocol, although rejected by the U.S., have encouraged discussion of these issues. The trend towards voluntary self-regulation of safe environmental practices and increasing concerns about the consequences of resource exploitation are both major issues for U.S. leaders to consider.

**Did You Know?**

- More than 60 percent of the increase in world primary energy demand between 2000 and 2030 will come from developing countries. These countries’ share of world demand will increase from 30 percent to 43 percent.
- To feed the eight billion people expected by 2025, the world will have to double food production.
- 1.7 billion people currently lack access to safe drinking water.
- Freshwater makes up only 2.5 percent of the Earth’s total volume of water. Three-quarters of this freshwater is frozen in the polar ice caps.

Source: *Seven Revolutions Project* from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, http://www.7revs.org.
Technological advancement is perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of the past century. Advances in health and communications technologies have revolutionized daily life around the world. Information technology (IT) is now accessible to individuals and non-state actors, and expands the reach and capabilities of governments. Advances in biotechnology and medicine have enhanced quality and length of life. The downside to these advances, however, is the growing disparity between technologically advanced countries and those that cannot afford to take advantage of the newest technologies. Also, the potential for nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare, and the use of technology by terrorist groups to expand illegal activities serves to highlight the dangers of technology “in the wrong hands.”

Information technology is one part of the overall advances in technology that play a significant role in the future of international relations. The Internet and improved global communications have empowered non-state actors from grass-roots humanitarian groups to transnational criminal and terrorist networks. IT also serves a crucial function in international commerce—the Internet provides direct contact between producers and consumers and is beginning to reach a broader range of people from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The expansion of the IT field also provides jobs for a growing class of specialists, high-tech workers, and entrepreneurs whom are trained and available worldwide.

Advances in biotechnology hold the potential for medical breakthroughs that could alleviate world suffering. Already, those in developed nations enjoy increased longevity and higher quality of life, and life expectancy generally worldwide is higher. The development of genetically modified crops (GMCs) could improve nutrition among the world’s one billion malnourished people, according to the Global Trends 2015 report. Of course, just as IT has a downside, biotechnology brings not only controversial new tools to the world but also biological and chemical weapons that can be manufactured under the noses of regulatory agencies. Advances in biotechnology also raise new moral and ethical questions regarding the nature of life itself and the limits one should respect in efforts to improve and extend life. Examples include issues of cloning and the debate over stem cell research.

In a report entitled, Assessing the Impact of Science and Technology Drivers in Regions, from the National Intelligence Council’s 2020 project (an update in progress of past Global Trends reports) concluded that culture, competence, capital, and control were the main variables that characterize the implementation of new technologies worldwide. These variables determine the level of success, failure, or danger of such technologies being introduced to different societies. Population pressures, societal make-up, and government stability strongly relate to these variables. Knowledge and understanding of these features is important to the U.S. in its role as prime producer and investor in technology.

Globalization and the Global Economy

“The networked global economy will be driven by rapid and largely unrestricted flows of information, ideas, cultural values, capital goods and services, and people: that is, globalization.” This description of globalization by the National Intelligence Council’s Global Trends 2015 report summarizes the forces that shape the global economy and create both opportunities and problems around the world. Globalization and the global economy are forces fueling both development and tension in the international realm. With the enhanced connections facilitated by globalization comes increased interdependence. National economies are increasingly affected by fluctuations in economies on the other side of the globe. Rising economic powers in Asia and the growth of independent multinational corporations complicate the global economic landscape. In a period of globalization, both money and information flow easily, almost without regard to national boundaries, with significant economic and political ramifications.

Globalization and growth of the global economy reflect changing international circumstances. Until recently, the nations known as the G8 (the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and Russia) dominated global economics as the most powerful industrialized countries. Nations such as India, China, Brazil, and South Africa are now becoming increasingly important economic players. China and India particularly have mobilized their populations to create competitive markets both in industrial and technological fields. Their ability to produce highly trained and highly educated workers has proved immensely rewarding. Developing nations are becoming increasingly involved with organizations such as the World Bank, International

Information Technology and Globalization at Work

“When the Indian industrial and technology conglomerate ITC started building a network of Internet-connected computers called ‘e-Choupals’ in farming villages in India’s rural state of Madhya Prades in 2001, soy farmers were suddenly able to check fair market prices for their crops. Some farmers began tracking soy futures on the Chicago Board of Trade, and soon most of them were bypassing local auction and markets and selling their crops directly to ITC for $6 more per ton than they previously received. The same ITC network enables farmers to buy seeds, fertilizers, and other materials directly, at considerable savings, as well as to purchase formerly unavailable soil-testing services. Today, the growing e-Choupal network reaches 1.8 million farmers, and ITC is receiving demands from rural farmers for new products and services—the beginning of consumer market power at the poorest level of Indian society.”

Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. With this participation comes new demands for fair trade practices and pressure on the U.S. to allow for more global market integration, although the political clout of the U.S. as an independent economic entity is still far-reaching and influential.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- The global economy has skyrocketed to $47 trillion, over four times the level in 1975, and is expected to continue to grow at the average annual rate of 3.6 percent or higher.
- The accumulated wealth of the 225 richest individuals in the world is equivalent to the combined annual revenue of 2.7 billion people at the bottom of the global income ladder.
- A recent World Bank report documents how those countries that opened their economies—the “new globalizers”—experienced a 5 percent increase per year per capita GDP (gross domestic product) relative to non-globalizers.
- Revenues of the Wal-Mart Corporation in 2002 totaled $246 billion, placing it significantly ahead of the entire GNI (gross national income) of Sweden (with a GNI of $229 billion) and making it the 19th largest economic entity in the world.

Source: Seven Revolutions Project from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, http://www.7revs.org.

The concentration on attracting direct foreign investment, privatization, and investing in advanced technologies such as computers, pharmaceuticals, and aviation, has paid dividends. According to the National Intelligence Council, economic growth is expected to double average per capita income in South Asia in the next 15 years, amid admittedly widespread poverty. Many U.S. corporations, in fact, have relocated capital and resources to the region in the form of offshoring or outsourcing, because they can employ highly skilled professionals for less pay than at home. Outsourcing has provoked controversy in the U.S. Its merits and disadvantages, as well as the impact of the issue in the long term, have become subjects of heated debate.

Sandra Polaski, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, explains how outsourcing has become a major issue because of changes in the availability of workers worldwide. She states, “There is currently a global surplus of workers. It is primarily the result of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the socialist economic system. Two global economic systems—with very separate labor forces, trade patterns, and investment pools—merged into one. The labor force of the formerly socialist economies in Russia, China, and Eastern Europe is being slowly incorporated into the global production system. This is also true of workers in countries like India that were more in the socialist sphere than in the capitalist sphere.... At the same time, the integration of the two formerly separate economic blocs has not brought a proportional increase of capital for investment in the new global system.... The scale of the labor supply shock is unlike anything experienced before.

These changes have brought the two largest countries in the world, China and India, fully into the global production system, along with hundreds of millions of workers in other formerly socialist countries. To put the size of the shock in perspective, if all U.S. jobs were moved to China, there would still be surplus labor in China.”

A recent article in The Economist suggests that although outsourcing, or offshoring, is serious and controversial issue with potentially damaging effects on the U.S. economy, it is not as extensive a trend as it appears. The article explains that “outsourcing abroad is too small to matter much. One of the most popularly cited estimates, by Forrester Research, is that 3.4 million jobs will be outsourced by 2015. That may sound enormous, but it implies an annual outflow of only 0.5 percent of the jobs in the industries affected. In an average year, the American economy destroys some 30 million jobs and creates slightly more, dwarfing the effects of offshoring.”

The private sector realizes not only the potential advantage of cheaper labor in developing countries, but also the potential profit in foreign markets. MNCs have penetrated many developing countries, creating an international consumer culture. This, in addition to the constantly growing body of trade agreements and treaties between nations, leads to an international economic dynamic that fosters interdependence. Crisis in one region can have global economic repercussions. Economic interests and the protection of U.S. business operations abroad, are therefore reasons the U.S. must be aware of wars, ethnic strife, and rising regional institutions seeking to tip the balance of economic power. Even as some developing countries are managing to catch up, the gap between rich and poor nations, and the wealth and poverty gap within nations is increasing as well. The globalization of labor markets has the power to change political and social status of previously unrecognized segments of society. This source of national and social strife, while empowering for human rights causes, is another potentially destabilizing force.
The great paradox of globalization is that it has the potential for creating substantial opportunities for the world by advancing prosperity, promoting more open societies, and helping create opportunities for peace and stability in many of the world’s troubled regions—and that it also has the potential for destabilizing international relations, widening resource gaps between rich and poor, and making it more difficult for the United States to exercise its power throughout the world. As the National Intelligence Council’s Global Trends 2015 report warns, “Those feeling left behind will face deepening economic stagnation, political instability, and cultural alienation.”

