

# INSIGHTS

| SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

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P9



## CHALLENGES TO JOURNALISM

### Lessons to overcome them

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#### EXPERT INSIGHTS

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**Bill Emmott**  
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The Economist



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**Maria Nikitenova**  
Editor-in-Chief, 'Russia &  
America in XXI century'

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# BOLSTERING JOURNALISM TO FIGHT DISINFORMATION

A threefold response mechanism to the disinformation pandemic involves an emphasis on building credibility, adapting to new business models and enforcing accountability



**Bill Emmott**

is the former Editor-in-chief of *The Economist*. He is the founder of the Wake Up Foundation UK, an awareness-focused educational charity, and also chairman of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Japan Society of the UK and the Trinity College Long Room Hub for Arts & Humanities. He has authored fourteen books and worked on two documentary feature films. This article takes off from his thoughts shared at the 99th Synergia Forum titled 'Journalism in a disinformation pandemic' held on 19th March 2021.

**H**umankind's willingness to tell or believe lies has always remained the same. In contrast, the current disinformation pandemic is turbo-charged, thanks to the digital revolution. The ubiquity of smartphones and the subsequent rise of social media has sown greater doubt, and at a rapid rate too.

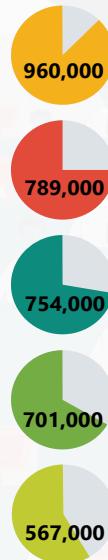
## CONCERN AS CITIZENS

As citizens, our primary concern must be that the disinformation pandemic tends to neutralize our biggest opportunity in the 21st century – the progress of science, technology, and communication. In fact, it may harm our ability to tackle some of the complex issues like COVID-19, climate change and poverty, to name a few, using the

## FAKE NEWS IS A REAL PROBLEM

Facebook engagement of the top five fake election stories\*

### ENGAGEMENTS



### PUBLISHED HEADLINE

- "Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement"  
Ending the Fed
- "Wikileaks CONFIRMS Hillary Sold Weapons to ISIS... Then Drops Another BOMBSHELL! Breaking News"  
The Political Insider
- "IT'S OVER: Hillary's ISIS Email Just Leaked & It's Worse Than Anyone Could Have Imagined"  
Ending the Fed
- "Just Read The Law: Hillary Is Disqualified From Holding Any Federal Office"  
Ending the Fed
- "FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apartment Murder-Suicide"  
Denver Guardian

### Total Facebook engagement for top 20 election stories (August-election day)



Source: Business Insider

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same scientific and technological advancements. Rather than gaining from the information and technology revolution, it is ironic that disinformation has imposed an opportunity cost on the society, thereby limiting the progress it can bring us. Secondly, it threatens the essence of democracy; the essence being trust, accountability and equality of citizenship. These values are thrown into doubt by the disinformation campaign, which in turn feeds the agenda of

authoritarian leaders and dictators.

## CONCERN AS JOURNALISTS

As journalists, we have a related but different set of concerns, the principal one being revenue generation. The IT revolution has destroyed the Press industry's advertisement-led old business model. However, it is noteworthy that this issue only correlates with the disinformation pandemic and is not caused by it. Moreover, the financing



## HOW CONFUSING IS FAKE NEWS & WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

Confusion caused by fake news regarding current affairs

a great deal of confusion

**64%**

some confusion

**24%**

not much/ no confusion

**11%**

Who's responsible for preventing fake news from spreading?

- A great deal ■ Some
- Little/no responsibility

The general public

<b>43%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>24%</b>
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The government, politicians

<b>45%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>26%</b>
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Social media sites

<b>42%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>24%</b>
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Source: Pew Research Center

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of certain forms of journalism, especially that of local newspapers, is currently in a transition phase. The success of digital platforms shows that the transition is galloping ahead. In many ways, it is an indication for the industry to adapt to the change and innovate suitable business models.

