

WE ARE LIVING IN A TIME OF A MATCHLESS FLOOD OF INFORMATION, AND THUS IN A TIME IN WHICH QUALITY OF INFORMATION GAINS IN TREMENDOUS IMPORTANCE

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With the rise of social media has come a new term: “fake news” – a term that has even made it into the German Duden dictionary. Fake news is either invented, factoid-based or manipulative information intended to mislead the recipient of the information. But is fake news a new phenomenon? The answer is no. Fake news is nothing more than an electronic version of rumour.

Rumour – whether true, almost true or pure lies – exists from time immemorial. One source of rumour of which everyone is probably aware, is the so-called “Stammtisch”, a table men sit around drinking beers, exchanging information and gossip and discussing local politics.

The later an evening becomes and the more beer is consumed, the more colourful the rumours become.

In former times, rumour remained at a local or a regional level. Today, however, with all the social media instruments available, a lot of rumour is globalized and distorts information by taking the guise of news or, even worse, facts.

We are indeed living in a time in which individual perceptions and hypotheses are more important than facts – a time in which fake news is part and parcel of everyday life.

Fake news supports the tendency to judge based on one’s own point of view, which narrows the perspective. But, as mentioned above, some kinds of fake news have always existed. With the tendency to raise the importance of individual perceptions, fake news just has a wider, different reach today. And with modern technological means, it can be spread instantly across the entire globe.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF INFORMATION

There are a number of crises worldwide, most of them due to shifts in global power. And there are very different types of news and information that cover these crises. Breaking news provides information on events, such as the recent earthquake in Mexico. It is mostly a theme of the electronic media. Then there is commentary, which are an important part of the printed media. And then there is gossip, which is widely spread in electronic, social and print media.

Then there is news that is either wrong or manipulative, distorts real facts and frequently gives rise to conspiracy theories. Sometimes, there are also facts that are just not reported properly; this might be for ideological reasons or for reasons of avoidance due to political correctness. And then, there are serious background information which allows one to understand a situation in its entirety, to realise the consequences of a situation and which highlight future scenarios. Such background information from genuine sources have become a very narrow niche and they are essential for decision makers in business, politics and academics in order to avoid misperception and misjudgement.

GEOPOLITICAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICES

In 2011, I founded Geopolitical Intelligence Services (GIS). Driven by my own need for high-quality information, I decided to establish a system that provides useful, unbiased information that provides deep insight into relevant topics and highlights the geopolitical relevance and consequences. In our understanding, geopolitics translates the lessons drawn from historical legacy and geographical facts into

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operational tools. It describes the shifting impact of dynamics in a multipolar world. It is also realism, beyond ideologies and preferred conclusions, in foreign policy, international relations and economics.

Geopolitics in the way we at GIS understand it develops scenarios and fosters out-of-the-box thinking. We deliver scenarios based on probabilities. We do not just deliver a prognosis. We help clients to understand the rationale of the other side, put themselves in the shoes of their client, negotiating partner, opponent, etc.

For example, a peace conference on the Syrian conflict was convened for January 2014. Montreux, Switzerland, was the venue for the initial peace talks and the drafting of a transition plan for Syria. These talks were bound to fail, as they began with the Syrian government and its main political opposition taking entrenched positions. President Bashar al-Assad’s government refused to participate in the conference, and some neighbouring countries were excluded, whereas some 40 participants from different countries (representing quite unrelated parties) were included. What went wrong?

First, important parties such as Iran were not invited. Second, in a successful peace conference, there may be no preconditions, because preconditions mean that at least one party will continue to fight. Third, the myriad of unrelated parties that were invited made efficient decision-making impossible. Finally, there was a misconception that continued

through the Syrian conflict, while the real underlying causes were never considered. That is, the removal of President Assad was considered paramount. But shouldn’t the most important thing have been peace for the people in Syria? Such unfortunate situations have become common.

EXPERTISE IS ESSENTIAL

So, to make key decisions in politics and business, access to high-quality, unbiased background information is essential. GIS’s mission is to remain a privately owned, unbiased intelligence service that strives for the highest professional standards, so we can give decision-makers the advice they need. Hence, the crucial criteria for GIS are:

- Objectivity
- Expertise
- Deep knowledge of background information
- Competency and trustworthiness of sources
- Information based on facts and figures.

One key to GIS’s success is its network of experts. Well-versed experts from various countries and areas of expertise work for GIS, and each of them has their own, high-quality network of people. All of our experts have a proven track record in politics, economics, energy or security and defence. On top of that, they have a strong sense for future developments and how such developments will influence politics, the economy and society – and they have the ability to formulate potential scenarios.