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Bringing Environmental and Economic Internationalism into US Strategy

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Dramatic events such as the end of the Cold War, the turn of the century, and now a new presidency offer opportunities for the United States to reconsider its national security policy.[1] The notion that the focus should be limited to defending against an emerging peer competitor or rogue state is flawed, however, and current analyses of emerging threats are generally too narrowly defined. Internal regional strife, not power-projecting challengers to US primacy, will likely spark the crises of the 21st century for which US strategy must be prepared.

A tidal wave of public outcry over the deteriorating state of regional economies and the global environment is rushing toward the shores of the world's most powerful nations. In an era in which there are few imminent threats to US security, government as well as corporate leaders praise the superpower status of our nation. In such times it is not surprising that labor and environmental reform issues are often placed on the back burner. Nevertheless, these are the issues that will take center stage in the coming decades. From its current position of vast global power, the United States can either choose to meet this challenge head on, or be overcome by it.

My intent is not to dismiss the current theories of strategy, but rather to add to them. Four such strategies (and many variations on these) compete for relevancy in the current public debate: neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy.[2] The implications of each are normally outlined in a traditional analysis of foreign affairs in which there exists a constant competition for power between states. Although this tradition continues, the real danger the world now faces "stem[s] not from conflicts between countries but from conflicts within them." [3] Such internal strife over distribution of wealth, labor inequality, scarcity of resources, and declining environmental conditions will spill over into neighboring states, creating chaos. The new grand strategy of the United States, therefore, needs to respond to regional internal weaknesses, not to the external strengths of perceived rogue and competitor states.

The Economic Challenge

Current statistics place the population of the 42 so-called Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) at 700 million. This number is expected to rise to 1.5 billion by 2030.[4] These are the people currently isolated by extreme poverty, those failed by their governments and the international system. Because of the economic plight of these people, death by disease is reaching proportions not seen since the plagues of Europe. Some statistics place the annual number of malaria-related deaths at 2.5 million. Disease is so heavily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa that nobody bothers to keep accurate records of clinical cases or death.[5] The economic burden of the AIDS epidemic on developing nations is even more worrisome. Two-thirds of the world's 33 million individuals infected with the virus are sub-Saharan Africans, according to a 1998 UN estimate.[6]

The medical costs associated with stabilizing the situation cannot be absorbed solely by the states most affected. An international effort is required to prevent the flames of civil war that will surely ignite if the suffering and deaths of millions of people cannot be avoided.

Compounding the issues of economic disparity is the global movement against labor repression. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) turned 50 years old in 1998. Along with it, labor rights activists celebrated another key document of their cause: Convention Number 87 of the International Labor Organization (ILO). Both documents delineate what can be referred to as "internationally recognized worker rights," including the right to

healthy working conditions, equal pay, acknowledgement of human dignity, and the right to form and join trade unions.[7] Despite the sweeping declarations of these international works, over half the world's population lives in countries that have not ratified ILO Convention Number 87 (including China, India, and the United States), and little impetus exists to enforce the labor standards proposed.[8]

Deep concern over this issue is on the rise worldwide as laborers join together to be recognized. Recent violent demonstrations in Seattle, in Washington, D.C., and in Paris over meetings by the World Trade Organization are harbingers of the potential explosiveness of the problem. The indisputable fact is that inequality is on the rise and the voices of three billion people each trying to live on two dollars a day cannot be ignored for long.[9]

One needs to look only as far as Sierra Leone to understand the destabilizing impact of these attitudes. A small country in Africa is currently transforming into a big problem for Western policymakers. The reason is labor inequality: a classic fight for distribution of wealth. The civil war, currently in its ninth year, is a struggle for control between the corrupt elite (who profit from most of the country's diamond exports) and the rural dispossessed.