The other often-overlooked angle pertains to the undeniable significance of professionally trained journalists as truth-tellers, as agents of accountability and as counter activists against this disinformation pandemic. Though the digital information revolution had fantasized about citizen journalism destroying the need for professional journalism, the reality is quite the opposite – journalists are more crucial now than ever.

## THREEFOLD RESPONSE

Given so, the journalists' response to this issue must be threefold. Firstly, journalists and their publications need to secure an indispensable asset, upon which all else hinges – reputation. Both the present and the future of the news industry depend on building a reputation for independence, credibility and accuracy. The strength and value of independent publishers and journalists have been tremendously enhanced by the disinformation pandemic. The belief that information is biased by financial, political or any kind of interests is deadly to the value-adding proposition that journalists depend upon. Independence has therefore become a far more

important factor now.

Secondly, while the rapidly vanishing old business model may set the alarm bells ringing, the need of the hour is to adapt to newer revenue frameworks such as the subscription model. In fact, the role of advertisers or sponsors is a corrupting parasitical influence on the act of truth-telling that journalism is essentially about. On the other hand, subscription has the merit of allowing journalists and their editors to focus on the fundamental questions – what value has been added for the reader, why should somebody pay for what has been provided, and why should they believe what has been published.

Lastly, journalists and publishers must campaign for regulations worldwide, enforced at the national level but coordinated globally, to ensure that social media platforms have the same level of responsibility for their published content as publishers or broadcasters have had for years. While it is impossible to eliminate disinformation, it can be curbed by holding the producers or publishers accountable for the information published, thereby mitigating it. While the competition we face from social media platforms is one part of the issue, the larger and significant point to be noted is the necessity to hold these channels accountable for their content. In campaigning for these regulations to be put in place, the press industry can compete with it through truth-telling and its reputation.

