SPECIAL FOCUS:

Ambassador Thomas Gass on the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

Ambassador Thomas Gass, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination, speaks with World Information Transfer to discuss the challenges to be faced in implementing the post-2015 sustainable development agenda (Agenda 2030), offering succinct, erudite rebuttals to the criticism of governments, civil commentators, and journalists alike.
Interview with H.E. Thomas Gass

WER: Why should we be excited about the development and implementation of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in the wake of MDGs that have only been partially achieved, or not achieved at all?

TG: This (the SDG formulation process) is the first time that everyone is discussing a new, shared vision of humanity. I think it’s huge for two main reasons: the first is that instead of saying, for example, that we will reduce poverty by half, every SDG starts with the word ‘all’ – they are very ambitious. The idea is to eradicate poverty, to give access to water to all etc. Have a look at the goals and especially the targets. There is a universal commitment to leave no one behind, which we have never had before. The structure of the MDGs allowed nations to hide behind averages – ‘China experienced strong economic growth, so Asia (as a whole) didn’t do too badly…’ – and allowed for cases where, within a single country, you had good progress on some of the indicators. Over the last eight years of economic crisis, we realised that if we get this big ship on course, but leave half of the world behind, for whatever reason, then we haven’t really achieved what we wanted.

It is here that sustainable development is being refined before our eyes. Textbook sustainable development is defined by three pillars: the economic, the social, the environmental. But now, if you look at it, you have an intergovernmental panel saying, wait, sustainable development is seventeen goals, and they include things like sustainable cities, climate change, access to justice and fighting against inequalities. I think that the most important paradigm shift is the commitment to leave no one behind. If, in our process of development, an individual, a community, or a socioeconomic group is left behind, then our development is not sustainable.

WER: How does the discussion surrounding SDGs seek to encourage those in power to tackle such inequalities? How can we ensure that those who are at risk of being left behind, or have already been left behind, are given a voice and access to a solution? Where do we see a framework that determines responsibility, and allows us to work in support?

TG: This is all about strengthening the relationship between duty bearers and right holders. The most important thing now is that, when the heads of government come to the U.N. this September, it cannot be about the photo-op. The leaders need to know that they are coming to make a promise to their people back home, as this shared vision is for them. If this is going to work, it’s not going to be about one head of state making a promise to another head of state. All heads of state and governments are accountable to their own people. They need to make a promise to their own people. Let me reiterate: This is all about strengthen-
ing the relationship between duty bearers and right holders. These are two very important concepts that are coming out of the human rights perspective – the duty bearers are those who have a duty to serve the people, and the rights holders are those who have the right to receive. The discussion surrounding the SDGs is not about the relationship between donor governments and recipient governments, a dichotomy that was far more relevant to the MDG story. This is the big shift, it’s very exciting, and I hope that you yourselves are all going to go back and hold your governments accountable – it is necessary to do so in achieving our desired aims.

**WER:** What shift in attitude have we seen from member states and their representatives with regard to the move against inequalities so strongly stressed in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda?

**TG:** I am a former delegate. My role years ago was to defend the interests of the private sector. I was very pleased to see an intergovernmental goal for reducing inequalities in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda – Goal 10 of the SDGs. Member states are currently in Addis Ababa, and one of the main discussions they are having is all about taxes, and about how they can make sure that private companies who are in the extractive business actually pay taxes in the countries where they make money, instead of declaring their income in tax havens. This is a central part of the discussion. Will that change the people who are powerful? No, I don’t think so. The international community, however, is moving, and certain people have helped – Thomas Picketty and Joseph Stiglitz, for example – people who have been saying this many times already. But it is clear now that this is part of the sustainable development discussion, for the U.N. and others. You cannot increase inequalities and think you can get away with it.

**WER:** The status quo is no longer acceptable…

**TG:** Yes. In order to transform this situation, we need to get into the ways the money markets work – the stock markets – but there are discussions on that. There are initiatives that are looking at investments – the principles for responsible investment. The key thing now is to continue this. If some of the big countries are willing to exchange data, great. But what about the small countries – they also want to know about tax evasion in their territory. One of the discussions in Addis relates to whether discussions on tax co-operation should happen in the OECD in Paris, or at the U.N.

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*Source: The Millenium Development Goals Report, 2015, United Nations*
WER: There has been some disagreement over certain aspects of the post-2015 ‘Financing for Development’ (FFD) process, particularly with regard to requirements for technology transfer. The Group of 77 has been particularly vociferous in calling for a liberal transfer of technology, whilst others have been firmly opposed. On what terms would you like to see technology transfer, and on what scale?

