

the global future forum

the global future forum prepares business for the future



Jerome C. Glenn

State of the Future - a report card on the future Executive Overview

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The Millennium Project - the global participatory think tank - has produced its ninth annual State of the Future report. This unique "Report Card on the Future" distills the collective

intelligence of nearly 2,000 leading experts from around the world who work for governments, corporations, NGOs, universities and international organizations.

There is so much extraneous information that it is difficult to identify and concentrate on what is truly relevant. The State of the Future is a unique reference that cuts through this clutter by presenting short, clear summaries in the paperback, while giving the full details of the research in an attached CD."

For example:

- the annual gross income of organized crime is more than twice that of all military budgets worldwide
- views of women and men on future ethical issues are strikingly similar around the world
- the worldwide race to connect everything not yet connected is just beginning
- in the best case scenario, China's water situation does not start to improve for another 10 to 15 years, which is now the key impediment to its growth and could lead to future mass migrations
- dramatic increases in collective human-machine intelligence are possible within 25 years. It is also possible that within the same time frame single individuals acting alone might create and use weapons of mass destruction (WMD)
- conducting regional water negotiations in the Middle East may be the best way to build confidence that peace is possible in the region

This year's State of the Future has updated 15 Global Challenges and shares the Millennium Project's research on the State of the Future Index, future ethical issues, environmental health research priorities for nanotechnology, environmental security, and sustainable deployment indexes. Some highlights:

The world's astonishing outpouring of humanitarian assistance to the victims of the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of December 2004 established a new standard in the ethical evolution of humanity. It inspired hope that we can create the will to act more decisively to address global challenges and win the race between the increasing proliferation of threats and our increasing ability to improve the human condition.

The world has grown to 6.5 billion people, the annual economy is approaching \$60 trillion, and the Internet is connecting 1 billion people. Future synergies among nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science can dramatically improve the human condition by increasing the availability of food, energy, and water and by connecting people and information anywhere. The effect will be to increase collective intelligence and create value and efficiency while lowering costs.

Just as it would be difficult for the human body to work if the neurons, muscles, bones, and so on were not properly connected, so too it is difficult for the world to work if people, ideas, resources, and challenges are not properly connected. The initial global infrastructure to manage globalization is being built through ISOs, WTO rules of trade, Internet protocols, and the standards and treaties of the UN and its organizations that help manage international air travel, postal systems, food quality, financial transactions, and health. Yet the moment-by-moment connectivity among ideas, people, resources, and challenges in order to create optimal solutions is yet to be developed. A worldwide race to connect everything not yet connected is just beginning.

This year's annual military expenditures will reach \$1 trillion, and annual income for organized crime has passed \$2 trillion. Yet the world has not dedicated the resources needed to stop water tables from falling, to narrow the rich-poor gap, or to provide safe and abundant energy.

After nine years of Millennium Project research, it has become increasingly clear that humanity has the resources to address its global challenges; what is less clear is how much wisdom, good will, and intelligence will be focused on these challenges.

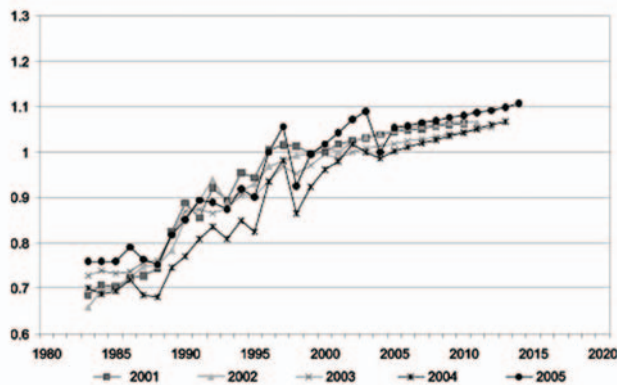
The **2005 State of the Future** consists of a series of executive summaries accompanied by a CD-ROM of approximately 3,800 pages with complete details of the Millennium Project's cumulative work since 1996 and an annotated bibliography of over 600 scenarios.

So, is the future getting generally better or worse?

According to the **State of the Future Index** and a review of its performance over the past five years, prospects are getting better, but slowly. The chart opposite shows comparisons among the five annual SOFIs. It appears that the 2005 SOFI is, in general, higher than the SOFIs of previous years. The reason for variations in the graphic presentation over the past 20 years, for each of the five SOFIs, is that sometimes some sources change their past data. Hence, it would be incorrect to simply add new data for the current year without checking to see if there were any changes in the past data. As a result, there are five different SOFIs, each with slight changes in its past 20 years. Nevertheless, the pattern among all is the same.

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Figure 1. 2001–05 State of the Future Index annual comparisons



The State of the Future Index is constructed from key variables and forecasts that, in the aggregate, depict whether the future promises to be better or worse over the next 10 years. Many variables were suggested and rated by a global lookout panel to show changes in the 15 Global Challenges in Chapter 1. The number of variables was reduced to 20, due to the availability of reliable data over the previous 20 years. Full details of these data and analysis appear in CD Chapter 2. A SOFI can be created for issues, organizations, even individuals. Chapter 3 presents national SOFIs.

Globalization and advances in science and technology will lead to future ethical issues affecting our species as a whole; reaching informed decisions about these issues may take many years. Hence, to help those future dialogues, the Millennium Project conducted an international assessment to identify the most important ethical issues that may face humanity in the foreseeable future such as: Should religions give up the claim of certainty and/or superiority to reduce religion-related conflicts? Do we have a right to clone ourselves? Do parents have a right to create genetically altered “designer babies”? As the brain-machine interface becomes more sophisticated and global, do the demands of collective intelligence outweigh those associated with individual identity? Do we have the right to genetically change ourselves and future generations into new species? The results are in Chapter 4.

Nanotechnology will provide an extraordinary range of benefits for humanity, but as with any advance, it is wise to forecast problems in order to avoid them. Little is known about the environmental and health risks of manufactured nanomaterials. For example, artificial blood cells (respirocytes) that dramatically enhance human performance could cause overheating of the body and bio-breakdowns, or disposal of highly efficient batteries using nanomaterials could affect ecosystem and human health. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the results of a two-round Delphi on these issues.

The Millennium Project defines environmental security as environmental viability for life support, with three sub-elements: preventing or repairing military damage to the environment, preventing or responding to environmentally caused conflicts, and protecting the environment due to its inherent moral value. Chapter 6 is a distillation of monthly emerging environmental security issues reports.

The Central European Node of the Millennium Project has created a Sustainable Development Index composed of seven major subject areas, 14 indicators (2 for each major area), and 64 variables (various numbers of variables for individual indicators). This index was calculated for 179 countries to express their state of development and progress toward sustainable development. Thus it allows a mapping of sustainable development as well as comparison among different countries. The countries rated as most sustainable were Sweden, Finland, and Switzerland, while those rated as least sustainable were Afghanistan, Somalia, and Burundi. Chapter 7 expands on the Sustainable Development Index first presented in the **2001 State of the Future** and introduces the Quality and Sustainability of Life Indicators at national and regional levels.

The full 2005 State of the Future report can be purchased via <http://www.acunu.org/millennium/sof2005.html>, price \$49.95.



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