

# A global campaign of hope

The scale of terrorism continues to expand and the attempts by Western governments to suppress it look increasingly costly, punitive and unsuccessful. For people with comparatively high incomes, the world has become more unstable and dangerous, though it is still far safer, accessible and predictable than for the majority of the world's population.

As well, scientific recognition of the scale of adverse environmental change continues to grow. Adding to the well-recognised problem of greenhouse gas accumulation, a vast brown haze over much of Asia and the Mediterranean Basin has been identified as changing global climate by reducing rainfall and the penetration of light needed to grow food. Contributing to this haze are aerosols from cars, coal-fired power stations and biomass burning from innumerable cooking fires. A bright spot is that, while this haze may have contributed to the prolonged dry spell across the eastern Sahel in the 1970s and 1980s, the recent increased rainfall in this region has coincided with (and may have been caused by) reduced European emissions of sulphur dioxide.

Meanwhile, drought has reduced harvests in southern Africa, Ethiopia, Australia and parts of Asia. Globally, the per capita production of grain has fallen for the fifth straight year, to levels last seen in the early 1970s (see figure). A drought followed by crop-damaging rain currently threatens famine in Cambodia. Food is short in Central America, partly because of Hurricane Mitch's destruction of so much infrastructure. In Argentina and Uruguay, people are increasingly going hungry as their economic crisis deepens.

## What lies ahead?

The performances of the U.S. and Australia at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Delhi Conference of the Parties on climate change do not augur well for our common future. Both countries continue to appear indifferent to the risk of climate change. Presumably, they think others will be most severely affected. William Blum, author of *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, has collated several reports of U.S. triumphalism. For example, Robert Kagan of the Carnegie Endowment wrote: "The truth is that the benevolent hegemony exercised by the U.S. is good for a vast portion of the world's population. It is certainly a better international arrangement than all realistic alternatives." Similarly, Blum reports that columnist Charles Krauthammer speaks of America's "uniquely benign imperium."

There is a disturbing parallel between the U.S., the Nazis and the Taliban. All see the world in Manichean terms, that is, one in which people are solely good or bad (Aryan/

non-Aryan, believer/infidel, and terrorist/non-terrorist). The U.S. is far more inclusive than the Nazis and Taliban, but needs spurring to provide the leadership required to ensure the future is better than the past.

Consistent with a Manichean worldview is the West's widespread ignorance of its governments' record of manipulating or supporting foreign regimes in exchange for access to their resources, even where such governments are flagrantly corrupt. One example of the double standard of democracy at home allied with autocracies abroad is the unflagging Western support for the Saudi Arabian monarchy (despite its vast wealth, Saudi Arabia has a comparatively low life expectancy.) Michael Klare, author of *Resource Wars*, reports the common belief that, in 1945, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt pledged continual U.S. support for the Saudi monarchy in exchange for unfettered access to its oil. Similar meddling by Western powers (including Russia) in the Middle East contributed to the rise of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban.

Just as barbarians assaulted the walls of the Roman empire, it's not surprising that today's centers of world power are under attack. That the instigators are not the poorest of the poor (the fourth "classe") does not invalidate the claim that the extent of global inequality is an important factor in their genesis. For example, assertions that the CIA is behind the Bali bomb attack had widespread credence in Indonesia. Would such views be as common if Indonesians had a long history of democracy, literacy, scientific achievement and engagement as emerging equals in the world economy, and if the CIA had a less meddling history?

In fact, the rise of terror, the availability of weapons of mass destruction, the still growing global population and the continuing decline in natural capital are deeply concerning, particularly if the rich

world continues to rely on fortification and militarization as its main response.

## Alternatives to war on terror

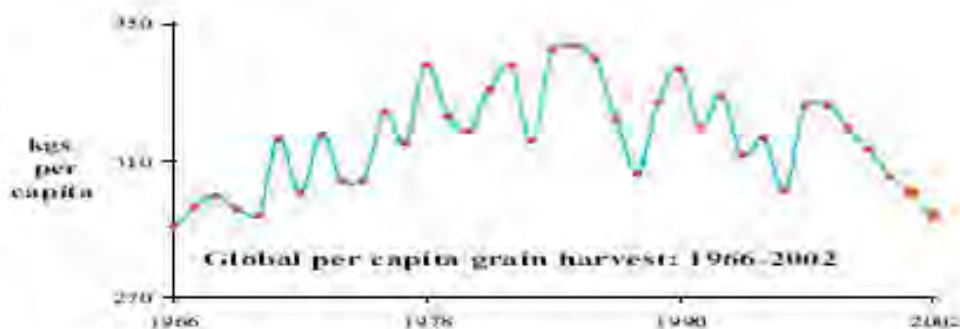
Instead, a campaign of hope, led by the U.S. and its allies, is far more attractive than a conventional war on terror, and may prove more effective at reducing terrorism. For this to occur, Western leaders must see that near universal access to education, information (and data) and clean technology are in our collective self-interest. Yes, it would be expensive. It would require enormous investment, on the scale of a military war. With luck research, subsidies, economies of scale and new technologies (especially to provide energy and transport) could become affordable to billions in the majority world. This campaign could stimulate the global economy and retard ecological harm. As well, wouldn't the hope of genuine engagement in the global economy reduce the attraction of terrorism as a career path?

## A new gilded age?

Writing in the *New York Times*, Princeton economist Paul Krugman recently warned that the U.S. has returned to a new gilded age in which the super rich, cared for by armies of servants, live in mansions, some approaching the White House in size. Not unrelated, Jared Diamond warns that a major cause for the scale of global environmental risk-taking is the insulation of decision-making elites from the consequences of their actions.

The sacrifices required for a war of hope appear daunting. But a future in which terrorists use increasingly desperate means attempting to destroy civilization is appalling. A war on terror does not reduce the long-term risk. At the least, it needs to be allied with a campaign of hope. And this means that we must abandon Manichean world views.

References available on request.



The global grain harvest comfortably outpaced population growth during the 1970s, but has faltered in recent years. The mainstream explanation for the fall between 1985 and 1996 does not persuasively explain the subsequent decline. Total food production has not experienced the same decline, but grain is important because of its facility for storage and transportation, thus serving to protect and reduce the impact of poor seasons in different regions. Per capita fish consumption has also started to decline. Raw data: FAO, UN Population Division, and U.S. Dept of Agriculture (provisional data for 2001-2).