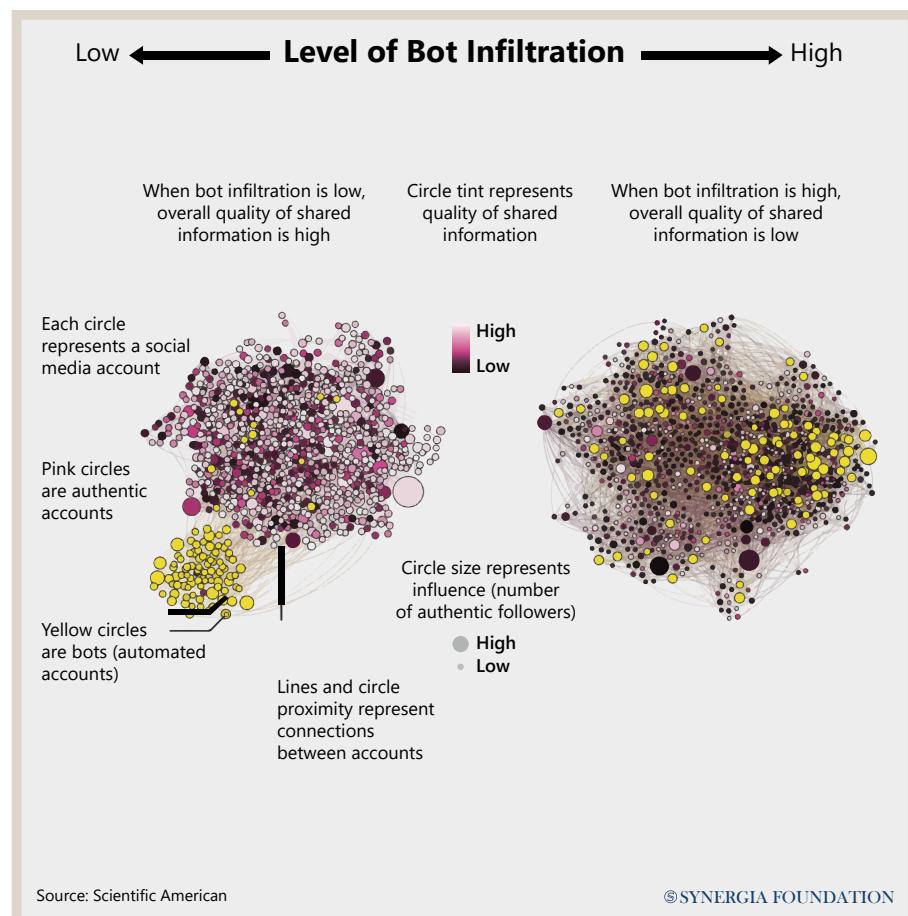
# DE-HYPHENATED JOURNALISM OVER CITIZEN JOURNALISM

While holding citizen journalism accountable for its content is an immediate requirement, the true practice of de-hyphenated journalism necessitates the generation of innovative business models

**Shekhar Gupta**

a recipient of the Padma Bhushan, is the chairman and Editor-in-chief of ThePrint. Few of his notable projects are Operation Blue Star, Tiananmen Square protests, fall of the Berlin Wall and the first Gulf War. He has served as editor-in-chief of The Indian Express for 19 years, and authored the bestselling book, 'Anticipating India'. This article is based on his thoughts shared at the 99th Synergia Forum titled 'Journalism in a disinformation pandemic' held on 19th March 2021.

**H**aving emerged fifteen years ago, the concept of citizen journalism had attracted a lot of attention and was hailed as a great liberal idea. It fuelled the notion that anyone with a smartphone could be a journalist, while also implying that professional journalism would soon become extinct. The idea of citizen journalism is disrespectful to the profession, trade and craft of journalism. It presumes that anyone who has witnessed an event can be considered a journalist, and their inputs constitute journalism. While the point is not to delegitimize their experience, more often than not, the specifics are lost. By the time credible journalism comes out with the truth, the social media space would be rife with propaganda, which in turn, turns on professional journalistic reporting and brands it as propaganda, to serve its purpose.



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## ENFORCING ACCOUNTABILITY

To continue the fight against disinformation campaigns by means of credible journalism, a "respectable" media needs to build its reputation the right way, on the backs of both successes and failures, those which the institution gets right and those that they don't. The admittance of the occasional error underlines the news organisation's commitment and priority of seeking truth above all. On the other hand, the acceptance of this accidental failure by the reader is a true marker of their faith in the organisation's work ethics and enhances its reputation. This

sense of accountability, that powers reputation, is absent in both citizen journalism and the social media news mill. News media institutions, therefore, require a substantial amount of time to build credibility and reputation.

In most cases, self-sufficient credible media institutions are frequently delegitimized with the pejorative term "mainstream media", and charged with disseminating false news, seeded with propaganda. Unless the news mills on social media platforms are delegitimized or made accountable, the market for fake news will prosper. The process of discrediting and disintermediating credible press, aids in circumventing



difficult questions and fact-checking posed by professional journalists, especially in the context of sensitive issues like politics.

As journalists, while campaigning for legitimacy, it is also their duty to ensure that opinions are always supported by a thorough analysis that reflects non-partisanship. For instance, opinion pieces in newspapers, while they are meant for expressing opinions, cannot wrap up the conclusion shortly and neglect an in-depth examination of the argument provided.

While credibility can be subjected to assault, the crippling of the business model, however, can have disastrous consequences.

