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### Beyond Morality: Global Poverty As a Threat to National Security

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**BEYOND MORALITY: GLOBAL POVERTY AS A THREAT TO NATIONAL  
SECURITY**

**A thesis submitted to  
Regis College  
The Honors Program  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Graduation with Honors**

**by**

**William Dong**

**May 2009**

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## **I.**

### **Introduction**

When Civil War broke out in Sierra Leone, rebel leaders sought widespread support for the movement from the country's embittered youth by inspiring greater discontent with economic conditions. Without means of subsistence, the youth turned to violence as the only viable way to improve their lives. In this way, the population's impoverishment had a destabilizing effect on the country, eventually leading to civil conflict and instability in the region. Many First World countries still ignore the connection between poverty and insecurity, choosing to focus instead on the use of hard power (coercion) when confronting regional instability. That being said, the campaign against global poverty is typically grounded in appeals to moral obligation or responsibility. But without widespread recognition of the consequences of poverty, countries will not incorporate the use of soft power (co-option and attraction) into their extensive list of foreign policy prescriptions simply because the benefits are often ambiguous or immeasurable. Most philosophers advocate some form of cosmopolitanism or allude to a shared sense of humanity as means of demonstrating the responsibility we share towards impoverished populations. However morally compelling these arguments may be, they are insufficient to produce the desired ends as people are generally not moved by moral responsibility. Thus, arguments for eradicating global poverty should focus on the ways in which doing so serves national security and other more immediate interests.

Vast amounts of energy and resources are being spent on the campaign against global poverty. And yet, individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and governments

have failed to eradicate poverty and the systemic conditions that cause it. Indeed, 2.8 billion people live on less than US\$2 per day, and 1.2 billion people live below the UN established poverty line of US\$1 per day.<sup>1</sup> Most educated people agree that these global conditions are unacceptable and that governments should be an instrument of change vis-à-vis the Third World. But most individuals and governments have yet to take meaningful steps toward reducing poverty. To make this issue more compelling so that it becomes a matter of necessity, the global community must adopt a new conception of poverty that is inseparable from the national interests of First World nations. That is to say, governments will be more inclined to respond to global poverty if doing so becomes necessary to ensure national security.

The history of the United States Agency of International Aid (USAID)—specifically, the Kennedy administration’s commitment to foreign assistance as a policy priority—demonstrates the extent to which the fight against global poverty has typically been rooted in moral responsibility. According to John F. Kennedy, the reason why the United States should continue foreign economic assistance through the work of USAID “is that there is no escaping our obligations: our moral obligations as a wise leader and good neighbor in the interdependent community of free nations.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we have economic obligations as the wealthiest people in a world of poor people, as a country no longer dependent on loans from abroad to help us develop our own economy.<sup>3</sup>

Kennedy justified foreign assistance by claiming that economic collapse in Third World countries “would be disastrous to our national security, harmful to our comparative

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) 2.

<sup>2</sup> “US AID History.” *USAID: From the American People*, 30 April 2008, <[http://www.usaid.gov/about\\_usaid/usaidhist.html](http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/usaidhist.html)>.

<sup>3</sup> US AID 1.



prosperity, and offensive to our conscience.”<sup>4</sup> Given the Cold War context, the president feared most the threat of Soviet expansion. To prevent Third World countries from being swallowed up by communism, the US needed to promote international economic stability. In the contemporary global community, post-Cold War and Post-9/11, terrorists and other sub-national groups, population flows, disease, and environmental degradation have become the primary threat to international stability. Due to the changing dynamics of the international system—namely, the trends instigated by globalization and the corresponding rise of religious fundamentalism—the United States must confront new and, in some ways, more complicated threats.

In “Globalizing Weakness: Is Global Poverty a Threat to the Interests of States,” Vincent A. Ferraro, international politics professor at Mt. Holyoke, provides historical context for this relationship, describing the evolution of the international system since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Since Thomas Hobbes first framed the security dilemma, new threats have emerged that simply cannot be ignored by state actors. Global poverty immediately threatens the stability of the international system. Because the United States has a strong interest in the continuation and maintenance of this system, the foreign policy elite must prioritize the eradication of global poverty.<sup>5</sup> Within the 17<sup>th</sup> century Hobbesian framework, states could afford to ignore the economic failure of other states, but because the nature of the global system has fundamentally shifted, today’s countries can no longer disregard conditions that may in fact lead to regional or even international instability.

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<sup>4</sup> US AID 1.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Ferraro, “Globalizing Weakness: Is Global Poverty a Threat to the Interests of States?” Should Global Poverty Be Considered a U.S. National Security Issue, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 30 April 2008 <[http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.item&news\\_id=34999](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.item&news_id=34999)> 3.

Whether global poverty constitutes a threat to national security depends in large part on how we define “national interest.” Ferraro defines national interest at the most basic and traditional level: “the territorial integrity of the state and its political autonomy are the *sine qua non* of statehood.”<sup>6</sup> Within this framework, the nation state must maintain territorial integrity and protect the country from foreign threats. If the “national interest” is defined in these terms, states have only a marginal interest in the affairs of other countries; concern for other regions weakens with distance. States will more readily address other issues that have a more perceivable impact at the domestic level. Since Hobbes and especially in the past decade, the world has changed drastically, necessitating a redefinition of “national interest.” Security threats are now more complicated and more ambiguous. In the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS), the United States notes the changing face of the international system: “Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank.”<sup>7</sup> The NSS recognizes that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.”<sup>8</sup> Ferraro points out, however, that this recognition is not accompanied by any change in strategy to deal with modern global politics. Our leaders cannot effectively respond to twenty-first century threats using a twentieth-century foreign policy. To best confront global threats in this new environment, the United States must come to understand the root causes of conflict and insecurity so that it may respond accordingly.

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<sup>6</sup> Ferraro 1.

<sup>7</sup> “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” The White House, Sept. 2002, 30 April 2008, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2002/index.html>> 1.

<sup>8</sup> NSS 1.

In “Poverty, Terrorism, and National Security,” Carol Lancaster provides important and in some ways alternative insight on this subject. According to Lancaster, the link between poverty and terrorism should not be misconstrued in such a way as to assume that eradicating the former will completely eliminate the latter. That is to say, the connection between global poverty and terrorism is an indirect one at best, and First World countries should not operate under the assumption that the two are directly correlated. Some misguided analyses assume that the 9/11 terrorists were somehow motivated by poverty despite evidence of their middle-class upbringings. Still others, according to Lancaster, believe that “poverty breeds the discontent that leads to terrorism.”<sup>9</sup> The author demonstrates the fallacy of this argument by drawing a historical analogy:

This argument is much like one heard during the Cold War—that poverty bred discontent and discontent increased the allure of communism, or led to chaos that opened opportunities for communist gains. Eliminating poverty was, therefore, important to eliminate the causes of discontent, violence, radicalism, and (now) terrorism. But if either of these causal chains were true, much of the world would surely now be communist-dominated or engulfed by terror and violence.<sup>10</sup>

In both instances, advocates of this false perception assume that poverty led directly to the respective systemic threat, but there was a failure on both accounts to identify the missing link in the causal chain that connects poverty and to the respective global security issue.

While the global community has yet to fully understand the causes of terrorism, we have no evidence to suggest that terrorist groups are responding to pervasive disparities between rich and poor. Surely, the poor lack the time, energy, resources, and physical vigor to obtain an education, to collaborate with fellow impoverished and disenfranchised

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<sup>9</sup> Carol Lancaster, “Poverty, Terrorism, and National Security,” Should Global Poverty Be Considered a U.S. National Security Issue, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 30 April 2008, <[http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.item&news\\_id=34999](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.item&news_id=34999)> 1.

<sup>10</sup> Lancaster 2.

revolutionaries, to devise masterful plans, or to fly commercial airplanes into buildings: “For the just over one billion people who each live on \$1 per day, it is simply often an exhausting task to get an adequate meal or two every 24 hours.”<sup>11</sup> Not one terrorist group identifies the elimination of global poverty as their primary goal. For Lancaster, a reduction in global poverty could very well lead to a subsequent increase in the number of potential terrorists because it would give previously-starved individuals resources to pursue other ends. But also, at a practical level, the implementation of policies that pursue the strengthening of national security and the elimination of terrorist activities may have negative consequences. If the US increases the amount of foreign aid to impoverished populations with the expressed purpose being to advance the current anti-terrorist agenda, “support for foreign aid could well erode in Congress and among the public” if the “threat of terrorism fails to abate.”<sup>12</sup> Once the connection between global poverty and national security becomes widely accepted, the public will be less likely to support foreign assistance if international stability does not improve. In other words, when the expressed purpose of foreign assistance is to bolster national security, an increase in terrorist activity or any other sign of rising insecurity will be blamed on failed foreign aid programs, failed policy.

