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National Security Study Memorandum 200: World Population Growth and U.S. Security

By Stephen D. Mumford

We must help break the link between spiraling population growth and poverty. ...Where they have been tried, family planning programs have largely worked. ...Many pro-life advocates ...contend that to condone abortion even implicitly is morally unconscionable. Their view is morally shortsighted. ...if we provide funds for birth control ...we will prevent the conception of millions of babies who would be doomed to the devastation of poverty in the underdeveloped world.

— Richard M. Nixon
Seize the Moment
(Simon & Schuster, 1992)

President Nixon has recently reasserted his belief that overpopulation gravely threatens world peace and stability. He ranks assistance in population growth as the most important effort the United States can undertake to promote peace and stability. During his presidency he authorized the study that came to be known as NSSM 200 — National Security Study Memorandum 200. In order to effectively examine the content and fate of NSSM 200, we need to backtrack a bit to the Rockefeller Commission which was discussed in the Summer 1992 issue of this journal.

From his first days in office, President Nixon understood the grave dangers of high rates of population growth — more than any other president. He responded appropriately when he perceived that his people and their way of life were gravely threatened. Seven months into his first term, in a rare move for a president, he delivered his *Special Message to the Congress*.¹

The message set forth a far-reaching commitment to limiting population growth. It set in motion a broad range of government activities, both domestic and international. It called for the creation of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future to collect and analyze data that would make possible the formulation of a comprehensive United States population policy.

In March, 1970, the U.S. Congress created The

Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, which completed its work in March 1972. Its final report offered more than 70 recommendations. Collectively, they constituted a detailed blueprint for a superb national population policy.

WHY WAS THE COMMISSION'S FINAL REPORT IGNORED?

1972 was a presidential election year and President Nixon was facing a difficult reelection bid, so when a delegation of the Commission presented the Final Report to him on May 5, 1972, six months before election day, he sharply condemned the most important recommendations.² Why was he attempting to distance himself from the report? In the words of a Commission member, Congressman James Scheuer (D.-NY): "The reasons were obvious — the fear of attacks from the far right and from the Roman Catholic Church because of our positions on family planning and abortion. With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that this obstruction was the first of many similar actions to come from high places."³

During the following two-year period, it became increasingly clear that there would be no response to the Commission's recommendations. In May 1974, a group of pioneer population activists acknowledged this inaction and asked Ambassador Adolph Schmidt to speak with his friend, Commission Chairman, John D. Rockefeller III. They met in June, 1974 in New York City. Schmidt noted his own disappointment and that of his colleagues because no program had been mounted as a result of the recommendations. What had gone wrong? Rockefeller responded: "The greatest difficulty has been the very active opposition by the Roman Catholic Church through its various agencies in the United States."⁴

***"...a definitive interagency study
of the threat of overpopulation
to U.S. security ... NSSM 200 details
how and why world population growth
threatens U.S. and global security."***

None of the Commission's 70 recommendations were ever implemented. It is tragic that the American people have been kept in the dark about this bold opposition by the Vatican and other pronatalist groups. Lay Catholic Americans desire the same number of children as non-Catholic Americans,⁵ use contraceptives⁶ and obtain abortions⁷ in the same proportions, support school-based population information and sex education⁸ for their children, and advocate a halt to illegal immigration⁹ into the U.S. in the same proportions. No doubt, both Catholic and non-Catholic Americans would have strongly counter-balanced this bold obstruction of American policy had they been aware of it. The quality of life for all of us has been significantly diminished by this change in policy, in substantial measure at the behest of pronatalist pressures from the Vatican.

PRESIDENT NIXON MAKES A BOLD MOVE

Despite the intense opposition of the Catholic hierarchy he encountered in the wake of the Rockefeller Commission, President Nixon's assessment of the gravity of the overpopulation problem and his desire to deal with it remained unchanged. On April 24, 1974, in an effort to contend with this crisis, in National Security Study Memorandum 200 (NSSM 200), Nixon directed that a study be undertaken to determine the "Implications of World Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests."¹⁰ Its findings would be momentous indeed.

I can only speculate, but the President must surely have been aware that this new document would meet with the same intense opposition from the Vatican and others as the earlier one. However, perhaps he felt that a definitive study of the national and global security implications of overpopulation, revealing that the very security of the United States was seriously threatened, would generate public demand for action to curb growth. That might serve to overcome the pressures being exerted by the opponents. Why else would he have undertaken this study, given his painful experience after the Rockefeller Commission?