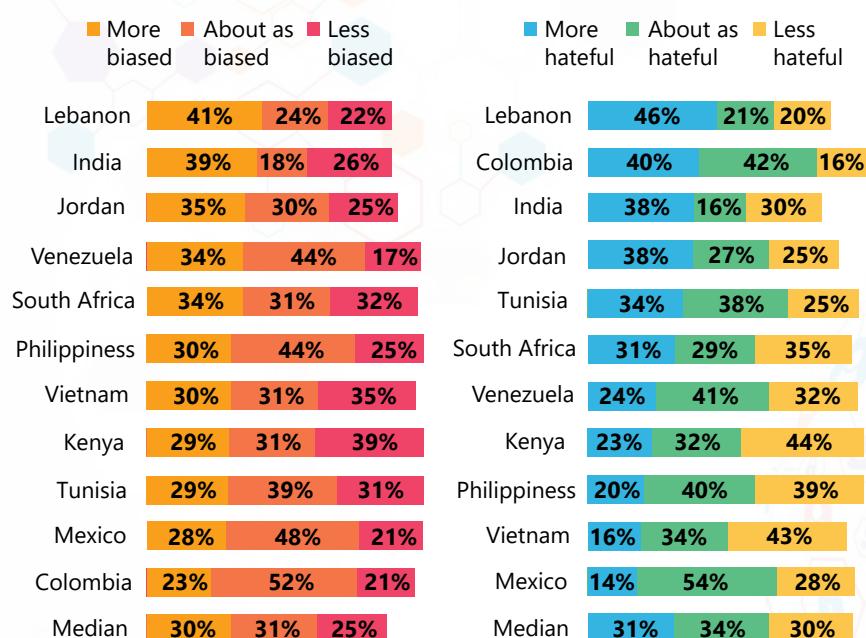
## FUNDING DE-HYPHENATED JOURNALISM

The subscription model, while being noteworthy, cannot function as the primary means of financial sustenance for the news industry. Put differently, relying solely on subscriptions can make practising de-hyphenated journalism impossible. De-hyphenated journalism does not imply a lack of view but rather that

the perspective is not laid out openly, unlike partisan or citizen journalism. Subscription shifts the power onto the readers in a way that pushes for hyphenated journalism; they will pay only if they believe a purpose is

being served and if they like or align with it. Therefore, heavy dependence on subscriptions is not a sustainable model for covering salaries or investing in certain kinds of coverage.

**Around three-in-ten social media users say news and information on social media platform is more biased & more hateful compared with other sources**



Source: Pew Research Center

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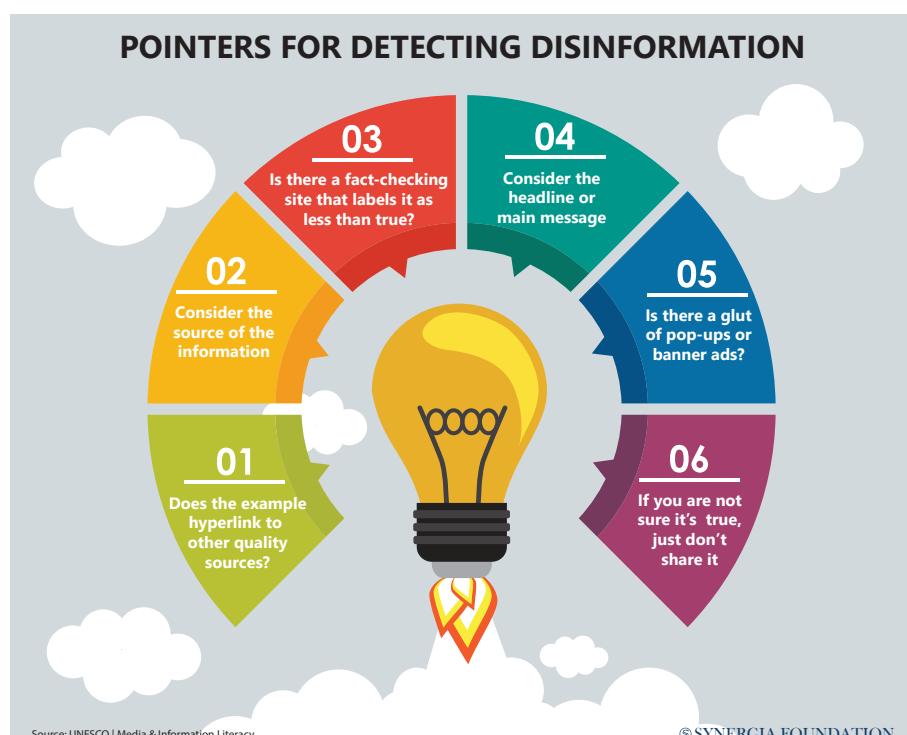
# TRAINING THE NEXT CROP OF JOURNALISTS