TG: I was working in the seed sector years ago, in agro-biodiversity, and during that time a company in Texas patented Basmati rice. There was a huge outcry - Basmati has existed for 6000 years in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and in the end this patent was overturned. Most of the food that you have is probably based on crops that were domesticated over thousands of years, and most of them from developing countries. And now if you create something, you patent it. Technology is about making sure that you can become richer, but also making sure that you stay rich. You have to be able to invest in innovation, and many countries want to be part of this. With regard to food and agriculture there are already public institutions – you already have publicly owned gene-banks – 15/16 of which can be accessed by any country – the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) for example. The main food crops are already in the public domain. If you remember the potato plague in Ireland, the problem there was homogeny – when the disease came, it wiped out the strain. That was a technology sharing issue. So we should look to share energy, population, and health related technology and, thankfully, much of it is not patented.

WER: Fifteen years into the MDG process, and there are still many who are unaware not only of the MDGs themselves, but of their state’s commitments, required actions, and progress. How do you propose addressing barriers to education regarding the SDGs, to ensure that rights-holders have access to the information that they need?

TG: We need dialogues at every level. What happens at the U.N. rarely interests the rest of the world, unless it is an issue of the Security Council. So for this to have an impression on the rest of the world, there needs to be discussions in every country, and civil society is going to play a huge part in this. Some countries are already having these, and are asking

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The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

what in my opinion is a indispensable question: What do the SDGs mean to us? From looking at the SDG framework, and after a period of introspection, one country might decide that they need to provide better social security to stay-at-home moms. There is also the issue of not having a legal identity – no legal identity grants no right to ownership and no educational certifications – and you have countries that don't really have a good picture of who lives there. There needs to be a reckoning at a national level. We at the U.N. will be asking every government to present their progress to us, but of course it is most important that every government presents their progress to the people.

WER: And how can we ensure that, on a national level, stakeholders, both public and private, cooperate to the best of their abilities for the successful implementation of solutions to national and international challenges?

TG: Part of the reason why there is a disconnect is that one sector accuses the other of having bad intentions – the private sector will be accused of ‘just wanting to make money’ by the public sector, and suffer accusations of unreliability. On the other hand, members of civil society understand that the private sector needs to make money in a certain way. Discussions about the role of government are crucial. The private sector needs a good, solid framework upon which to act. The private sector cannot act in a place where the environment is not predictable at all. The legal environment has to be clear – I want to know that trade agreements are going to stay in place, that the regulatory environment is stable, and that justice is blind and swift. The sense of predictability and the security of a legal environment is crucial for the private sector. This is crucial to encouraging sustainable partnerships for our sustainable solutions.

WER: Are there currently any initiatives in place to facilitate access to the SDG programme for youth demographics?

TG: There are many campaigns going on – there is one in particular that comes to mind called the ‘World’s Biggest Classroom’. There is a dedicated U.N. youth envoy, Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, who is in Addis Ababa (at the discussions pertaining to ‘Financing for Development’ (FFD)) at the moment, and and we have many opportunities to work at the

### Global ‘Stretch’ to Reach SDGs by 2030 - LICs, MICs, and HICs

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Source: Overseas Development Institute
municipal level etc. I think that there is a stronger and stronger recognition for youth to be involved. The important thing is also to develop, to cultivate, an interest in the post-2015 development agenda. It is not an easy discussion; you have to show interest for what is happening in your society, beyond what is happening within the borders of your town, and you have to recognise that there is diversity, and that it is that diversity which makes the world worthwhile. Not all adults are going to be interested, but if you find a group/club within your school or your university that wants to engage, then I’m sure you can be part of the discussion. We at the U.N. are trying to open up this discussion to a selection of groups, one of which is youth.

**WER:** Finally, the inclusive nature of the SDGs seems to pose problems for the programme’s execution – problems of priority resource use and task management in particular. How can the international community pull together to execute all of the relevant tasks in the allotted time?

**TG:** The MDGs were very much the rollout of a plan. They are about facilitation, empowerment etc. You have to create a space where everyone can do, otherwise you might not hit the 15 year target. And this goes to the U.N. as well – as I’ve been saying, it doesn’t just work with individual mandates anymore. We need to create a system with ‘docking stations’, where anyone who wants to participate can just dock on, and crucially not a system that is exclusive. The relationship between duty bearers and rights holders at the national level is crucial, but it is, alone, not sufficient. Many issues in the world are not restricted to countries – they flow across borders. The SDGs are about solving things together, and doing so in a thematic manner. We need thematic reviews of how our goals are doing globally and regionally. We need to strengthen the international legal framework on climate change, biodiversity, and diversification. We need a system where everyone can participate, and I think that the SDGs allow everyone to participate. The progress that we’ve already seen is a very good sign…

**WER:** Thank you, Ambassador Gass.

Interviewed by Calum Anderson

To know how to say what other people only think is what makes men poets and sages; and to dare to say what others only dare to think, makes men martyrs or reformers, or both.”