NSSM 200

To implement NSSM 200, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, acting for the President, directed the Secretaries of Defense and Agriculture, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Deputy Secretary of State and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development (AID), to jointly undertake "a study of the impact of world population growth on U.S. security and overseas interests." This work was completed on December 10, 1974 and circulated to the designated Secretaries and

Agency heads for their review and comments.

Meanwhile, on August 9, 1974, Gerald Ford had succeeded to the presidency. Revisions to the study continued until July, 1975. On November 26, 1975, the 227-page report and its recommendations were endorsed by President Ford in National Security Decision Memorandum 314: "The President has reviewed the interagency response to NSSM 200....," wrote the new National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft. "He believes that United States leadership is essential to combat population growth, to implement the World Population Plan of Action and to advance United States security and overseas interests. The President endorses the policy recommendations contained in the Executive Summary of the NSSM 200 response..."

President Ford, recognizing the gravity of the situation, assigned responsibility for further action to the National Security Council (NSC): "The President, therefore, assigns to the Chairman, NSC Undersecretaries Committee, the responsibility to define and develop policy in the population field and to coordinate its implementation beyond the NSSM 200 response."

NSSM 200 was intended to be and is a definitive interagency study of the threat of overpopulation to U.S. security. NSSM 200 details how and why world population growth gravely threatens U.S. and global security. It also provides a blueprint for the U.S. response to this burgeoning problem, reflecting the deep concern of those who produced the report. Because of the bold nature of the suggested initiatives, the authors recommended that the report remain classified for 5 years in order to provide time to educate the American public as to the necessity of these initiatives. The NSSM 200 report actually remained classified for 14 years.

Both the findings and the recommendations are as relevant in 1992 as they were in 1975, but too numerous to list here in their entirety. To mention a selected few:

NSSM 200 reports:

There is a major risk of severe damage [caused by continued rapid population growth] to world economic, political, and ecological systems and, as these systems begin to fail, to our humanitarian values [Executive Summary, page 10].

The sense of near emergency is electric:

...world population growth is widely recognized within the government as a current danger of the highest magnitude calling for urgent measures [Page 194]. ...it is of the utmost urgency that governments now recognize the facts and implications of population growth, determine the ultimate

population sizes that make sense for their countries and start vigorous programs at once to achieve their desired goals [Page 15].

The threat to security briefly summarized,

...population factors are indeed critical in, and often determinants of, violent conflict in developing areas. Segmental (religious, social, racial) differences, migration, rapid population growth, differential levels of knowledge and skills, rural/urban differences, population pressure and the spatial location of population in relation to resources — in this rough order of importance — all appear to be important contributions to conflict and violence... Clearly, conflicts which are regarded in primarily political terms often have demographic roots. Recognition of these relationships appears crucial to any understanding or prevention of such hostilities [Page 66].

The report gives three examples of population wars: the El Salvador-Honduras " Soccer War," the Nigerian Civil War, and the Pakistan-India-Bangladesh War, 1970-71. (With hindsight, we can see that the two-decade-long civil war in Lebanon is another classic example, and that the civil wars in The Sudan, Somalia and other countries on the African continent are realizations of the projections made in NSSM 200. South Africa is on the brink. War between Israel and Arab countries fueled by population growth is all but inevitable.)

Where population size is greater than available resources, or is expanding more rapidly than the available resources, there is a tendency toward internal disorders and violence and, sometimes, disruptive international policies or violence [Page 69].

(This was a vital element, surely, in the 1991 U.S.-Iraq War, much more costly than decades of successful worldwide population growth control.)

In developing countries, the burden of population factors, added to others, will weaken unstable governments, often only marginally effective in good times, and open the way to extremist regimes [Page 84].

(The Sudan is a vivid recent example.)

The depth of concern for this ominous and progressive threat to national security is reflected in the objectives and goals outlined in the report:

The World Population Plan of Action and the resolutions adopted by consensus of the 137 nations at the August 1974 U.N. World Population Conference, though not ideal, provide an excellent framework for developing

a worldwide system of population/family planning programs [Executive Summary, page 19].

