

Presentation of the State of the World 2005 Report

Extracts from the presentation by

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"State of the World 2005: Redefining Global Security"

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The global security debate in the last few years has been fixated on too narrow a slice of security concerns and remains steeped in traditional understandings of security.

But traditional approaches are often inappropriate to the challenges at hand:

- Weapons do not necessarily provide security (and proliferation is a growing risk)
- Real security in a globalizing world cannot be provided on a purely national basis.
- The traditional focus on state security is inadequate, and needs to encompass safety and well-being of individuals and communities.
- Non-military dimensions of security have an important influence on stability.

The global war on terror is diverting the world's attention and resources from many of the underlying causes of instability. They include:

- endemic poverty
- infectious disease
- large-scale population shifts
- ecosystem breakdown
- and rising competition over natural resources.

While the poorest countries are most affected, none of these issues respect human-drawn borders, and we might think of them as "problems without passports."

Alone or in combination, these pressures threaten to erode—and even undermine—the livelihoods of communities and nations, and compromising their viability in fundamental ways.

But they could also lead the world into a dangerous spiral in which political and ethnic fault lines deepen and radicalization grows. This may create conditions in which political instability, extremism, and warfare thrive—the world of failed states.

Worst-case outcomes are more likely—

- where political grievances are left to fester,
- where public institutions are weak or corrupt, and
- where weapons (particularly small arms) are easily available.

Ultimately, it is the dimming of hope for a better future that helps fuel extremism.

Unlike traditional military threats emanating from a determined adversary, many of today's security challenges are risks and vulnerabilities shared across borders.

Among the major forces undermining global security are the following factors:

Oil

- Continued heavy dependence on oil fuels geopolitical rivalries, civil wars, and human rights violations.
- The economic security of supplier and buyer nations is compromised by severe price swings, particularly as ever-growing demand bumps up against limited supplies.
- And oil's role in undermining climate stability poses grave threats to human safety.

Water

Worldwide, more than 430 million people currently face water scarcity, and the numbers are set to rise sharply. Water cooperation, rather than conflict, has been the norm among neighboring states. But as the geographic scale drops, the likelihood of tensions, and even violence, is considerably higher.

Food Security

is influenced by factors such as water availability, land distribution, poverty, and environmental degradation. Worldwide, nearly 2 billion people suffer from hunger and chronic nutrient deficiencies. Some 1.4 billion live precariously off marginal lands. Among the major food security threats on the horizon are climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and the rise of foodborne illnesses and bioterror.

Infectious Disease

Some twenty known diseases have re-emerged or spread geographically, and many new ones, such as SARS, have been identified. Pathogens are crossing borders with increasing ease in a globalizing world. HIV/AIDS has become a major killer. In southern Africa, the disease is weakening farm economies, devastating education, and ultimately undermining social and political stability.

Natural Disasters

Ecosystem destruction and population growth are setting the stage for more frequent and more devastating natural disasters. Three times as many people—250 million—were affected by such events in 2003 as in 1990.

The pace is likely to accelerate as climate change translates into more intense storms, flooding, heat waves, and droughts. Desertification puts 135m people at risk of being driven off their lands.

Youth Bulge

Youth unemployment is skyrocketing (with highest rates found in the Middle East and Africa). More than 200 million young people are unemployed or do not earn enough to support a family. When large numbers of young men feel frustrated in their search for status and livelihood, they can be a destabilizing force—if their discontent pushes them into crime, or into joining militias or extremist groups.

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