

National News

Thirteen Million U.S. Children in Poverty

UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center in Florence, Italy, reports that 13.5 million American children, 22.4% of the total, live in households with less than half of the national median income, according to the June 13 *New York Post*. Among the 26 "industrialized" countries studied, only Mexico has a higher proportion of poor children than does the United States: 26%.

Child poverty in the United States is higher now than in the 1960s and 1970s.

The UNICEF study found that the Scandinavian countries, led by Sweden at only 2.6%, have the lowest level of child poverty. Following the United States among the worst countries, were Italy (20.5%), Britain (19.8%), Turkey, and Ireland.

Agencies Say NMD Not Ready for Deployment

A General Accounting Office report, commissioned by Sen. Dan Akaka (D-Hi.), a supporter of National Missile Defense, has warned that the NMD plan being considered by President Clinton is based on inadequate test data and other uncertainties, and warns against "pushing the envelope" by making a deployment decision prematurely. The report, which has been endorsed by the Pentagon, according to the *Washington Post* on June 17, warned that key components are not able to be tested, due to treaty and funding restrictions, and there are other "untested assumptions," including the idea that "rogue states" could send nuclear weapons against the United States by 2007.

In addition, a panel of retired military commanders and senior defense scientists have given the Pentagon's Ballistic Missile Defense Organization a classified report, warning about the folly of an early deployment of the NMD. The panel, headed by former Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Larry Welch, affirmed that, with adequate time to fully test all the components of the system, the NMD plan would work.

Concerns include the cited problems with the booster rocket for interceptor mis-

siles, doubts about whether the interceptor can distinguish an enemy missile from decoys, and concern that the timetable for constructing a working system in five years is unrealistic, the *Post* reported on June 18. The article noted that the Welch report carries far more weight than earlier such assessments, "because the panel had extensive access to secret information and is giving lengthy briefings on its conclusions directly to Pentagon decision-makers."

Earlier in the week, a group of prestigious former Pentagon officials, including former Defense Secretary William Perry and former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. John Shalikashvili, had issued a similar warning about the dangers of a hastily deployed system. They called on President Clinton to defer making a deployment decision, and let the next President decide.

Holbrooke Pushes for United Nations Army

The man who would like to be Al Gore's Secretary of State, U.S. United Nations Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, called for the transformation of the UN's peacekeeping department into a standing army, in an interview with the *New York Times* published on June 14. "The peacekeeping department is effectively the UN's Ministry of Defense," he said. He continued, "Peacekeeping needs three things: more financial resources, more and better-trained military and civilian personnel in the field, and a coherent command structure overseas with better central direction out of New York."

Military professionals "borrowed" from national militaries, have to be brought in, despite opposition from most of the world's developing nations, he said, because the UN cannot keep relying on what the *Times* described as "polyglot pick-up armies."

Holbrooke said he would welcome a debate in the United States on the role of UN peacekeeping as a factor in U.S. national security—but not during the U.S. election campaign.

According to the *Times*, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan agrees with Holbrooke, and the upcoming selection of a new head of the peacekeeping department (the contract for the French civilian who currently heads it, Bernard Miyet, runs out later this year)

could be used to introduce changes, in an end-run around the UN General Assembly.

Project Lazarus: Can Gore Be Revived?

Al Gore's new campaign staff, led by Commerce Secretary William Daley, "when the boss does not hear them," call their job "Project Lazarus," the Italian daily *La Repubblica* reported on June 17. "But it will not take a saint to make the miracle of resuscitating Lazarus Al Gore." Gore, the article goes on, "looks like the gunfighter in a comic film, who cannot shoot straight."

According to a *Los Angeles Times* poll of 1,686 registered voters, polled during June 8-13, George W. Bush was leading Gore by 10 percentage points. Only 6% of Republicans planned to vote for Gore, and 53% of independents who had been backing Republican candidate John McCain, had swung behind Bush.

New Evidence in EgyptAir 990 Crash

Aviation Week's website reported on June 13 that new information which has emerged in the investigation of the crash of EgyptAir Flight 990 last Oct. 31, casts serious doubt on the theory by some U.S. circles, that the plane was deliberately crashed by a suicidal co-pilot. The Boeing 767 crashed off Nantucket Island shortly after taking off from New York, killing 214 people.

Detailed analysis of data from the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder revealed data that suggest mechanical failure, the article says. The evidence pertains to the "split" elevators; evidence that they were moving in opposite directions has been taken as an indication that the first officer and the captain were battling each other for control of the plane. But follow-up analysis is not consistent with that theory.

The *New York Times* reported on June 7, that the Egyptian government has developed a theory of the crash which involves a mechanical problem in the plane's tail, a particular problem which has been seen on other Boeing 767s.