

Population in Defense Policy Planning

In 1974, the National Security Council expressed concern that population growth in less-developed countries would increase competition for resources, as a result of its assessment of “the likelihood that population growth or imbalances will produce disruptive foreign policies and international instability” (Kissinger, 1974, p. 1). Today’s defense community has a broader view of the connections between demography and security, focusing less on competition for resources or on population policies to stem growth and more on a wider range of population issues, such as age structure and migration. But government interest in the influence of population on stability and foreign policy remains high—and, since 9/11, has intensified.

To prepare for terrorist attacks and other irregular, non-state challenges, the Department of Defense (DoD) has begun to seriously examine the roles of demography, ethnic and national identity, and environmental issues in disrupting state stability and instigating conflict. While some in the government have long recognized the importance of these issues, the most recent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), released in February 2006, encouraged the systematic analysis and incorporation of these factors into a comprehensive national security framework. For example, the 2006 QDR directed DoD to build partnership capacity, to shift from “conducting activities ourselves to enabling partners to do more for themselves” (Rumsfeld, 2006, p. 2). DoD recognizes that the inability of some states to meet the needs of their growing populations may impede this goal; instead of increasing the ability of partners to aid in achieving U.S. goals, domestic strains are likely to hamper these states’ efforts to defend their borders and prevent the spread of terrorist networks. In this article, I

outline the military and intelligence communities’ interests in population trends in three key regions—the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa—and describe their use of demography to support military planning and strategy.

Four Trends for Defense

Interest in population trends has recently increased due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the launch of the new Africa Command (AFRICOM). Four global demographic trends are particularly relevant to U.S. defense planning in these regions: youthful populations, changes in military personnel, international migration, and urbanization.

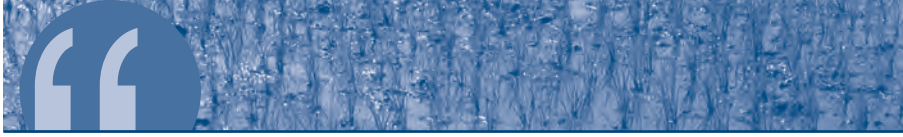
Youthful Populations

In the Middle East and Africa—the two fastest growing regions in the world—between 30 and 50 percent of the populations in most countries

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are under age 15 (PRB, 2007). These huge youth cohorts—commonly known as “youth bulges”—can be desperate or disgruntled if they have few economic or political opportunities. Lack of employment may also prevent them from getting married or participating in other traditional rites of passage. Youth bulges and armed conflict are strongly correlated, especially in underdeveloped countries (see, e.g., Urdal, 2006). Thus, the Middle East and Africa are likely to become more turbulent as the population grows and remains youthful, especially where young people lack job opportunities or other positive outlets. In Africa, the already-dire situation is compounded by the prevalence of deadly infectious diseases—such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis—that kill the most productive segments of society.

Through Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, as well as larger efforts to combat global terrorist networks, the U.S. military is highly engaged in these regions. However, the United States does not have a robust and comprehensive strategy for targeting the connections between youth and conflict. Given that 45 percent of the Afghan population is under age 15, victory—in whatever form—will remain elusive as long as this segment of the popula-

tion is marginalized (PRB, 2007). Ongoing programs to build schools and improve education, such as those carried out by the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa under U.S. Central Command, are a start, but more concentrated efforts to engage children and youth in positive activities would not only improve their attitudes toward U.S. soldiers, but would also empower them to contribute to rebuilding their societies.

U.S. soldiers helping to construct some schools and distribute educational supplies may improve public relations, but as part of U.S. strategy for the Middle East and Africa, DoD should focus on training and engaging youth in more meaningful ways. Programs that focus on leadership skills and encourage peaceful contact between youth and U.S. military personnel would be a start. The discipline and leadership required of soldiers makes them good role models for youth in developing states, and the more meaningful interactions these youth have with soldiers, the more successful DoD will be in encouraging stability in these volatile regions. The nature of conflict is changing, leading the U.S. military to undertake such new and innovative missions and roles.