Added to the problem is the declining state of labor-related conditions. There are approximately 160 million cases per year of occupational disease covering everything from exposure to biological hazards to heavy labor stress.[10] The risks are increasing, particularly in developing countries, due to poor sanitation, lack of access to potable water and nutritional foods, illiteracy, and rampant disease.

Not all economic flash points lie in weak, isolated parts of the world. Some are in areas of historical strategic significance to the United States, such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Haiti. Other countries are rarely acknowledged by US analysts as potential crisis regions, but will surely gain prominence in the coming decades. Worsening regional economic conditions argue that the United States should define its interests differently. Clearly, American prosperity is inexorably linked to the rest of the world. "In our new global economy," remarked President Clinton during a 1999 radio address, "a financial crisis half a world away can be felt on factory floors here at home." [11]

The Environmental Challenge

Beyond the US borders, the global environment is deteriorating with potentially disastrous results. The demise of the Soviet Union left behind an eco-nightmare of problems ranging from uninhabitable, nuclear-waste-ridden lands to provinces stripped of all their natural resources. In those parts of Asia struck by the industrial boom of the 1980s, air is often unfit to breathe under the skyscraper-dominated skylines of big cities. Heavily populated countries, such as Bangladesh and West Bengal (India), are suffering from crisis proportions of non-potable water, contaminated with everything from disease (typhoid, cholera, and hepatitis) to arsenic.[12]

Eroding environmental conditions are also deepening concerns in areas of the world already in turmoil. Water rights disputes between Israel and her adversaries have the potential of derailing future peace agreements hinged to withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Farther west, Egypt is building a canal to divert water from the Nile, which may cause problems with her North African neighbors.[13] Closer to home, a heated debate over shared water from the Rio Grande is turning Texas farmers against their Mexican counterparts with cries for immediate government intervention.

Public opinion reinforces the statistical concern. According to a 1999 Roper poll, 56 percent of Americans worry that the next ten years will be "the last decade when humans will have a chance to save the earth from an environmental catastrophe." [14] Such concerns of the masses may be more than just gloom and doom prophecy. Many of the worsening environmental catastrophes have far-reaching global effects. Despite efforts to curb trans-boundary air pollution, for example (sulfur dioxide emissions in Europe are currently down 40 percent from 1980 levels), global atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations are on the rise, up 13 percent since 1970.[15] Global warming and ozone depletion is increasing, as evidenced by an ever-shrinking polar ice cap and record high temperatures around the world.

Paralleling the issue of economic despair, some of the greatest environmental concerns lie in historically strategic areas of the world: Russia and the Middle East. Other pockets of problems are less known, but give credence to the idea that the United States should reassess its interests abroad. Given the potential effects on the air we breathe and the water

we drink, we cannot afford to shrink behind an isolationist shell. The focus of a new strategy that takes these issues into consideration should be proactive: it should use our current position of power to work with other countries in the hopes of staving off catastrophe.

Environmental and Economic Internationalism

These facts all add up to the belief that environmental and economic problems are approaching epidemic proportions in key parts of the world. A focus on "environmental and economic internationalism" would introduce an important new dimension to the already numerous definitions of US interests: the necessity to radically reform global economics and improve environmental conditions. Similar to the proposed strategy of cooperative security, it would be an initiative based on liberalism rather than realism, in which advocates propose to act collectively through international institutions.[16] It presumes that the majority of the world's population--not necessarily the ruling elites--has a keen interest in conserving scarce resources and distributing wealth.

Environmental and economic internationalism responds to the concept of "global crisis effect." That is, economic and environmental issues are not constrained by geographical boundaries. A violent response to repressive labor laws in Burma, for example, has the potential of spilling over into other economically fragile Pacific Rim countries. Similarly, radiological contamination from Russia can easily drift into Western Europe, as frightfully demonstrated during the Chernobyl accident. The result of this reasoning, not unlike cooperative security, is a bond between the United States and her more traditional allies, one that requires action in response to multiple labor- and environmental-related crises abroad in the name of international security.

