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| Interest Group: Geopolitics | | | | | |
| Date: 9 May 2024 | | | | | |
| Venue: Admiral Rodney Public House, Southwell: As a public house, the venue has its own risk assessments and inspections, not duplicated below. | | | | | |
| Description: Discussion of geopolitical topics | | | | | |
| | Assessment Topic: | Yes | No | N/A | Mitigating Actions: |
| General | Is there enough space for all members in attendance? | X | | | Group size limited to around 12 (half the capacity of the room) Will create additional groups if numbers grow |
| | Any trip hazards? | X | | | Stools, chair legs, bags: Vigilance of all members |
| | All walkways clear of obstruction? | X | | | Stools, chair legs, bags: Vigilance of all members |
| | Enough seats for all attendees? | X | | | Yes: some are taller bar stools. Adequate supply of chairs with back rests |
| | Can everyone access? | | X | | Wheelchair access difficult (via external door) |
| | Register of attendees maintained? | X | | | By GL |
| | Details of Next of Kin available? | X | | | GL takes list from Beacon |
| Electrical | Ensured no trailing leads or cables constituting a trip hazard | X | | | Vigilance of all members |
| | All cables in use visually inspected to ensure intact and safe to use? | X | | | Vigilance of all members |
| Fire Safety | All exits unobstructed? | X | | | Vigilance of all members |
| | Is there a working smoke alarm? | X | | | Vigilance of all members |
| Well-being | Have all members done a personal risk assessment to ensure they can safely participate in the activity? | | X | | Members asked to do their own health assessment |
| | Does the group organiser know of any relevant H&S/personal risk assessment concerns of members? | | X | | Members asked to inform Group Leader & Dep Leader |
| | Light refreshments available? | X | | | At licenced bar in next room |
| | Mental health of members considered in planning activities | X | | | Geopolitics paper on mental health given to all members & discussed as topic approx. annually (Attached) |

Geopolitics and Mental Health

This is a paper written by Rik, as Group Leader of the Geopolitics Interest Group, for our occasional reading, discussion and well-being! It includes some ideas and text generated by AI – itself an interesting topic capable of good and evil!

The paper formed part of our meeting of May 2024, which included looking for further ideas from members to strengthen it as an annex to our “Group Risk Assessment”.

RL
May 2024

A risk we must all recognise in our Geopolitics group is the threat to the mental health of ourselves and others inherent in our subject and group structure. The risks are mainly:

- The nature of our discussion can easily be misconstrued: Enthusiasm for making our point can easily be misconstrued as threatening or intimidating to other members
- Gender balance – we can’t choose our members, but a preponderance of one gender could again be threatening or intimidating to others
- Perhaps most critically, to be informed and involved geopolitical group members we need to be aware of the news, be this via newspapers, social media or otherwise. This can potentially damage mental health by skewing our view of the world, its risks and dangers.

The first two points above can be mitigated to some extent by member awareness, occasional reminders and vigilance: Our group code of conduct being focussed on us enjoying a challenge to our own views whilst avoiding over-dominating challenges to others.

The third is perhaps more complex, and often an activity carried out in private, alone. Any analysis of newspapers shows a strong bias to negative news, and similar bias appears to exist in social media.

The prevalence of negative news in newspapers can be attributed to several reasons:

1. Human Psychology and Attention Bias:

- Our brains are wired to pay more attention to negative information. This phenomenon, known as the “negativity bias,” ensures that we remain vigilant to potential threats. As a result, news outlets often prioritise stories related to disasters, conflicts, and crime because they capture our attention.
- Positive news tends to be less sensational and may not evoke the same emotional response. Consequently, it receives less coverage.

2. News as a Business Model:

- Media organisations, and a growing number of bloggers/social media “influencers” operate as businesses. They need to attract readers, viewers, and advertisers to survive. Unfortunately, negative news tends to generate more interest and engagement, and hence sales.
- Sensational headlines and dramatic stories sell more copies and attract more clicks. As a result, media outlets often prioritize stories that evoke fear, outrage, or curiosity.

3. Newsroom Pressures and Deadlines:

- Journalists and bloggers work under tight deadlines and face pressure to deliver breaking news. Investigative journalism and in-depth reporting require time and resources.
- As a result, newsrooms may prioritize quick, attention-grabbing stories over positive, nuanced pieces.

4. Confirmation Bias and Polarization:

- Readers often seek out news that confirms their existing beliefs and opinions. Negative news can reinforce these biases.
- In a polarized media landscape, outlets cater to specific audiences. They may emphasize stories that align with their viewers' perspectives, even if those stories are negative.

5. Global Events and Crisis Reporting:

- Major global events such as natural disasters, conflicts, and health crises dominate headlines. These events have significant implications for society and warrant extensive coverage.
- Unfortunately, positive news often takes a backseat during such times.
- Natural disasters, conflicts and crises are often sudden and dramatic. Changes that are positive, such as improvements in health, education, food availability, technology, transport, safety, cultural activity and other "positives" to our global world and to humanity tend to take place slowly, gradually, over many years or decades.