Elizabeth Rundle Charles, writer (1828-1896)
Acute Travelers’ Diarrhea

Brian R. Landzberg, M.D., A.G.A.F.

Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine,
Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology,
Center for Advanced Digestive Care,
Weill Medical College of Cornell University,
Assistant Attending Physician,
New York-Presbyterian Hospital

BACKGROUND

Acute travelers’ diarrhea (ATD) affects 30-70% of travelers to developing countries, including areas in Latin America, parts of the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. The map below shows areas at particular risk for ATD. It is the most common infectious illness affecting travelers. Fortunately, the vast majority of cases are self-limited to less than a week, but ATD may have devastating consequences on vacations, business trips or diplomatic missions. It is therefore important for travelers to be aware of the pathogens they are likely to encounter and know how to prevent and treat ATD. In terms of the epidemiology, men and women are equally affected and younger ages are more affected than older. Poor hygiene in local restaurants is a major factor. Poor access to plumbing leads to more fecal contamination, and unreliable electricity is associated with unreliable refrigeration and food spoilage. Poor access to water and absence of sinks for food handlers leads to less handwashing and more exposure of fruits and vegetables to contaminated water. Seasonality may play a key role. Enteric infections in travelers interestingly may parallel those seen in young children in endemic countries as both groups share a naïveté to the local bacterial pathogens.

CAUSES

At home in the U.S., the usual cause of acute gastroenteritis is viral and antibiotics have a small role. ATD, or

Expected Rates of Diarrhea Among International Travelers, Low to High

turista, however, is a different matter. When acquired in brief travel to endemic areas like Latin America or Africa, studies show that the majority of the time, the cause of acute diarrhoea is bacterial. (80-90%) Enterotoxigenic and other E. coli top the list of the usual bacteria, which also includes Campylobacter, Shigella, Salmonella, Aeromonas, Plesiomonas, and Non-cholera Vibrio spp.

The pre-formed toxin syndromes are another ATD culprit, such as those due to Staphylococcus and B. cereus. Seafood and re-heated rice are higher risk for these. Patients become violently ill with vomiting, diarrhea, cramping, fever and neurological symptoms, usually within a window of hours to a day after ingesting the pre-formed toxin. Symptoms then resolve within 12-24 hours. Many pre-formed toxins are inactivated with heat and therefore sticking with cooked foods, especially in the case of seafood, will reduce the chances of illness.

Protozoa, such as Giardia lamblia, Amoeba, Cyclospora (seasonal- late spring/early summer in select areas), and Cryptosporidium tend to occur in longer term travelers. Giardia lamblia tops the list in incidence to Americans, and may be ingested through surfaces infected by stool (bathroom handles, changing tables), contaminated drinking water, unintentional swallowing of water while swimming in lakes and ponds, or contact with feces during sex. Fresh water swimming is high risk for many organisms beside Giardia. Its active form, the trophozoite, has two bilaterally symmetrical nuclei that give the organism the appearance of a face looking back at the microscopist.

Viral causes represent 5-8% of ATD and include Norovirus (especially on cruise ships), Astrovirus, and Rotavirus. Norovirus, which affects many millions gets its name from Norwalk, Ohio, where an elementary school suffered a large outbreak in 1968. It spreads like wildfire in contained places such as cruise ships and sleep-away camps through the fecal-oral route – either by hand contact or contaminated food and water. One infected food-handler with poor hand hygiene can infect hundreds of people. Stairway banisters and self-serve buffet lines may also pose a greater risk for spread. Fortunately it is almost always self-limiting and non-life-threatening, but it may decimate the vacations of hundreds of people in one fell swoop. Unlike with other viral infections, one is not left with long term immunity to it. When on a cruise ship, frequently use the hand disinfectants provided by the staff. With this particular bug, chlorine based cleansers seem to be more effective than alcohol-based solvents. More information on Norovirus can be found at: http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Norovirus/.

**TYPICAL PRESENTATION**

Typically, the presentation of bacterial ATD is the sudden onset of diarrhea, but may include vomiting, severe cramp-
ing pain and bloody diarrhea (dysentery). Preformed toxin diarrhea usually begins within 12 hours and last less than 24 hours, while viruses incubate 1-2 days and last 2-3 days and bacteria incubate 1-2 days and last 3-5 days. Protozoa such as *Giardia* incubate 1-2 weeks and can last for weeks or months, but usually have a much more gradual onset. Typical symptoms of diarrhea – flatulence and greasy stool – may take 1-3 weeks to develop.