Each of the trends discussed previously has the potential to contribute positively to U.S. security and prosperity. Significant youth populations in the developing world could provide a burst of energy in the form of new labor markets to help stagnant economies at home and abroad. Scientific and technological advances could assist conservation efforts to develop creative responses to the world’s resource limitations, as well as improve treatment and prevention methods for diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Such advances would require not only U.S. leadership and resources as the world’s superpower, strongest economy, and leader in research and development, but also the sustained commitment of other governments and international organizations.

Although such optimistic goals are not completely out of reach, a rapidly changing international environment and a lack of cohesive cooperation in many areas makes attainment of them unlikely in the near future. The international system is still searching for ways to manage conflict in a changed environment. The following sections of this background paper focus on growing threats to the United States and the international community—specifically, the threats of weak and failed states, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—all threats that will likely become more prevalent as a result of many of the trends discussed in this paper.

**The Threat of Weak and Failed States**

“Terrorists training at bases in Afghanistan and Somalia. Transnational crime networks putting down roots in Myanmar/Burma and Central Asia. Poverty, disease, and humanitarian emergencies overwhelming governments in Haiti and Central Africa. A common thread runs through these disparate crises that form the fundamental foreign policy and security challenges of our time. These crises originate in, spread to, and disproportionately affect developing countries where governments lack the capacity, and sometimes the will, to respond. In the most extreme cases, these states have completely failed, as in Afghanistan, Haiti, or Somalia. In many others, states are not failed but weak. Governments are unable to do the things that their own citizens and the international community expect from them: protecting people from internal and external threats, delivering basic health services and education, and providing institutions that respond to the legitimate demands and needs of the population. These weak and failed states matter to American security, American values, and the prospects for global economic growth upon which the American economy depends.”

The above quote, from a report entitled, On the Brink: Weak States and U.S. National Security, from the Center for Global Development, suggests that the capacity of national governments to deal with instability is of immense concern. A major challenge for the U.S. and the international community is how to manage conflict in a world being changed by demographics, resource limitations, technology, and globalization. Policymakers are focusing more on how nations govern themselves, maintain legitimacy, and provide services and protection for their citizens.

During the Cold War both the U.S. and the Soviet Union looked at the “Third World” through the lens of Cold War conflict and competition. Following the Cold War, many of the conflicts in the developing world resurfaced as the Soviet Union disappeared and the U.S. focused its foreign policy on managing the end of the Cold War. In the 1990s, the U.S. found itself involved in several local conflicts, such as in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. It was not until the late 1990s, however, that policymakers began to see these conflicts as part of a broader pattern of failed and failing states. After 9.11, these issues took on even more significance.

A clear example is Afghanistan. In the late 1970s, Afghanistan’s communist regime was supported by the Soviet Union. In response, the United States funded groups in opposition to the government. The Soviet Army responded by occupying the country for ten years until the end of the Cold War. A power vacuum resulted when both superpowers left at the end of the Cold War. Afghanistan devolved into anarchy. Eventually the radical Islamic regime of the Taliban took over, which allowed fundamentalist Islamic terrorists to use Afghanistan as a base of operations from which they carried out the attacks of September 11, 2001. As a result of 9.11, the U.S., with the support of the international community, removed the Taliban regime and, today, finds itself carrying much of the burden of rebuilding what was once a failing state into a stable and productive society.

The example of Afghanistan echoes in other places as well. In Somalia, the country experienced a civil war in the early 1990s, and until recently was described as not having a functioning government—some saw it as a possible haven for terrorist activity. Recently, with the selection of a new national leader, some are hopeful that the situation will improve. Nearby, Sudan continues to suffer from a twenty-year long civil conflict, mostly due to ethnic and religious tensions, with a recent conflict in the
nation’s western Darfur region, which the U.S. and other governments have characterized as “genocide.” Elsewhere in East Africa in the 1990s, refugees flowing into neighboring countries as a result of civil conflict also had a destabilizing effect, straining limited resources and fueling civil strife, proving that instability in one country can spill over into another.

