

central government, as has already happened in Somalia and the Solomon Islands; and overwhelming poverty, as in all of the countries on these lists. Hence the best predictors of modern "state failures"—i.e., revolutions, violent regime change, collapse of authority, and genocide—prove to be measures of environmental and population pressure, such as high infant mortality, rapid population growth, a high percentage of the population in their late teens and 20s, and hordes of unemployed young men without job prospects and ripe for recruitment into militias. Those pressures create conflicts over shortages of land (as in Rwanda), water, forests, fish, oil, and minerals. They create not only chronic internal conflict, but also emigration of political and economic refugees, and wars between countries arising when authoritarian regimes attack neighboring nations in order to divert popular attention from internal stresses.

In short, it is not a question open for debate whether the collapses of past societies have modern parallels and offer any lessons to us. That question is settled, because such collapses have actually been happening recently, and others appear to be imminent. Instead, the real question is how many more countries will undergo them.

As for terrorists, you might object that many of the political murderers, suicide bombers, and 9/11 terrorists were educated and moneyed rather than uneducated and desperate. That's true, but they still depended on a desperate society for support and toleration. Any society has its murderous fanatics; the U.S. produced its own Timothy McVeigh and its Harvard educated Theodore Kaczinski. But well-nourished societies offering good job prospects, like the U.S., Finland, and South Korea, don't offer broad support to their fanatics.

The problems of all these environmentally devastated, overpopulated, distant countries become our own problems because of globalization. We are accustomed to thinking of globalization in terms of us rich advanced First Worlders sending our good things, such as the Internet and Coca-Cola, to those poor backward Third Worlders. But globalization means nothing more than improved worldwide communications, which can convey many things in either direction; globalization is not restricted to good things carried only from the First to the Third World.

Among bad things transported from the First World to developing countries, we already mentioned the millions of tons of electronic garbage intentionally transported each year from industrialized nations to China. To grasp the worldwide scale of unintentional garbage transport, consider

the garbage collected on the beaches of tiny Oeno and Ducie Atolls in the Southeast Pacific Ocean uninhabited atolls, without freshwater, rarely visited even by yachts, and among the world's most remote bits of land, each over a hundred miles even from remote uninhabited Henderson Island. Surveys there detected, for each linear yard of beach, on the average one piece of garbage, which must have drifted from ships or else from Asian and American countries on the Pacific Rim thousands of miles distant. The commonest items proved to be plastic bags, buoys, glass and plastic bottles (especially Suntory whiskey bottles from Japan), rope, shoes, and lightbulbs, along with oddities such as footballs, toy soldiers and airplanes, bike pedals, and screwdrivers.

A more sinister example of bad things transported from the First World to developing countries is that the highest blood levels of toxic industrial chemicals and pesticides reported for any people in the world are for Eastern Greenland's and Siberia's Inuit people (Eskimos), who are also among the most remote from sites of chemical manufacture or heavy use. Their blood mercury levels are nevertheless in the range associated with acute mercury poisoning, while the levels of toxic PCBs (polychlorinated bi-phenyls) in Inuit mothers' breast milk fall in a range high enough to classify the milk as "hazardous waste." Effects on the women's babies include hearing loss, altered brain development, and suppressed immune function, hence high rates of ear and respiratory infections.

Why should levels of these poisonous chemicals from remote industrial nations of the Americas and Europe be higher in the Inuit than even in urban Americans and Europeans? It's because staples of the Inuit diet are whales, seals, and seabirds that eat fish, molluscs, and shrimp, and the chemicals become concentrated at each step as they pass up this food chain. All of us in the First World who occasionally consume seafood are also ingesting these chemicals, but in smaller amounts. (However, that doesn't mean that you will be safe if you stop eating seafood, because you now can't avoid ingesting such chemicals no matter what you eat.)

Still other bad impacts of the First World on the Third World include deforestation, Japan's imports of wood products currently being a leading cause of deforestation in the tropical Third World; and overfishing, due to fishing fleets of Japan, Korea, Taiwan and the heavily subsidized fleets of the European Union scouring the world's oceans. Conversely, people in the Third World can now, intentionally or unintentionally, send us their own bad things: their diseases like AIDS, SARS, cholera, and West Nile fever,