

WILSON CENTER DIGEST

Summaries of recent papers, studies, and meetings at the Wilson Center

“The Global Infectious Disease Threat and Its Implications for the United States.”

A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE 99-17D) by the U.S. National Intelligence Council, presented at an Apr. 18, 2000, meeting sponsored by the Wilson Center’s Environmental Change and Security Project. Authors: *George Fides and Donald L. Noah*

Globalization has at least one indisputable major drawback: It facilitates the spread of infectious diseases, such as influenza, tuberculosis, AIDS, and hepatitis C. Since reaching a historic low in 1980, the annual death rate from infectious illnesses in the United States has nearly doubled, to some 170,000 a year, according to this report, prepared—and presented at the Wilson Center—by George Fides of the National Intelligence Council and Lt. Col. Donald L. Noah, M.D., of the Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center. Before 1980, the yearly death rate had been decreasing steadily for 15 years.

The problem is much more severe abroad, the report notes, particularly in the developing and ex-communist countries, which have “poor sanitation, poor water quality, and inadequate health care.” Of the roughly 54 million deaths worldwide in 1998, as many as a third were from infectious illnesses—and nearly half of these were in sub-Saharan Africa.

More than 57 million Americans went abroad in 1998 for business or pleasure, “often to high risk countries,” the report says. That was

more than twice the number a decade earlier. Tens of millions of foreign travelers also enter the United States each year, reaching the country in less time than it takes many infectious diseases to incubate. Some one million immigrants and refugees enter legally each year, “often from countries with high infectious disease prevalence,” and several hundred thousand enter illegally. Though immunized against many illnesses, U.S. soldiers and other military personnel abroad are at risk, particularly in developing countries, and may unknowingly bring viruses back with them. Food-borne illnesses also have become more common, thanks to Americans’ changing tastes and increased trade. Food imports have doubled over the last five years, and in certain seasons, more than three-fourths of the fruits and vegetables in supermarkets and restaurants are from outside the country. Food-borne illnesses now claim some 9,000 lives a year in the United States.

The authors expect the global problem to grow worse in the coming decade, but then—with improved prevention and control, new drugs and vaccines, and socioeconomic advances—to get fitfully better.

“Is Japan in the Midst of a Social Revolution?”

A report based on a Dec. 13, 1999, seminar, sponsored by the Wilson Center’s Asia Program.

Authors: *Gary D. Allinson, Merry I. White, and L. Keith Brown*

As if Japan’s economic woes were not enough, some observers report that the country also is being roiled by seismic social changes. Gary Allinson, a professor of East Asian studies at the University of Virginia and one of three specialists addressing this seminar, asserts that various generational fissures have opened in Japanese society, “heighten[ing] contention in political life, on the job, and in the family.”

During the 1990s, Allinson noted, Japan’s “volatile partisan conflicts brought seven different

men to the office of prime minister,” including five who did not become adults until after World War II. In 1990, two-thirds of the electorate had been born before 1945; by decade’s end, only one-third had been. This shrinkage translated into a diminished base of reliable voters for the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party, as well as for the socialist parties. Younger Japanese voters seem to harbor different values from those of their elders, he said. Many under 35 are “alarmingly uninformed” and “quite uninterested in politics.”

At work, a similar generation gap has opened between “the older men at the helm of firms and enterprises and the younger people whom they employed,” Allinson said. The former are typified by “the devoted, hard-working postwar company man, willing to sacrifice self and family for the good of the firm,” while the latter have been much more prone to avoid such sacrifice (particularly as dismissals mounted) and “to seek gratification outside of work, through a hedonistic consumer culture.”

At home, the Japanese family is now split three ways, Allinson said. The elderly members are “likely to have been reared in rural villages and towns . . . and to have worked on farms, in shops, and in small factories,” with the women usually not having worked outside the home. In the middle generation, women increasingly join men in such work to sustain “affluent lifestyles.” Younger family members, meanwhile, take part in “a youth culture” in malls, arcades, and the streets, or else stay in their rooms, watching TV, listening to music, and exploring the Internet.

Yet only 11 percent of Japanese households contain three generations, observed Merry I. White, an anthropologist at Boston University. Despite this, Japanese policymakers have tried “to shore up Confucian filiality” by encouraging daughters and daughters-in-law to care for

elderly parents. However, out of necessity, most women now work outside the home, White said. Though “the problems of caring for the aged and dealing with a shrinking population, labor force, and tax base are laid at women’s feet,” women alone can hardly solve them. “People have always complained that youth are selfish, materialist and amoral, and unfilial to their elders, and that women are prone to weakness and selfishness,” she said. But, in her view, families have been adapting to broader socioeconomic trends, not simply surrendering to individualism.

Still, for all the changes, basic Japanese culture remains much the same, asserted L. Keith Brown, an anthropologist at the University of Pittsburgh. In rural Mizusawa, 400 kilometers north of Tokyo, “the three-generation household is alive and well,” and government efforts to eliminate small and medium-size rice farming operations have had to take into account farmers’ determination to hold on to the land of their ancestors. “The natives of Mizusawa are not the only Japanese who think their ancestors matter,” he said. Fundamental Japanese values are “found in abundance in Tokyo as well as on the farms of Mizusawa.” Despite the economic “crisis,” Brown sees no “radical transformation” taking place in Japanese culture.

“The Peace Process in Colombia and U.S. Policy.”

A Working Paper, based on a Sept. 28, 1999, conference sponsored by the Wilson Center Latin American Program’s Project on Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America. Authors: *Cynthia J. Amson et al.*

Since winning the presidency of Colombia in 1998, Andrés Pastrana—with the Clinton administration’s support—has tried to give peace a chance. Early last year, he unilaterally withdrew all government troops from a Switzerland-sized swath of territory controlled by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. But the FARC has not responded in kind, notes Cynthia J. Amson, assistant director of the Wilson Center’s Latin American Program. The FARC murdered three American indigenous-rights activists in March 1999, strengthening suspicion in Washington that the “narco-guerrillas” are merely building up their military capacity in the demilitarized zone. A Clinton administration \$1.6 billion aid request passed the House and, in modified form, the Senate.

“What, after all, can the Colombian government give [the FARC guerrillas] that they cannot take by force or buy with their resources?” asks U.S. Representative Benjamin A. Gilman, R-N.Y., chairman of the House International Relations Committee. While Pastrana’s term expires in 2002, he notes, “the guerrillas have all the time in the world. . . . The indefinite extension of the unilateral DMZ means that there is . . . no real pressure on the FARC to act.”

“When one looks at the polls,” says Luis Alberto Moreno, Colombia’s ambassador to the United States, “it is clear that people believe overwhelmingly that the government of President Pastrana has given too much to the guerrillas, but those same people believe that the peace process should not be broken off.”