Rules and Tools

A policy of US economic encouragement lies at the heart of applying environmental and economic internationalism. In order for the United States to successfully lead in this endeavor, a restructuring of traditional international aid and debt forgiveness would be required. The World Bank, along with the international financial institutions, should enter a new era of lending. Aid should be conditional on the basis of environmental, labor, and social reform. Such economic leverage was applied to keep a fragile peace in Bosnia.[17]

Loans are but one source of international pressure. Debt forgiveness is another. The solution was identified by the G8 (the world's eight wealthiest nations) during the Cologne Summit of 1999. Leaders acknowledged the need for debt relief and called for a "greater emphasis by the international community on social programs to help alleviate human suffering." [18] The \$39 billion debt currently owed to the World Bank by predominantly developing nations can be used as an influential tool. Debt forgiveness, proportionate to change, can potentially save millions of people by allowing poor nations to focus their existing monetary strength on internal rather than external problems.

The idea of conditional aid is not new to the World Bank. Nevertheless, the current institutional leaders have focused on imposing economic conditions, leaving labor and environmental reform to others, such as the UN. History indicates that economic stability often walks hand-in-hand with regional peace. Unified action between the world's lenders and leaders is needed to mount a successful strategy. Given the current US monetary strength, the United States is in the greatest position possible from which to influence this strategy.

The United States should further use its current position of global power to set the example and influence other nations to reform unrestricted trade practices. The first step in this process is US-led pressure on the World Trade Organization (WTO). That organization is a key contributor to the growing environmental and economic crises,[19] and a worsening of labor and environmental conditions is inevitable in the wake of WTO rulings.[20]

Under the WTO, member countries cannot tax or limit imports made under unfair or unsafe labor conditions. The same can be said for those imports that significantly harm the global environment during production. National sovereignty is what is at stake, since countries do not retain the ability to choose for themselves. For example, if the United States seeks to ban goods manufactured by exploited child laborers in other countries, a measure that has been proposed by Senator Tom Harkin, a WTO challenge would be forthcoming.[21] Similarly, WTO members are not permitted to restrict trade with countries demonstrating horrific human rights and labor inequality. China is most noteworthy in this respect. As a country soon to be welcomed into the WTO, this awakening Asian giant stands to gain everything and

sacrifice nothing to the WTO's seemingly unconscionable rulings favoring unrestricted trade.

What is needed by the United States and the world to drive the principles embodied in a focus on environmental and economic internationalism? The preferred tool may lie in the reformation of an organization already in existence, the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Developed as part of the UN structure immediately following World War II, the ILO serves the world by drafting labor standards conventions, monitoring their implementation, and analyzing changing global labor conditions. The US representative to the ILO is the Secretary of Labor. Other governments similarly send their senior labor ministers, resulting in an unusually progressive forum concerned with social protection and labor union issues. The ILO's conventions set high standards in such areas as health and safety, freedom to organize, and ending child labor abuse.[22]

Despite the promise of the organization, the ILO, like the UN, is arguably ineffective because it lacks the power to do anything about the issues that most demand attention. The solution requires that member nations form a collective bond, one in which members are willing to stand together for a set of principles and are prepared to back them with economic and even military response if necessary.

A strategy of environmental and economic internationalism favors economic encouragement first. If this fails, levy trade sanctions. As a last resort, deploy a multinational military response. Applying this strategy to current events, China would be denied permanent normal trade relations by the United States due to its abysmal human rights record and labor inequality under its communist government. In response to crises such as Sierra Leone, in which labor repression is transformed into civil war, advocates of this strategy would call for the immediate deployment of peacekeeping troops. Similar to the desire of humanitarian interventionists, proponents would argue that morality requires us to act, regardless of cost.