**PREVENTION**

How can we avoid ATD? Most important are food and water precautions. A valuable resource is the Centers for Disease Control website: [http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2014/chapter-2-the-pre-travel-consultation/food-and-water-precautions](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2014/chapter-2-the-pre-travel-consultation/food-and-water-precautions). In high risk areas, only bottled water and only produce which can be cooked or peeled should be consumed. Common pitfalls include frozen drinks due to contaminated water in the ice, salads washed in local water and brushing teeth with sink water. Patients who are pregnant or immuno-compromised need to be especially careful. Those taking proton pump inhibitor medications, such as Nexium or Prilosec, are at higher risk, as the suppression of acid reduces food sterilization by the stomach and may increase chances of ATD by ten-fold! Most preformed toxins are heat labile so one should avoid raw seafood! One should carry alcohol or chlorine based hand sanitizers, especially on cruise ships.

Bismuth subsalicylate has shown to be 50-65% effective in prevention, but requires taking two large pills four times daily. This can cause black tongue and stool, nausea, and tinnitus. There are also drug interactions. It also may not be used in aspirin allergy, and can cause Reye’s syndrome. Vaccines are generally not used to prevent ATD, but remember other vaccine preventable disease in travelers such as polio, Hepatitis A, yellow fever, etc.

Probiotics have had inconclusive to negative results in preventing ATD. In American travelers to Mexico, there was no benefit from *L. acidophilus* or *L. bulgaricus*. In British soldiers deployed to Belize, there was no benefit from *L. fermentum* or *L. acidophilus*. *Lactobacillus GG* (Culturelle), as prophylaxis for ATD seems more more promising, though yielded conflicting results in visitors to Turkey with a protection rate by LGG of 8% in one of the destinations and 38.5% in the other. Among 245 American travelers to various destinations in Asia, Africa and South and Central America, the protection rate was 7%.

For prevention, antibiotics do work (>90% prevention), but can lead to allergy, photosensitivity, breeding resistance, antibiotic-associated diarrhea, candidal infections etc. For this reason we recommend preventative antibiotics only for inflammatory bowel disease patients, the immuno-compromised, or travelers in whom there would be devastating diplomatic, athletic or financial consequences of ATD.

**TREATMENT**

Given the overwhelming prevalence of bacteria as the etiology in ATD, brief courses of antibiotics are useful therapy. If instituted early, they will shave off 1-3 days of illness. Patients should therefore bring a 3 day antibiotic course with them to empirically self-medicate ATD once it begins (but not take as prevention). The mainstays are fluoroquinolones (ciprofloxacin), rifaximin (Xifaxan) for non-invasive diarrhea, or macrolides (azithromycin) in some areas with resistant diarrhea, or macrolides (azithromycin) in some areas with resistant bacteria such as Southeast Asia.

Fluid and electrolyte replenishment is also key, using chlorine-treated, boiled, or sealed water. Oral rehydration

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**Homemade Oral Rehydration Solution**

[picture of homemade oral rehydration solution]

Source: [http://rehydrate.org/solutions/homemade.htm](http://rehydrate.org/solutions/homemade.htm)
CONCLUSION

ATD is usually of bacterial origin and can often be prevented or at least treated quickly if it develops. NB: Certain areas of the world require far more extensive pre-travel care unrelated to ATD, including vaccinations for Japanese encephalitis, polio, hepatitis A, malaria prophylaxis and the like. The CDC website has helpful information on this and the International Society for Travel Medicine website (www.ISTM.org) can direct you to a certified practitioner of pre-travel care near you. Key points to remember in order to avoid acute gastrointestinal infection in travel, are hand hygiene, exclusive use of bottled water in endemic areas, avoiding fruits and vegetables in endemic areas unless they can be cooked or peeled, extreme care with fresh water swimming and carrying a course of antibiotics for self-initiation in the event of ATD. Wishing you happy, meaningful, productive, enlightening and safe travels.
FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Rethinking Alternative Development

Barnett S. Koven

Barnett S. Koven is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at The George Washington University.

Given the potent combination of insurgent groups with massive funding from narcotics, governments have attempted to combat the threat through a combined counterinsurgency (COIN) and counternarcotics (CN) strategy. At first glance, this appears to be an extremely logical strategy. This is the case given that the COIN portion of the strategy directly targets the insurgents, while the CN side of this approach aims to cut off guerrillas’ main funding source. In reality, COIN and CN are at odds with each other.

Insurgencies are only able to operate so long as they maintain the support of the local population in their areas of operation. Most insurgencies – including extraordinarily well-armed ones – recognize that they cannot win in a set piece battle against even a relatively small national military. Instead, the guerrillas operate by blending into the local population and relying on locals for assistance. At the limit,
this assistance includes providing new recruits, but it also includes providing food and shelter and critically sharing information on government troop movements in the area. Recognizing that the center of gravity in COIN warfare rests with the civilian population, modern population-centric COIN doctrine emphasizes the need for the counterinsurgent to win over the civilian population.

