

Instantaneous television coverage from around the globe has made the media impact on popular opinion more dramatic. It has put a greater premium on a government's ability to react quickly and to make clear statements about the national interest.

If officials like Warren Christopher do not want television images to be the North Star of foreign policy, they had better point to the star they are steering by.

The new information order forces government to enter the lists of public argument more quickly and more forcefully than might have been necessary in more languid times. Even Canadians, long remarkable for their deference to government, have grown sceptical of official infallibility. The flood of information delivered by the new media encourages public opinion to doubt that elected representatives or public officials have a monopoly on wisdom, or some inspired perception of the national interest.

In this climate, policy achieved in open dialogue with an aroused and attentive public, although more difficult for policy-makers, must be a better policy than one concocted behind closed doors and communicated as though divine revelation.

In the difficult choices that lie before us, of shaping a new world order while defending our standard of living, balancing our selfish interests with those of others, recognizing the need to curb some expectations in a globe whose limits in satisfying all human demands are more apparent, national consensus will be more necessary, most especially in a nation as fractured as Canada is today. Consensus is best achieved through openness, and openness, however untidy, is the essence of democracy. To paraphrase Woodrow Wilson, open compromises, openly arrived at, suit the tenor of these times.

Finally, it may be the paramount virtue of the miraculous new media that they have shrunk the earth in our perceptions. They have made it more apparent that we are one species, inhabiting one planet. This may have begun to condition people, particularly in the most-favored nations, to think more co-operatively, even more supranationally.

Since we Canadians, disdaining nationalism, seem to have supranationalism in our political genes, perhaps we should be saying with Eduard Shevardnaze, "Praise be information technology!"