According to the Center for Global Development’s aforementioned report, “spillover effects—from conflict, disease, and economic collapse—put neighboring governments and peoples at risk. Illicit transnational networks, particularly terrorist and criminal groups, target weak and failed states for their activities. Regional insecurity is heightened when major powers in the developing world, such as Nigeria or Indonesia, come under stress. Global economic effects come into play where significant energy-producing states, regional economic powers, and states key to trade negotiations are weak. Finally, the human costs of state failure—when governments cannot or will not meet the real needs of their citizens—challenge American values and moral leadership around the globe. For these reasons, weak and failed states pose a 21st century threat that requires institutions and engagement renewed for the 21st century. In short, destabilizing trends not only can affect individual states, but also entire regions, making these challenges more difficult to deal with by the international community.

**COMBATTING THE PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION**

A major security challenge since the end of the Cold War has been the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). The growing threat of terrorism has made that challenge even more urgent, given the possibility that terrorist groups as well as rogue nations could gain control of WMDs.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the U.S. managed their nuclear standoff through a phenomenon called “mutually assured destruction” (MAD)—neither had an incentive to use nuclear weapons against the other.

**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM—A CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF NON-STATE ACTORS**

On September 11, 2001, the most devastating attack on American civilians in U.S. history was launched not by a nation but by a group of individuals working outside of the traditional state system. In places like Bali, Madrid, Baghdad, and Beslan, terrorist attacks have killed more innocent people, and in the aftermath of such attacks there has been a great deal of discussion about the root causes of terrorism. For what reasons would people choose to plan and execute such horrific attacks against innocent civilians?

To some extent, the growth of global terrorism represents the “dark side” of globalization. The same kinds of technological advances that allow corporations to operate globally, communicate in a global network, and conduct global financial transactions also allow terrorist organizations to function independent of states or national institutions.

In some ways terrorism represents a reaction to the pressures of globalization. The global trends mentioned in this paper, such as demographic changes, energy issues and environmental degradation, disparities in the availability of new technology and scientific advances, and the impact of a globalized economy are also part of the reasons that some people have been drawn to extreme theories and solutions in order to deal with the hardships of their everyday lives. Governments throughout the world must understand how terrorists recruit individuals into their organizations and address issues that feed recruitment.

In the wake of the attacks in Beslan, Russia, a September 13, 2004 report from the Associated Press described how Russian President Vladimir Putin perceived the underlying issues, beyond the political issue of Chechnya, that had contributed to the horrifying hostage crisis. Putin linked terrorism in the North Caucasus region to low living standards, growing unemployment, and substandard education. The report quoted Putin as saying that because of these reasons, the region “is a rich, fertile ground for the growth of extremist propaganda and the recruitment of new supporters of terror.”

Each of these trends is highly visible throughout the Middle East region as well. The Middle East is an area of significant population growth—throughout the Arab world and Iran people under 15 years old typically make up 40 percent or more of the population. Recently, fluctuations in oil prices have affected many of these countries’ economies, and have caused a steady increase in unemployment and decreases in wages. As a result, people are often poor, hungry, and have more idle time. Many see globalization as unfair to their society because they do not see concrete benefits. Many of these countries have authoritarian regimes and high levels of corruption. In these countries, people have no opportunity within the system to voice their frustration and discontent. The slow pace of political and economic reform in their countries remains an obstacle to addressing their unsustainable conditions.

In large measure because of opposition to their own governments, many radical groups have turned to terrorist activities. Some have focused their attacks on local authorities to deal with their own issues; others have broadened their attacks against countries—like the United States—who are seen as supporting corrupt governments they oppose; others have expanded their attacks such that they are directed against the symbols of globalization, which they equate with America or at least Western influences.
because of the high probability that a nuclear exchange would destroy both of them (and the rest of the world). In the post-Cold War period, however, a threat to annihilate a “rogue state” or a terrorist group may not be credible, and the damage to the U.S. (or other societies) from a WMD attack would be significantly more lethal and devastating than the attack of 9/11.

