
DAVID C. WILLIAMS

Inspector General

Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration

The Invasion of Cybarbarians

"The barbarians are the brooms which sweep the Historic stage clear of the debris of a dead civilization ..."

Arnold Toynbee

Globalism is sweeping around us, over us, under us, among us. We might be welcoming it, fearing it or just rolling our eyes, but a new age has arrived, making a very different world for us.

Globalism has morphed the planet from atoms to bytes, as Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Nicholas Negroponte explained a few years ago. Globalism has massaged and reshaped the clay of the planet in its very wired palm.

The planet is becoming small and hot, energized by communication activities that reach everywhere, at a cost nearly too cheap to meter. At astounding speed the knowledge and choices of the world are being accumulated, analyzed, recombined and made instantly available to the emergent global village. For the first time ever, great truths, economic secrets, and enticing choices are available to princes and paupers in the same instantaneous electronic ripples and flashes. Dark reaches of the planet are brightening, economies are expanding and wealth is rushing toward well-positioned corporations and people. The nation state is straining under the decentralized pull of globalism's devastating centrifical force.

And ... time is also warping under the ebb and flow of globalism's powerful gravitation. The 70s and 80s seem so ancient now. Archeologists must be sifting through the curiosities of my childhood—Captain Midnight, Sky King, Howdy Doody—now distant.

Elements of the corporate world, its arteries bulging from the rushing flow of currency, are also reeling from spiraling cycles of downsizing, reengineering, mergers, and acquisitions. The French President of Michelin Tires has recently described the pace of the age as a "drum beat that grows steadily faster."

To stand apart from the fast current of change, is to experience what authors Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer describe as the sensation of the world passing in a blur. To stand in opposition to globalism or to rely on slight of hand tricks from the good old days, is to suffer a rapid economic death without dignity. And yet to fully participate in this new world feels as though we are being swept along, left to navigate in very fast dark waters without moral beacons.

If you are not so sure of globalism's impact and the passing of the Old World, consider a few facts.

- If you combine the wealth of Bill Gates and a small band of other elite, that wealth exceeds the combined treasuries of one-third of the nations on earth.
- Since 1989, worldwide military spending is down well over half.
- U.S. exports have tripled between 1985 and 1996.
- Business mergers are accelerating and enlarging at an amazing rate—from \$464 billion in 1990 to nearly \$3.5 trillion last year.

The rise of personal wealth and the concentration of corporate power at the expense of the wealth and prestige of nations and those businesses left behind is a strange collateral phenomenon of globalism. Despite the riotous protests of demonstrators around the world and determined governments, geopolitical imperatives vaporize daily in the face of the economic realities of globalism. The world has abandoned the comfortable, but ghastly, specter of the Cold War, into a world of endless, but illusive, possibilities. We have changed from an "economy of death" to an economy of "which way did they go?"

The challenge of how to regulate and find inventive controls for the dark side of globalism, without stifling the beneficial aspects or scaring off needed capital is a process that is still baffling world governments, including our own. Digital globalism randomly sweeps along good, bad and ugly aspects. It certainly possesses intoxicating and beneficial features. But by its nature, it is blind to gender, race, and age . . . and rapidly to location. It is a patch of neutral ground for civilizations, ideologies, and religions to gather for exploration and development. It is liberating, fast, exciting and illuminates neglected and economically depressed regions of the world. It takes knowledge and coolness wherever it goes. And it goes everywhere. Globalism is transforming cities into the glowing nodes of an electronic nervous system for our increasingly accessible planet. That wiring is making for economic and cultural advances and allowing for rapid human development possibilities that we are only just imagining.

But . . . amid the glitter, is that darker side. Globalism is unforgiving and it voraciously eats cultures and traditions that cannot mold themselves to its complicated model.

Globalism destroys resisters and cheaters (even when they are our friends). Globalism makes transparent everything including the state and corporate secrets. Globalism, for the moment, has made it impossible for us to find the balance between computer security needs and rapidly expanding operational requirements.

Globalism devours nation-states, corporations, and professions without even the courtesy of doing battle. Globalism inundated the Soviet Union and passed on leaving embattled wreckage in its wake. So who's complaining? Well, the beast that ran down the evil empire also ate Indonesia and very nearly Korea and Japan.

Globalism presents moral dilemmas and ambiguities for us. Globalism makes it hard for us to see that right and wrong are different from risk and opportunity. With the infinite choices of the Internet, frenzy can mask a lack of discipline or loneliness. The same impulse that blinds globalism to race, gender and age makes it impossible for the age to comprehend forgiveness and empathy.

Globalism in Your Face and In Your Lap

The engine of globalism is, of course, the computer and specifically the personal computer. The superhighway on which the age of globalism advances is the Internet. This communication-of-knowledge revolution has begun

spinning off economic and cultural revolutions, as well as revolutions of governance.

A fundamental aspect of the revolution is the changing workplace. The personal computer and its software have given us incredible power and freedom. It could be said that the normal confines that we associate with an office workplace have fallen from around us, and that we are looking up from our desks and imagining our first tentative steps outside those fallen walls. Workplace technology advances have been so great that the most basic premises concerning corporate and government business workplace settings must be placed into question. In the span of a very few years the basis for expensive offices in congested and inaccessible locations, has been fundamentally undermined.