The battle against the disinformation campaign cannot ignore the critical need to train the next generation of journalists



**Tim Witcher**  
is the South Asia Director for AFP bureaux in Delhi, Mumbai, Dhaka, Colombo and Kathmandu. He has organized the coverage of major events such as the Olympics and FIFA World Cup.

Journalism, while it can claim victimhood due to the proliferation of social media news mills and the subsequent current onslaught of fake news, needs to adjust its sails to the present-day conditions and adapt to changes. For instance, Agence France-Presse (AFP) has set up fact-checking centres in more than thirty-five countries, a number intended to grow tremendously over the coming years. Both independent and State media need to recognize the need to have fact-checking centres to bolster confidence in the news that they publish. At the same time, the fact-checking infrastructure ought to be supported by practitioners who are cognizant of the significance of the source. In other words, a sufficient amount of emphasis is urgent and necessary with regard to the mentoring of the next crop of journalists. This crucial point of concern pertains to the training of these young minds, not only to mistrust disinformation but also the know-how. Having said so, Tim Witcher raised the question of training the next generation of journalists to the two keynote speakers.



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Shekhar Gupta responded that the best training for these young people can only be found in the newsrooms themselves. The numerous editors positioned at various levels, constituting the middle management, can be considered as the professors. These middle managers, often in the shadows, are the ones that assist the young reporters in learning the ropes, helping their copy or their bylines shine, thereby aiding in the training process. They are, however, being slowly decimated due to various factors, the chief one being financial scarcity. Yet another roadblock in the training process is the current tendency of the younger journalists to overlook the need to cross-verify. While social media or the digital space as a whole, can be replete with tapes and videos, that may or may not carry journalistic value, reporting cannot solely depend on that. Otherwise, the

absence of cross-verification with the source can inadvertently encourage guerilla journalism, as it indulges biased reporting. The significance of the source has to be drilled in their minds and requires immense patience from the seasoned.

Bill Emmott seconded Gupta as he too pointed to the critical investment, in terms of both time and effort, in training the new generation of journalists. However, he also foregrounded the vital tension between speed and standard. As editors and managers, the urge to publish instantly is the biggest enemy of standards and training. The current incentivising model of measuring metrics, that is based on the instant response to a story, is dangerous and begs reconsideration. Evaluating and rewarding journalists in this tradition, can embolden the clickbait culture and therefore needs to be kept in check by the editors.

# THE SCIENCE OF REPORTING SCIENCE

Reporting about science in a disinformation pandemic is a challenge that needs to be urgently addressed



**Dr Maria Nikitenova**

is the Editor-in-chief of the science journal titled "Russia and U.S. in XXI century" and is Head of Division at the Institute for U.S. and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

One of the main issues regarding the dissemination of news on science is the level of knowledge about the subject. This is a crucial challenge for a highly technical topic or rigorously research material that is being published and often, there is a lack of understanding with regard to the depth of the matter. The only solution I believe, is education from good institutions that then creates a solid foundation for the individual to write or report on complex technical and scientific topics. There is also a need for self-education and constant updation of knowledge. This is essential as the scientific field plays an extraordinarily important role in our society and there needs to be a thorough understanding and investment in those who can write on scientific issues.