Global poverty is both a cause and an effect of global insecurity. Oxford economist Paul Collier’s recent research on the topic provides empirical evidence to verify this link. While conventional opinion supposes that civil conflict most commonly stems “from ancient ethnic hatreds or political rivalries,” Collier demonstrates that, in fact, ethnic diversity serves

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<sup>11</sup> Lancaster 1.

<sup>12</sup> Lancaster 3.

to prevent such conflict.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to popular belief, the most powerful predictors of civil conflict include fragile economic growth, low incomes within the population, and exclusive dependence on natural resources. Countries suffering from all three circumstances “are engaged in a sort of Russian Roulette,” desperately struggling to improve the economic condition before the hammer falls.<sup>14</sup> Because civil conflict is likely in these countries, poverty and its consequences should be recognized as immediate (while indirect) national security threats.

The United States and the rest of the international community have started to recognize this link in recent years. According to former Secretary of State Colin Powell, the US will never win the war on terrorism unless it confronts the social and political causes of poverty. In his 2005 *Foreign Policy* article “No Country Left Behind,” Powell establishes that development in foreign countries “is not a ‘soft’ policy issue, but a core national security issue.”<sup>15</sup> While few terrorists are impoverished—i.e. the perpetrators of the September 11 attack on the United States were all well-educated, middle class individuals—poverty generates feelings of resentment and aggravation, “which ideological entrepreneurs can turn into support for—or acquiescence to—terrorism, and particularly in those countries in which poverty is coupled with a lack of political rights and basic freedoms.”<sup>16</sup> That is to say, the conditions surrounding poverty make it easier for ideologues to prey on the vulnerable and resentful minds of the world’s poor. Terrorist factions can generate sympathy for their cause, which in turn leads to the perpetuation of violence and destabilizing activity.

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<sup>13</sup> Lael Brainard, “The Tangled Web: The Poverty-Insecurity Nexus,” Too Poor for Peace: Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007) 3.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Collier, “The Market for Civil War,” *Foreign Policy* (May-June 2003) 38.

<sup>15</sup> Colin L. Powell, “No Country Left Behind,” *Foreign Policy* (Jan.-Feb. 2005) 30.

<sup>16</sup> Powell 30.

In some part, the general thrust and Powell's article has been written into policy as various NSC documents have recognized the relationship. The 2006 National Security Strategy states that "development reinforces diplomacy and defense, reducing long-term threats to our national security by helping to build stable, prosperous, and peaceful societies," and the Pentagon's 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review points out that the US has a role to play in "alleviating suffering... [Helping] prevent disorder from spiraling into wider conflict or crisis."<sup>17</sup> This rhetoric is certainly substantiated by commonsense logic. When a population suffers from severe poverty, the state is often hampered by ineffective governance, rendering it unable to meet people's basic needs for food, sanitation, health care, and education" among other things. Where these conditions persist, the ability of government to control its territory is greatly diminished, and the ability of predatory sub-state actors to engage in illegal activity and contribute to internal strife correspondingly expands. Just as gangs congregate in cities that lack the wherewithal to manage gang violence, terrorist groups will undoubtedly establish operations in countries with weak institutions, where territorial management capabilities are weakened by domestic strife.

Another leading perspective on the issue is offered by Dr. Susan E. Rice, a former White House and State Department Senior Official, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and now an American foreign policy advisor and Ambassador to the United Nations. In her May 2007 article "Poverty Breeds Insecurity," Rice claims that impoverished states unavoidably become breeding grounds for potentially destabilizing activities, and the transnational spillover effect often plagues surrounding weak states. Rice's research suggests, "for a country at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile for income, the risk of experiencing civil conflict within

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<sup>17</sup> Brainard 2.

five years is 7-11 percent; for countries at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile, the risk rises to 15-18 percent.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, a direct correlation exists between the wealth and the stability of a nation, as a fifty-percent reduction in relative income level doubles the likelihood of internal conflict. An increase in a county’s GDP, irrespective of other factors like the amount of ethnic groups or the condition of governmental structure that preside over the country, greatly reduces the likelihood of civil war.

When conflict broke out in Sierra Leone in March 1991, the country was experiencing the conditions that Rice identifies as the most correlative indicators of potential conflict. Just before the war, the country experienced negative economic growth, and the real GDP per person had fallen more than thirty-five percent since the 1970’s. In 1990, Sierra Leone ranked dead last on the UN Human Development Index. The widespread failure of the economy, coupled with the rise of youth unemployment and the collapse of the educational system, led to the disenchantment of younger generations who turned to rebel activity as their last resort. According to the UN Refugee Agency, the rebellion won an unusual amount of support among young people. When choice becomes limited and opportunity diminishes, individuals will naturally accept or subscribe to movements that promise change. Poverty breeds insecurity.<sup>19</sup>

The long and tired history of civil war in Mozambique and the subsequent cessation of the conflict offer a hopeful example of economic growth leading to stability and further prosperity. London School of Economic Professor Dr. Christopher Alden demonstrates that, in the first decade after achieving independence, the country suffered through a highly

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<sup>18</sup> Susan Rice, “Poverty Breeds Insecurity,” Too poor for Peace?: Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institutional Press, 2007) 37.

<sup>19</sup> Rice 38.

destructive civil war that killed and displaced millions. By the early 1990's, towards the end of the war, the country became the world's single most aid-dependence country.<sup>20</sup> The 1992 peace-treaty eventually led to successful democratic elections and significant foreign investment "in key sectors that set the stage for rapid, at times double –digit, economic growth that seemed to vindicate the decade-long imposition of a structural adjustment programme by international financial institutions."<sup>21</sup> Because of these hopeful developments, Mozambique is often used as a model for post-war prosperity. Since the civil war's end in 1994, the country has experienced an average economic growth rate of 8 percent between 1996 and 2006 (World Bank). As a result, three million out of a population of twenty million people have risen out of extreme poverty, the infant mortality rate has fallen thirty-five percent, and primary school enrollment has improved by sixty-five percent (World Bank). Due to the improving economic conditions and the subsequent reduction in extreme poverty, the country is now regarded as one of the most stable in the region. In this way, Mozambique has essentially lifted itself from the "doom spiral" by focusing on poverty-elimination, which has in turn led to greater regional stability and has reduced the likelihood of terrorist activity within its borders.

The outbreak of civil war has obvious security implications for regions where one or more states suffer from severe poverty. Civil strife often causes countries to become "sinkholes that destabilize entire regions."<sup>22</sup> Aside from providing an ideal environment for sub-state actors to proliferate, interstate conflict typically requires "costly international

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<sup>20</sup> Chris Alden, "Human Security and the Limits of International Intervention: A Comparison of Post-Conflict Angola and Mozambique," Protecting Human Security in a Post 9/11 World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 144.

<sup>21</sup> Alden 144.

<sup>22</sup> Rice 39.



peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions” with a price tag that normally exceeds the estimated bill for eradicating poverty in the entire region. In this sense, the elimination of global poverty and the economic development of third-world nations should be conceptualized as a preventative measure of ensuring that these sinkholes do not emerge. In this understanding, poor states threaten regional stability, which the international community has an obvious interest in maintaining. Instead of waiting helplessly for these states to unsettle regions, the global community and particularly first-world countries should be more proactive in utilizing preventative measures—mainly, policies that promote economic development in foreign countries—to ensure that the destabilizing effects of poverty do not become unmanageable problems.

Poverty is directly connected to the propagation of terrorist activities in the global community. For Rice, the most dangerous threats to global security are the conflict zones that degenerate into fully failed states, which unavoidably lose the ability to monitor their own territory: “Afghanistan and, most recently, Somalia are classic failed states where anarchy facilitated the ascendancy of Islamic extremist who gained their foothold by defeating warlord and providing essential social services to bereft populations.”<sup>23</sup> This sequence of events may sound like a broken record to a 21<sup>st</sup> century ear, but it certainly demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of economic instability. Impoverishment is even identified by Al-Qaeda as a condition to be exploited in a 268-page book written by a top official of the terrorist syndicate.<sup>24</sup> The *Management of Savagery*, which the Military Academy of West Point identifies as a significant strategic text for Islamic militants, outlines the stages for

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<sup>23</sup> Rice 39.