Current doctrine, as epitomized by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps’ Counterinsurgency Field Manuel (FM 3-24) suggests three critical tenants for winning over this uncommitted middle. These include providing security such that the civilian population can (relatively) safely cooperate with the counterinsurgent. In addition to security, FM 3-24 also recommends that governance reforms be enacted and development aid disbursed in order to address any grievances the population may have against the counterinsurgent. In short, winning at COIN entails separating the civilian population from the guerrillas.

CN strategy, on the other-hand, primarily entails eradication. This can include the manual, chemical or mechanical destruction of illicit crops. Alternative development programs have also been used. For example, Colombia experimented with the Forest Ranger Families Program that operated as a conditional cash transfer program, which paid peasant farmers of coca to manually eradicate coca plants and replant native plant life. Unfortunately, while alternative development holds considerable promise for reconciling the two strategies, previous initiatives have been poorly designed and implemented. Consequently, they too often prove ineffective. Typically, those cultivating illicit crops are neither hardened criminals nor insurgents, but peasant families who are only able to maintain a meagre living in this manner. By destroying their livelihoods, eradication programs drive civilians into the open arms of local insurgents. Rather than accomplish their mission, CN operations run afoul of COIN doctrine in that they alienate the uncommitted middle from the counterinsurgent and strengthen the relationship between the guerrillas and the civilian population.

**CHANGING COURSE:**

Given that simultaneously employing COIN and CN operations is counterproductive, what are governments to do? Often the larger concern is the insurgent movements, not drug cultivation and trafficking itself. This is the case for at least two reasons. First, insurgents are directly responsible for violence and are committed to presenting a continued armed challenge to the state. Unlike insurgents, those who cultivate illicit crops and others involved in the production of narcotics do not have any prima facia reason to resort to violence against the state and its agents, provided the state does not attempt to curtail their activities. Second, while drug consumption is associated with social ills such as petty theft and violence among users, this is largely a foreign problem. Paradoxically, many countries that are large producers of illicit narcotics do not have high incidents of drug use. Consequently, one might conclude that exclusive focus should be given to COIN operations and CN initiatives should be tabled until after the insurgencies have been mopped up.

However, reliance on U.S. support in countering insurgent and narcotrafficking threats, coupled with domestic political considerations, inhibits the adoption of a policy that tacitly approves of the cultivation of illicit crops. Consequently, many countries (e.g. Afghanistan, where poppy has greatly increased the Taliban’s financial resources), ought to again consider alternative development. However, whereas past efforts have been largely limited to providing subsidies to encourage farmers to plant licit crops, a much more holistic approach including a long-term commitment to sustainable development is required.

Subsidies alone will not work! Narcotic producing regions tend to be extremely remote, and consequently the success of licit agriculture in these areas will not likely have

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"By destroying their livelihoods, eradication programmes drive civilians...to...local insurgents"

"Subsidies alone will not work!"
a discernible impact on the national economy. As such, the state will experience difficulty justifying a large, long-term financial commitment after the insurgency has been quelled and licit crops have been planted. However, if the state ceases subsidizing alternative development, conditions will again be ripe for the resurgence of remaining remnants of the insurgency and/or a return to illicit production. Similarly, alternative development efforts have historically failed because they do not provide sufficient subsidies to make up the difference between the proceeds derived from licit agriculture versus illicit cultivation. In short, subsidization alone will not work unless it continues indefinitely and fully compensates producers of licit crops for lost income. Obviously, subsidization of this sort is not viable (nor advisable).

Instead, the government ought to provide initial subsidies to encourage voluntary productive reconversion. However this ought to be coupled with efforts to build value-added industries in the areas. For example, rather than encouraging local farmers to grow and export licit cash crops, the state should investment in building processing facilities. This will entail an initial investment in not only building facilities but also in training the local population to run them and provide education in business administration and commercialization. While this entails a large, upfront cost, in the long-run, this option is far more cost effective. By enabling the local population to produce and sell a value-added product, they will be able to generate a substantially larger profit versus selling raw agricultural products. As such, extensive long-term subsidization will not be required.

Irrespective of if an investment is made in value-added industries, the local producers will need a reliable way to get their products (whether raw or refined) to market. Farm-to-market infrastructure, namely roads, are often non-existent or only accessible seasonally and of poor quality in many narcotics producing areas. In order for licit agriculture or industry to be successful, a relatively reliable and inexpensive means of transporting goods must be available. Investing in roads is expensive but it confers other benefits as well. Roads are valuable not just for business but for the entire population of rural areas. As such roads may help win local support for the government. Moreover, improved roads will make access by the state easier, thereby improving the government’s odds of success at COIN and CN.