Military Personnel

Demographic trends in fertility and mortality rates can directly affect a military’s recruiting pool. Diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis are weakening African militaries at the same time that conflict may be increasing due to more youthful populations, strained resources, and a lack of governance. HIV/AIDS has devastated the most productive segments of African society, especially its military-age population (PRB, 2008). Although there is little comprehensive data, UN and government reports show that infection rates in many African militaries are slightly higher than in the general population, as rates are exacerbated by the extended time soldiers spend away from home, easier access to money for prostitutes and drugs, and risky behavior characteristic both of



Spc. Josh Jenkins, a medic of the 82nd Airborne Division, inspects an Afghani child for symptoms of pink eye, on Sept. 30, 2002, Kandahar, Afghanistan. Jenkins is part of the Psychological Operations (PSYOP) teams, humanitarian aid package that goes out on daily patrols to local villages to help build a positive rapport with the local communities and U.S. Forces. (Photo by Spc. Marshall Emerson; courtesy U.S. Army)

the young in general and military culture in particular (Garrett, 2005). The U.S. military is concerned that these diseases could have a devastating effect on African peacekeeping forces, as well as on efforts of Americans and Africans to work together against terrorism.

In many countries in the Middle East, growing youthful populations mean the pool of potential recruits is too big—and the military is one of the few employment outlets for young men in a region where jobs are scarce. In Iraq under Saddam Hussein, young Sunni men joined the military, but now that the Iraqi system has been disrupted, youth are increasingly vulnerable to recruitment by extremists. With few ways to earn a living and support their families, many young Iraqi men are more willing to accept a couple of hundred dollars—or less—to plant a roadside bomb or take up arms for warring factions. Unless economic development accompanies U.S. efforts in Iraq and these young men are able to find legitimate employment, they will continue to be more susceptible to recruitment by anti-U.S. groups.

International Migration

Large-scale movements of people can change the composition of a country's population within days or weeks—much more quickly than fertility and mortality trends. When people move, so do their politics; clashes of identity and interests may lead to conflict or create deep social divisions. In the Middle East and Africa, migration is often conflict-driven. The millions displaced by troubles in Sudan and Iraq, for example, could potentially carry their domestic political skirmishes across borders and further disrupt these regions. Already, environmentally induced migration in South Asia has caused conflict. Since the 1950s, 12-17 million Bangladeshis have moved to India because of floods, drought, land scarcity, and other environmental conditions. This migration led to violence between eastern Indians and Bangladeshis in the 1980s (Reuveny, 2007).

UNHCR (2007) estimates that more than two million Iraqi refugees are elsewhere in the Middle East—more than one million in Syria alone. Governments in the region have been



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struggling to meet the needs of this displaced population and provide social services, jobs, and housing. Tensions between citizens of the receiving states and the refugees are producing social strife in an unstable region and overly burdening governments that already have trouble providing for their populations. While internal strife could potentially unseat regimes that are unfriendly to the United States, like Iran, there is no guarantee that the new government would be a more peaceful or stable one. The United States is seeking to build the capacity of states in the Middle East to address their internal issues and aid in the war on terror by encouraging stable governments that could stem sectarian violence, but international migration will continue to challenge these efforts in the region.

Urbanization

Two major global urbanization trends could challenge the U.S. military to continue to increase its global role: the growing concentration of people in megacities and coastal areas and the growth of urban slums. By 2020, all but four of the world's megacities—those cities with more than 10 million people—will be in developing states (UN-HABITAT, 2006c). In addition, 75 percent of the world's population already lives in areas that were affected by at least one natural disaster between 1980 and 2000 (UN-HABITAT, 2006a). Megacities and coastal cities in developing countries lack the infrastructure to withstand most disasters and the capacity to deal with the after-effects. The vulnerability of these areas will likely increase demand for stability operations (military efforts to maintain or restore order) and humanitarian assistance. Though these increased requirements may strain U.S. capabilities, conducting stability operations or providing humanitarian assistance could also help build a positive image of the U.S. military abroad, as demonstrated by the relief efforts following the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami and the 2005 Pakistani earthquake. Soldiers can also increase their own cultural awareness by engaging with locals in areas

where they otherwise would not be deployed.

Whereas urbanization in developed states offers benefits to city residents—sanitation, education, jobs, and transportation—slums offer no such services or governance. “Slumization” in sub-Saharan Africa increases ungoverned areas and the potential for internal instability, and thus provides an environment conducive to terrorist recruitment and activity. Rapid urbanization can increase the risk of civil conflict: “During the 1990s, countries with urban population growth rates greater than 4 percent a year were twice as likely to experience civil conflict than those where urban growth was more paced” (UN-HABITAT, 2006b, p. 1).