<sup>24</sup> Laura Sullivan, “Al-Qaida’s Playbook,” *NPR*, 30 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5516640>>.

developing an Islamic Caliphate, or ruling regime, in a weakened nation: The “common links between states in which the regions of savagery can come into being” include “the weakness of the ruling regime and the weakness of the centralization of its power in the peripheries of the borders of its state and sometimes in internal regions, particularly those that are overcrowded...the presence of jihadi, Islamic expansion being propagated in these regions.”<sup>25</sup> This important strategic text for Al-Qaeda identifies the vulnerability of weakened states as a desirable precondition for the propagation of terrorist activity and the expansion of its fundamentalist agenda. If terrorist groups themselves identify the conditions of these failed states as opportunistic and strategically desirable, perhaps the international community should be more diligent about preventing countries from falling into the poverty trap. Countries interested in global security must be more responsive to this seemingly basic and explicitly stated terrorist strategy.

By ignoring the destabilizing effects of global poverty, the United States and other First World countries compromise their own national security. While global poverty may only present difficulties for the specific population that it afflicts in the short term, it has obvious long-term and far-reaching effects on international stability. Despite recognition of the problem in academic circles and major strategic documents, the United States has not implemented any meaningful policies to address poverty in Third World countries. If President Obama is serious about promoting international stability, he will need to implement policies direct toward improving economic conditions in weak states. He has, in fact, expressed intent to do so. While the past administration focused almost entirely on hard

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<sup>25</sup> Rice 41.

policy, Obama has emphasized the importance of supplemental economic measures to improve security conditions in Afghanistan.

## II.

### **Moral Arguments against Global Poverty**

Before progressing further with this argument, some mention and analysis of the typical philosophical response to global poverty is needed to demonstrate the extent to which these conceptions have failed to instigate meaningful change. In his essay “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” Peter Singer argues that the gross discrepancy between the world’s wealthy and poor is morally reprehensible. In the same way that a physically capable individual would be morally obligated to save a drowning child, a rich person is required by ethics to contribute a sizeable portion of his wealth to help fight poverty. Singer’s argument is limited in scope—that is, he focuses primarily on the responsibility of individuals. A person should donate all income above a specified amount, a sum which he believes would sufficiently ensure an adequate level of human flourishing. Again, Singer’s ideal seems completely at odds with capitalism and will therefore not likely take hold in Western liberal democracy. Individuals will not likely accept or even engage Singer’s ethic since it fails to establish any sort of causal relationship between First World citizens and the world’s impoverished.

Moral considerations even more rarely factor into state foreign policy decision making. Attempts to *alter* behavior at the state level by focusing exclusively on moral considerations, while noble, typically fail. At the same time, because the public—which should theoretically have an impact on the direction of foreign policy—is normally too preoccupied with selfish pursuits to demand a change in foreign policy or, for that matter, to even understand the nature of international issues, the world’s foreign policy elite has no

driving force pushing it towards greater consideration of standards of justice. “If only everyone living in affluent nations were to read *World Poverty and Human Rights*! Pogge’s combination of rigorous moral argument and judicious use of relevant facts compels us to acknowledge that the existing global economic order is ethically indefensible.”<sup>26</sup> So wrote Peter Singer in describing Thomas Pogge’s work. But everyone will *not* read this ethically compelling argument. Before dismissing this cosmopolitan approach to global injustice, however, we should acknowledge some of the truth in Singer’s characterization. By questioning the institutional framework of the global economic order, Thomas Pogge illustrates the extent to which First World countries have a hand in and a responsibility for global poverty and human rights violations.

Technological innovation and economic progress, together with the dominance of Western civilization and its moral norms, should reduce the pervasiveness of severe poverty in the world. But instead of uplifting the world’s population, modernity and progress have simply contributed to an ever-increasing gap between rich and poor. How can “we citizens of the affluent Western states not find it morally troubling,” asks Pogge, “that a world heavily dominated by us and our values gives such very deficient and inferior starting positions and opportunities to so many people?”<sup>27</sup> The vast majority of global and regional economic arrangement have been brokered by Western countries, but the ideology of most liberal democracies has failed to make their way into these agreements, leaving vast quantities of people in dire circumstances. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and other European nations have claimed that the spread of liberty and equal opportunity benefits all.

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<sup>26</sup> See back cover of Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*.

<sup>27</sup> Pogge 3.

But given the current global economic order, we can scarcely say that Western dominance has promoted improved living conditions for all. Even if the poorest have become slightly less poor as a result of the global economy and Western liberalism, the rich have become exponentially more rich, which has resulted in an ever-increasing gap between them.

Based on the current condition of mankind, Western civilization's strong emphasis on the individual seems like empty rhetoric. Perhaps Western countries only emphasize the importance of moral norms to justify actions abroad. In *For the Time Being*, a work that has many philosophical links to Pogge's human rights framework, Annie Dillard expresses this sentiment, asking, "What, here in the West, is the numerical limit to our working idea of 'the individual'? As recently as 1894, bubonic plague killed 13 million people in Asia—the same plague that killed twenty-five million Europeans five and a half centuries earlier. Have you even heard mention of this recent bubonic plague? Can our prizing of each human life weaken with the square of the distance, as gravity does?"<sup>28</sup> If Western states have any desire to eliminate this obvious disconnect between ideological rhetoric and action abroad, the system must be reconstructed to provide better starting positions to more people. But we will not find the cause to eliminate poverty morally compelling until we realize its persistence and the relentless rise in global inequality troubling enough to require serious consideration. Moral reflection must be strong enough to warrant economic intervention in the Third World. At best, the developing world has only superficial or misguided reasons—i.e. that social justice is politically unfeasible or that economic equality will result in overpopulation—for ignoring the prevalence of severe poverty. Until the Western world understands the extent to

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<sup>28</sup> Annie Dillard, *For the Time Being* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) 59.

which our global economic order harms the poor, severe poverty will surely continue into the indefinite future.

As long as the global economic order has some measure of influence on lives, the country also has a responsibility to ensure that those individuals under its domain experience a certain degree of human flourishing. “That persons are flourishing,” writes Pogge, “means that their lives are good, or worthwhile, in the broadest sense.”<sup>29</sup> This concept of human flourishing attempts to ensure deference for individual autonomy; respect for the autonomy of another means that we respect his measure of human flourishing. Any attempt to improve individual opportunity should be partly conditioned by the subject’s own concept of flourishing. Attempts to force a certain way of life on someone does not pay adequate heed to that person’s autonomy, and only by allowing the individual to construct self directives can human flourishing be fully upheld.

To some extent, the current international system falsely distinguishes between domestic and foreign justice. For the most part, the “justness” of a country depends on the opportunities afforded to its own citizens, and its hand in global injustice largely goes unnoticed. According to Pogge, the word “justice” is associated “with the morally appropriate and, in particular, equitable treatment of persons and groups. Its most prominent use currently is in the moral assessment of...social systems practices or ‘rules of the game,’ which govern interactions among individuals and collective agents as well as their access to material resources.”<sup>30</sup> But behind these social systems and networks—specifically, the global economic order—lies various countries and IGOs which together serve to perpetuate the

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<sup>29</sup> Pogge 27.

<sup>30</sup> Pogge 31.

status quo (provided it benefits countries according to their relative influence). For justice's sake, we need to understand how various regimes contribute to global injustice by sustaining or acquiescing in the current institutional framework. Globalization has rendered obsolete the notion that countries can simply agree to disagree about justice. Justice for one must be justice for all. At the current level of interconnectedness, because institutions cannot avoid interaction with other institutions, we must adopt a common conception of global justice. In other words, "we must aspire to a single, universal criterion of justice which all persons and peoples can accept as the basis for moral judgments about the global order."<sup>31</sup> Without this shared moral standard, the international system and, consequently, countries within it will essentially continue to condone the prevalence of poverty and official disrespect of human rights.