While dealing with a scientific subject, there are few pointers that can be followed by journalists or others who are reporting it. While the string of unfamiliar terms may seem daunting at the first glance, here's where maximum care needs to be taken. The abstract can be the best place to glean an outline about the topic and recognize the broader implications of the research. Perusing through it can help ease the reader in, especially

## Expert Q&A

**Q** **Dr Maria:** What are the procedures and parameters for deciding on the cover page in news magazines?

**A** **Bill Emmott:** The value and importance of the cover page, particularly in the previous print-based era where it was inherently connected to the status of the publication as print. The cover image is the single most powerful way of conveying an idea, story or the analysis of an argument. The goal is to offer an impression to the reader, regarding the attitude of the publication, its point of view and the overall tone. This is best done through the cover.

While the chief onus lies with the Editor-in-chief, they are supported by an able group of staff, constituting of artists and interpreters. They are made part of the editorial discussion so that they understand the issue in every sense and produce proposals for how the cover's message can be conveyed.

However, in the digital world, the cover has a different value and status. The chief objective is to tempt people to opt to read the magazine, especially when the market is flooded with surplus information. While the reading modes have come to include tablet-style reading, the cover is still important, but in another way. It can have a distinct centrality and sense to it in the current age.

when having to tackle the scientific jargons or acronyms. Both the introduction and conclusion are also vital in achieving a substantial level of comprehension regarding the issue.

While reporting, it is important to remember to not dilute the research by oversimplifying the scientific terms as it tends to change the portrayal of science. Similarly, the tone, while reporting any scientific issue, should not appear overly opinionated as it encourages the discussion of established scientific facts as it were mere opinions.

Additionally, the concept of 'pre-bunking' can be practised to inoculate readers against both misinformation and disinformation. Pre-bunking, research suggests, is proven to be more successful than debunking. As part of this process,

readers are exposed to a weak dose of the means employed to propagate disinformation, which allows them to have a better idea of how they might be deceived. Pre-bunking is one of the psychological strategies adopted to battle the disinformation pandemic.

Few tips for communicating science can be double checking facts, making the fact appear more captivating by focusing on the human story of the issue, and credible by offering additional information. Techniques employed by disinformation super spreaders such as cherry-picking and logical fallacies can be pointed out to the reader. Finally, highlighting the rigour that undergirds any scientific consensus is vital for the readers' reaffirmation of the scientific community's credibility.

# NAVIGATING THE FACT-CHECKING BUSINESS

Fact-checking, rather than mercilessly enforcing regulations, is essentially about the practice of honest journalism



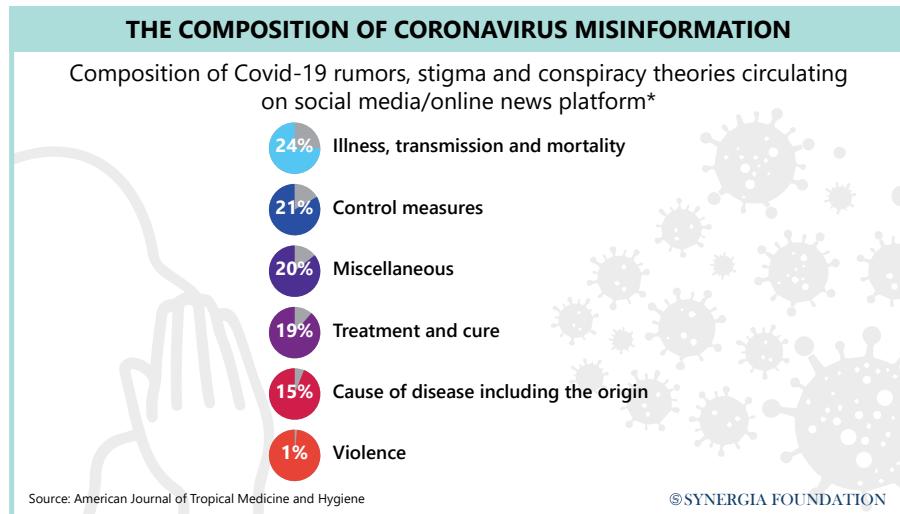
**Kishalay Bhattacharjee**

a recipient of the Ramnath Goenka Award for Excellence in Journalism, is Professor and Dean of the O.P. Jindal School of Journalism and Communication. He is also a former Resident Editor of NDTV and a documentary filmmaker.