At the UN World Population Conference, only the Vatican opposed the Plan:

...the Conference adopted by acclamation (only the Holy See stating a general reservation) a complete World Population Plan of Action [Page 87].

SUGGESTED GOALS AND MEANS

Our objective should be to assure that developing countries make family planning information, education and means available to all their peoples by 1980 [Page 130]. ...intense efforts are required to assure full availability by 1980 of birth control information and means to all fertile individuals, especially in rural areas [Executive Summary, page 9].

While specific goals in this area are difficult to state, our aim should be for the world to achieve a replacement level of fertility, (a two-child family on the average), by about the year 2000. ...Attainment of this goal will require greatly intensified population programs ... U.S. leadership is essential [Executive Summary, page 14].

It is now all too clear how crucial this leadership was. The U.S. withdrew from this role shortly after the election of President Carter, just one year after the initiation of public policy based on the report. Initiatives for curtailment of population growth have been deteriorating ever since.

... After suitable preparation in the U.S., announce a U.S. goal to maintain our present national average fertility no higher than replacement level and attain stability by 2000 [Executive Summary, page 19]. Only nominal attention is [currently] given to population education or sex education in schools... [Page 158] ... Recommendation: That U.S. agencies stress the importance of education of the next generation of parents, starting in elementary schools, toward a two-child family ideal. That AID (the Agency for International Development) stimulate specific efforts to develop means of educating children of elementary school age to the ideal of the two-child family... [Page 159].

Despite the Helms Amendment, which clearly ruled out abortion assistance in U.S. foreign aid programs, there was a clear consensus that continued widespread use of abortion would be required to meet/attain the objective.

While the agencies participating in this study

have no specific recommendations to propose on abortion, the following issues are believed important and should be considered in the context of a global population strategy. ...Certain facts about abortion need to be appreciated:

— No country has reduced its population growth without resorting to abortion [Page 182].

— Indeed, abortion, legal and illegal, now has become the most widespread fertility control method in use in the world today [Page 183].

— It would be unwise to restrict abortion research for the following reasons: 1) The persistent and ubiquitous nature of abortion. 2) Widespread lack of safe abortion techniques...[Page 185].

An important goal in NSSM 200 dealt with leadership:

These programs will have only modest success until there is much stronger and wider acceptance of their real importance by leadership groups. Such acceptance and support will be essential to assure that the population information, education and service programs have vital moral backing, administrative capacity, technical skills and government financing [Page 195].

The report recommended spending whatever could reasonably be absorbed to achieve these goals:

We recommend increases in the AID budget requests to the Congress on the order of \$35-\$50 million annually through FY 1980 (above the \$137.5 million requested for FY 1975)... However, the level of funds needed in the future could change significantly, depending on such factors as major breakthroughs in fertility control technologies and LDC receptivity to population assistance [Executive Summary, page 24].

A ONE-CHILD FAMILY POLICY FOR THE U.S.

We know that even after a country reduces fertility to the replacement level, that, thanks to the phenomenon of momentum, the population continues to grow for another 70 years before stability is achieved. A goal of NSSM 200 was to attain this stability here by the year 2000. One of the chief coordinators of the NSSM 200 study recently acknowledged that the government recognized the one-child family norm would be necessary to achieve this goal and was under obligation to encourage Americans to limit family size.

NO ACCOMMODATION TO THE VATICAN

The study frankly dismissed the arguments that have been raised by the Vatican to counter efforts to reduce population growth. The position of the Roman

Catholic Church on population growth centers on the need for economic development in Third World countries as a way to bring growth rates down. NSSM 200 takes an entirely different tack:

We cannot wait for overall modernization and development to produce lower fertility rates naturally since this will undoubtedly take many decades in most developing countries...

[Executive Summary, page 7]. Clearly development per se is a powerful determinant of fertility. However, since it is unlikely that most LDCs will develop sufficiently during the next 25-30 years, it is crucial to identify those sectors that most directly and powerfully affect fertility [Page 137].

There is also even less cause for optimism on the rapidity of socio-economic progress that would generate rapid fertility reduction in the poor LDCs, than on the feasibility of extending family planning services to those in their populations who may wish to take advantage of them [Page 99].

This directly opposes the Vatican position.

But we can be certain of the desirable direction of change and can state as a plausible objective the target of achieving replacement fertility rates by the year 2000 [Page 99].