Nuclear weapons are not the only type of WMDs. While the creation of a secret nuclear program can prove incredibly daunting, chemical and biological weapons can be produced far more easily. Weapons components for chemical and biological weapons may be available through completely legal channels, utilizing the ease and speed of the global economy. Facilities to produce legal pharmaceuticals or fertilizers can also be used to produce biological or chemical weapons. Although these weapons may be produced relatively easily, their transportation and dissemination can still prove difficult.

During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union stockpiled all three types of WMDs, but both superpowers shared an interest in stemming their proliferation to others. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) signed in 1968, the Biological Weapons Convention signed in 1972, and the Chemical Weapons Convention signed in 1993 all represented attempts—however imperfect—to place international controls on these weapons. The end of the Cold War hardly meant the end of either the expertise or the materials to make these weapons, and it remains a major policy objective of the U.S. government to work with Russia to ensure both that these materials are under control and that expert scientists are not selling their knowledge to rogue states or terrorist organizations.

While the reasons that states acquire or seek to acquire WMDs vary, at one level it represents a desire to provide for a perceived security need. Today, in addition to the five “nuclear weapons states” recognized by the NPT—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China—Israel, India, and Pakistan maintain nuclear capabilities, and none of these has signed the NPT. In addition, North Korea—a signatory to the NPT but who has since rejected it—is believed to have a small number of weapons. Iran, according to Miriam Rajkumar of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is believed to be on the fence, while maintaining the option to develop a weapon. And Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, was known to be developing a nuclear weapons capability (along with chemical and biological capabilities) during the 1980s, before Desert Storm and the United Nations inspection process that ensued, followed ultimately by the current war in Iraq.

While nuclear weapons are indeed an important concern, biological and chemical threats are in many ways of greater concern. Throughout the 1990s, it became frighteningly clear that biological and chemical weapons have become easier to produce, not just by rogue states, but by small terrorist organizations. In 1995, the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo released a dozen bags of poisonous sarin gas into the Tokyo subway system, killing 12 and injuring 5000. They had produced their own chemical and biological weapons in a factory, buying all of the items necessary for production legally, claiming they were going to make fertilizers. Other groups in the U.S. have attempted attacks with salmonella and ricin, though both were caught trying to bring in the materials from Canada.

In the 1990s it was also relatively easy to purchase biologically sensitive materials like botulinum toxins and bubonic plague bacteria that could be used to make biological weapons. These have been purchased and grown in petri dish colonies by terrorist cells or by transnational crime syndicates and are on the black market today. America remains vulnerable to biological attacks, as evidenced by the anthrax mail attacks that plagued the nation after September 11th.

The threats are out there. How does the U.S. combat them? One option is preemption, where the U.S. would attack a country or group that is suspected of producing WMDs. Other options include cracking down on international crime syndicates, beefing up border patrol and scanning cargo containers coming into the U.S. Cooperation with foreign police services to find groups making home grown chemical and biological weapons abroad is also important. Diplomacy, economic sanctions, and incentives may help convince nations to give up their arsenals, while other times force may be the only viable way to check proliferation. These questions formed part of the backdrop for the recent U.S.-led war on Iraq and Washington’s determination to topple Saddam Hussein. The implications of that decision remain uncertain.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES—ISSUES FOR THE SOLE SUPERPOWER IN A CHANGING WORLD

In the past fifty years, the U.S. has been instrumental in establishing a system of international organizations to assist not only U.S. interests, but also broader global interests in stability and prosperity. Institutions such as the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and G7 (now G8) meetings have played important roles in managing conflict, regulating and liberalizing economies, and considering how to improve the lives of people suffering from poverty, disease, and deprivation. For the most part, these were the institutions established after World War II to ensure that there would no longer be a major war among the world’s most powerful countries. These were the institutions that kept the Cold War “cold” and ultimately won the Cold War.

The focus of these institutions was largely in terms of East-West relations. The world was bipolar. Two focal points of power, one in Washington, the other in Moscow, wrestled on the international stage. Both had nuclear
capabilities, so both were essentially at a stalemate, for a war between them would have been catastrophic. U.S. and allied policy was one of containment and deterrence—containing the power of the Soviet bloc and deterring attacks on the U.S. and its allies. Meanwhile, the “free world” expanded its own sphere of democracy and prosperity, as the world’s industrialized democracies were also allies in the Cold War. By the end of the Cold War, the U.S. and its formal allies—NATO, Japan, and South Korea—were responsible for almost 85 percent of the entire gross domestic product on the planet.

