
Conference Report

Stating the premises: willful depopulation or investment for economic growth?

Below are slightly abridged transcripts of the opening statements at the May 20 Washington, D.C. debate on "Global 2000: Premises and Implications" sponsored by EIR. The debaters were Nicholas Yost, former chief counsel for the White House Council on Environmental Quality and coordinator of the Global Futures task force recommendations, and Uwe Parpart, scientist and Fusion Energy Foundation development specialist. Mr. Yost spoke first.



For hundreds of millions of desperately poor, the outlook for food and other necessities of life will be very poor. Barring revolutionary advances in technology, life for most people on earth will be more precarious than it is now, unless the nations of the world act decisively to reverse current trends.

By the year 2000, the world's population will grow to 4.5 billion to over 6 billion. Most of the people will live in the poorest countries. With respect to income, a gap between the rich and the poor is projected to widen. There are now 800 million who live in conditions of absolute poverty; by the year 2000, this number could grow to over 1 billion. . . .

As for food, there'll be a 90 percent increase in food production, which works out to a per capita increase of 15 percent. However, that increase will not go where it is most needed, to the most hungry people. Most of the increase will go to people in the countries that are already well fed. I might add that this increase in food production—modest as it is relative to need—still assumes more energy consumption inputs including fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and irrigation. With respect to croplands, *Global 2000* projects a total increase of 4 percent in such lands available.

So right now, on a global basis, we are losing an area of the size of the state of Maine to desertification each year. Agricultural land is lost to soil erosion, to diminishing fertility, to salinization, and to lack of water. . . .

With respect to energy, oil production will level off before the year 2000. For the one-quarter of the people on this earth that depend on wood for fuel, the outlook is

bleak. By the year 2000, the report projects an immense loss of genetic resources: 15 to 20 percent of all the species on earth. As to water resources, there will be a 200 to 300 percent increase in water withdrawal. This, of course, is related to food production, to energy, and to deforestation. . . .

Global 2000, as I noted, has both limitations and strengths.

First, the limitations: U.S. governmental capacity for projecting future resource trends is not a unified model. We have what is basically a series of separate models, by sector, which are not linked. For instance, the Energy Department may make fine projections on energy availability; the Agriculture Department may make solid projections on food availability. However, they both use the same barrel of oil in their projections. DOE plans to burn the oil; USDA plans to use it for fertilizer purposes. In brief, this lack of linkage results in double counting, which biases the result on the side of optimism. If you had one barrel of oil—not two—the shortages are more acute.

Second, the quality of projections differs from sector to sector. For instance, the water resources projections are admittedly based on very inadequate data. They're the best that people have, but it is still very inadequate. The energy projections were made about 1977-78, before OPEC took its actions that resulted in price rises, with the result that those projections are also quite skewed.

Third, the assumptions on food productivity are seen by many as unduly optimistic. You will remember that the Club of Rome report is criticized—and rightly—for failure to assume continued technological advances in food production. *Global 2000* responded to that criticism by explicitly assuming such continued technological advances. And that is quite an assumption, when you realize that recent decades have seen the enormous advances sometimes summarized under the phrase "Green Revolution." The report assumes continued such advances, but many assert that there is no evidence to support this assumption.

Now something about the strengths. When all is said and done, for all its limitations, *Global 2000* represents the most complete effort undertaken by anybody to date. There is room for improvement: there is room for lots of

improvement—but it's the best we have got to go on today. Further, the results of the report are substantially in line with all the other major efforts that have been undertaken.

In concluding my discussion of the first of these two reports—*Global 2000*—let me emphasize, and emphasize again, what the report is: It is a projection, not a prediction. It is what happens if we keep on as is, if we exercise no foresight, if we fail to adapt our actions to future needs. The very purpose of that report is clearly to stimulate action to forestall these trends.