These statements manifestly rule out *any* accommodation to the Vatican on the issue of population growth control.

IMPLEMENTATION OF NSSM 200 IS BROUGHT TO A HALT

During 1976, Catholic activists worked diligently to undermine population growth control efforts. Dr. R.T. Ravenholt, who directed the global population program of the U.S. Agency for International Development in the Department of State from 1966 to 1979, tells the story. On March 4, 1991, he addressed the Washington State Chapter of Zero Population Growth (ZPG) on "Pronatalist Zealotry and Population Pressure Conflicts: How Catholics Seized Control of U.S. Family Planning Programs," and described some of these activities:

Following a meeting of Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter and his campaign staff with fifteen Catholic leaders at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., on August 31, 1976, on which occasion they pressed Carter to deemphasize federal support for family planning in exchange for a modicum of Catholic support for his presidential race... Joseph Califano became Secretary of HEW... When Father Hesburgh [President of Notre Dame University] declined the role of AID Administrator, the appointment was given to John J. Gilligan, a Notre Dame graduate and a former governor of Ohio... John H. Sullivan moved from Congressman Clement Zablocki's office into AID... Congressman Zablocki and Jack Sullivan had persistently worked to curb AID's high powered family planning program. In 1973, Jack Sullivan and allied zealots helped Senator Jesse Helms develop the Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act.¹¹

AN IMPORTANT DISCLOSURE: TIME MAGAZINE TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

The headline on the cover of the February 24, 1992 issue of *TIME* magazine was: "Holy Alliance: How Reagan and the Pope Conspired to Assist Poland's Solidarity Movement and Hasten the Demise of Communism," referring to an article written by prize-winning journalist Carl Bernstein. He reports:

The Catholic Team: The key Administration players were all devout Roman Catholics — CIA chief William Casey, [Richard] Allen [Reagan's first National Security Advisor], [William] Clark [Reagan's second National Security Advisor], [Alexander] Haig [Secretary of State], [Vernon] Walters [Ambassador at Large] and William Wilson, Reagan's first ambassador to the Vatican. They regarded the U.S.-Vatican relationship as a holy alliance: the moral force of the Pope and the teachings of their church combined with ... their notion of American democracy.

In a section of his *TIME* article headed, "The U.S.

and the Vatican on Birth Control," Bernstein writes three very revealing paragraphs:

In response to concerns of the Vatican, the Reagan Administration agreed to alter its foreign aid program to comply with the church's teachings on birth control. According to William Wilson, the President's first ambassador to the Vatican, the State Department reluctantly agreed to an out-right ban on the use of any U.S. aid funds by either countries or international health organizations for the promotion of...abortions. As a result of this position, announced at the World Conference on Population in Mexico City in 1984, the U.S. withdrew funding from, among others, two of the world's largest family planning organizations: the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

'American policy was changed as a result of the Vatican's not agreeing with our policy,' Wilson explains. 'American aid programs around the world did not meet the criteria the Vatican had for family planning. AID [the Agency for International Development] sent various people from [the Department of] State to Rome, and I'd accompany them to meet the president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, and in long discussions they finally got the message. But it was a struggle. They finally selected different programs and abandoned others as a result of this intervention.'

'I might have touched on that in some of my discussions with [CIA director William] Casey,' acknowledges Pio Cardinal Laghi, the former apostolic delegate to Washington. 'Certainly Casey already knew about our positions about that.'

Bernstein makes clear what the cadre of devout Catholics in the Reagan Administration did to protect the papacy and Catholic teaching from the potential fall-out from NSSM 200. He quotes the U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, William Wilson, who reveals that during the Reagan Administration, papal policy on birth control and abortion replaced the policy set forth by NSSM 200; and so the 21st century will be irredeemably less livable because of "this intervention."

A CODE OF SILENCE CLOAKS THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF NSSM 200

Immediately after President Ford adopted the recommendations of NSSM 200 on November 26, 1975, a peculiar silence fell over the whole matter. The report was never printed. There are only a handful of photocopies. Those who wrote the report

recommended that it be classified for 5 years. Werner Fornos, President of the Population Institute, with the aid of several members of Congress, succeeded in getting the NSSM 200 report declassified for a brief period in 1976. Despite his best efforts, and the explosiveness of this report detailing major changes in the lives of every American, he was unable to achieve any press coverage whatsoever. Instead, he found the report reclassified as a result of the objections of "members of the national security establishment" to the early declassification.