In most slums and cities in developing states, population growth is outpacing the ability of the state to create jobs for these citizens and to build infrastructure to accommodate concomitant growth in pollution and sewage. Such unmet expectations in overcrowded cities can be the catalyst for civil conflict. Urban instability—as we have seen in Iraq—requires that U.S. forces be prepared for a variety of missions in urban environments, and could increasingly blur the distinctions between police and military functions.

Opportunities to Address These Trends in Current Policy

The defense community has three major opportunities to address these trends and implications through policies aimed at the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia. First, the establishment of AFRICOM demonstrates recognition that the military and intelligence communities should be more anticipatory, rather than reactionary. In planning for the roles and missions of this command, DoD—in partnership with the intelligence community—should develop strategies to mediate effects of HIV/AIDS, conflict-driven migration, and youthful populations. For example, the military could devise programs that engage youth through leadership training and through their involvement in building infrastructure alongside soldiers. AFRICOM may also offer more opportuni-



Sgt. Freddy Valdez, assigned to the 27th BSB, 4th BCT, 1st Cav. Div., attempts to reach a soccer ball before an Iraqi MTR Soldier with the 10th IA Div., can kick the ball away during a soccer match at Contingency Operations Base Adder in southern Iraq Oct. 23, 2008. The contest was an effort to further strengthen the two units' partnership in stabilizing Iraq. (Photo by Maj. Jesse Henderson; courtesy U.S. Army)

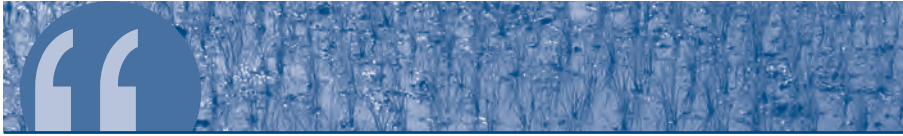
ties to partner with African militaries to help them combat HIV/AIDS, by expanding HIV/AIDS education and leadership training—some of which can be funded under existing foreign military training and education programs.

Second, DoD could continue to take demographic issues into account when crafting the next iterations of policy planning documents, as it did in the latest National Defense Strategy (see brief on page 26). The NDS and other policy reports analyze long-term trends (like climate change, globalization, and technology) and help shape the types of programs DoD funds, the capabilities the military develops, and priorities for intelligence collection. Analyzing demographic issues in the Middle East and Central Asia is also a robust piece of the strategy for winning the “long war.”

Finally, the defense and intelligence communities must recognize their limited ability to

influence these trends. According to the standard division of labor within the U.S. government, the intelligence community is tasked with providing analysis, not recommending or implementing policies that address these population concerns. And, while it is within the scope of the military’s mandate to prepare for humanitarian missions and stability operations, devising education programs for youthful populations and even distributing aid requires the help of partners in other agencies. DoD will need to partner with the U.S. Agency for International Development and non-governmental organizations; many of these agencies are better suited to work with local populations and can function as advisors and planners.

While interaction among the agencies at all personnel levels is frequent, fostering the type of large-scale collaboration necessary to address demographic trends requires two key steps.



The military does not always have the tools to address these population and development issues, but by drawing on a wider community for support, they lessen the chances that they will have to deal with the consequences.

First, it needs the support and encouragement of senior leadership, both political appointees and career civil servants, in all departments. Second, top-down direction from Congress and the executive branch could help institutionalize the process.

Additionally, in its dealings with Congress, the military can voice its support for development in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia, and communicate the connections between demographic issues and security. DoD could also encourage congressional funding for necessary programs. The military does not always have the tools to address these population and development issues, but by drawing on a wider community for support, they lessen the chances that they will have to deal with the consequences.

