NSSM 200: Understanding National Security Study Memorandum 200

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National Security Study Memorandum 200 (NSSM 200) was a decisive document in the history of US foreign policy. Because it touches on the motivation behind US funding for population control, an awareness of NSSM 200 is crucial to understanding why the US continues to spend millions of tax dollars to prevent families in the developing world from having children. NSSM 200 was written in 1974 under the direction of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The anti-population aspect of American foreign policy was actually well underway, with the creation of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1961. NSSM 200 simply added the issue of national security as another justification.

Population Growth = Civil Disturbances?

NSSM 200 tied rapid population growth in the developing regions of the world to civil disturbances and other disruptions. It argued that such agitation would lead to interruptions in the flow of strategic minerals and other materials to the United States and would thus constitute a threat to national security. Chapter Three of the document states “The US economy will require large and increasing amounts of minerals from abroad, especially from less developed countries. That fact gives the US enhanced interest in the political, economic and social stability of the supplying countries. Wherever a lessening of population pressures through reduced birth rates can increase the prospects for such stability, population policy becomes relevant to resource supplies and to economic interests of the United States.”

It would never do for the citizens of developing nations to realize the motivation behind population assistance. So NSSM 200 warns against the danger that leaders of less developed countries will “see developed country pressures for family planning as a form of economic or racial imperialism; this would create quite a serious back1ash.”
Questionable Statistics Used

NSSM 200 relied on statistics that were questionable, even at the time, but which history has proven to be extremely inaccurate. In its section of population projections, NS SM 200 states that “If present fertility rates were to remain constant, the 1974 population 3.9 billion would increase to 7.8 billion by the year 2000 and rise to a theoretical 103 billion by 2075.” Even the so-called medium variant projected that world population would reach 6.4 billion by 2000 and 12 billion by 2100.

Most critically, NSSM 200 assumed that the rate of world population growth was increasing. In reality, it was beginning to decrease at the time the document was written. The world population growth rate has decelerated dramatically from 2.07% annually during the period 1966–1970 to 1.33% annually during the period 1996–2000, and is expected to halt altogether in the coming decades.

World Population on the Decline

The current world population is about 6.1 billion persons and will never again double. The United Nations has projected that population will peak somewhere between 7 and 8 billion persons before beginning a rapid decline. Declining populations mean developing nations will not only suffer from the current ills that afflict them due to underdevelopment: they will also suffer from a rapidly aging population. The potential for civil unrest and revolution will be greatly multiplied under such conditions.

In light of these projections the time has come to reconsider the appropriateness of massive population control expenditures. Since the world population will soon decline, causing vast demographic and societal changes, the time has come to redirect population control monies into the authentic economic development of the developing world and into programs designed to care for the world’s aging population.

$100 Billion + Spent

The developed nations of the world (in particular the United States, Canada, Sweden, Denmark and Japan) have spent more than $100 billion on population control programs over the past thirty years. We have learned that mere population control measures do not lead to
peace and stability (the major objective outlined in NSSM 200), but to resentment and more poverty. The effects of NSSM 200 on men, women, and families in the developing world have been devastating.

Please Help Meet Basic Needs

The people of the less developed countries are crying out for basic health care, for rural electrification, for better roads, for clean drinking water and sanitation, and for improved agricultural equipment. Tragically, they have been asking for these basic necessities for years. Instead, the US continues to send money to decrease their numbers. It is long past time to respond to their pleas and to abandon our population control programs. We must instead use our great influence and wealth to promote authentic economic development. Only this course of action will bring lasting justice and peace to the world.

The full text of NSSM 200 is available on our website at www.pop.org/students/nssm200.html

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