

Baby Boom or Baby Bust?

Only 35 years ago, in 1968, both the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Population began funding family planning activities. Anyone who thought of a link between population and international affairs at the time focused almost exclusively on rapid population growth. The entry of international organizations and bilateral donors into the field of family planning programs was controversial—many questioned a government role in such a personal and value-laden area.

Rapid population growth was a security concern because the Coale-Hoover Growth Model predicted that economic growth would be restricted by rapid increases in population size caused by high fertility and lowering mortality rates. The resulting economic stagnation and decline, in the face of ever increasing demands by a growing population, were seen as a recipe for massive political, economic, and social instability in the developing world. Providing

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knowledge and modern contraceptive supplies for family planning appeared to be a realistic remedy for reducing rapid population growth and increasing possibilities for economic growth.

The development of population programs (read programs to provide family planning services) has a rocky history. On the international political level, there have been UN Population Conferences every ten years since the first in Rome in 1964. The first conference was basically a scientific meeting of about 600 scientists discussing the global demographic situation. The three subsequent UN meetings in Bucharest, Mexico City, and Cairo were gatherings of government delegations discussing population policy, still

the one child policy with the conviction that its population growth rates were unsustainable. They announced an unreasonable target of keeping total national population below one billion. Indira Gandhi's government in India was brought down by what was perceived by many citizens as an over-vigorous sterilization campaign. The United States, once a vigorous supporter of family planning programs and the major donor to them, came to the meeting questioning the correctness of assumptions that population growth was detrimental to economic development. Equally important, however, was the issue of abortion and its role in efforts to control population growth. The U.S. government

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with a primary emphasis on reproductive issues. At Bucharest in 1974, many developing countries, along with Communist countries, questioned the usefulness of population programs. Marxists insisted that population growth would not be problematic in a socialist state while developing countries were more focused on the motivation of donors than Marxist-Leninist or Maoist ideologies. In the words of the Indian delegate, they proposed that development was the best contraceptive. They saw pills, intrauterine devices, and condoms as cheap substitutes for aid, investment, and access to markets. While many supporters of the family planning movement were shaken, they continued on.

Ten years later, there seemed to be an about face by many when governments met in Mexico City. China came to adopt

announced that it would no longer support organizations that provided abortion information and services—a move that came to be known as “the Mexico City policy.”

During this period there were also increasing questions and criticisms raised by women's health advocates and advocates for women generally. They felt that women bore the brunt of family planning and were treated as ciphers in programs that over-emphasized statistical measures, such as fertility rate targets, family planning adopter targets, and contraceptive prevalence rate targets. The information necessary to make informed choices, the safety and side effects of an array of methods, the balance between maternal mortality and contraceptive targets, all came in for severe questioning. Advocates claimed that the focus

needed to be shifted towards reproductive health, including maternal and child health, the education of girls, and women's access to earning opportunities.

By the time the 1994 UN conference was held in Cairo, most governments had adopted the perspectives of activists from the developing world and advocates of women's rights. The rationale for population control and "traditional" family planning as mechanisms for achieving certain economic goals were widely perceived as too instrumentalist. Meanwhile, there was an increasing sensitivity to the burden placed on women under such population policies. Consequently, there was a general re-conceptualization of "family planning," with a shift away from target-oriented thinking to a focus on women's reproductive health and life opportunities. Implicit in this approach to population policy was the presumption that if women were given the appropriate information, a number of safe choices, and the opportunity to take control of their lives through education and access to job opportunities, they would make wise decisions about child bearing and family size themselves. In effect, externalities of individual choices, in an appropriate environment, would obviate the problem of rapid population growth, as prior experience in developing countries showed. This remains the essence of population policy as the possibility of another UN population conference in 2004 or 2005 continues to be discussed.

This history of international population policy should provide some perspective for the issues discussed in this issue of the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*. For the past several decades, the role of population in international affairs revolved around finding ways of containing what came to be coined the "popula-

tion bomb." Population and international affairs today, however, means something much, much more and encompasses many more issues than ever before. The fact that some regions of the world are concerned about population aging and decline while others are struggling with population younging and growth is an indication of how far we have come. But, issues such as HIV/AIDS, population and environmental pollution, population and economics, refugee flows, trafficking in people, and internally displaced persons are all deeply embedded on the international agenda today. The fact is that we have moved away from a single-issue approach to population and international affairs toward a much richer analysis of the nexus.

This interest in complicated accounts of international affairs is related to the broader prominence given to "soft" issues, such as population, as distinguished from the "hard" concern of balance of power security studies in international affairs scholarship today. The end of the Cold War, and the decreased threat of global nuclear war and the increased salience of state-building and stabilization that came with it, provided space and direction for focusing on other issues. And although 9/11 and the rise of global terrorism may once again marginalize "softer" issues, a sense of perspective and balance is necessary.

As the articles in this issue illustrate, the relationship between soft power issues, like population dynamics, and "hard" power concerns is complicated. In some places, like Russia, inattention to changing population patterns may gradually evolve into serious security issues. In many parts of Africa, this has already happened, with changing demographic trends lying at the root of social

and political crises. Meanwhile, other regions confront population problems that are neither debilitating nor likely to foster “real” security threats. Two things are clear: different regions face different population problems of differing gravity, and while these challenges call for various economic, social, and healthcare initiatives, few, if any, are likely to require primarily military solutions.

The topics analyzed herein do not exhaust all the important demographic challenges prevalent in international relations. Debates continue to rage among

demographers and economists about the impact of various population pyramids on healthcare and welfare systems, economic productivity, and the even balance of power as well as about the solutions to these issues. However, while this Forum is not a definitive encyclopedia on population and international affairs, it is an excellent introduction and solid addition to a continuing conversation.

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