

GLOBAL SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
- THE ESSENTIAL GLOBAL CONNECTION -

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ABSTRACT

This is a time of growing uncertainty and doubts in the world's understanding of itself and its future. The global economic system is showing signs of severe strain, giving rise to serious concern in all quarters as to its future resiliency in the face of repeated shocks. The world economy is, in fact, undergoing dramatic changes -- changes that are vast and sweeping in their scope and, very possibly, irreversible in their consequences. As the old economic order gives way to an, as yet, uncertain new pattern, an inescapable fact is emerging. And, that is, the world's economy is now truly global. Interdependence and linkage characterize its configuration and processes. The central driving force, the engine that powers the world economy is economic development -- a panoply of activities and endeavors fashioned to satisfy the culturally derived needs of the world's society and now, of necessity, increasingly focused on the survival of hundreds of millions of poor peoples caught up in the agony of pervasive and persistent poverty. Economic development rests upon the underpinnings of the environment, underpinnings that, like the world's economic system they support, are showing signs of severe strain, and whose resiliency is the object of growing concern. If the environmental and resource underpinnings of the global economic system cannot be secured, if they cannot furnish evidence of being able to sustain present and future development, then economic dislocation and breakdowns will occur. The emergence of global environmental insecurity as a threat to global economic security, and, hence, international peace is yet to be widely perceived and understood. Several requirements and recommendations are advanced as providing a basis for planning and action.

1. INTRODUCTION

Our International Symposium on the Biosphere comes at a time when the resiliency of the world's economic system is being sorely tested. Subjected to repeated traumatizing shocks, it reels under the stresses that threaten its very integrity. Suddenly, the world is coming to see its economic system much as the ecologist views the environment; namely, everything is somehow connected. The web of interconnections, interrelationships and interdependencies that characterize the world's economic system has its parallel in the web of life. Stress some part of an ecosystem and the repercussions are manifested throughout the system. Declining oil prices on the world market are not without their effect on your friendly neighborhood bank around the corner. Declining demands for exports of raw materials from developing countries is reflected in their

inability to service their growing indebtedness, with the spectre of defaults looming.

This is a time of growing uncertainty and doubts in the world's understanding of itself and its future. Some speak of the fading promise, while others talk confidently of unlimited potential. Some see the world moving precariously close to international anarchy, while others predict the emergence of a glorious new age to be made possible through technology that literally boggles the mind. Whatever your own perceptions -- hope or fear, anticipation or resignation -- be certain that profound movements are at work globally -- in technology, in politics -- movements that are vast and sweeping in their scope and, most certainly, irreversible in their consequences.

2. GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE

The world is changing -- it is experiencing convulsions not unlike those that characterized its birth. The world economy is undergoing dramatic revisions. The "old order changeth," and many of the familiar guideposts that served to direct the patterns of trade and development are less visible or have disappeared. Even the traditional institutions that for so long provided equilibrium and stability to the system are now coming under assault as being no longer adequate or even relevant to the emerging "new order."

Amidst this economic and political fermentation an inescapable fact is surfacing and, that is, the world's economy is now truly global and the interconnections and linkages point to the interdependence that now characterizes the system. Interdependence and linkage characterize its configuration and processes.

The fact of interdependence is ahead of its perception by governments; and even the corporate sector and the banks reflect an uncertainty as to the processes at work.

Policymakers around the world seeking to give practical effect to their national self-interests are experiencing difficulties. They are now discovering that their vested interests are inextricably tied to the vested interests of others. The structural changes occurring in the global economy are profoundly altering traditional patterns of trade, thereby affecting national and regional relationships, and the economic roles which history has served to confer on countries.

3. TOWARD AN AGE OF GLOBAL SCARCITY?

While the patterns of economic development and the configurations of the global economy undergo change, including the stresses inherent in these evolving new relationships, it still remains for economic development to be the engine, the central driving force of the world economy. In all its manifestations, be it the landless poverty-stricken family trying to sell charcoal wrested from the rapidly disappearing forests of East Africa, or the transnational corporate giant eyeing a new generation of microcomputers, economic development is the means whereby culturally derived needs and wants are satisfied. That for a growing majority of the world's people these efforts are directed increasingly at ensuring survival is testimony to the apatheid which has historically characterized the man:environment relationship.

Development is a process, and the business of development rests upon the underpinnings of the environment. If the environmental and natural resource underpinnings of the world's economic system cannot be secured, if they cannot provide evidence of being able to sustain present and future development, then economic dislocations and outright breakdowns would seem to be in our future. Their occurrence will trigger human deprivation on an unprecedented scale, including social unrest with militant manifestations.

The scenario which appears to be emerging is one of the advent of an age of global scarcity in a world of increasing population. There are varying views on the degree of tension inherent in this emerging situation, on the ways this tension is likely to manifest itself, and how it can be alleviated, but there can be no doubt as to its potential threat to world security.

Population increases in many countries of the world are eroding hard-won economic gains, and in the process are contributing to an acceleration in the trends of environmental and natural resource degradation and destruction.

A world that now has over four billion inhabitants; a world divided to an alarming and increasing degree by a poverty curtain that is giving rise to social tensions threatening of international security; a world in which soon over 75 percent of the then six billion inhabitants will intensify pressures on an already stressed environment and swell the ranks of the poverty-stricken; a world evidencing continued environmental degradation -- deforestation, topsoil loss, desert encroachment, water scarcities, overgrazing, overfishing, toxic wastes, pollution -- in such a world the only kind of economic development that can make any sense is that which is capable of meeting minimal human needs, and whose continued growth can be sustained.

