

Published in **The Lancet** 2001; Vol 358, p 1366
October 20

A world war against terrorism”

I was disappointed by your comments on global terrorism. 1 Appropriately, you ask why so much hatred has built up against the USA. But you avoid answering your question. Strikingly, you omit any comment on the extent and role of global inequality; 2 the most likely reason for the durable and pervasive anti-US attitude that you admit now exists in many parts of the non-western world.

Additionally, your claim that the USA now seeks international engagement ignores its current self-interest in so doing, and makes obscure the US policy consistent with the converse conclusion. There are many examples: they include the US behaviour at the Durban antiracism conference, its rejection of the biological weapons convention protocol, its selective interpretation of international law, its attitude towards the possible fate of less-developed countries affected by global warming, and its miserly foreign aid budget.

You seem to suggest that, although the assault on the USA should be utterly condemned, it cannot be understood. The manner and scale of the assault was highly dramatic, but the annual toll from terrorism in more-developed countries remains numerically trivial compared with that from poverty in any year in less-developed countries. The death and suffering in poor countries is, however, scarcely acknowledged by the general western public, especially in the USA, unsurprising given the self-absorption of most US media.

Unfortunately, your assessment that far worse threats—biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction—may soon be at hand now seems increasingly plausible. The economic, insurance, political, social, and psychological structures of western populations might survive a single attack from these weapons, but the cumulative harm to global civilisation from a series of such attacks would be immense. Climate change, the still growing population in the South, and frustration heightened by an increasingly obvious virtual abundance that, for billions, remains unrealisable, warn that the security threats in the current century may dwarf the past.

We may be lucky: those dangers might prove overstated. However, the apparent risk in the present and near-future resembles, without exaggeration, the nuclear

brinkmanship that characterised the most frightening period of the Cold War. 2,3 Glib claims of the alleged power of globalisation to bring wealth for all 4 instead show the failure of dominant development and economic theory. Wealthy populations must urgently do all they can to accelerate the demographic and sustainability transitions, 5 thus giving real hope to the people of the South. This warrants the highest strategic priority.

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3 Kennedy RF. Thirteen days: a memoir of the Cuban missile crisis. New York: WW Norton, 1969.

4 Feachem RGA. Globalisation is good for your health, *BMJ* 2001; **323**: 504–06.

5 McMichael AJ, Smith KR, Corvalan CF. The sustainability transition: a new challenge. *Bull World Health Organ* 2000; **78**: 1067.