

Focusing our attack on the symptoms (of terrorism) is doomed to failure... it may magnify, not solve the problem - Ian Buchanan

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Entering the age of discontinuity

BY K.P. LEE

"EVERYONE in this room is transient - is busy dying. We have limited time." This wasn't something said at a support group for the terminally ill, but was paraphrased Bob Dylan from *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)*.

And it was rather improbably, meted out to some 300 prosperous-looking corporate bosses in a posh Kuala Lumpur hotel at Tec Asia's annual meet recently, even before their first coffee of the morning.

For a programme that promised "looking ahead to new vistas" interspaced with lots of food, drinks and "networking", it seemed a daring venture to start the day with such a vividly morbid wake-up jolt.

But Ian Buchanan persisted, ferreted as a man on an urgent mission.

He had been talking of the future, and by all indications, the diagnosis wasn't looking too favourable either.

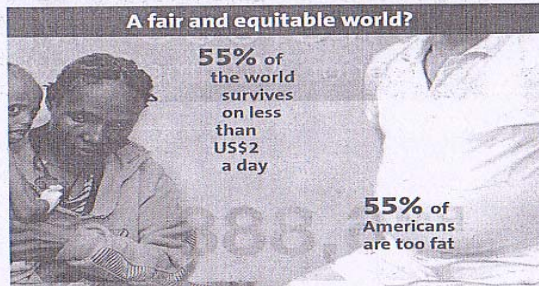
As one of the senior partners of Booz Allen Hamilton, the consulting firm that considers the US defence and intelligence services as its largest clients, Buchanan should know better than most when he warned of danger signs as the world entered its "age of discontinuity."

He said new mental maps were needed to navigate in this new environment, and they were needed now, more than ever.

Buchanan argued that clinging to old models would result in making the wrong decisions on current pressing issues such as terrorism and the environment. And often, these issues were inter-related.

He said that, particularly after the Sept 11 attacks in the US, the instinctive reaction to the threat of terrorism and urgent need for "revenge" framed by such outmoded mental maps was making the world an even more dangerous place.

"Focusing our attack on the symptoms (of terrorism) is doomed to failure... it may magnify, not solve the problem. There is a definite danger of it being self-perpetuating," he said, warning that the new US policy



of pre-emptive strikes "driven by political expediency" against "easier targets" like Iraq could prove counter-productive and result in more rather than fewer terrorist attacks.

The recent attacks in Jakarta and Baghdad appear to support this case. "To really win the war on terror, we must address the root causes of terrorism," he said.

Terrorism fed on the discontented and the disenfranchised, argued Buchanan.

This means the world needed to tackle the real drivers of this disillusionment, which included poverty, disease, resource scarcity, and the widening gaps in wealth, education and technology between developed and developing countries.

Although worldwide poverty had fallen to 23% in 2000 from 28% in 1975, the greatest benefits went to the richest nations, he said. "The rich got richer in both absolute and relative terms."

Buchanan said over one billion people today still subsist on under US\$1 a day, while three billion (or more than 55%) of the world's population live on less than US\$2.

He said that to complement the war on terrorism, a new, more important war - on poverty, ignorance and injustice - had to be fought and won, not only by governments but also businesses and indi-

viduals.

"My view is that for all of us, business-as-usual is no longer an option," he said. One potential area of conflict was demand for the planet's increasingly scarce resources.

"If the current consumers, mostly in wealthy western countries, seek to protect their current positions, I see no way to avoid a dramatic growth in global conflict and the ranks of the disenfranchised," he said gravely.

Buchanan provided some facts and figures to support his views. Water, for instance, may be a point of contention between Malaysia and Singapore at this moment but soon, the whole world could be fighting over the little that's left.

According to the World Bank, good water would be the planet's most sought after commodity in the next century if the trend of water consumption doubling every 20 years continues.

Forests were also being destroyed at a greater rate than ever before (149 acres are cut every minute) while virgin rainforests would disappear within the next 100 years, he said.

Buchanan said oil would be the major source of future global conflicts. He said that today, one barrel of oil was produced for every four consumed, and with oil expected to reach maximum production in 2010,



Ian Buchanan

"we can predict a battle between new consumers like China for these scarce resources." Meanwhile, the US with 4.6% of global population consumes 28% of the world energy, he said.

Buchanan said that although the picture looked gloomy, the outlook could be changed if every individual and corporation was empowered to make a difference.

"It is time for us, as individuals and business leaders, to anticipate new adaptive mechanisms, both for ourselves and by the way we use our voice, political contributions and our votes for the governments we elect," Buchanan appealed.

He said one starting point was to recommit resources to the eight points in the United Nation's eight Millennium Development Goals which includes eradicating poverty and hunger and reversing the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

The World Bank has estimated the

resources required to achieve these goals by 2015 would be additional foreign aid flows of between US\$40bil-US\$60bil per year, about double existing aid money.

Substantial figures maybe, but Buchanan said it was totally achievable. The amount was a small proportion of the money spent on things like defence.

According to the SIRRI 2003 Yearbook, the world last year spent US\$784bil, of which the US accounted for 44% or US\$344bil.

Over the next five years, the US was expected to spend in excess of US\$2tril on defence - or just over US\$1bil per day.

Buchanan said: "I would make the case that the US, and the world, would be a safer place if just over 10% of the expanded US defence budget - US\$137mil per day - was allocated to reduce poverty, ignorance and injustice, the source of new recruits to terrorism."