**M**isinformation & disinformation are divided by a fine line. While the latter implies intentional damage, the former is an accidental phenomenon. The impact, however, could be the same. A classic case where both have combined, can be found in the Tablighi case where thousands had attended a religious congregation amidst the public ban on gatherings in early March, which ended up being a coronavirus super-spreader. The immediate frenzied reporting by the media then, and its lack of following up with the case later on, indicates a sense of 'framing the agenda'. This can also be observed in our lack of coverage in the Myanmar issue. While our neighbour was left staring at an abyss of military hegemony, our reality of scarce-to-nil reporting is also, in some ways, disinformation, especially when considering how journalism is essentially a service industry, with the aim of providing credible information to the public.

## FACT-CHECKING SANS FACTS

The first concern raised by Kishalay Bhattacharjee pertains to the fact-checking process when facts



themselves are not present. Bill Emmott, in response, highlighted the working example at hand, namely the coronavirus pandemic. He remarked that the past year was a steep challenge to the news industry, especially since it was an immensely dynamic phase where facts were non-existent or subject to change every minute. At the same time, the most misleading phrase used by decision-makers then was "follow the science". "Science" or scientific studies on the virus was only gradually emerging. In this context, the important thing, as writers or narrators in this play, is to be honest about that which is available, and that which is not. Clarity, from our end, is part of the service we render. To accurately portray the level of uncertainty during such times, is of utmost priority. The COVID-19 situation has been one of the biggest failings of the news media industry. The journalistic principle is always to be honest about the content.

Shekhar Gupta, added to Bill's answer, by stating that while stories do constantly develop & change, credible journalistic institutions need to have the humility to admit the same. When stuck in a circumstance where the facts cannot be checked, they need to be willing to risk losing the story. On the

other hand, social media, he believes, rather than a cause of worry, is advantageous. It allows the rectification of errors, almost immediately. Speed, which is often a curse, can also be a gift.

## PLAYING CATCH-UP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

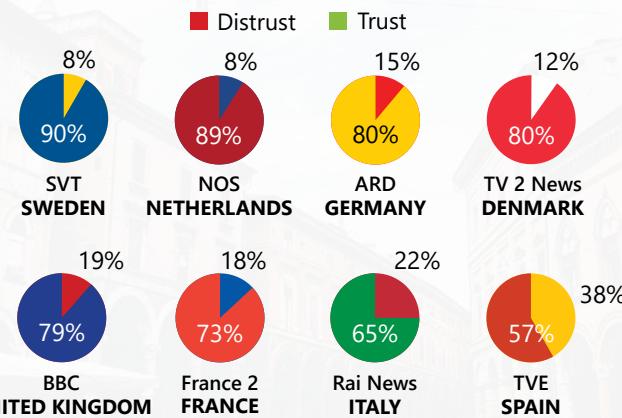
The other question involved the practicality of fact-checking information on social media platforms, when these spaces are being fed a large amount of breaking news every millisecond. To this, Bill answered that facts on social media should be the least of worries. The journalists' primary concern needs to be whether their published content is fact-checked. However, it is advisable to have an eye out to detect when these social media facts become contaminants or challengers to evidence-based information. More importantly, the news media organisations must be cognizant and respectful of the readers' time. It is their duty to ensure that the user's time is not wasted in having to wade through right and wrong. This can happen only when the credibility is of a high standard, & therefore, the efforts need to be chiefly focused on building that.



