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Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley

University of Massachusetts Boston, padraig.omalley@umb.edu

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Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley

It is presumptuous to engage in the exercise of predicting what the future might bring. With the drums of war beating rhythmically — the decibels rising either to an abrupt halt or to a crescendo of air assaults as F-14D *Tomcats* leap off the decks of the U.S. carriers and streak across the sightless skies to drop their payloads of “precision” bombs on Baghdad — one hesitates to anticipate what the Drum Master might do. Is he perhaps now marching to the beat of his own drummers?

This editor's note is being penned in mid-January. UN inspectors have reported to the Security Council that they have not yet found evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, a preliminary finding dismissed by the White House. We know for a fact, Ari Fleischer, the President's press secretary, tells the assembled hacks, that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. By their very nature, “known facts” are a dangerous species; but that notwithstanding, the administration is unwilling to share these “known facts” with the UN inspectors or the American public.

One doesn't get the feeling that this seeming irrational behavior on the part of the administration bewilders the public or even raises alarm. No matter what the outcome, one doubts that the residents of Washington D.C. will be huddled in the subterranean vaults of the subway system riding out retaliatory air strikes from the Iraqis. Rather, they will huddle around their digital TVs watching their guys do their thing — engrossing family entertainment before night prayers and beddie-byes to the kids.

But these matters certainly bewilder the rest of the world, including America's closest allies, with the exception of Britain, which has a proclivity for deluding itself that it is still a world power of consequence. Getting out front whenever a war presents itself allows it to bask in the reflections of past glories. Dead empires like to play footsie with dying ones.

If there is a war, it will, of course, go wrong, horribly wrong. Islam will not stand for it. Memory is a more potent weapon than the smartest of smart bombs; the promulgation of terrorism might become a sacred duty, not an obscene blasphemy.

But, while we wait to see whether the seeming inevitable becomes the merely inevitable in Iraq, other parts of the world are fighting their own wars and losing them. They are wars that America with its vast resources could stem, and in some instances perhaps even stop, but it has chosen largely to ignore them and they occupy little space in the public consciousness, although the toll they exact is far greater than the probable toll of a war in Iraq.

In Africa, the number of people facing hunger across the continent has soared to an estimated 40 million, a crisis exacerbated by high rates of HIV/AIDS.

In Southern Africa 16.7 million people need emergency food assistance to survive until the next harvest due in April. Half of Zimbabwe's 14 million people already face starvation. The collapse of the economy due to President Robert Mugabe's catastrophic land redistribution policies in the last two years, empty foreign exchange coffers, political turmoil as Mugabe clings to power, and the distribution of food assistance only to people who support him — all this has the

makings of a humanitarian and political crisis that will reverberate throughout the region for decades to come. Food riots have broken out in major urban centers. They are only the tip of the larger iceberg.

Successive years of drought, due in part to increasingly unpredictable climate changes, have resulted in massive crop failures throughout the region. Relief agencies have grown hoarse calling for a massive international intervention to avert a disaster that does not have to happen, but their voices are drowned by the drumbeats of war. Recession in the rich west evokes a parsimonious response to calls for aid to feed the wretched poor. And we wonder why they wear T-shirts extolling Bin Laden as a hero.

Complicating the problem is the pervasiveness of HIV/AIDS. Malnutrition and food shortages debilitate the healthy; for the tens of millions suffering from HIV/AIDS the effects are lethal. Weakened immune systems are further weakened; those who live on the thin edge of the poverty line fall off as they become more susceptible to opportunistic diseases. But there are no safety nets to cushion their fall. Increasingly unable to till their sun-scorched farming plots for whatever meager yields may sprout, they starve. They call it famine. We call it unfortunate. They die. We call it a catastrophe. Famine feeds AIDS. AIDS feeds famine. Together they feed death.

