

A New Marshall Plan for 2002: Advancing Human Security and Controlling Terrorism

By Dick Bell & Michael Renner

As the endgame nears in the fighting in Afghanistan, with Taliban power collapsed and Al-Qaeda members dead or on the run, it is tempting to believe that military success has decided the outcome of the war on terrorism. The Bush administration has already made it clear that it has limited interest in the long and arduous task of rebuilding Afghanistan. But Washington decisionmakers may want to heed this advice from a senior U.S. military officer and statesman from an earlier era, General George C. Marshall. In outlining the so-called Marshall Plan to rebuild a war-ravaged Europe on June 5, 1947, he warned that there could be “no political stability and no assured peace” without economic security. Europe, much like Afghanistan today, was torn by war, poverty, disease, and hunger, and risked “disturbances arising as a result of the desperation of the people,” and thus deserved American attention and funds to recover and rejoin the world community.

President Bush and his advisers should consider the relevance of Marshall’s strategy to the challenge of tackling the underlying conditions that give rise to political and religious extremism. We don’t really need to spend another dime on “intelligence” to recognize the social and economic conditions that leave whole countries in a state of despair and misery. Some 1.2 billion people worldwide struggle to survive on \$1 day or less. It is estimated that 1.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water and 2.9 billion have inadequate access to proper sanitation. About 150 million children are malnourished, and more than 10 million children under the age of five will die in 2002 alone. At least 150 million people are unemployed and 900

million are “underemployed,” contending with inadequate incomes despite long hours of back-breaking work.

Globalization has raised expectations, even as modern communications make the rising inequality between a rich, powerful, and imposing West and the rest of the world visible to all. Poverty and deprivation do not automatically translate into hatred. But people whose hopes have worn thin, whose aspirations have been thwarted, and whose discontent is rising are far more likely to succumb to the siren song of extremism. This is particularly true for the swelling ranks of young people whose prospects for the future are bleak. Some 34% of the developing world’s population is under 15 years of age.

The United States and the other industrial nations should launch a global “Marshall Plan” with the goal of providing everyone on earth with a decent standard of living. What could we achieve if we matched the tens of billions of dollars now spent on the military campaign in Afghanistan on programs to alleviate human suffering?

This is an obtainable goal, and one far cheaper than current military expenditures to ensure global security. A 1998 report by the United Nations Development Program estimated the annual cost to achieve universal access to a number of basic social services in all developing countries: \$9 billion would provide water and sanitation for every family; \$12 billion would cover reproductive health for all women; \$13 billion would give every person in the world basic health and nutrition; and \$6 billion would provide basic education for all children.

These social and health expenditures pale in comparison to what is being spent on the military by all nations—some \$780 billion each year.

The cost of failing to advance human security and to eliminate the fertile ground upon which terrorism thrives is already escalating. Since September 11, we know that sophisticated weapons offer little protection and

cannot buy us a lasting peace in a world of extreme inequality, injustice, and deprivation for billions of our fellow human beings. By choosing to mobilize adequate resources to address human suffering around the world, President Bush has a unique opportunity to seize the terrible moment of September 11 and in the

new year earn a truly exalted place in human history.

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