

Be Selfish: Take Care Of The Poor Ones.

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Summary:

Living freely does not only mean that one has intellectual rights but also the access to food, water and sanitation. As two third of the world is undernourished, solving the food supply problem is an essential step towards freedom. Until now, the solutions provided by developed countries have not taken in account a holistic picture of the world situation. They are punctual actions that seem more motivated by the political and economical interests of the countries than the will to save lives. Most of them have mitigated success. The resulting frustration in the endangered populations has given the possibility to extremism to find enough financial and human resources to take violent actions against those that are seen as the exploiters and to strike directly in their countries.

In order to restore the security in the developed world, retaliation is a temporary and dangerous solution, as it does not break the circle of violence. Developed countries will have to rethink their policies and use food and water aid as well as education to draw the populations in difficulties far away from extremism.

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What is the common point between the Kyoto agreements on carbon dioxide emission, the war against terror and the World Bank? Apparently none: the first item deals with the desperate attempt of humanity to slow down the climate changes that are devastating ecosystems as we know them today; the second one aims at putting an end to terrorist attacks in the Western World and establish democracy and freedom in regions that are plagued with extremism; the last one is an organisation that aims at helping the development of the poorest regions of the globe. These are three different approaches to make a better world, at least in the view of the Western World.

To understand what may be wrong with those approaches, one can make the comparison between the philosophical approaches of Western and Chinese medicines. In Western medicine, compounds are isolated to fight a cause of illness that is considered to be unique. The symptoms are related to an original cause and it is assumed that removing this very cause is enough to cure the patient. In Chinese medicine, a more holistic approach is taken: when ill, the body is considered as unbalanced, its overall functioning defective. With a combination of herbs and other ingredients that gather many different compounds in different quantities, the treatment aims at putting the body in balance again, considering the symptoms with more attention than the probable cause of the sickness. The three examples are typical of the Western medicine approach to the illnesses of the world.

Even if the Kyoto agreements are successful, they will reduce the carbon dioxide emissions by only a few percents¹. It is certainly a honourable attempt after two centuries of steady increase of the carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere. Still one should consider that the money involved in this almost worldwide project would be sufficient to provide drinking water to everybody on Earth. Moreover, it prevents economically developing countries to pass through the same technological phases that the now developed countries have been through: the use of simple but more polluting techniques before reaching the economical and technical maturity that is necessary to the implementation of the expensive environment-friendly technologies.

¹ The figure is published in Bjorn Lomborg's book *The Sceptical Environmentalist*. First heavily criticised, the book is now accepted by the scientific community and the governments as a realistic vision of the state of the planet.

The aim of the World Bank, as the one of the International Monetary Found (IMF), is to reduce the level of poverty in defined regions by providing financial help in form of direct loans or development projects. Their main criterion of success is the economical growth of the region they have been helping. This factor does not take in account disparities in the populations: people who are launching businesses are indeed getting richer and enhance the economical growth of the region, but it creates a class of exploited people that are in fact getting poorer.

What about the war against terror? A first sight, it looks like a fair reaction to the September 11th events. Even though it was acclaimed by most of the world in a supporting wave following the attack, more and more criticisms are heard: what looked like a justified action to seek for the responsible people is turning into a revenge or an attempt to establish political and economical influence in a strategic region.

Freedom is treated in the same self-centred way: For people in developed countries, intellectual freedom is what matters the most: Democracy and expression of religious or political ideas, opportunities to do business or travel without geographical or community restrictions. These issues, as essential as they are, do not concern the two third of the world population that is undernourished or starving. Intellectual freedom is the least of the concerns of someone who cannot obtain proper food to survive the next few days or sees her children dying because of lack of proper water supply and sanitation.

Poor communities are aware of the disparities between the overfed inhabitants of the developed world and themselves. They see how the international help does generally slip away from the most disadvantaged to profit those who do not need it, because it is not properly distributed or not attributed in a fair way. The anecdote of Swaziland is revealing and not unique: its king has just bought a private jet costing twice the amount of the aid necessary to save its population from starvation. The anger and despair that results from these injustices are mostly directed towards the developed countries that seem to do nothing to help out.

It is in these frustrated populations that extremists draw the core of their supporters and worse, their troops. The majority of those disadvantaged people are not educated. It is easy to indoctrinate them, especially against those who are supposed to be responsible for their misery and to use their despair as a deadly weapon in suicide actions. Moreover, well-organized extremist groups provide generally food, protection or money to their most dedicated members, other incentives to join the movement regardless of the convictions. It is for example well known that the family of the suicide bombers in Palestine receive financial compensation for the sacrifice of the bomber.

The way developed countries handle those problems, as shown in the examples, does not only affect the developing world but also backfires at them. With the attack of September 11th, people got more aware of the problem, but it is not new. Terrorism has been in the news for many years, both in Europe and in the USA. Whether they want it or not, they are involved in the destiny of those people. By invading them during the colonization period, most of the European countries have created bounds with their colonies: even now that the colonizers have left, they are still considered, sometimes with reason, as the source of the present day problems. Even though the United States do not have official colony, they have been involved

in many countries during the cold war. They are hated even more than Europeans for the consequence of their interventions nowadays or in the past.

Regarded as the bad guys, the developed countries have only one choice to prevent violent and suicide reprisal: to show that they are not as bad as they seem and that they are ready to provide adapted solutions to problems of poverty. It is time for them to look at what has been done in an objective way and to draw the conclusions. The economically leading countries have to leave their pride and their short-term political interests aside. They should accept that their ways of dealing with the world problems have not been optimal. Most of the military or humanitarian actions in developing countries have been too punctual, without concerns about the big picture and sometimes motivated by political or economical interests. New priorities have to be set.

Proper repartition of food help, water supply and sanitation are at the top of the list. Education, which will allow for long lasting development, follows just after. Using the resources and money that would be involved in the Kyoto agreement and the war against terror to provide basic needs to the populations would be certainly more appropriate. Instead of inferring in the policies of countries because they do not satisfy a certain geopolitical and financial vision, support should be provided to the humanitarian actions that are confronted with local political corruption. In those situations, military action can be justified by the necessity to save really endangered lives.

Helping the developing countries in a modest, objective and adapted way is not only a charity action. It is the proper long-term response to terrorist acts. As awful as the attacks are, retaliation is just another round in the circle of violence. Justice has to be done and the responsible have to be judged but someone has to make the first step against violence. The terrorists are not interested, as they thrive on violence. The only way to win the war is to remove the motivations for people to join extremist groups. With education, proper food and drinking water, people are less inclined to react violently. Who would like to blow oneself up when a good diner is waiting at home? The way to peace and the end of terrorism is long: even in developed countries, there are still activist groups that use violence to make their voice heard. The case of Ireland is a striking example of the complexity of extremism and terrorism.

What about the financial effort? Anybody involved in developing countries programs will say that it is not necessary to put the numbers on paper: money is not an issue. The real effort is to rethink in depth the policies and allocate the resources where they are actually needed. It has not been done for charity sake. Will the argument of security be enough? As selfish as it sounds, it would free hundreds of millions of people.