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REPORT ONLINE

The latest National Defense Strategy, released in June 2008 by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, recognizes the security risks posed by both population growth and deficit—due to aging, shrinking, or disease—the role of climate pressures, and the connections between population and the environment: <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/2008%20national%20defense%20strategy.pdf>

The Department of Defense's Stability Operations Capabilities notes that "integrated military and civilian operations are the now the norm with most military operations taking place in the midst of civilian populations. U.S. military forces must be prepared to support civilian stabilization and reconstruction efforts and to lead and conduct these missions when civilians cannot": http://www.defenselink.mil/policy/sections/policy_offices/solic/stabilityOps/

LTC Shannon Beebe (USA), senior Africa analyst at the Department of the Army, wrote in the *New Security Beat* that "security in Africa depends heavily on non-military factors that fall outside the traditional purview of the armed forces. For AFRICOM to be successful, it must approach security as a mutually beneficial proposition, not a zero-sum game": <http://newsecuritybeat.blogspot.com/2007/07/guest-contributor-shannon-beebe-on.html?showComment=1221690660000#c9183747927274650178>



Sgt. Catherine Olivarez looks over a toddler during a medical civil action program, July 24, 2008, at a village school in Goubetto, Djibouti. Olivarez is a medic with the 345th Civil Affairs Brigade working with Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (JTF-HOA). On Oct. 1, 2008, the Department of Defense stood up U.S. Africa Command, or AFRICOM. (Photo by Air Force Tech Sergeant Jeremy T. Lock; courtesy JTF-HOA)

Environment, Population in the 2008 National Defense Strategy

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Source: *The New Security Beat*,
<http://newsecuritybeat.blogspot.com>

The 2008 National Defense Strategy (NDS; Gates, 2008), released by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) in July, delivers the expected, but also throws in a few surprises. The NDS reflects traditional concerns over terrorism, rogue states, and the rise of China, but also gives a more prominent role to the connections among people, their environment, and national security. Both natural disasters and growing competition for resources are listed alongside terrorism as some of the main challenges facing the United States.

This NDS is groundbreaking in that it recognizes the security risks posed by both population growth and deficit—due to aging, shrinking, or disease—and the role of climate pressures, and the connections between population and the environment. In the wake of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports on climate change and the 2007 CNA study on climate change and security, Congress mandated that the NDS include language on climate change. The document is required to include guidance for military planners to assess the risks of projected climate change on the armed forces (see Section 931 of the FY08 National Defense Authorization Act). The document also recognizes the need to address the “root causes of turmoil”—which could be interpreted as underlying population-environment connections, although the authors provide no specifics. One missed opportunity in the NDS is the chance to explicitly connect ungoverned areas in failed or weak states with population-environment issues.

What really stands out about this NDS is how the authors characterize the future security environment: “Over the next twenty years physical pressures—population, resource, energy, climatic and environmental—could combine with rapid social, cultural, technological and geopolitical change to create greater uncertainty,” they write. The challenge, according to DoD, is the uncertainty of how these trends and the interactions among them will play out. DoD is concerned with environmental security issues insofar as they shift the power of states and pose risks, but it is unclear from the NDS what pre-

cisely those risks are, as the authors never explicitly identify them. Instead, they emphasize flexibility in preparing to meet a range of possible challenges.

The environmental security language in this NDS grew out of several years of work within the Department, primarily in the Office of Policy Planning under the Office of the Under Secretary for Defense, to study individual trends, such as population, energy, and environment, as well as a series of workshops and exercises outlining possible “shocks.” For example, the NDS says “we must take account of the implications of demographic trends, particularly population growth in much of the developing world and the population deficit in much of the developed world.”

Finally, although the NDS mentions the goal of reducing fuel demand and the need to “assist wider U.S. Government energy security and environmental objectives,” its main energy concern seems to be securing access to energy resources, perhaps with military involvement. Is this another missed opportunity to bring in environmental concerns, or is it more appropriate for DoD to stick to straight energy security? The NDS seems to have taken a politically safe route: recognizing energy security as a problem and suggesting both the need for the Department to actively protect energy resources (especially petroleum) while also being open to broader ways to achieve energy independence.

According to the NDS, DoD should continue studying how the trends outlined above affect national security and should use trend considerations in decisions about equipment and capabilities; alliances and partnerships; and relationships with other nations. As the foundational document from which almost all other DoD guidance documents and programs are derived, the NDS is highly significant. If the Obama administration continues to build off of the current NDS instead of starting anew, we can expect environmental security to play a more central role in national defense planning. If not, environmental security could again take a back seat to other national defense issues, as it has done so often in the past.