Recently, Stephen Lewis, Koffi Annan's special assistant on HIV/AIDS returned from a trip to several African countries. His report requires no elaboration. His own summary: "mass murder by mass complacency." He writes:

If I am to extract from my trip those aspects that made the greatest impression on me, they are six in number.

First, there is absolutely no doubt that hunger and AIDS have come together in a Hectare's brew of horror: We saw it everywhere. In Malawi, for example, analysis of the data shows that 50 percent of poor households are affected by chronic illness due to HIV/AIDS. You can't till the soil, grow the crops, feed the family, when disease stalks the land. Add to that the reality of erratic rainfall and drought.

I think the nadir was reached for me in the pediatric ward of the University teaching Hospital in Lusaka. The infants were clustered, stick-thin, three and four to a bed, most so weakened by hunger and ravaged by AIDS (a prevalence rate in the nutrition section of the ward of 56 percent – in the repository section of the ward of 72 percent), that they had no chance. Every fifteen minutes another child died, was awkwardly covered with a sheet, and removed then by a nurse, while the ward was filled with the anguished weeping of the mothers. A scene from hell.

Second, I couldn't help feel, on occasion, that we were witnessing the grinding down of a society. We've all imagined the catastrophe, but no one wanted to believe that it could happen. The fact that the agricultural sector is beginning to decay could simply be a harbinger of worse to come. My own sense is that education is on the brink. In all of the countries, teachers were dead, dying, teachers were ill and away from school, children, especially girls, were being taken out of school to tend to sick and dying parents, children who had lost their parents to AIDS were not in school because they couldn't afford the school fees.

In Malawi they have done an analysis of AIDS on four different ministries, and the erosion in each in human terms is inescapable. It's necessary to recognize that even at a prevalence rate of 15 or 20 percent, let alone 30 or 35 percent in Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, the incessant, irreversible, cumulative deaths of so many productive members of society means, ultimately, that things fall apart.

Third, one of the saddest manifestations of a society coming apart at the seams is the growing rate of sexual abuse of children and adolescents. I was frankly jolted by what we were told. Whether it was the plight of orphans in the mountains of Lesotho, or outreach workers telling gruesome stories, *sotto voce*, as we traveled in Zimbabwe, or the evidence we absorbed in Zambia, there seems little doubt that sexual assaults on children have reached shocking proportions.

Towards the end of this month, Human Rights Watch will release a powerful, heart-breaking monograph on the abuse of girls in Zambia and the link with HIV. There's something deeply, deeply wrong when children are frequent victims of adult sexual violence.

It appears to happen to orphans especially. As they are moved from place to place, more and more distant from their origins, they become increasingly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Ironically and bitterly, they also therefore become evermore vulnerable to HIV transmission.

Fourth, I've never felt the impact of orphans so strongly. It struck me again that we have ways of dealing with most other elements of the pandemic, but dealing with the astronomic number of orphans is a new phenomenon for which the world has no evident solution. We have never before witnessed the selective destruction of parents that leaves such a mass of orphans behind.

It is necessary, I think, to recognize that the extended family, and the willing community, can never fully cope with the numbers. The reality is the escalating numbers of orphan street children, of orphan gangs, of orphan delinquency, as hordes of children, torn from their familial roots, wander the continent, bewildered, lonely, disenfranchised from reality, angry and unable to relate to normal life.

Fifth, if women are at the centre of the epidemic as they are, acutely vulnerable to infection on the one hand, doing all the care-giving for the sick and the orphans on the other, we saw precious little evidence of efforts at women's empowerment or sexual autonomy.

Finally, the issue of anti-retroviral treatment came up constantly and everywhere. Every single group of People Living With HIV/AIDS pounded the demand home in unrelenting fashion. There is a crescendo of rage and desperation that governments will ignore at their peril.

The HIV/AIDS crisis is not a crisis of a lack of resources. It is a crisis of a lack of conscience. It is the obscene gap between the haves and the have-nots that is driving this holocaust.

