According to aid data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), during the past thirty years, often motivated by compassion, the international donor community has spent over $2 billion on development assistance for sub-Saharan Africa. With this assistance, economists predicted dramatic growth for the region, which has yet to truly materialize. Do we know why? Why is Bangladesh poor while Japan is rich? Why did the Industrial Revolution occur in Europe and not China? If we understand growth, why does poverty still exist? Poverty must be the lack of understanding or the inability to implement the policies we know to be conducive to growth. While many economists continue to debate how best to spur economic growth, some policy analysts argue that despite these mediocre results, there is another, overriding reason why we must provide aid to such impoverished regions—it is a matter of national security.

**Terrorism, Insurgency, and Poverty**

What is the nature of the link between terrorism, insurgency, and poverty? How strong is this link? Can we fight terrorism through...
aid, or simply use aid for what it appears to be on its surface: a tool to alleviate suffering and feed starving children? On April 3, 2009, echoing the words of his predecessor President George W. Bush who said, “Poverty doesn’t create terror—yet, terror takes root in failing nations that cannot police themselves or provide for their people,” President Barack Obama described the relationship between national security interests, terrorism, and poverty in these terms:

Over the long term...we’ve got to have a strategy that recognizes that the interest of the developed world in feeding the hungry, in educating children, that that’s not just charity; it’s in our interest. There’s not a direct correlation between poverty and violence and conflict and terrorism. But I can tell you that if children have no education whatsoever, if young men are standing idle each and every day, and feel completely detached and completely removed from the modern world, they are more likely, they are more susceptible to ideologies that appeal to violence and destruction.²

Think about this statement. Terrorism is not caused by poverty; prosperity, however, defeats violence and destruction. If true, the battle against terrorism must include initiatives to raise living standards in impoverished nations, such as by feeding the hungry and educating children.

“Foreign Aid in the National Interest,” a key document of the U.S. Agency for International Development, makes USAID’s case that development and aid are intrinsically tied to security. It argues that U.S. security increasingly depends upon the prosperity of the rest of the world, and that the world is more interconnected than ever. The world remains dangerous and conventional military force cannot adequately assure national security. Economic development, and the provision of bilateral and multilateral aid necessary to spur that development, must be recognized as critical to any national security strategy. The document concludes, “For the United States to prosper and be secure, the world must prosper and be secure.”

Of the nineteen suicide hijackers of September 11, 2001, most were from families in a socioeconomic category that could be considered middle class—not poor. And yet they committed suicide in order to kill nearly 3,000 people from around the world in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. What were their incentives? The theories and speculation could fill an entire book. For the purpose of this one, however, we begin with the assertion that they did not destroy themselves and others to escape poverty.