

carried inadvertently by passengers on transcontinental airplanes; unstoppable numbers of legal and illegal immigrants arriving by boat, truck, train, plane, and on foot; terrorists; and other consequences of their Third World problems. We in the U.S. are no longer the isolated Fortress America to which some of us aspired in the 1930s; instead, we are tightly and irreversibly connected to overseas countries. The U.S. is the world's leading importer nation: we import many necessities (especially oil and some rare metals) and many consumer products (cars and consumer electronics), as well as being the world's leading importer of investment capital. We are also the world's leading exporter, particularly of food and of our own manufactured products. Our own society opened long ago to become interlocked with the rest of the world.

That's why political instability anywhere in the world now affects us, our trade routes, and our overseas markets and suppliers. We are so dependent on the rest of the world that if, 30 years ago, you had asked a politician to name the countries most geopolitically irrelevant to our interests because of their being so remote, poor, and weak, the list would surely have begun with Afghanistan and Somalia, yet they subsequently became recognized as important enough to warrant our dispatching U.S. troops. Today the world no longer faces just the circumscribed risk of an Easter Island society or Maya homeland collapsing in isolation, without affecting the rest of the world. Instead, societies today are so interconnected that the risk we face is of a worldwide decline. That conclusion is familiar to any investor in stock markets: instability of the U.S. stock market, or the post-9/11 economic downturn in the U.S., affects overseas stock markets and economies as well, and vice versa. We in the U.S. (or else just affluent people in the U.S.) can no longer get away with advancing our own self-interests, at the expense of the interests of others.

15 A good example of a society minimizing such clashes of interest is the Netherlands, whose citizens have perhaps the world's highest level of environmental awareness and of membership in environmental organizations. I never understood why, until on a recent trip to the Netherlands I posed the question to three of my Dutch friends while driving through their countryside (Plates 39,40). Their answer was one that I shall never forget:

"Just look around you here. All of this farmland that you see lies below sea level. One-fifth of the total area of the Netherlands is below sea level, as much as 22 feet below, because it used to be shallow bays,

and we reclaimed it from the sea by surrounding the bays with dikes and then gradually pumping out the water. We have a saying, 'God created the Earth, but we Dutch created the Netherlands.' These reclaimed lands are called 'polders.' We began draining them nearly a thousand years ago. Today, we still have to keep pumping out the water that gradually seeps in. That's what our windmills used to be for, to drive the pumps to pump out the polders. Now we use steam, diesel, and electric pumps instead. In each polder there are lines of pumps, starting with those farthest from the sea, pumping the water in sequence until the last pump finally pumps it out into a river or the ocean. In the Netherlands, we have another expression, 'You have to be able to get along with your enemy, because he may be the person operating the neighboring pump in your polder.' And we're all down in the polders together. It's not the case that rich people live safely up on tops of the dikes while poor people live down in the polder bottoms below sea level. If the dikes and pumps fail, we'll all drown together. When a big storm and high tides swept inland over Zeeland Province on February 1, 1953, nearly 2,000 Dutch people, both rich and poor, drowned. We swore that we would never let that happen again, and the whole country paid for an extremely expensive set of tide barriers. If global warming causes polar ice melting and a world rise in sea level, the consequences will be more severe for the Netherlands than for any other country in the world, because so much of our land is already under sea level. That's why we Dutch are so aware of our environment. We've learned through our history that we're all living in the same polder, and that our survival depends on each other's survival."

That acknowledged interdependence of all segments of Dutch society contrasts with current trends in the United States, where wealthy people increasingly seek to insulate themselves from the rest of society, aspire to create their own separate virtual polders, use their own money to buy services for themselves privately, and vote against taxes that would extend those amenities as public services to everyone else. Those private amenities include living inside gated walled communities, relying on private security guards rather than on the police, sending one's children to well-funded private schools with small classes rather than to the underfunded crowded public schools, purchasing private health insurance or medical care, drinking