Further demands would be placed on governments to assist with environmental crises. In the case of the fragile Middle East peace process, a strategy of environmental and economic internationalism would suggest that peacekeepers help broker agreements over resource scarcity. This would include distribution of water to settlements in the Gaza Strip and Israeli access to the Sea of Galilee, should the Golan Heights be returned. It would further call for international immediate-action teams to be standing by to assist with regionally damaging environmental emergencies such as oil spills, nuclear reactor mishaps, and widespread forest fires. This strategy would place significant requirements on the military to conduct both traditional and nontraditional missions.

Proposed Force Structure

The wide range of missions that might be placed upon the military in implementing this strategy would require the United States to maintain or possibly increase defense spending and add to current force levels. This is because of the potential involvement of forces in multiple contingencies, some half a world apart. Unilateral action would be emphatically discouraged, since the strength of the strategy would lie in collective response to the requirements of the collective good. This approach suggests the need for a full-time multinational force under the flag of the UN. In this event, countries could be expected to contribute set numbers of forces on a rotational basis.

The United States could not assume, however, that other countries would contribute proportionally to a cooperative response. The United States would have to be prepared to assume the lion's share of the burden as means of encouraging less-capable nations to rise to the challenge.

Similar to cooperative security, the US contribution to a multinational force would emphasize the country's "comparative advantage in aerospace power." [23] It would likewise take maximum advantage of mobility. Forces requiring the lead of the United States would include command, control, communications, and intelligence; strategic airlift; logistical support (including rotary-wing and ground tactical transportation); and special operations. The need to maintain a qualitative edge over opponents would be of central importance to this strategy's force design.

Part of the reasoning behind basing a US strategy on environmental and economic internationalism is the belief that the rise of a future peer competitor is unlikely and that most future US military deployments will be unlike Desert Storm

and Kosovo, but similar in scope to those in Somalia, Haiti, and Sierra Leone. Such crisis areas are devoid of specific targets to attack with precision-guided munitions launched by technically superior fighter aircraft. The focus of increased defense spending to meet this new strategic emphasis would therefore be placed on force projection.

Applying this strategy to the current Quadrennial Defense Review debate, one can speculate that production of high-dollar items such as the F-22 and F/A-18 E/F would be pushed back indefinitely since US air superiority is unthreatened. Acquisition of rapid, medium-range tactical lift assets, such as the V-22 Osprey, would be increased. Additionally, strategic lift assets, such as the C-17, might find their acquisition nearly doubled in order to ensure immediate strategic lift support to a variety of simultaneous, worldwide contingencies. The number of aircraft carriers might be increased to 14, but their role and strike platforms radically modified. Squadrons of F-14s, designed during the Cold War to counter a Soviet bomber attack, could be replaced by ground-supporting lift (V-22 and rotary wing) and multiple-role Joint Strike Fighters.

Units constituting the Special Operations Command might be doubled, given their successes in contingencies such as Haiti and Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as their proven ability to provide much-needed human intelligence. Finally, the current Army transformation process would be funded and rapidly applied. Upgrade of Cold War legacy systems, such as the 70-ton M-1 Abrams tank, would be stopped in favor of producing lighter, more lethal, and rapidly deployable systems capable of arriving by air or sea on the heels of a Marine or multinational expeditionary force.

A critical enabler of this strategy would be the need for the international community to maintain situational awareness on potential economic and environmental hotspots around the globe. In 1998, the Central Intelligence Agency established an environmental center to "monitor and forecast crises from fires in Indonesia to water shortages in the Mideast that could affect America's economic and security interests." [24] This CIA role could easily be expanded to include other such monitoring missions. Timely analysis and global dissemination of this information would be imperative to plan for a suitable response.