Finally, in order for the local population to be able to invest in growing their licit agriculture or value-added businesses, they will need access to credit. Initially this may need to be guaranteed by the state. This is likely to be the case as commercial banks may be especially reticent to invest in areas that currently experience high-levels of insurgent violence and other forms of criminality. Moreover, this will require the state to help the local population to obtain titles to their land for use as collateral. In instances where the legal owner has moved due to violence and their land is being occupied by those cultivating illicit crops, these individuals cannot simply be evicted. Doing so will generate grievances that could result in insurgent support. Rather

Illicit Cultivation: Peru/Colombia

Source: http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2002/Colombia-Drug-ControlGAO8feb02.htm
the state should purchase the land from the original owner, providing fair compensation. The land can then be legally turned-over to the current tenant as a condition for producing licit crops.

The preceding paragraphs outline components of an effective plan for leveraging alternative development to reconcile incongruities between COIN and CN. However, it is also important that the government endeavor to avoid perceptions of relative deprivation when administering aid. Failing to do so, can result in the strategy proving counter-productive; that is, violence enhancing. Specifically, if one area or group perceives that another proximate area or group is receiving substantially more assistance from the state, this can lead to a ‘frustration-aggression response,’ whereby the aggrieved group opts to take-up arms or otherwise aid the insurgents against the state. Importantly, perception not reality are key. As such, the government ought to invest ample time and effort into explaining to the local population how it makes distributional decisions. Furthermore, it should ensure that aid is provided in a relatively equitable manner conditional on local realities and needs. Most importantly, local stakeholders ought to be involved in selecting, designing, and implementing all assistance efforts.

**CONCLUSION:**

This article argues that simultaneously pursuing COIN and CN operations in the absence of extensive alternative development efforts is an ineffective way of combating insurgent violence fueled by narco-funding. This is the case because while successful COIN operations require ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of the uncommitted middle, CN operations alienate precisely this group. Undoubtedly, the insurgents pose a larger domestic threat than narcotics production. Therefore, the optimal strategy would be to target the insurgents without pursuing eradication. Unfortunately, this strategy is politically challenging and risks alienating the U.S, given its paramount focus on drugs. Alternative development offers a potential solution. However, alternative development initiatives of the past have not proven highly effective. Rather than relying on similar programs, the state ought to design and implement a much more involved strategy. If alternative development strategies are not sustainable or if they fail to consider ancillary issues such as farm-to-market infrastructure and access to credit, they will undoubtedly fail. Similarly, the state must be cognizant of the risk of exacerbating violence when implementing assistance programs. Careful consideration must be given to mitigating perceptions of relative deprivation.

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OVERPOPULATION AND WASTE*

Overpopulation is one of the greatest challenges of our time, especially when it comes to its consequences on the environment. Major factors, such as breakthroughs in medical science and improvements to the global standard of living, have, according to the World Health Organization, increased the average global life expectancy from 48 years in 1955 to 71 years in 2013.1,2 The 2015 revision of the UN's World Population Prospects indicates that the rate of natural increase is the highest in developing countries, with Africa and Asia leading the way in continental growth, and projects a global population of 9.7 billion by 2050, and 11.2 billion by 21003; in 1972 there were fewer than 4 billion.

A population’s growth requires a hike in local production intensity - a direct response to increased demand for food, commodities and energy. Waste is often an unavoidable byproduct, the environmental impact of which is dependent not only on the waste’s volume and type, but also on relevant demographic conditions – density, consumption habits, affluence – and methods of waste management.4

A recent article in Nature notes that ‘in the year 2000, the 2.9 billion people living in cities (49% of the world’s population) were creating more than 3 million tonnes of solid waste every day.’4 ‘East Asia is now the world’s fastest growing region for waste, a distinction that is likely to shift to south Asia (mainly India) in 2025, and then to sub-Saharan Africa around 2050.’4 Will the problem grow to become unmanageable? The article predicts that, with ‘business-as-usual...by 2100, solid-waste generation rates will exceed 11 million tonnes per day – more than three times today’s rate.’4

It goes on, however, that ‘with lower populations, denser, more resource-efficient cities and less consumption (along with greater affluence), the peak could come forward to 2075 and reduce in intensity by more than 25%4 – a margin with vast and valuable environmental and economic consequences.

Sources:

*NOTE: With contributions from Ariel Granat and Elisabeth Muratori

NOTE: ‘Emerging Markets’ are currently China, India, and Brazil. The U.S. and China alone account for one third of global greenhouse emissions

Source: Washington Spectator, Nov. 2015
1. COP21 - United Nations Conference on Climate Change

The 21st annual session of the Conference of the Parties to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, will be held in Paris, France, from the 30th of November to the 11th of December, 2015.