## Expert Q&amp;A

## TRUST IN PUBLIC NEWS REMAINS HIGH IN WESTERN EUROPE

Share of respondents who generally trust or distrust each public news outlet per country



Source: Pew Research center

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**Q To what extent is the current situation a product of the institutional failure to create public-spirited journalism? Can you track the genesis of how we got here?**

**A Shekhar Gupta:** While it would be unfair to say that public-spirited journalism doesn't work, it cannot replace commercially-funded journalism that pays for itself. Good journalism must earn its living. I am unwilling to accept that there is a contradiction between good journalism and the marketplace. Even so, the subscriptions fail to pay for a lot of salaries. While some consumers pay, it is still not public-spirited journalism in that sense. I do not align myself with foundation-funded journalism as foundations also have expectations. When the foundation assigns an amount to cover a story, they would prefer a certain kind of story and coverage.

**A Bill Emmott:** The big question is about genuinely independent public service broadcasting. In the context of BBC for instance, its centrality and public service broadcasting as a whole, has declined because of competition from other television, and fragmentation of viewing habits. This implies that the anchor role played by the public service broadcaster

has been taken away. This, however, is not their fault. They have dealt with it badly, and sometimes well, but largely the onus of the blame lies with the information and communication revolution. A part of the issue is also that mainstream media has been insufficiently critical of the establishment; our proximity to it is a poor excuse for doing so. It has become blind sometimes to the sins of the establishment, a place where criticism can be legitimately parlayed.

**Q Given your disapproval of foundation-sponsored journalism, how do you then suggest we fund good journalism, especially when disinformation is being peddled by those with enormous economic might?**

**A Shekhar Gupta:** While there are some good foundations out there, most will refuse to pay for unhyphenated journalism. It cannot be denied that the Print has received help from the Indian Public Spirited Media Foundation (IPSMF), for a portion of our science coverage and also to cover certain far away regions in the country. This foundation-based funding, however, is only a small support and cannot be substituted as the means to run entire journalistic institutions or operations. Moreover, foundations are also subject to the vagaries of

the market. The real stakeholders are the audiences. We need to appeal not to their philanthropic sensibility but to their self-respect, as not everything free is necessarily good for consumption.

**Q Do you think the future of journalism will rely entirely on social media agencies? Will these large technological companies be the ones to eventually control journalism in the coming years?**

**A Bill Emmott:** There's going to be great multiplicity of truth-bearers in the future. However, the cause of worry is the imbalance of responsibilities that credible institutions share with these tech platforms. Social media platforms will always be pivotal outlets for journalism, especially for promoting credible work. However, they need to be sueable for the information that is posted by users, such as the propagation of hate speech. While checking every single thread of information is next to impossible, they ought to be motivated and incentivised to take responsibility of policing how their platforms are being put to use. Then there would be a level playing field.

**A Shekhar Gupta:** Ten years ago, as response to a speech that I had delivered in Pakistan, an internet troll posted an extremely insensitive comment regarding me that involved violent undertones. Despite the hate speech, Google refused to hand over the IP address of the one who posted. After repeatedly pursuing the matter, and Google's stubborn refusal, the Court had to finally step in. This foregrounds the practice of publishing anonymously or under a fake name, with no accountability attached, and raises the pertinent question of attribution-less digital space. The future of journalism ought to look carefully into these issues and there's much work to be done.

# NOTCHING UP THE NUKES

UK's increase of its nuclear stockpile, as a counter to Russia's improved ballistic missile capabilities, could trigger a new arms race in the region



MAJ. GEN. AJAY SAH (RETD.)  
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

The United Kingdom's (UK) integrated defence review, aside from discussing the nation's new focus towards the Indo-Pacific, also held one particular detail of importance: an increase in the nation's nuclear warheads from 180 to "no more than 260".

While there was no specific explanation for the escalation, the justification briefly called it "recognition of the evolving security environment, including the developing range of technological and doctrinal threats".

The document discusses a number of areas where "Global Britain" has an active influence in partnership with the U.S. and other NATO allies and where it can shape

global policy - cyber diplomacy, science and technology, and climate change. