They Shoot Bison, Don't They?

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THE MILITARY
Till Combat Do Us Part
Both common sense and informal surveys of U.S. soldiers and their spouses have suggested that longer, more frequent deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with the stress and uncertainty of combat, make military marriages more likely than ever to end in divorce. The Rand Corporation recently prepared a study for the Pentagon on the effect of divorce on military performance and retention rates, and the results challenge the conventional wisdom: The study finds no significant increase of divorce in the military during recent conflicts. Researchers examined personnel records for every member of the U.S. military serving between fiscal years 1996 and 2005 (more than 6 million people), and found, to their surprise, that while the divorce rate has risen steadily since the start of the war in 2001, it’s still roughly the same as it was in 1996, when the military was under significantly less stress. So, can married soldiers breathe easier when they’re parted from their spouses? The men can, but the study found that the risk of divorce for female service members, particularly enlisted women, is several times the risk for their male counterparts. Men, it seems, have a harder time waiting at home for the return of their soldier wives.


ECONOMICS
As the World Turns
It’s a dictum of the dismal science: “When America sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold.” But the International Monetary Fund’s most recent World Economic Outlook suggests that may no longer be the case: While the U.S. remains a dominant force in the global marketplace, many countries, the report states, may be “decoupling” sufficiently from the American economy that they’re gaining some protection from painful chain reactions. The IMF’s researchers also suggest that America’s disruptive impact may have been overstated: “Past episodes of highly synchronized growth declines across the globe”—like those created by the oil-price shocks of the mid-1970s, or the bursting of the tech bubble in 2000—“were not primarily the result of developments specific to the United States, but rather were caused by factors that affected many countries at the same time.” The report notes that one reason the global economy continues to hum along, even as growth slows in the U.S., is that America’s current sluggishness is driven by slumps in its housing and manufacturing sectors, which have a limited effect on other major industrial countries. Of course, it points out, given that America accounts for about a fifth of the world’s economic activity—a percentage that has changed little in the past 30 years—its sneezes remain “relevant.” But the rest of the world appears to be building a sturdier immune system.

—“World Economic Economic Outlook: Spillovers and Cycles in the Global Economy,” International Monetary Fund

HISTORY
They Shoot Bison, Don’t They?
Early America was so thick with buffalo that explorers said the land seemed draped with “one black robe.” By 1900, fewer than a hundred buffalo remained. But it was European demand, more than Manifest Destiny, that nearly drove the continent’s most majestic native species to extinction, according to a paper by an economist from the University of Calgary. Until about 1870, the author argues, American hunters killed buffalo only in moderate numbers, usually for their meat and hides. But in 1871, English and German tanners figured out how to easily and cheaply turn buffalo hides into boot soles and machine belts, and, the author suggests, as European armies reequipped after the Franco-Prussian War, the profits suddenly available to hunters set off a decade-long buffalo bloodbath, during which most of the meat was left to rot on the prairie. America, still recovering from the Civil War, needed the money, so the government let the massacre continue—a reckless act that the paper likens to the tendency of today’s developing countries to strip their land of natural resources to satisfy their trading partners in the developed world.


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