2. ENVICON — ENVICON International Environmental Protection Congress

The 19th meeting of The International Environmental Protection Congress, held in Poznan, Poland discusses practices pertaining to waste management, waste-to-energy technologies, sustainability, legal accountability and water management, featuring panelists from the European Commission, the European Environmental Bureau and various national and international bodies. Information available at: http://envicon.abrys.pl/

3. Annual Meeting of the British Ecological Society

To be held in Edinburgh, Scotland, from the 13th of December to the 16th of December, 2015, aims to understand human impact on ecological systems and its relevance to human health. Registration available at: http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/events/current_future_meetings/2015-annual-meeting/

4. IRSEC — International Renewable and Sustainable Energy Conference

To be held in Marrakech, Morocco, from the 10th of December to the 13 of December, 2015. ‘IRSEC’15 aims to provide an international forum to facilitate discussion and knowledge exchange of the state-of-the-art research findings and current and future challenges and opportunities related with all facets and aspects of renewable and sustainable energy. Registration available at: http://www.med-space.org/irsec15/registration/

5. SNEC 2016 — Sustainable Nuclear Energy Conference 2016

To be held in Nottingham, United Kingdom, from the 12th of April to the 14th of April, 2016. The conference aims to consider the complete nuclear cycle, with focus on contemporary challenges in ‘nuclear decommissioning and waste-management.’ Registration available at: http://www.icheme.org/snecc2016

6. World Information Transfer’s 25th Conference on Health and Environment: Global Partners for Global Solutions

To be held on April 26th at the United Nations Headquarters on the topic of “30th Anniversary of Chernobyl: Relevant Findings” and “Environmental factors influencing Human Health”. Register at witconferences@worldinfo.org, or call: 212-686-1996

New Book: Power in a Warming World

In Power in a Warming World, David Ciplet, J. Timmons Roberts, and Mizan Khan bring decades of combined experience as negotiators, researchers, and activists to bear on this urgent topic. Combining rich empirical description with a political economic view of power relations, they document the struggles of states and social groups most vulnerable to a changing climate, and describe the emergence of new political coalitions that take climate politics beyond a simple North-South divide, and that push action on climate change far beyond the United Nations.

Power in a Warming World is available from The MIT Press.
CHORNObYL UPDATE*: “Return of Paradise!”

Wildlife in the Exclusion Zone

In a wide departure from the notion that Chernobyl's exclusion zone is an inhospitable, desolate tundra, researchers have found wildlife thriving inside the exclusion zone, no longer burdened by humanity’s impact.

The area has been uninhabited since the 1986 meltdown of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, which killed 31 people and forced all residents to evacuate from more than 1,000 square miles. But a new study published Monday in the journal Current Biology found flourishing numbers of large wildlife, including wolves, elk, foxes and wild boar, inside the Belarusian part of the exclusion zone according to James Beasley, researcher at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory and Jim Smith, Prof. at the University of Portsmouth - authors.

The findings come with some striking statistics. Wolf populations in the area are seven times higher than they were before the accident. Populations of hoofed animals are on par with those seen in protected reserves in Belarus and small animals do even better as they breed faster. “When you take the humans out of the equation, the wildlife rebounds,” Smith said. “It reflects quite profoundly the impact ordinary human activity does to an ecosystem.”

Although scientists have long observed the toll of radiation on certain species - including deformed beaks in birds - a decline in the number of spiders and an increase of tumours in some animals, those effects are mostly concentrated in so-called “hot zones,” regions where radiation is still found at high levels. Other areas in the exclusion zone are relatively clean of the fallout, and tourism has spiked in recent years.

The Guardian does note that some have called the findings into question, but within Chernobyl, “... wildlife is abundant everywhere with very healthy populations,” Beasley said.

- Nick Visser, The Huffington Post, 5th of October 2015

*NOTE: ‘Chornobyl’ is the Ukrainian spelling. ‘Chernobyl,’ seen elsewhere, is the Russian.

When the Obama administration announced that it would not add the greater sage grouse to the endangered species list, some conservation groups criticized the ruling.

A more surprising development was that many other environmental organizations applauded the decision and the Interior Department’s proactive approach. With the threat of regulation under the Endangered Species Act hanging in the background, the department prodded states, federal agencies and private landowners to work together on a conservation plan that could make an endangered listing unnecessary. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, who called the Endangered Species Act a “catalyst for conservation”, said that the strategy sought to balance economic interests with the needs of the beleaguered bird, whose numbers have been devastated by development, wildfires, invasive species like cheatgrass, and other threats. The amount of land involved - millions of acres of state, private and federally managed land across 10 Western states- makes the effort one of the largest voluntary conservation projects.