And with that, let me turn to the followup report, the *Global Future* report. It is the purpose of *Global Future* to suggest the actions we as a people must take to avert those projections of *Global 2000*, to make *Global 2000* a self-defeating prophecy. . . .

Let me quote from the preface: "The report presents a collection of considered assessments and new ideas that the United States could take in concert with other nations for a vigorous response to urgent global problems. It does not represent an official U.S. government program nor a final set of proposals by CEQ or the Department of State. . . . The goal of the report is to further public discussion of these important issues and to offer our best thinking to government leaders who will be developing U.S. policy in the years ahead."

I think it goes without saying that if this report never had the chance to become the policy of the Carter administration, it has had even less opportunity to be considered by the Reagan administration. I will return to this later. . . .

Certain themes do emerge in various sectors. First, the interconnectedness of it all. Let me give an example. . . . In the past, the forests have sustained the people who live near them. Now population is increasing. Population grows faster than trees. There is insufficient oil; people burn cow dung, which in the past was used to enrich the soil; as a result, the soil is less productive, and in the future will no longer support the population that depends on it. As you may gather, many of our recommendations are aimed at interrupting the cycle and ensuring sustainable development.

Often domestically we speak—excessively I might add—of conflicts between development and environment. If any lesson emerges from the global studies it is that that adage lacks meaning in much of the world. It is, sensitive, sustainable development that bears the promise of both meeting people's needs and of securing a resource and environmental base to sustain those depending upon them. Cutting population growth, planting a tree—indeed, planting a tree farm—improving crop yields, each of these are steps which can interrupt the cycle as I described.

Let me be clear about what we are discussing. Cutting population growth is not cutting population, in other

words, promoting birth control so as to lessen future demands from resources. To go on, transfers of skills and money to those primarily in the less developed countries who most urgently face the problems we are discussing are an essential part of any answer. . . .

Let me turn to the second major theme: the adequacy of the U.S. government's institutional capacity to deal with these global resource, environmental, and population problems. Quite simply, that capacity is inadequate. Four years ago, the then-President directed the U.S. government to report to him within one year on the global resource problem in the year 2000. The report took over three years and still has the severe limitations I've described. It took this time, not because of any lack of diligence, but because the models and institutions to look at the world as a whole simply were not there. We lacked an adequate predictive capacity and must have it. We still lack a long-range policy capacity, an ability to take the data about the future and relate it for the benefit of the President and of the nation to the choices we make today. This capacity cannot be confined to either foreign or domestic measures, as is the case with our departmental organization, but must include both. . . .

The third thing which emerges is that of conservation and wise use. We in the richest corner of the world use resources on a per capita basis strikingly disproportionate to that of most of the world. As others escape from poverty, they too will use more. All of us will have to learn to use what we have as responsibly as possible.

First, we must make sure that there's enough to go around. Second, we Americans, who consume so much, are poorly placed to advise others to consume less.

Let me conclude my discussion of the global reports by asking a question: What next? I don't know. . . .

After *Global 2000* came out, over 200 editorials were written in support of it. Third, that concern is reflected in actions by concerned groups, a variety of citizen groups, that were formed or decided to take action in these areas. Fourth, there is a net interest in Congress. . . .

In concluding, let me emphasize that Americans have concerns in facing up to global problems and in joining others in solving them. What are those concerns? First, there is the moral concern of the world four-fifths poor and one-fifth rich; the disparities we've largely addressed domestically have their parallels in the world community. Next, we have concerns for the availability and prices of natural resources. Thirdly, we have interest in the conservation of the U.S. renewable resource base which will be stressed by world needs. Fourth, we have interest in disputes over water, remembering that 148 of the world's river basins are shared by two or more countries. In the news today, in the war between Iraq and Iran, in part regarding water resources. We have an interest in energy availability. We have interests in trade, particularly with growing markets in developing countries. We have inter-

ests in what happens with national immigration in areas of resource impoverishment. We have interest in areas of genetic resources. We have interests in climate change and the condition of the global atmosphere.