The Cold War created certain structures, rules, and boundaries that dominated the international scene. The end of the Cold War meant that this predictable structure and its associated rules disappeared. For a while, following UN support for the U.S.-led international coalition that ousted Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1990-91, it seemed that the UN and other international and regional institutions might take on some of the burden of maintaining stability and peace in the international environment. Failures in the Balkans, in Africa, and in the Middle East all demonstrated both that the problems were especially complex and that U.S. leadership remained an important if also controversial feature of what former president George H. W. Bush called “the new world order.”

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 brought all these issues into sharper focus. The U.S. had accepted its position as the world’s superpower, but this status brought a new form of vulnerability that had not been part of the American experience. No longer could the U.S. focus only on states as potential enemies or rogue actors—the landscape also included non-state terrorist “networks of global reach,” as President George W. Bush called them in September 2001.

The past few years have brought several key questions to the surface for not only the United States but also the rest of the international community. No longer is the U.S. content with “containment,” a policy that essentially preserved the status quo. The U.S. National Security Strategy, announced by President Bush in September 2003, outlined a strategy by which the United States would attack preemptively if it believed that there was an imminent danger of being attacked by weapons of mass destruction. That strategy also speaks proactively of promoting democracy throughout the world. Both of these strategies are highly controversial—do new weapons technologies make preemption more justified? To what extent should the U.S. engage with international institutions (such as the UN) to provide greater legitimacy to its actions abroad? Can the U.S. readily export “democracy”—as the U.S. understands it? How can the U.S. best accomplish that objective? Is the U.S. willing to sustain the investment and risks associated with achieving that objective, both in the Middle East and elsewhere? How will these efforts shape other countries’ attitudes toward the U.S. and what will be the implications for the U.S. ability to achieve its objectives and promote its interests internationally?

There are many threats to the United States, global stability, and worldwide prosperity today. Local conflict potentially expanding to regional instability, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are no longer theoretically linked to U.S. interests—they are everyday concerns for U.S. policymakers and citizens throughout the world.

Such problems have been compounded by sweeping changes in demographics, global economics, concerns about energy and the environment, and the availability or lack of access to developments in science and technology. The capacity of individual states and international institutions to address such changes will inevitably affect global outcomes.

There was a time when U.S. interests could be clearly defined—deterring Soviet attack, containing Communist influence, promoting free enterprise for American business interests overseas. Today, it is difficult to define those interests, since so much of what happens in the world affects U.S. security interests. Today, the United States faces a paradox—although the U.S. is the most powerful nation on earth, the U.S. is arguably more vulnerable today than ever before and more dependent on other countries in so many ways than ever before.

The longer-term trends discussed in this paper will only accentuate this paradox. For the United States, the world of tomorrow offers great promise with effective leadership and wise use of resources and technological capacities. At the same time, that world can easily be a world of even greater conflict, more poverty and frustration, and increasing turmoil and instability, placing increasing demands on U.S. resources and threatening its own interests. How the U.S. responds to these issues as a nation as well as a government will be of great importance in the years ahead.

**KEEPING UP WITH GLOBAL TRENDS**

**Keep up with world news** — Broaden your knowledge of current events by reading various news sources. Try reading articles from sources with different political perspectives or English language news from other countries.

**Take advantage of opportunities to experience the world firsthand** — Hosting foreign students, connecting to pen pals abroad, welcoming immigrants and refugees from other countries, studying foreign languages, or trying international food at a local restaurant are excellent ways to learn about other cultures without even leaving the U.S.

**Prepare for changes in the nature of work** — according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies’ Seven Revolutions Project, “[a]daptability will be key: Workers of the future will make on average six career changes in their professional lives.” Technology will be increasingly integrated into the work environment both in the U.S. and abroad.

**Stay involved** — Continue thinking about and forming your own opinions of these global trends. Consider how you might play a role in affecting how such changes will affect the world and the decisions of U.S. policymakers in the future.
JOURNALS, MAGAZINES, AND NEWSPAPERS

Associated Press (September 13, 2004)
The Economist (July 17, September 18, 2004)
Foreign Affairs (November/December 2001, July/August 2004)
Foreign Policy (May 2004)
Newsweek (July 19, 2004)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES


Job Anxiety is Real—and It's Global, a policy brief by Sandra Polaski, produced by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (May 2004)