In the end, as noted, the document remained classified for 14 years, rather than the recommended 5 years. Declassification in 1989 apparently resulted from application of the Freedom of Information Act.

THE SILENCE EXTENDS BEYOND NSSM 200

The Vatican must be confronted on this issue. Says Representative Scheuer: "The Roman Catholic Church and its allies cannot be allowed to dictate the rules of the game when it comes to preservation of life on this planet at some level of decency."¹²

Clearly, Carl Bernstein's article in *TIME* has been the most important development in revealing the influences of the Vatican on American policy. Rep. Scheuer's article, published in this journal, and Ravenholt's speech to ZPG were both major advances.

Congressman Scheuer has put it succinctly: "The issue of population growth is too crucial to the future welfare of our nation and of the world to be left to ... the Roman Catholic hierarchy and its allies in the fundamentalist movement."¹³ The pressures must be countered so that the rational and measured policies proposed by the Rockefeller Commission and NSSM 200 can be implemented as rapidly as possible. ■

NOTES

¹ Nixon, R. "Special Message to the Congress on Problems of Population Growth," July 18, 1969. *Public Papers of the Presidents*, No. 271, p. 521, Office of the Federal Register, National Archives, Washington, DC, 1971.

² Nixon, R. "Statement About the Report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future," May 5, 1972. *Public Papers of the Presidents*, No. 142, p. 576, Office of the Federal Register, National Archives, Washington, DC, 1974.

³ Scheuer, J. "A Disappointing Outcome: United States and World Population Trends Since the Rockefeller Commission," *The Social Contract*, Summer 1992, pp. 203-206.

⁴ Schmidt, A.W., Personal communication, August 28, 1992.

⁵ National Security Council, *National Security Study Memorandum 200*, Washington, DC, April 24, 1974. 2 pp.

⁶ National Security Council, "NSSM 200: Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests," Washington, DC December 10, 1974,

227 pp.

⁷ National Security Council, "National Security Decision Memorandum 314," Washington, DC, November 26, 1975. 4 pp.

⁸ NSSM 200, Executive Summary, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 194.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹¹ Ravenholt, R.T., "Pronatalist Zealotry and Population Pressure Conflicts: How Catholics Seized Control of U.S. Family Planning Programs," Center For Research on Population and Security, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709, May 1992, 27 pp.

¹² Scheuer, J., *op. cit.*, p. 206.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 205.

BIRTH CONTROL PERCEIVED AS A THREAT TO PAPAL AUTHORITY

Why is the Roman Catholic Church obliged to halt legalized abortion and contraception despite the strong wishes of Americans?

In *Papal Power: A Study of Vatican Control Over Lay Catholic Elites* (The University of California Press, 1980), Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Montreal, closely examines the sources of papal power. It is derived in significant part from papal authority. If the Pope's authority is diminished, papal power is diminished. However, some authority is derived from papal power and if papal power is diminished, then authority is undermined. The relationship is circular. Less authority means less power which means even less authority. With diminishing power, survival of the institution of the Roman Catholic Church in its present hierarchical form is gravely threatened. Thus, the very survival of the Vatican is threatened by programs to control population growth.

In April, 1992, in an exceedingly rare public admission of this threat, Cardinal John O'Connor of New York, delivering a major address to the Franciscan University of Steubenville, acknowledged, "The fact is that attacks on the Catholic Church's stance on abortion — unless they are rebutted — effectively erode Church authority on all matters, indeed on the authority of God himself."

This threat was recognized decades ago by the Papal Commission on Population and Birth Control which met from 1964 until 1966. According to Commission member Thomas Burch, the Pope himself assigned the Commission the task of finding a way of modifying the Church's position on birth control without destroying papal authority, which is absolutely essential for the continued survival of the Vatican and the Catholic Church as we know it today. The Commission failed to find a way and the result was the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* which banned the use of contraception.

The Vatican clearly believes that if solutions to the population problem are applied, the teaching of the church will be undermined and the dominance of the papacy will be vitiated. Thus, it is convinced that it cannot compromise on the issue of birth control, regardless of our national policy. NSSM 200 forthrightly opposes Rome on population strategy, family planning and abortion in the interest of national security.

— Stephen Mumford