For Pogge, a common criterion of justice would be best formulated in the language of human rights. The sanctity of human rights should be respected by both social institutions and by those who uphold the current framework. Under this conception, individuals have the right to make certain claims on institutions, which have a corresponding duty to make such claims a reality. This takes a step beyond the current conception of human rights—that each society should incorporate human rights language into law. Pogge proposes instead the following:

...the postulate of a human right to X is tantamount to the demand that, insofar as reasonably possible, any coercive social institution be so designed that all human beings affected by them have secure access to X. A human right is a moral claim on any coercive social institutions imposed upon oneself and therefore a moral claim against anyone involved in their imposition.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Pogge 33.

<sup>32</sup> Pogge 46.



In this sense, Pogge wants to expand the current understanding of human rights to restrict the conduct of both nation states and IGOs because both have coercive power over individuals. Because the global institutional order benefits from the individual's participation therein, it must ensure the protection of certain basic, fundamental rights. For example, the United States gains greatly from cheap labor sources, so as a secondary institution that serves to prop up the current economic order—which makes this interaction possible—it has a subsequent responsibility to make possible the secure access to potable water, basic health care, etc. The United States should not be able to reap the benefits of cheap labor or cheap natural resources while the sources of those commodities suffer at the hands of coercive regimes, environmental disaster, or economic failure. By brokering and consenting to widespread interaction under the current global economic order, the US has entered into relationships with certain populations, giving individual members of those populations the ability to make claims against this country.

If the United States as a nation has a duty to fulfill these claims by virtue of its role in propping up the system, then by default, citizens of this country have a consequent responsibility—because they are the ones ultimately benefiting from economic interaction—to support measures and elect officials that have as their goal the enhancement of global justice. Conversely, under the current institutional framework, citizens of most First World countries contribute in some measure to human rights violations in the world. Pogge hopes to create a causal link between purchasing a turkey baster at Wal-Mart and the propagation of state-sponsored cultural genocide in Tibet. Both happen under the auspices of the global economic order. Again, because the happy Wal-Mart customer gains something from cheap labor—an inexpensive turkey baster—he has a responsibility to ensure that his role in the

market does not contribute to global injustice. Pogge accurately characterizes the nature of today's institutional world order, and he effectively ties consumer activity to human rights violations. Citizens of the First World should feel compelled to work for change in the system. Already his prescription places, perhaps justifiably, a heavy burden on the shoulders of individuals, but he overestimates their willingness to become educated on the matter and to *work* for any meaningful change. Because the current global economic order serves to benefit countries with the greatest bargaining power, citizens of those countries will look for any reason—even superficial and misinformed ones—to support the status quo. Without widespread domestic unease over the immorality of current economic arrangements, Pogge's proposed changes have little possibility for being implemented.

But this does not preclude the importance of Pogge's human rights conception, which evolves out of natural law and natural rights. All three concepts, according to Pogge, "were used to express a special class of moral concerns, namely ones that are among the weightiest of all as well as unrestricted and broadly shareable."<sup>33</sup> All attempt to establish a moral relationship between peoples and institutions irrespective of culture, nationality or religion. That is to say, the subject of all three concepts is the *human*. Pogge focuses on "uses that present natural law, or the natural rights, as making moral demands on people's conduct, practices, and institutions. Under normal circumstances, these demands should undermine or outweigh other moral and nonmoral concerns or ideals—like nationalism. Whether persons should respect these demands cannot be answered differently depending on culture, religion, or philosophy. In other words, Pogge holds human rights to be self-evident *and* universal. As in the natural law tradition, by virtue of an individual being human, the person is entitled to

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<sup>33</sup> Pogge 54.

certain protections against coercive persons or institutions. But the secularizing *shift* from natural-law language to natural-rights language introduces a select set of moral demands as broadly shareable our world, which has become much larger, more heterogeneous, and more connected. The shift from natural-rights to human-rights language is subtle. Pogge explains:

The potential appeal of the select moral demands is thereby further broadened [by using human rights language] in that these demands are made accessible also to those who reject all variants of moral realism—who believe, for instance, that the special moral status of all human beings rests on nothing more than our own profound moral commitment and determination that human beings ought to have this status.<sup>34</sup>

But perhaps most importantly, human rights, as opposed to natural rights, protect persons, all persons equally, from the coercive elements of certain bodies—specifically, governments and government-sponsored institutions. We can only say that a person’s human right has been violated under certain circumstances. I cannot fault the global economic order for allowing my car’s windshield to be broken, but I can make a legitimate claim if my government, which happens to be funded by oil revenues, decides to eradicate my ethnicity. I can also make a legitimate claim against the country benefiting from my country’s natural resources, as it has entered into an economic arrangement with my country and therefore contributes to state-sponsored human rights abuse.

Pogge’s institutional understanding of human rights attempts to take a step beyond common criticisms of social and economic rights. Libertarians hold a negative conception of human rights: Individuals have a responsibility to refrain from violating another’s autonomy. Maximalists subscribe to both negative and positive duties: Individuals must respect negative rights while at the same time actively seeking to protect and help others. For Pogge, the

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<sup>34</sup> Pogge 57.

libertarian fails to acknowledge the very real ways in which an individual's conduct can have an indirect effect on the rights of others, and the maximalist does not draw a sufficient causal link to justify positive duties. But he has a way to rise above the terms of this debate. His institutional understanding claims that by affirming a human right to palatable water, society, broadly speaking, ought to be restructured so as to provide for all of its members secure access to palatable water. And because citizens collectively contribute to the organization of their respective societies, "human rights ultimately make demands upon (the especially more influential) citizens. Persons share responsibility for official disrespect of human rights within any coercive institutional order that are involved in upholding."<sup>35</sup> Here again is where Pogge's philosophy expresses a far too idealized vision of human nature. By conceiving of human rights in this way, however, we at least have a better understanding of how US citizens contribute to global injustice. For those of us who accept responsibility for the current global economic order, this should inspire a sense of duty to reform the system and to establish safeguards against human rights violations. What we need, however, is a *compelling* source of motivation, one that steps beyond morality, to elicit action on a broad scale. Pogge has failed, but not by his own fault. Individuals simply do not respond to moral appeals.

As Pogge previously points out, the notion that people may prioritize the needs of their compatriots—commonly referred to as nationalism—presents a skillful defense of the status quo. In the same way that individuals value their own family over strangers, citizens should place the wellbeing of fellow citizens over and above foreigner's "claims," to use Pogge's language. In a sense, moral responsibility for the strict nationalist weakens "with the

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<sup>35</sup> Pogge 64.

square of the distance, as gravity does.”<sup>36</sup> But for Pogge, nationalism has been taken to unjustifiable extremes, and even a slight moderation of this ideology could reduce human misery and premature deaths. In many cases, nationalist sentiment perpetuates global injustice, and in its extremes, it contributes to or directly causes human misery in one society in an attempt, however indirect to improve the condition of its own. “It cannot be appropriate...in each and every context to put a compatriot’s interests, however minor, ahead of foreigners interests, however vital.”<sup>37</sup> To use a rather ridiculous example (which may or may not have bearing on the real world but the spirit of which certainly addresses Pogge’s sentiment) if presented a choice between the long-term interests of a foreigner and the short term interests of a compatriot—say, for example, while driving his brother to school from a remote area, Bob sees a stranger sitting in her broken-down vehicle twenty miles from the nearest town in the dead of winter—it could be legitimately expected based on an intuitive sense of morality that the foreigner receive assistance. Nationalism has its limits. This we must concede. Some misguided patriots say that it is valuable and desirable to benefit one’s own country and compatriots even if doing so brings or suffering death to a plethora of outsiders. “But we do not face this kind of choice. Our countries can flourish quite well without depriving the global poor.”<sup>38</sup> In brokering economic arrangements, the country could very well benefit *without* harming the poor. The benefit may be less compared to that which could be secured by following a kind of extremist nationalism, but this is a small price to pay for the advancement of global justice.

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<sup>36</sup> Dillard 59.

<sup>37</sup> Pogge 120.

<sup>38</sup> Pogge 145.

Pogge certainly presents some very compelling moral arguments for reforming the global economic order and the institutions that sustain it. In fact, with his account of structural causes, Pogge makes one of the best moral arguments for addressing global poverty. Proceeding under the assumption that all persons should be able to make legitimate claims on coercive institutions, Pogge illustrates his ideal solution for “official disrespect” of human rights. But for the purpose of this paper, the “why” is more important than the “how” because the “why” gives us reason to support an overhaul of the current system. From an objective standpoint, Pogge’s “why” *should* be compelling enough, but sadly, it will not have any meaningful effect on the individual’s willingness to *work* for institutional change. Nationalism may have its moral limits, even to the extent of Pogge’s assessment. But, like it or not, nationalism exists and will continue to constrain the efforts of very well-intentioned cosmopolitans. Without a more compelling argument to support efforts to realize global justice, world poverty and human rights violations will continue into the indefinite future.