Criticism of the Strategy

Despite its dominant location on the moral high ground, a strategy applying environmental and economic internationalism is open to significant criticism. The issue of linking trade to economic and environmental reform already has touched off a heated international debate. Proponents of globalization are concerned that increased conditions on trade will result in less trade. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated this position in a 1999 *New York Times* interview: "What is needed is not new shackles for world trade but greater determination by governments to tackle social and political issues directly." He added, "Practical experience has shown that trade and investment often bring not only economic development but higher standards of human rights and environmental protection as well." [25]

On the issue of China, advocates of permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) cite the counterpoint to the strategy's recommended use of restricted trade as an instrument to spark reform. Using the former Soviet Union model, pro-PNTR groups argue that permanent trade status will bring about the labor reform desired in the Asian power. "Trading with China is the foundation necessary for a more open China," remarked Calman Cohen, President of the Emergency Committee for American Trade. [26] In this view, only by opening markets, not isolating individual states, can the international community bring about desired reform.

The effectiveness of reduced international debt and reform of conditional loans, likewise, carries the burden of proof. The World Bank mostly makes loans to individual countries. It does not finance global public goods. [27] Goods, unfortunately, are what is required to alleviate much of the growing crisis: vaccines, potable water, and biotech diversity in food-scarce regions. Even if the World Bank were to cancel a country's multibillion-dollar debt, there would be no guarantee that the savings would be used to aid the suffering.

Although the strategy of environmental and economic internationalism suggests that trade sanctions would be used as a tool to encourage reform, the wisdom of this means is, likewise, debatable. From 1995 to 1998, the United States imposed or threatened economic sanctions 60 times against 35 different countries, affecting an estimated 42 percent of the world's population. [28] Economic sanctions cost our nation some \$20 billion in lost annual exports with varying effects. [29] Given the potential of increasing sanctions based on this new strategy, it is likely that US companies would

bear most of the economic burden. The national will required to implement a strategy focused on environmental and economic internationalism would be in jeopardy if the US economy were to plunge into even a limited recession.

On the issue of military intervention, there is certainly a lot of room to doubt whether the United States would have the courage to consistently execute such a strategy. One element of US society is clearly in favor of reserving application of military might to counterbalance an emerging peer competitor, such as China. Proponents of this view argue that an American strategy based on the need to intervene in multiple regions simultaneously does little more than diminish political support and erase popular will. Based on divided opinion over such recent military actions as Kosovo, it is doubtful that a majority of the US population would stand in favor of a military deployment to support water distribution in the war-torn Middle East. And don't forget cost: current spending levels would need to be increased to produce the military presence required to enforce such a strategy. This would be a difficult sell to the American public, especially if the economy were to take a drastic downturn.

Finally, there exists the issue of legality. The UN Charter would need to be modified before the more extreme interventionist tack of the strategy could be applied. In its current form, the Charter prohibits intervention across state borders, allowing for only two exceptions: self defense in cases of "armed attack" (Article 51) and "actions taken with Security Council approval as matters of collective security" (Chapter VII).[30] Modern international law does not recognize the necessity to intervene in a state's affairs based on economic and environmental turmoil.

Conclusion

With the rising inequality brought on by globalization comes a torrent of economic, labor, and environmental problems which, if left unchallenged, will fuel the fires of regional crisis in the 21st century. For the global market to survive, nations need to collectively establish and maintain economic, labor, and environmental policies that provide for the common good. Such standards also need to be collectively enforced with the same zeal as is currently reserved for defense against armed attack.

In the eyes of the world, American leadership diminishes every time we choose not to act upon a potentially devastating human crisis. To the contrary, successful actions in support of regional economic and environmental well-being bolster confidence in American leadership at home and abroad. Further, immediate action today may prevent the wars of tomorrow, especially in those areas where imminent chaos is most pronounced.

The United States cannot afford to look away from global economic and environmental despair, saving its strength for the "big fight." The future US grand strategy, if not entirely based on environmental and economic internationalism, should expand the definition of US interests to include global economic reform and environmental standards enforcement. The greatest danger America faces is neither China nor Iraq. It is indifference to this emerging crisis.