During the careers of the youngest employees, powerful and mobile communication tools and concentrated access to business tools and resources have



appeared and rapidly become common-place features of the landscape:

- Laptop computers
- Modems
- Palm-size computers
- Search engines
- Hypertext connections
- Wireless technology
- Scanners
- E-mail
- Instant messaging
- E-meetings

Professionals separated from their offices and one another can freely move their projects and written products instantly to colleagues, supervisors or clients to obtain clearance and concurrence; to receive repairs and improvements; and, to submit final reports from point of origin to managers and to clients.

Growing more dependable and more private daily, the Internet brings you the world. The world tearing through your phone line and spilling a sea of knowledge into your lap.

From your personal computer and telephone you can communicate through E-mail or instant messaging, hold E-meetings or teleconferences, engage powerful search engines, or access a sea of research information using point and click technology and hyper text connections.

Drowning Here!

A word about chaos. The sea is beautiful, but would you like it suddenly pouring into your office? For the moment, we are sometimes in the alchemist's basement in *Fantasia*. Brooms are marching down the stairs with buckets of water . . . and more buckets . . . and more buckets The information we receive is still not well organized, analyzed, or easily retrievable.

It takes a little foresight to see above the present chaos, and make out the contours of the emergent new age of order and value. President Clinton has said that when he came to office there were 50 Internet sites and that as he leaves the presidency, there are 50,000,000. Would you like fifty million of anything in your lap?

Except that even amid the chaos we should remind ourselves that when we decide matters great and small, we are often starved for information. We decide matters daily from looking at unfinished puzzles and from imagining the whole by peering at fragments. Informed decisions are better ones, even in an age of chaos and highly imperfect search engines.

Now that much of the world's knowledge is in your computer, it is fairly obvious that the next great developmental stage for globalism will be the ordering and analysis of all that mankind knows. When these many fragments are fitted together and recombined in undiscovered ways, globalism will completely change our world. The new explorers on this sea of knowledge will find many new lands. Information ordered, analyzed and recombined is a kind of intelligence in itself that will manage our routine tasks, while we (1) grapple with novel opportunities, (2) face new risks, and (3) attack persistent problems and the lingering plagues of mankind. We are approaching the edge of a knowledge genome project on an order we can only sketchily imagine.

"A New Science Is Needed For A New World"

Alexis de Tocqueville

The world is changing. Can government departments elect to sit this one out or trail along behind the parade? In many ways Washington has become more than a world capital, it is the de facto capital of the world. We have a special responsibility and are specifically positioned to meet and shape globalism. The United States has engaged the new technology, and is focusing on the social and economic dynamics of globalism, formulating policies and investments that will shape its emergent contours.

An essential element of the government's response to a changed world is a changed workplace. Washington is experiencing the incompatible co-existence of two workplace settings. The first workplace is as powerful and dominant as it is sad and disengaged—that is, a government of dozing pigeons atop bronze statues. It is a world of granite blocks and stodgy bureaucracies. It is a city of venerable old institutions convinced of the virtues of tradition, harboring cavernous warehouses of file cabinets, standing guard like dragons over treasures of secrets moving too slowly to matter. It is a city of creaking manuals that belch detailed instructions to hem workers tightly into worlds of narrow unimaginative duties. It is a government of departments obsessing with command and control, hoarding information at our inundated apexes, valuing location, FTE and autonomy, above even mission accomplishment.

The second government workplace is fragile, but expanding. The pigeons residing there are constantly startled. This new workplace values connectivity over location. The new workplace pursues the vision of its mission, rather than the idiosyncratic behaviors of chiefdoms and fiefdom. Its employees follow simple rules that unleash their imaginations and energies. Workers here are immersed and drenched in information resources and urged to enter and engage the world of ideas. These operations are 24×7

heartbeats that never come to rest. These workplaces are adaptive and customer driven, constantly navigating off the echoes returning from their actions and policies.

Scrambled OIGs

This suggests a question closer to home. What should Office of Inspectors General be doing in the coming world of risk and opportunity, of virtue and vice?

While we assist in the vital role of helping departments respond to issues associated with globalism, we also must be deciding upon the new architecture of our own offices.

IGs are nearly perfect candidates for becoming laboratories for the changing workplace. Many of the corporations, such as Microsoft, Texas Instruments and AOL, that have succeeded in escaping the bonds of the traditional workplace shackles deal with information management. Information management is also our business. IGs collect, analyze and communicate information.

We have a serious need for our employees to be mobile, creative, and drenched in information resources. Workstations should keep employees in touch with their work, their organization and the world of ideas, while they embark on expeditions farther from their offices and closer to their assignments.

In addition to being in the information business, we have the ability to experiment in a fairly risk-free environment. Since IGs are forbidden from taking on agency mission responsibility, our experiments can forge ahead or sputter, without essential services to the public being interrupted or jeopardized.

Our low risk experiments could have a very hefty payoff. Our relatively small offices could show the way and send up cautionary signals as we scout ahead of larger governmental departments. The road ahead is fog-shrouded and littered with sharp stones. It is best probed by small parties, such as ourselves, in advance of the main armies.

The cybarbarians are peering hungrily at us from the near horizon. In an environment moving as rapidly and destructively as digital globalism, horrified observers will not be safe. They will be devoured. Just behind the promise of the new is the destruction of the old. The cybarbarians are approaching to clear away the debris of the current world for a coming age. We have had ten years to grasp the specter of the Soviet Union and others who have chosen to cling to the debris of the Old World. We should begin the process of embracing the new and keeping a step ahead of the cybarbarians. 🐉