### III.

#### **Arguments from National Interest**

##### **Political and Civil Unrest:**

Despite our leader's continuous insistence upon eliminating poverty's grasp on the nation, the majority of citizens seem uninterested, indifferent, or ignorant of a force that plagues this country's population. How can Pogge expect Americans to work towards eradicating poverty on a global scale? Global poverty is dismissed by most first-world citizens—despite being an evil that kills millions of people each year—as a normal condition for the Third World, one that cannot be remedied. After all, we have our own economic prosperity to worry about. It may be an overstatement to say that the entire First World shares this mentality. In fact, a few of Britain's primary political parties are committed to fight global poverty—e.g. Labour. Such a party platform simply would not resonate with most Americans. Perhaps Britain's social elite have relentlessly showered the population with portraits of poverty to the point where many ordinary citizens have begun to recognize the connection between the well-being of persons inhabiting other regions and their own national security. Maybe the size of Britain makes widespread social movement easier in comparison to the United States.<sup>39</sup> In any case, the United States must come to realize the connection between poverty and insecurity in the world's remote regions. Perhaps Susan Rice's appointment as UN Ambassador will allow her to follow in the footsteps of Gordon Brown, Tony Blair, the BBC, Bob Geldof, Bono, and the like. That is to say, her positioning

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<sup>39</sup> Rice 31.

in the Obama administration may signal a shift in American thinking on global poverty and its effects on security.

Half of the world's population suffers from severe poverty. For Rice, basic "intuition suggests that such pervasive poverty and grotesque disparities breed resentment, hostility, and insecurity," especially in the twenty-first century, with the advancement of cross-cultural communication.<sup>40</sup> When a poverty-stricken individual compares his lot to the average American life, made possible by technology, he will no doubt develop a sense of disdain and contempt for the system and the countries that make it possible. At the individual level, poverty may not pose a significant security threat to the United States, but at the nation-state level—that is, when poverty becomes more widespread to the extent that the vast majority of a country's population suffers from it—poverty may indeed threaten the most vital interests of the international system. Impoverished states typically fail to meet even the most basic needs of their citizens. And where needs have not been met and great service gaps exist, people will accept help from almost anyone willing to provide it. When regional conditions cannot be remedied, basic survival instinct kicks in, as people will go to great lengths to secure means of survival. Help could come from sources with positive motivations and interests, but it also could come from extremist institutions that demand some form of retribution.

For example, the only gunmen captured during the terrorist attack on Mumbai in early December 2008 claims to have been promised cash for his family if he died fighting for militant Islam.<sup>41</sup> That this type of exchange occurs between destructive organizations and

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<sup>40</sup> Rice 31.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,461566,00.html>



impoverished populations demonstrates how poverty threatens both regional and global stability. More broadly speaking, the same poor states that fail to provide security and sustenance to their populations also fail to exercise necessary sovereign control over their territory. These types of exchanges are most likely to occur in poor states without effective means of regulating the population's behavior. In other words, "poor states often lack the legal, police, intelligence, or security sector capacity to control their borders and remote areas."<sup>42</sup> Militant groups provide the flame, starved individuals the tinder to ignite widespread regional conflicts, which often have global implications. With this in mind, the United States has sought to improve security in poor states by establishing military operations in these countries. It would be far more effective in the long term, however, to prop up these nations, pull their populations out of the grips of severe poverty, and give them means (or the capacity to develop means) of securing their own territory.

The face of global politics has changed in such a way that the United States can no longer ignore the desperate conditions of distant regions. In *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman explains the world's current and future trend towards increasing globalization and interdependence. By itself, technology is morally neutral, and whether it helps or hurts the condition of the world depends on how human beings wield its power. But there is no "whether or not" technology and interaction will increase. The progression of this earth-altering force is inevitable. As Friedman demonstrates, the trends initiated by the advancement of technology cannot be reversed. Both interdependence and interaction have increased dramatically, making one population susceptible to the vulnerabilities of others. People, commodities, information, currency, and even microorganism cross land and sea

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<sup>42</sup> Rice 33.

with incredible, almost unfathomable speed. The globalized economy relies on efficiency of transfers to increase profit, and the world has met this demand: Air and Sea traffic have increased dramatically over the years (excluding this current era, initiated by our global economic recession).<sup>43</sup> With so many commodities being exchanged, the possibility for negative interaction also increases. When goods travel at such a high level of frequency and efficiency, poor populations can negatively impact even the wealthiest and securest societies.

Susan Rice's examples are illustrative:

These threats could take various forms: a mutated avian flu virus that jumps from poultry to humans in Cambodia or Burkina Faso; a US expatriate who unwittingly contracts Marburg virus in Angola and returns to Houston on an oil company charter flight; a terrorist cell that attacks US Navy vessel in Yemen or Somalia; the theft of biological or nuclear materials from poorly secured facilities in the former Soviet Union; narcotics traffickers in Tajikistan and criminal syndicates from Nigeria; or, over the longer term, flooding and other effects of global warming exacerbated by extensive deforestation in the Amazon and Congo River basins.<sup>44</sup>

Weak states breed certain ills that may be transferred to first-world nations. In the same way that a global economic recession damages the economy of all countries involved, negative conditions may spread through the international system with unprecedented speed.

Heightened interaction forces countries to share fates of others. Because globalization cannot be reversed and in fact benefits our society in many irreplaceable ways, the US cannot address the negative factors associated with the global economy by hermetically sealing the country; our economy cannot succeed without distant markets, and thus, First World nations cannot afford to ignore the problems facing poor states.

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux) 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Rice 33.

While weak states pose the most immediate threat to their own populations, they also threaten the physical and economic well-being of far-off peoples when they fail to fulfill even the most basic governmental responsibilities. The most significant and perhaps the most threatening consequence of poverty is the heightened risk of conflict in already unstable regions. At all stages of conflict, poverty instigates or perpetuates fighting. States with pervasive levels of poverty are not only more likely to engage in civil war, but are also more likely to experience long-term conflict. Once conflict subsides in such countries, persistent poverty, now exacerbated by civil strife, often reignites subsequent wars even before the country has a chance to stabilize from past conflict.<sup>45</sup>

Consider that East Timor has been in a perpetual state of civil war for decades. Resuming again in 2006, the violence displaced an estimated 150,000. Many experts extolled East Timor as reliably moving toward lasting peace, but they failed to consider the security consequences of its pervasive poverty.<sup>46</sup> Just seven years after conflict originally subsided, poverty rose sharply when the economy no longer benefited from the artificial boost instigated by UN activity. And despite large inflows of international monetary aid, only a small amount of funds was directed towards creating jobs or improving health care. As a result, more than half of the country's youth have no jobs, and the child mortality rate remains one of the highest in the world, "heating a cauldron of disaffected youth." What was previously claimed to be intuitive—that pervasive poverty breeds animosity and resentment—can be empirically demonstrated by an examination of countries suffering from such conditions. As in Sierra Leone, the embittered youth, faced by a perceived lack of

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<sup>45</sup> Rice 37.

<sup>46</sup> Rice 38.

options, sought to improve their lot in East Timor making their voices heard, by clashing in bloody civil war. Conflict usually leads to greater poverty and worsened regional conditions, and domestic populations will continue to clash if the country does not address the underlying causes. What else can a desperate individual do to improve his life if all peaceful avenues have been exhausted? People will choose the most viable alternative for ensuring a decent livelihood, and at times in these poor nations, to align oneself with a militant group becomes the most promising option.