4. THE UNRECOGNIZED THREAT TO GLOBAL SECURITY -- THE NEED FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

It is both interesting and disheartening to note that the world's family of nations are bearing the heavy burden of arming themselves against perceived threats to their national security. Something approaching eight hundred billions of dollars are being spent annually, ostensibly to deter aggression and threats to national security and international peace. At the same time, no less a threat to both national and global security continues largely unrecognized and unabated. I am referring, of course, to the demise of the world's environmental systems which, because it has proceeded insidiously and incrementally, and the consequences are further removed in time, is accorded relatively scant attention. And, if the environmental community thinks the environment is under heavy stress now -- in the words of the old showman, "you ain't seen nothin' yet." And, if the development community perceives no need to pursue patterns of development that give promise of being sustainable, no need to reorder priorities concerning the exploitation and consumption of the supporting environmental and resources substratum, it will do so at its own great risk and peril. Failure of our global environmental system means failure of our global economic system. And, given the present uncertainties surrounding the resiliency of the latter, this should be taken as an early warning signal of what could happen if the outer limits of our global environmental systems are likewise exceeded beyond their capacity to equilibrate. The integrity of the environment is essential to our being able to sustain economic development. Thus, economic development and those who are responsible for it throughout the world have a vital interest in protecting

and wisely managing the environmental systems and resources committed to their control and use, if for no other reason than to ensure that much-needed economic development and growth are not threatened by the loss of these essential supports.

"In the real world today, the national interests of the separate states converge in the need to defend and sustain the living systems of the Planet Earth the idea of common security is relevant, as well, to the economic structures of the world we live in -- an interdependent world, not only in terms of expanded exchanges of goods and money and people, but of mutual dependence on the daily functioning of integrated economic and technical systems and services that have become a kind of metabolism for the body politic of the society of nations And, the idea of common security is relevant to the ecological realities of the world -- for how ... can we even talk about national security when the global commons and the basic biological systems are under threat, that is, when the planet itself is insecure and under rising risks from year to year.^{1/}

Admittedly, the emergence of environmental insecurity as a global threat is something of a new phenomenon. Just as the interdependencies and linkages that now characterize the evolving world economy are becoming apparent, so, too, the interrelatedness of their resource underpinnings and their essential role in sustaining development are just becoming apparent to a wider audience. The integrity of the environment and natural resource base is essential to the world's ability to sustain economic development.

Yet, there still exists throughout much of the world a universal complacency about the declining state of the environment.

And so, I would make several points that I believe warrant our individual attention and collective action:

- first, the security of nations, and therefore, of the world depends ultimately on achieving sustainable development; hence, our perspective must be global;
- second, development must allow for economic growth on the part of both developed and developing nations if it is, in fact, to be sustained;
- third, sustainable development requires that national development strategies include vigorous attention to the environment, resources management, and social equity.

5. FIVE ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

How then can we reconcile the global imperative to assist in the socio-economic advance of all peoples, with the imperative to safeguard the environment and natural resources that are essential to the very development that makes such advances possible?

To my mind, five essential requirements stand out:

^{1/} Wilson, Thomas W. Jr., "National Security: New Perceptions," Interaction, Vol. 2, Nos. 4 & 5, Global Tomorrow Coalition, Washington, D.C. 1982.

- Recognize that economic growth in all countries is essential, if for no other reason we are to avert economic, political, and social disaster.
- Act on the evidence that such growth, if properly planned and executed, need not cause unacceptable environmental penalties.
- Assist nations in the choice of patterns of growth which, above all, promise to be sustainable and yield reasonable economic gains with minimal environmental risk.
- Provide the world's poorer nations with urgently needed concessional aid to promote the kind of development that will prevent ecological disaster, and the middle-income countries with greater access to commercial capital conditioned for environmentally sound development.
- Finally, to understand that human degradation that grows out of persistent and pervasive poverty now threatening hundreds upon hundreds of millions of people is the most dangerous threat to the environment.

The growing uncertainty and doubts in the world's understanding of itself and its future, of which I earlier spoke, are symptomatic of the great transition on which it has embarked -- a transition, hopefully, in which it will find new patterns of growth more sensitive to the realities of the world's needs. To the extent that the global economic system fails to transform perceived possibilities into realities; to the degree that the majority of the world's peoples continue to see their environments being changed and shaped in ways which, somehow, still only frustrate their hopes and expectations for a better life; to that extent mankind is coming more and more to see its image of the future as an illusion.

It seems to me that if we are to have any chance at all for alleviating the growing dimensions of human deprivation, a whole new concept of obligation and duty needs to be blueprinted on an international scale. The realities of today's world and the prospect of tomorrow's mandates that we cannot continue to practice environmental apartheid, for, in the final analysis, it is the environment which sustains the peoples of the world. Given the trend of environmental degradation, fueled by the consequences of a world economic system in turmoil, hundreds upon hundreds of millions of human beings will continue to suffer, bringing further grief to their environment and diminishing their hopes for the future.

Sustainable development is a global imperative -- failing to observe it can only contribute to a furtherance of global insecurity -- the results of which can only be speculated upon.

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