

BREAKING: GLOBALIZATION IS DANGEROUS

Globalization is dangerous.

But not, as it turns out, because it has gutted the middle class. Not even because a globalized supply chain has made it easier for our rivals to sabotage our defense programs, or that a globalized supply chain has led to a loss of manufacturing capacity that threatens our defense, to say nothing of our distinctly American commercial sectors.

Rather, retired Admiral James Stavridis, in a more popularized version of a piece he wrote for a National Defense University volume on the topic, argues that “deviant globalization,” whether that of drug traffickers, terrorists, counterfeiters, or hackers, poses a rising threat.

Convergence may be thought of as the dark side of globalization. It is the merger of a wide variety of mobile human activities, each of which is individually dangerous and whose sum represents a far greater threat.

I’m sure it is a threat. But Stavridis makes the same mistake just about everyone else makes when they consider criminal globalized networks to be a security threat: they ignore that there is little these illicit networks do that licit ones didn’t already pioneer. They ignore that the only thing that makes them illicit is state power, the same state power that corporatized globalization has weakened.

In fact Stavridis’ fourth point telling how to combat deviant globalization is notable for what it’s missing.

Fourth, we must shape and win the narrative. Many have said there is a

“war of ideas.” That is not quite the right description. Rather, the United States is a “marketplace of ideas.” Our ideas are sound: democracy, liberty, freedom of speech and religion – all the values of the Enlightenment. They have a critical role in confronting the ideological underpinnings of crime and terror. Our strategic communications efforts are an important part of keeping our networks aligned and cohesive.

You see it? In spite of using the metaphor of the market to describe the realm of ideas, Stavridis neglects to mention that one of our ideas, so-called capitalism (or the marketplace itself!), that value of Enlightenment, is precisely the logic that has made globalization imperative.

If the way to beat these criminal globalized networks is to compete ideologically, but the ideological foundation our elites cling to most desperately is the same one the criminal globalized networks are exploiting so spectacularly, haven't we already lost the battle of ideas?

Stavridis' choice to ignore capitalism is probably why he doesn't get the problem with his call to “follow the money.”

Third, we must follow the money. Huge sums of cash from these trafficking activities finance terrorists and insurgents such as the Taliban, as well as corruption. The money is used to undermine fragile democracies. Efforts to upend threat financing must be fused with international initiatives, move across U.S. agency lines and have the cooperation of the private-sector institutions involved.

It is true that globalized cash flows undermine weak governments (the same ones that otherwise

might make these criminal globalized networks illicit). But that's at least as true of the money looted from poorer countries and deposited, completely legally per western elites, in secrecy regimes, or of the hot money that destabilizes the global economy more generally. Moreover, one of the biggest impediments to tracking the flows of criminal globalized networks is that the so-called licit multinational banks they use to transfer their money are more interested in the profits from the money than in cooperating with increasingly weak states. So long as HSBC can get away with a wrist slap, after all, why would any multinational bank give up its customer base to American authorities?

Stavridis ends his column by citing Hardy's warning about icebergs.

Just over a century ago , the poet Thomas Hardy wrote "The Convergence of the Twain" about the collision of the Titanic and the iceberg that sank it. "And as the smart ship grew/ In stature, grace, and hue/ In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too." There is an iceberg out there in the form of weapons of mass destruction; what is most worrisome is the convergence of such a weapon with a sophisticated global trafficking route enabled by cybercrime and the cash it generates. That is the convergence we must do all in our power to prevent.

Stavridis almost gets it. He almost gets it that these global trafficking routes, whether deemed licit or illicit by increasingly weak states, are the iceberg that is looming.

It's just that he chooses to ignore the iceberg he can see for the parts he can't see.