When civil conflict reaches a threshold which the state can no longer withstand, the civil institutions may collapse, leaving the state in a position where it can no longer control its territory. Fallen states afford terrorist with an opportunity to exploit both the population's weakness and the relative freedom to operate in the peripheries of such regions. Recently in both Afghanistan and Somalia, anarchy "facilitated the ascendance of Islamic extremists who gained their foothold by defeating warlords and providing essential social services to bereft populations."<sup>47</sup> The consequences of Somalia's collapse are both obvious and grave. The militant group responsible for the 1993 attack on US forces in the so-called "Black Hawk Down" incident likely received weapons and training from al Qaeda. In 1998, al Qaeda terrorists involved in United States Embassy bombing in East Africa took refuge in Somalia, knowing that the nation lacked the wherewithal to find and displace them. Somalia is unable and perhaps unwilling to control its territory, so al-Qaeda continues to exploit its vulnerabilities—i.e. the 2002 Mombasa attacks were made possible by arms smuggled from Somalia. The state cannot effectively regulate the transfer of commodities across its borders. And most recently, al Qaeda terrorists have targeted Western civilians in high traffic areas

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<sup>47</sup> Rice 39.

throughout the country. In late August, 2008, Somalia kidnappers seized and continue to hold two freelance journalists—one Australian and one Canadian. Many people in Third World countries resent Westerners for having a privileged position in the world, hence the preponderance of violent acts committed against the West.<sup>48</sup>

Many groups also seek to exploit the vulnerabilities of weakened states for other purposes. Specifically, al Qaeda already preys upon the territory, livelihood, natural resources, and institutions of relatively stable but poor countries such as Senegal and Yemen.<sup>49</sup> Countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Indonesia with poor population flow management, weak intelligence capabilities, and few financial controls cannot effectively counter militant activity. For obvious reasons, terrorist groups operate in countries with the least sufficient ability to monitor their territories. Attacking weakened states first, al Qaeda can garner support and resources for more involved aggression against first-world countries. By improving the economic condition of states, the United States and other powerful nations can improve the security of the entire international system. At times, military intervention may be necessary, but a foreign policy that relies exclusively on hard power will never ensure our long-term security.

Even though Mali has a relatively stable government, terrorists have exploited the country's capability gaps and its inability to efficiently monitor every parcel of territory. The government in Mali, a multiparty democracy, has cooperated fully with the United States in the War on Terror and has since received the West's seal of approval. But even though it aligns itself with the Western world, Mali remains extremely poor: seventy-two percent of its

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<sup>48</sup> Rice 39.

<sup>49</sup> Rice 39.

people live on less than \$1 per day. Four years ago, the country ranked fourth from the bottom on the world's human development index. The country resides in a sea of instability, highly vulnerable to "spillovers" from bordering states—Mauritania, Algeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Niger. With a land area about the size of Texas and California combined, Mali has for years toiled without much success to prevent the Algerian-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) from staging operations on their territory. Poorly controlled borders, nomadic populations, vast uninhabited spaces, and under-resourced security services attract GSPC and other sub-national groups seeking to recruit, train, and deploy new terrorists.<sup>50</sup>

The United States should understand all too well from its operations in Afghanistan and Iraq the difficulties of combating insurgents in this type of environment. Even with the highest-funded military on the planet, the United States struggles to find and eliminate threats in vast, mountainous territory. Crippled by poverty, Mali's government cannot effectively stamp out insurgencies, which can plan and operate with relative ease and can also use the country as a springboard to neighboring states. The GSPC uses Mali's "centuries-old trans-Saharan Tuareg trading routes to smuggle cigarettes and other contraband to raise cash for operations."<sup>51</sup> Terrorist syndicates cannot operate without human and financial resources. If states have enough capability to monitor their territory, sub-national aggressors hiding in mountainous regions will eventually exhaust their resources. The United States tries to prevent state-sponsored terrorism—e.g. Iran and Pakistan—but it doesn't do enough to eliminate other sources of revenue for these terrorist groups.

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<sup>50</sup> Rice 40.

<sup>51</sup> Rice 40.

The borders between Mali and its seven neighbors act as two-way valves, allowing militant groups to move without restriction through the region as they recruit desperate individuals to fight. As expected, Mali's government cannot provide for its citizens. A vast majority of the population cannot find nourishment or potable water on a daily basis. Under these circumstances, the promises made by extremist groups attract many desperate citizens. Wahhabist charities and mosques funded from the Gulf States attempt to provide what the government cannot. According to Abass Haidara, imam of the Sankore Mosque in Timbuktu, "Wahhabists are setting up mosques all over northern Mali" and offering means of survival and religious training to young Malian males. "When those newly minted Wahhabist clerics return, they draw additional adherents to their extremist ideology."<sup>52</sup> This is all made possible by Mali's government being unable to monitor its territory or to adequately provide for its citizens. By providing what the government could not, Wahhabists charities and mosques can easily garner support for their cause. Young Malian males identify with extremist movements because they often offer an option—means of subsistence and sense of purpose—people would not otherwise have. Poverty limits the availability of options, giving sub-national groups a heightened ability to attract support.

### **Infectious Disease:**

How else can the vulnerability of one population be transferred to another? At an individual level, severe poverty weakens the immune system, increasing the human's susceptibility to infectious disease. In the same way that poor countries lack sufficient resources to control their borders, widespread poverty "severely constrains poor countries' capacity to prevent, detect, and treat deadly disease outbreaks or to constrain them before

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<sup>52</sup> Rice 40.

they spread abroad.”<sup>53</sup> As poverty rises, so too does the incidence of exposure to deadly pathogens. Each year, around 10 million children under the five perish from disease.<sup>54</sup> Over the past three decades, thirty new infectious diseases have emerged globally, many of which originated in developing countries. And according to the World Health Organization (WHO), fifty-three percent of children in developing countries with infectious disease die, not from the disease itself, but from poor nutrition.<sup>55</sup> Most of these statistics, along with nearly every other statistic on global poverty, are not surprising, and yet, next to nothing is done to remedy the issue. When infectious disease develops and spreads through the developing world, it is only a matter of time before it makes the leap to the developed world. By engaging severe poverty in Third World countries before deadly pathogens have ample time to take root, First World countries can prevent such problems from spiraling out of control and can reduce their own vulnerability to diseases that originate elsewhere.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, two regions which by their proximity to the United States pose a direct threat to national security, the mosquito-borne Dengue Fever has become widespread in recent years. Dengue (DF) and dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF) are both caused by one of four antigenically distinct virus serotypes of the same genus, Flavivirus. Individuals living in areas afflicted by dengue can contract more than one infection during their lifetime because infection with one serotype provides immunity to only that serotype. The infection, which produces illness ranging from viral syndromes to fatal disease, spreads between humans and by the Aedes mosquito, a species that now commonly

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<sup>53</sup> Rice 41.

<sup>54</sup> World Health Organization, “10 Facts on the global burden of disease, 16 March 2009 <[http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/global\\_burden/facts/en/index2.html](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/global_burden/facts/en/index2.html)>.

<sup>55</sup> World Health Organization, “Nutrition: Challenges,” 16 March 2009 <<http://www.who.int/nutrition/challenges/en/index.html>>.



resides in the Southern and Southeastern United States. The first reported epidemic occurred in Asia, Africa, and North America in 1779-1780, at which point DF was considered a mild disease sometimes acquired by tropic tourists, but after World War II, a denque pandemic that began in Southeast Asia quickly spread to the Americas and Pacific regions. Since 1975, it has been a frequent cause of hospitalization and death for children in these regions.<sup>56</sup>

Dengue and dengue hemorrhagic fever has been most endemic in the American region since the Second World War. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Pan American Health Organization initiated a campaign to prevent urban yellow fever and eradicated *Ae. Aegypti*, the most common Aedes mosquito, from most Central and South American countries. During this period, the epidemic dengue did not pose a significant health threat to citizens or visitors of this region, but in 1970, the United States discontinued the *Ae. Aegypti* elimination program, which consequently led to reinfestation of mosquito-friendly countries. The geographic distribution of *Ae Aegypti* in 2002 far exceeds that in 1970, the year the United States discontinued the eradication program. As a result, DF and DHF have become more widespread in Latin American and the Caribbean. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), dengue is the most important mosquito-borne viral disease. Not only is the size of its geographical distribution comparable to that of malaria, but an estimated 2.5 billion people live in areas susceptible to epidemics. Between 1977 and 2004, a total of 3,806 suspected cases of imported dengue were reported in the United States, and many more unreported cases likely occurred.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Dengue Fever," 27 March 2009, <<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/dengue/>>.