It is impossible how strongly people feel that the Global Fund is the best vehicle we have to finance the struggle against the pandemic. As I understand it, the Global Fund, has enough resources to get through the next round of proposals at the end of this month, but then it faces the moment of truth. The Global Fund after January can be said to be in crisis.

It is legitimate to ask: what's wrong with this world? What's wrong with the rich countries?

I want to say what we're all saying privately to each other. If, as some suggest, there is a war in Iraq come February, then the war will eclipse every other international human priority, HIV/AIDS included.

In other words, if the US and the other members of the G8 don't augment their contributions to the Global Fund in the immediate future, we will be in desperate trouble. Wars divert attention, wars consume resources, wars ride roughshod over external calamities.

People Living With HIV/AIDS are in a race against time. What they never imagined was that over and above the virus itself, there would be a new adversary — a war.

* * *

This issue of the journal is a special issue of a different kind. It highlights the research capabilities of students in the Institute's Masters of Science in Public Affairs (MSPA) program. The Director of the Institute, Ed Beard, has more to say about the program in his introduction. Suffice to say that tooting one's own horn is occasionally permissible, especially if one has much to toot about.

The three articles that appear in this issue were chosen after careful review with one criterion uppermost in mind: do they meet the standards that merit publication in a professional journal that prides its contribution to the arena of public policy research? Written initially as degree requirements, the articles merit a wider audience, and we present them proudly, more sure than ever that our Masters program

fulfills a vital component of the university's mission. These articles are testimonials to the caliber of student the program attracts, students who see public service not merely as a profession, but as a calling to enrich the quality of life for all in the Commonwealth and beyond.

Maura Greaney examines an area that has received scant attention in public policy discussions — outdoor public paintings funded by municipalities and the impact they have on the communities themselves. These mural art projects articulate the dreams and frustrations of communities and thus open the way for them to consider strategies for change. Greaney explains how mural arts projects can establish communal bonds in urban centers rife with racial, social, and economic divides; how they can build social and intellectual capital in “at-risk” youth; and how they can enhance the physical perception and quality of urban neighborhoods. “Municipal mural programs,” she concludes, “must be integrated within the urban environment to be effective: they should beautify surroundings while serving a higher educational or social purpose. A meaningless public mural is a missed opportunity. Policymakers must let community-based murals be their muse.”

Shannon Cadres examines some implications of the steadily increasing prices of prescription drugs. Massachusetts has attempted to solve the problem through the Prescription Advantage Program, a first-in-the-nation insurance model that is open to all seniors in the state. Former Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy II set out to administer his own privately run drug discount program, Citizens Health. Cadres' study finds that there are lessons to be learned from both Citizens Health and the state's program, Prescription Advantage. While Prescription Advantage can serve as a model for a government-sponsored prescription drug plan for seniors, Citizen Health can provide insight into how to reach other segments of the population who can't afford the drugs they need.

Finally, Marissa Glowac assesses the impact of the “Back to the Beaches” project approved in 1993 by Massachusetts Governor William Weld and Boston Mayor Thomas Menino. The seven-year, \$30.5 million public project was designed to restore nineteen Boston Harbor beaches. This study concludes that the implementation and success of the “Back to the Beaches” project can be attributed to several factors — an increased public awareness of the value of open spaces and environmental resources, the Boston Harbor Clean-Up Project, the project's political support, the Metropolitan District Commission's receipt of funds over its capital spending ceiling, and the interactive community process and strategy used to bring about these changes.

Glowac's analysis presents policymakers with three general areas of consideration for future public works projects. First, this project demonstrates how public projects can benefit from nonprofit organizations in an oversight and management function. Second, this project highlights the necessity of special environmental regulations for man-made urban environments in order to facilitate their management and use and also save government time and resources. Finally, the “Back to the Beaches” project posits the need for performance measures to truly assess public works projects and their use of public dollars. ❀