NOTES

1. Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," in *Strategy and Force Planning*, 2d ed. (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1997), p. 102.
2. Ibid., p. 103.
3. Stanley Hoffmann, "Too Proud," *The New Republic*, 24 January 2000, p. 6.
4. Jeffrey Sachs, "Sachs on Development: Helping the World's Poorest," *The Economist*, 14 August 1999, p. 18.
5. Ibid., p. 19.
6. Ibid.
7. Timothy H. Holtz, "Labour Rights Are Human Rights," *The Lancet*, 13 March 1999, p. 923.

8. Ibid.
9. Moises Naim, "Editor's Note," *Foreign Policy*, No. 118 (Spring 2000), p. 11.
10. According to World Health Organization statistics, occupational accidents account for more than 120 million injuries and 220,000 deaths per year. The report goes on to identify that the vast majority of workers (5-10 percent in developing countries and 20-50 percent in industrialized countries) do not have access to adequate occupational health care services. World Health Organization, *Fact Sheet Number 84* (Geneva: December 1997), p. 7.
11. William J. Clinton, Radio Address, "Economic Reform," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 18 January 1999, pp. 35-36.
12. "Wells of Despond," *UN Chronicle*, 36 (No. 1, 1999), 34.
13. Bruce B. Auster, "Enviro-intelligence: The CIA Goes Green," *U.S. News & World Report*, 16 March 1998, p. 34.
14. David Whitman, "It's a Breath of Fresh Air," *U.S. News & World Report*, 17 April 2000, p. 16.
15. Marvin S. Soroos, "Preserving the Atmosphere as a Global Commons," *Environment*, March 1998, p. 8.
16. Posen and Ross, p. 116.
17. The 1996 incident revolved around Momcilo Krajisnik, leader of the Bosnia Serbs, and his refusal to attend the presidential swearing-in ceremony following the Dayton peace negotiations. This act of Serb defiance threatened to "undermine the fragile new Bosnian State from its inception." Following a warning from the World Bank, European Union, and United States, one threatening to cut all reconstruction aid flowing to the Serb Republic, Krajisnik attended the ceremony. James K. Boyce and Manuel Pastor, Jr., "Aid for Peace: Can International Financial Institutions Help Prevent Conflict?" *World Policy Journal*, 15 (Summer 1998), 42.
18. Sachs, p. 19.
19. Conceived in 1995, the WTO is an international court of sorts, whose primary purpose is to adjudicate trade disputes between countries. With 135 members, the WTO represents most of the industrialized world. Although powerful corporations have no official place at the WTO, they do have a forum within which to appeal trade barriers that limit their ability to buy and sell goods abroad. Corporations likewise have the ability to lobby the delegates working at the Geneva headquarters. This, more than anything else, has made the WTO synonymous with "a place where governments can collude against their citizens." Peter Dorman et al., "The ABCs of the Global Economy," *Dollars & Sense*, April 2000, p. 30.
20. Venezuela sued the United States in 1996, claiming that the Clean Air Act (which limits contaminants in gasoline) discriminates against Venezuelan gas imports. The WTO agreed and ruled that United States either had to dilute existing EPA standards or face a fine of \$150 million in trade sanctions. The United States chose to "dilute the standards and allowed the importing of gas that can cause more air pollution and lung disease." "The Case Against the WTO," *The Progressive*, January 2000, p. 9.
21. Ibid.
22. Dorman et al., p. 32.
23. Posen, p. 119.
24. Auster, p. 34.
25. John Caron, "World Trade Can Improve Life for All," *National Catholic Reporter*, 4 February 2000, p. 19.
26. Murray Hiebert and Susan V. Lawrence, "Trade Tightrope," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 February 2000, p.

22.

27. Sachs, p. 20.

28. Daniel W. Drezner, "Serious about Sanctions," in *Strategy and Force Planning*, 3d ed. (Newport: Naval War College Press, 1997), p. 271.

29. Ibid.

30. Elliott Abrams, "To Fight the Good Fight," *The National Interest*, No. 59 (Spring 2000), p. 71.

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