<sup>57</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Dengue Fever"

If global warming continues along the current trend, because warm environments will become more mosquito friendly, the already susceptible US South and Southeast may experience more dengue outbreaks in the near future. Also, between the United States and its southern neighbors, citizens frequently travel, making it vulnerable to imported cases of the viral disease. While this example demonstrates the extent to which diseases originating the Third World threaten US citizens, it also provides sufficient evidence of the United States being capable of eliminating such transnational security threats. The *Ae Aegypti* elimination program greatly reduced the incidence of DF and DHF infection. Such programs not only reduce the threat of infectious disease in the Third Word but also advance the interests of First World citizens.

Hampered by poverty and conflict, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of Africa's most diseased nations. And when new diseases begin to spread, the country cannot adequately respond because poverty has crippled the population and government. The DRC currently has the lowest per capita health expenditure of any country in the world. It is currently one of the poorest countries per capita in all of Africa, so the future appears to hold more death and destitution. The ongoing conflict in Eastern Congo and the presence of about 17,500 UN peacekeepers increases the odds that foreign military, police, or aid workers could contract infectious agents and transport them abroad.<sup>58</sup> The 2006 outbreak of pneumonic plague in the Ituri region sickened about 100 UN peacekeepers, killing nearly 20.<sup>59</sup> While the disease is highly treatable through the use of antibiotics, the DRC's hampered government cannot effectively impede its spread through the population. In 1976, the Sudan

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<sup>58</sup> Rice 42.

<sup>59</sup> World Health Organization, "Ebola haemorrhagic fever," 27 March 2009  
<<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/>>.

province and the nearby region of Zaire (which now reside in modern day DRC) experienced the outbreak of Ebola hemorrhagic fever, which is characterized by the WHO as one of the “most virulent diseases known to humankind, causing death in 50-90% of all clinically ill cases.”<sup>60</sup> The disease has a high death rate, an extended incubation period, and is transmitted through many forms of human contact, making it especially dangerous to the stability and security of our globalized world. After originating in DRC, Ebola quickly spread to nearby countries—Gabon, Uganda, and South Africa.

While the disease did not continue to spread beyond the African continent, the United States must consider the possibility that an extremely deadly disease like Ebola may one day make a transcontinental leap. Other infectious diseases have crossed natural barriers and have been transmitted from one civilization to the next. For example, polio spread from northern Nigeria to Indonesia in 2004. The mosquito-borne West Nile virus, which originated in Uganda, crossed the Atlantic Ocean by boarding a commercial aircraft, infected New York City in 1999, and it now resides within the continental United States. Like other transnational security threats, diseases use modern technology and transportation networks to transmit vulnerabilities between regions. From East Africa to Yemen to Saudi Arabia, Rift Valley Fever spread and infected hundreds of people, killing 11 percent of its victims in Yemen and 19 percent in Saudi Arabia. Lassa hemorrhagic fever infects up to 300,000 people every year, killing as many as 15-20% of hospitalized patients. Several UN peacekeepers died from Lassa while attempting to bring stability to Liberia and Sierra Leone. As people move within and between regions, deadly pathogens can easily spread through populations. Heightened governmental regulation in countries where diseases commonly originate would improve

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<sup>60</sup> World Health Organization, “Ebola haemorrhagic fever”

international security. By contributing to poor states, which are typically ill-equipped to contain and eliminate disease, the developed world can simultaneously advance their own national agenda.<sup>61</sup>

### **Population Growth and Environmental Degradation**

Some academics claim that reducing global poverty will harm the international system by causing a vast increase in population to the detriment of the world's collective food supply and natural resources—e.g. Garrett Hardin. But in reality, the population growth of a country generally varies inversely with the GDP. In other words, the birth rate in developing countries exceeds that of developed countries. The majority of the world's population resides in regions where high birth rate virtually guarantees high population growth for years to come. Also, most of the world's least developed countries face an exploding youth population that they cannot hope to sustain. On their current course, Third World countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Uganda will experience a population growth of more than 200 percent by 2050. The fertility rate in developing countries average 4.6 birth per woman, compared to 1.6 births per woman in developed nations.<sup>62</sup> Lack of education, lack of access to viable contraceptives, and a desire to increase family prosperity all fuel this type of growth, which in turn, heightens the demand for workable land. With greater proportions of person per acre of land, poor nations will be increasingly unable to support their populations, exposing people to many of the vulnerabilities already discussed—terrorism, civil strife, and disease.

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<sup>61</sup> Rice 43.

<sup>62</sup> Population Action International, "Fact Sheet: Fewer of More? The Real Story of Global Population," 27 March 2009 <[http://www.populationaction.org/Publications/Fact\\_Sheets/FS32/Population\\_Growth.pdf](http://www.populationaction.org/Publications/Fact_Sheets/FS32/Population_Growth.pdf)>.

Some leaders of developing countries doubt the merit of this claim, believing instead that high population growth rates will eventually lead to economic development. Again, ineffective governance in poor countries often causes or exacerbates many existing problems. In the past 25 years, Uganda's population has quintupled, causing a dramatic rise in poverty levels and corresponding social evils. But instead of taking measures to slow this growth, President Yoweri Museveni encourages it for the reasons described above. With a growth rate of 3.4%, Uganda must support another million people with each passing year. Between 1948 and 2002, the population increased from 5 million to 24.4 million, and experts estimate that, if current growth continues, the population will reach 51.9 million by 2025. Despite belief to the contrary, this will not lead to corresponding economic growth, and the country will inevitably fall into greater poverty. In just five years, the number of people living below the poverty line increased from 7.8 million to 10 million. Thirty-eight percent of Ugandans live on less than US\$1 per day. Infant mortality rates and the incidence of infectious disease continue to rise. Pressure from the UN fund for Population activities and other donor groups has not convinced President Museveni to change his policies. If Uganda continues down this path, it will soon become a breeding ground for transnational security threats, and the spillover effect will be imminent.<sup>63</sup>

The consequences of population growth stretch far beyond a specific country's physical borders. Neighboring countries must contend with the increased incidence of mass population flows. Large increases in population and heightened energy consumption—which usually takes the form of wood burning in poor countries—have many negative effects on the

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<sup>63</sup> Wairagala Wakabi, "Population Growth Continues to Drive up Poverty in Uganda," 18 February 2006 <[www.thelancet.com](http://www.thelancet.com)>.

environment. Demand for arable land, firewood gathering, and logging for precious hardwoods accelerate deforestation. Many places, but most notably in China, governments or companies engage in environmentally devastating infrastructure development projects and unsustainable energy consumption. Overfishing, poaching, and deforestation all accelerate resource depletion, which often leads to heightened poverty and worsened living conditions. Poor states typically lack the will and/or the means to prevent populations and companies from engaging in this type of behavior. Ill-equipped and ineffective governance, therefore, becomes perhaps the largest thorn in the side of developing countries. But by a concerted effort, First World countries can promote effective governance and help improve economic conditions

Without any substantive change, poor nations will continue to battle the negative environmental effects of poverty. Poverty afflicts society, according to Anthony Nyong in his article “Resource and Environmental Security,” by causing an inequitable distribution of and access to resources.<sup>64</sup> Because most developing nations have resource scarcities, the poor and marginalized cannot secure enough goods to ensure a decent livelihood. Forget about our conception of a “working wage” or minimum standards of decency. These countries simply cannot provide for their respective populations. Indeed, the “poorest segments of the population live in the most degraded and marginal lands and economically do not have access to most environmental goods and services.”<sup>65</sup> Four of ten people in Africa live on arid or semiarid lands. Seventy percent of the world’s least developed countries reside on the African continent, and forty percent of them are entirely or almost entirely composed of arid

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<sup>64</sup> Anthony Nyong, “Resource and Environmental Insecurity,” Too poor for Peace?: Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institutional Press, 2007) 74.

<sup>65</sup> Nyong 74.

or semiarid land.<sup>66</sup> This geographical feature destines the vast majority of Africa's population to become trapped in a vicious cycle: poverty is both a cause and result of environmental degradation. As was the case in both Haiti and Madagascar, the poor virtually never adopt sustainable activities and instead focus their energy on short-term survival. If the only land available for farming lies underneath an old growth forest, then the forest must be destroyed. Also, when conflict ignites over land and resources, the most affected people are those with the least resources to draw upon. Most of them are forced to abandon their homes in the event of conflict over resources and end up as environmental refugees.<sup>67</sup> Resource depletion leads to more intense poverty and often to civil strife.