In brief, American interests and national security are closely tied to the global resource, environment, and population issues we've been discussing today. We all have the tendency for absorption to be immediate, to preclude attention to the important. Global population, resource, and environment problems are long term. They are also important, to all of us. It is up to us to muster the foresight, the energy, and perhaps above all the will to deal with it.

From Mr. Parpart's opening statement:



The set of reports, *Global 2000* and *Global Future*, are not simply an academic exercise undertaken by government professionals for the purpose of somehow understanding how the world works. *Global 2000* is a report which serves a political purpose, and was issued under very definite political conditions and circumstances.

It came out in a policy environment which was shaped by the policies of the Carter administration, and it came out in a policy environment that was not only characterized by the concerns expressed by this report, but also by definite international policies which I think are basically coherent with this report and coherent with the recommendations that were based upon the *Global 2000* report.

As far as the overall philosophy, the report is quite explicit. It says that if present trends continue, that is to say, if present *policies* continue, certain consequences will ensue.

There are two things we must settle in such statements. First, yes, I would agree: If present policies continue, then, not only will the consequences listed in *Global 2000* ensue, but indeed, consequences far worse than what is reported there will occur.

But second, the report studiously avoided drawing out its principal policy assumptions. In the *Global Future* report, for example, the principal assumption of the *Global 2000* report is not even addressed. I would like to draw your attention to that particular item of policy.

I will quote from page 526 of the technical report, i.e., Volume II, of *Global 2000*. It says there:

The model [used in the report] thus implicitly also assumes that the existing economic system and associated financial institutions and facilities are fundamentally sound. . . . These assumptions may seem to imply that recent demands by the LDCs for

a new economic order will not be met. Simlink [the model], however, was not designed to analyze this issue.

Now I will draw your attention to the following quote:

Such a New Economic Order would involve major changes in the structure of world industry, a new international division of labor, and a dramatic shift in the relative influence of the Western world on the international economic system.

I submit to you, that on this page, number 526, is buried the principal assumption on which the entire report is based.

To put it very briefly: There are two ways to look at world resources, resource development, the total amount of wealth that the world will have by the year 2000. You can look at the numerator, or look at the denominator. You can make the assumption at the outset that you can do nothing about the numerator, *that you will do nothing* about the numerator: that the actual wealth will not be increased, and *that you will not take steps* to increase it. Therefore, the only thing you can possibly do is deal with the denominator, that is to say, control population, control resources, and attempt to create a situation in which the size of population—controlled by whatever means necessary—becomes your principal policy focus.

This, in fact, is precisely what is happening in policy circles in this country. It is happening not only in terms of the philosophy embodied in this report, but in terms of the overall policy environment within which such a report is issued.

I will give you one very explicit example: If you are concerned about energy, as the basis of food production, food development, or as the basis for irrigation, or any number of other undertakings anywhere in the world, and you, as a nation, adopt a policy of preventing the export of peaceful nuclear technology, under the general aegis of "nonproliferation," then you are creating a situation in which, when you have to make policy concerning energy supplies in various parts of the world that you have denied energy technology, then of course, the only thing you can say is, plant more trees. Conserve what you have. Find a way of using your cowdung more efficiently. Conserve the energy that is already there.

It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Your recommendations are already shaped by making previous decisions about *what you're not going to do*. And that is the principal import, and impact, of this report.

The assumption is that *we will not change* the basic investment structure, the basic capital flows structure, the basic economic framework within which economies now exist. Of course, then we can all agree, that to the extent that a country like the United States, or more

broadly, the Western countries, agree that there will be no changes in investment flows, etc., under those circumstances we are in a position where no improvement can occur in the well-being of all countries, and in particular, the Third World. This should be firmly understood.

This kind of report is not unique in history. In fact, as far as you can go back in history, there probably have been reports like this. . . . The one I want to call your attention to is the one that was issued in the 18th century by the British East India Company under the actual signature of Parson Thomas Malthus. . . . In that report, Malthus said if present policies are maintained, then we will have severe overcrowding, and a population catastrophe in England by the year 1845. . . .

In fact, because of the looting policies of the British East India Company elsewhere, while the population by 1845 had more than doubled, the standard of living had gone up by about four times within England itself. So, what Malthus predicted didn't come true.

However, he was absolutely right, and with a vengeance, concerning India, precisely because the British had adopted a policy vis-à-vis India of not making any changes in investment flows. On the contrary, because they made the explicit decision to exacerbate the already existing *disinvestment* policy of that time, by our best estimates, in the 19th century India experienced 31 periods of severe starvation and depopulation, in which at least 32 million people died. That is the lowest possible estimate. Thirty-two million people in that period of time would have amounted to close to one-third of the Indian population. . . .

More recently, we had the Club of Rome report, worked out by Jay Forrester, Dennis Meadows and others involved in formulating the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* document. Forrester came up with the so-called "life-boat" theory of economic growth. . . .

Jay Forrester's life-boat theory is very simple. It says that if you are already in the life-boat, then you have the right to survive. . . .

This is made explicit in a book issued in 1967 by Paul and William Paddock who were then officials of the AID. In the book, called *Famine 1975*, which is to say eight years after it was written, they say that the notion of triage, kicking "least fit" people out of the lifeboat in order to save the others from hunger, is the necessary policy. Paddock says: "My own opinion of sample nations that must be triaged is as follows." Then he goes through a few sample nations: He says "Haiti can't be saved. Egypt can't be saved. . . . Tunisia should receive food. . . . India can't be saved. Pakistan should receive food."

This is Paddock, then an official of AID.

What does it mean? First of all let's look at India. Not only was India not saved. India saved herself! India produced a surplus grain supply in several years for the first time. This was not the result of beneficial policies of

the U.S. government. In fact, we had a situation in which the U.S. government made almost every effort possible to keep India down, in every respect: technology transfer and overall policy framework. But India saved herself. Paddock wanted her to die. . . .

On the broader issues themselves: The basic assumption made in all these reports is that somehow higher population growth implies lower per capita economic growth. Let me say very clearly: *There is absolutely no evidence whatsoever, of any kind, to support this.*

If you look at the empirical data of the last several hundred years, in detail, and try to find some correlation between population growth and per capita economic growth, you will find no correlation whatsoever. The data points are distributed almost evenly all over the coordinate system. The only significant point is that, indeed, if we restrict the methods of creating new wealth, then of course, under those circumstances, population growth indeed means lower per capita income and greater stress on the environment, etc. But who says those assumptions have to be made?

In an environment in which population is looked upon as an asset, rather than as a problem, what we can and must do is quite obvious. We educate our population, we make every effort to create circumstances in which these populations can develop their creative potential; if we make every effort to develop new technologies and diffuse them or allow them to be diffused, rather than adopting government policies making sure that diffusion of these technologies does not occur, then under those circumstances, a newborn child is the principal asset of the human race, and not a threat to the existence of the living.

It is a very odd world indeed, in which every time a cow is born, we feel that we are richer, and every time a child is born we feel that we are poorer. That is the world, and that is the assumption, the policy framework and environment, of these two reports, *Global 2000* and *Global Future*. And it is that policy environment and philosophy that has to be changed. . . .

If we do not at this point take action, action exactly opposite to the gist of the *Global 2000* and *Time to Act* recommendations, then precisely the consequences those reports predict and worse will come to be.

I think there is no question that if we adopt those recommendations—concerning population control, concerning energy conservation, concerning resources generally—we will, well before the year 2000, get into circumstances in the Third World which will probably bring about a conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union which will lead to nuclear war. Indeed, we may solve our population problems all at once and for all time. In light of recent events, that possibility is very real indeed, and that possibility is perhaps the most severe consequence that I envision for a policy adopted within the framework adopted by these reports.