6. News Selection Criteria:

- News editors and producers make subjective decisions about what to cover. They consider factors like relevance, impact, and novelty.
- Negative events often meet these criteria more readily. Positive stories may be seen as less urgent or less newsworthy.

7. Social Media and Clickbait Culture:

- Social media platforms thrive on sensational content. Clickbait headlines and emotionally charged stories spread rapidly.
- Positive news may not fit this mould, leading to its underrepresentation.

8. Cynicism and Scepticism:

- Some argue that media consumers have become cynical and distrustful. As a result, they may dismiss positive news as biased or overly optimistic.
- This scepticism affects media outlets' editorial choices.

For us as Geopolitics Members, remembering all of the above is crucial – we can focus on the negative, whilst missing the slow advance of the positive. Uplifting stories are “out there”, and some media outlets have dedicated sections for positive news. Seeking those out can help us gain a more balanced perspective and not feel “dragged down” by constant news of danger, disaster and doom. Balancing negative and positive news is crucial for several reasons:

1. Mental and Emotional Well-Being:

- Constant exposure to negative news can lead to anxiety, stress, and feelings of helplessness. We need to balance this with positive news to maintain mental and emotional well-being.

- Positive news uplifts our spirits, provides hope, and reminds us of the good in the world.

2. **Perspective and Realism:**

- A balanced view of the world includes both challenges and progress. Negative news highlights problems, but positive news shows solutions and progress.
- Without positive news, we might lose sight of the progress being made in various fields, such as science, technology, and social justice.

3. **Motivation and Inspiration:**

- Positive news stories inspire action. When we hear about acts of kindness, resilience, or innovation, we're motivated to contribute positively ourselves.
- Inspirational stories remind us that change is possible and encourage us to be part of it.

4. **Community and Social Bonds:**

- Positive news fosters a sense of community. Stories about local heroes, community initiatives, and acts of kindness bring people together.
- Celebrating positive events reinforces social bonds and encourages collective action.

5. **Avoiding Desensitization:**

- Constant exposure to negative news can lead to desensitization. We become numb to tragedy and may lose empathy.
- Positive news helps counterbalance this effect, reminding us of our shared humanity.

6. **Media Literacy and Critical Thinking:**

- A balanced news diet encourages critical thinking. When we see both sides of the story, we learn to evaluate information more objectively.
- It's essential to recognize biases and understand that news outlets have their own agendas.

7. **Promoting Solutions Journalism:**

- Solutions journalism focuses on constructive responses to problems. It highlights successful approaches and encourages collaboration.
- By balancing negative news with solutions-oriented reporting, we promote a more informed and engaged society.

Remember that seeking out positive news intentionally and being mindful of our media consumption can contribute to a healthier perspective on the world, and a more accurate understanding of geopolitics!

At the same time, we can take some steps to be informed but at the same time limit exposure to negative news to a "safer" level. We need to stay informed while also protecting our mental and emotional well-being.

Mitigation:

Here are some **ideas for effective ways** to limit exposure to negative news and thus have a more balanced view of the world as affected by our interest in geopolitics:

1. **Regulate Consumption:**

- Designate specific times of day or set limits on how much time you spend reading the news.
- Avoid news consumption when you're feeling tired or stressed.
- Identify news sources or communication styles that trigger negative feelings, and limit exposure to those.

2. **Unfollow Social Media Accounts:**

- Unfollow or mute social media accounts that consistently share negative news.
- Examine your news feeds, and make sure these include more positive and uplifting content.

3. **Limit Online News Consumption:**

- Be intentional about the amount of time you spend browsing news websites or apps.
- Set boundaries to prevent constant exposure to headlines.

4. **Unsubscribe from Negative Email Newsletters:**

- If you receive email newsletters that contribute mainly or only to negative feelings or events, consider unsubscribing.
- Choose newsletters that provide balanced information or focus on positive stories.

5. **Turn Off News Notifications:**

- Uninstall apps on your phone that constantly send news notifications.
- This helps reduce the constant bombardment of headlines and potential for stress.

6. **Communicate Boundaries:**

- Let friends and family know if you prefer not to discuss certain news topics.
- It's okay to set boundaries and protect your mental well-being.

Remember that staying informed doesn't mean immersing yourself in negativity. This will neither give a "balanced view" nor be good for mental health.

For most of our geopolitics meetings, we include a "Quick Fire" section: I ask all of us to contribute a couple of ideas to this at each meeting and encourage us all to **include a balance of "positive news items"**, recognising that some of these will by their nature be "long term trends" rather than sudden developments. IF they have a geopolitical impact, then they are important!

Rik Ludlow
Group Leader, Geopolitics



Website: <https://www.southwellu3a.com/geopolitics.html>

Email: rik@theludlows.co.uk

Mobile: 07946 398 349