The Rwandan genocide demonstrates the extent to which poverty and environmental insecurity can undermine the security of entire regions. While the "general opinion regarding the Rwandan conflict tends to place the cause at the doorstep of ethnic political rivalry," writes Anthony Nyong, "the genocide was in reality the product of complex interactions among demographic pressure, land degradation, inequitable access to and shortage of land resources, unequal education opportunities, the unemployment of rural youth, and unequal representation in power."<sup>68</sup> Without these factors, the ethnic rivalry between Hutus and Tutsis would likely not have degenerated into bloody and horrific genocide with a death toll of nearly one million. Population growth led to increased poverty levels, which in turn threatened the environmental security of the country. Specifically, the population grew from 1.9 million in 1948 to 7.5 million in 1992. To complicate things further, the country's

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<sup>66</sup> Nyong 74.

<sup>67</sup> Nyong 74.

<sup>68</sup> Nyong 80.

primary cash crop depreciated on the world market, causing the value of total exports to fall from an average \$60 per capita per year between 1976-1979 to \$13 in 1991.<sup>69</sup>

Rwanda's woes do not end here. With its growing population and worsening poverty, the country also experienced a period of frequent droughts causing soil degradation and consequent declines in food production. In the mid-1980, hundreds of persons and livestock perished as a result. Witnessing such widespread calamity, the population developed a sense of helplessness and disillusionment—both with the state, for being unable to provide for basic welfare, and with the social elite, for profiting while the rest suffer. Negative sentiments amongst the country's marginalized population eventually led to a politically hostile social environment. The state's "failure to acknowledge and address such grievances prompted political dissension and presented opposition leaders with an opportunity to wage war against the government."<sup>70</sup> Without the necessary institutions to instigate peaceful change, the opposition leaders had no other choice but to initiate a civil war for control of political power and resources. The conflict spread quickly through the country, first to the most impoverished regions, where people whose existence was threatened sought to engage the rich, whom they accused of stealing all the resources meant for the state, in bloody civil war.<sup>71</sup> To this day, the region remains both hostile and unstable.

This genocide could have been prevented had the global community responded to Rwanda's impoverishment. But instead, the world stood by as a country and a population fell into severe poverty and resulting war. Instead of using economic aid as a sort of preventative medicine, the world uses peacekeeping forces to quell the fighting *after* death and destruction

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<sup>69</sup> Nyong 80.

<sup>70</sup> Nyong 80.

<sup>71</sup> Nyong 80.



have devastated the country. Developed countries must fully recognize the relationship between poverty and global insecurity and have the foresight to promote economic development *before* a poor country reaches its breaking point. Why not spend money to prevent a condition rather than to treat it (which usually takes exponentially more resources)? Millions of lives, international stability, and national security are at stake.

Fueled by poverty and environmental insecurity, the ethnic cleansing occurring in the Darfur region demonstrates the degree to which conflict and instability results from desperate conditions. Complicated and worsened by high population growth and weak government, Sudanese violence will continue unless the world addresses the source of the region's woes. Darfur has always faced harsh environmental conditions—negligible rainfall, intense heat, and periodic droughts. Power currently lies in the hands of the northerner Jellaba, Sudanese of Arab Origin, who in the 1970s initiated a scheme to gain from southern resources. Because the development project only benefitted the Jellaba, the South began to question the government's motives. A group of discontented and marginalized southerners soon established the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement to improve the condition of their people by (almost) any means. As expected, civil war eventually broke out between the new coalition and Sudan's official government. Poverty and human insecurity instigated this clash between two ethnicities, and contrary to popular opinion, the two ethnicities did not fight over cultural differences. Rather, "ecological imbalances, a scarcity of water, deforestation, the mismanagement of natural resources, an alleged inequality in the distribution of available resources and national projects, and a lack of cooperation" forced individuals to identify along ethnic lines to ensure

survival.<sup>72</sup> Without these pressures, southern Sudanese would have no reason to clash with the northern government. Had the northern government been able to provide for the southern coalition, conflict would have been unnecessary.

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<sup>72</sup> Nyong 83.

#### IV.

#### Conclusion

The exclusive use of hard policy, military engagement, does not address the underlying causes of such civil, regional, and global conflict. There is hope, though. If ethnic rivalry was the sole cause of instability, there would be little hope for peace. But given the true nature of the conflict, the global community *can* improve unstable regions by eliminating poverty and by contributing to environmental security. By now, it should be clear that most transnational security threats—including poverty, civil conflict, terrorism, environmental degradation, and overpopulation—are inter-related. Particularly in the developing world, poverty feeds other existing sources of conflict, and existing sources of conflict feed poverty. Many developed countries focus exclusively on forces that most directly threaten their national securities—e.g. terrorism. But because terrorism has underlying causes, a foreign policy that relies exclusively on military intervention or “peacekeeping” will never eliminate this transnational security threat. Even with heightened involvement in the region, occupying forces have even witnessed a worsening of conditions in Afghanistan. General David Patreus claims that Afghans are less safe now than they were two years ago, so it seems that peace and stability will require prolonged and intensified involvement in the region. Newly appointed US envoy Richard Holbrooke has also noted the intense disorder afflicting the region. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will require infinite resources; the United States would need to keep military forces in the Middle East indefinitely. This type of foreign engagement, especially given the recent downturn in the economy, cannot be sustained. The same conditions that initiated this era of terrorism still

exist and will continue to plague the developing world unless the United States and other able countries put forth a concerted effort toward eliminating regional instability and toward uplifting impoverished populations.

Since declaring the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has lost its position as the world's preeminent superpower. Many of our closest allies have distanced themselves from our cause while many of our greatest enemies have become more defiant. At the same time the world resists our self-proclaimed role as leader of the free world, the country has severely constrained its ability to respond to threats in other regions. With its involvement in the Middle East, the United States will not be less able to respond militarily if, for example, rogue states continue to engage in nuclear proliferation. Our overall superior military strength will count be severely hampered if it is diffuse. What in the past was a source of strength, a source of deterrence for countries that resist our ideals, has become a potential weakness. That is to say, the country's overconfidence in its military capability may eventually undermine its influence in the world. Economic over-commitment and overextension often cause great powers to fall—e.g the Soviet Union. The military component of foreign policy is certainly a necessary one, but it cannot be the only one. More emphasis should be placed on long-term, sustainable responses to transnational security threats. That being said, the United States cannot afford to address global poverty and its consequences alone. Unilateralism in the Middle East has caused economic insecurity at home. The United States must actively seek international coalitions and multilateral engagement of global issues so that multiple countries share the economic burden of improving international stability. Consensus, not Bush-style unilateralism, should be the *modus operandi*.

The United States also cannot afford to severely curtail its presence in far-off regions. The picture of global politics advanced by this thesis could be seen as supporting isolationism: Prevent transnational security threats from impacting the United States by fighting the trends of globalization. The increasing interconnectedness of the global system has made the international environment more vulnerable to regional conditions and conflicts. Instead of improving regional conditions or preventing regional conflict, prevent them from affecting the rest of the world by resisting globalization. This path is reminiscent of the position taken by Taft-style Republicans, who favored non-interventionist foreign policy. By confining itself to domestic issues, claim isolationists, the United States can avoid overextension and over-commitment. Foreign engagement has contributed to an ever-increasing national debt, which threatens the economic stability of the country. Isolationists believe that the country should refrain from transferring funds overseas because the domestic economy will invariably suffer as a result. And because any type of action abroad will have unforeseen consequences, countries should work toward preserving the status quo. There may be only caricatures of isolationism, but similar arguments are commonly made in response to these types of global issues.

Admittedly, the United States must be careful about involving itself in distant countries and be skeptical of foreign entanglements. But as Thomas Pogge points out, the United States and other developed countries benefit greatly from increased interaction and interconnection. The domestic economy has much to gain from foreign markets, and the structure of our global economy is such that the United States cannot just remove itself from the system. The country should pursue an end that allows it to benefit from the global

institutional framework, while at the same time improving international stability and national security.

In executing its foreign policy, though, the United States must avoid being recognized as just another Western imperial power. Many peoples in developing nations see the United States as imposing its will on the rest of the world. Over the past decade, this country has dug itself a hole it may never climb back out. To be more effective on the international stage, the United States must take action towards improving its legitimacy—that is, giving foreign countries reason to see it in a more positive light. By improving the conditions in Third World nations, by securing impoverished populations' access to resources, by taking responsibility for the various institutional arrangements that order the global economy, the United States may advance its legitimacy, improve its ability to operate internationally, develop its own national security, and uplift the world's poor.

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