To many conservationists the government’s decision to avoid listing the grouse reflects a larger shift in thinking that is taking hold in academic departments and advocacy circles around the country. The Endangered Species Act was signed by president Richard M. Nixon in 1973, when the world’s population was less than 4 billion and climate change was not on most people’s agendas.

Extract from ‘A Shifting Approach to Saving Endangered Species’
Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/science/a-shifting-approach-to-saving-endangered-species.html?_r=0

Above: ‘A grizzly bear and three cubs in Alaska. More than $10 million was spent on preserving the species in 2013’ (Source: The New York Times, as above)
World Information Transfer

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475 Park Avenue South, 22nd Floor
New York, NY 10016
TELEPHONE: (212) 686-1996
FAX (212) 686-2172
E-MAIL: wit@worldinfo.org
ELECTRONIC EDITION AVAILABLE ON:
http://www.worldinfo.org

FOUNDER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:
Dr. Christine K. Durbak
MANAGING EDITOR:
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TRANSLATIONS:
Chinese: Josepshine Au, Kyle Yin Chan,
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REGIONAL DIRECTORS:

CANADA:
Taras Boychuk
440 Rathburn Rd. Apt. 501
Toronto, ON M9C 3J7
Tel: (416)781-3807
E-mail: webforge@gmail.com

CHINA:
Josephine Au, William Cho
3 Hop Yat Road 4th Floor,
Kowloon, Hong Kong, China

EASTERN EUROPE:
Prof. Mykola Prytula,
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K. Levytschio1a, #15, Lviv, Ukraine
Tel/Fax: (380) 322 76-40-39 & 76-68-18
E-Mails: mykola.prytula@gmail.com,
stefko54@gmail.com

EUROPEAN UNION:
Dr. Michel Loots
Oosterveldlaan 196
B-2610 Antwerp, Belgium
Tel: 32-3-448-05-54; Fax: 32-3-449-75-74
E-Mail: mloots@humaninfo.org

TREASURER
Margarita Pappas

SECRETARY
Carolyn T. Comitta

VICE CHAIR
Dr. Claudia Strauss

E-MAIL: mloots@humaninfo.org
Tel: 32-3-448-05-54; Fax: 32-3-449-75-74
B-2610 Antwerp, Belgium
Oosterveldlaan 196
Dr. Michel Loots

WORLD INFORMATION TRANSFER

World Information Transfer, Inc. (WIT) is a non-for-profit, non-governmental organization in General Consultative Status with the United Nations, promoting health and environmental literacy.

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"We have not inherited the world from our forfathers...we have borrowed it from our children."
-KASHMIRI PROVERB

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has"
-MARGARET MEAD

"Every student needs someone who says, “You mean something, You count.”
-Tony Kushner, playwright (b. 16 Jul 1956)

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World Information Transfer

World Ecology Report

Winter 2015
Excellencies, Delegates and Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important gathering and thank you to the organizers of this NGO Conference, Friendship Ambassador’s Foundation, their sponsors and supporters.

I try to keep my feet on the ground, as Pres. Theodore Roosevelt stated, and do a great deal of reality testing and reading scientifically grounded material. Our reality has to be focused on the future of our planet, just as our daily pursuit of happiness includes the happiness of our children.

However, people can only focus on the future when their daily needs are met every day. Since the wealthy and the policy makers have their needs met, they are the ones that need to spend the time to focus on the future. In my opinion, I see a two-prong problem for the attainment of the U.N. Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals, which is the main focus of World Information Transfer – education and enabling those that can achieve change, despite the resistance of those around them:

1. Very rapid population growth in developing countries which can only be addressed by the leaders of these nations.
2. A powerful fossil fuel industry that is deterring the development of sustainable energy for all and destroying the environment.

Fundamentally, we need fewer people and more clean energy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030!

I believe that if the power of NGOs can be galvanized to work on the above issues we will be able to create a better world for the future generations. But we need to be united in our efforts and not allow fundamentalist misconceptions to interfere with reality. I’m addressing these issues even though we have been hearing them since 1972, the first U.N. Earth Conference, and again in 1992 during the Earth Summit in Rio and Rio+20.

We have achieved major accomplishments, including the development of clean alternative energy. However, we still have not addressed the issue of very rapid population growth in developing countries. According to the new U.N. estimates the world population will reach over 11 billion in less than 50 years.

The key to curbing population growth is educating women, many of whom seek birth control and also educating their brothers and fathers and sons about the privileges conferred on small families. We have witnessed how smaller families in Europe expanded the middle class and in China recently. I would like to see a world, as I stated during the U.N. Population Summit in Cairo in 1995, where every child has a parent that provides food, shelter and an education and is not condemned to a live of misery, slavery or jail. It is up to us to make this happen.

Thank you for your attention.

Dr. Christine K. Durbak,
Chair and CEO, World Information Transfer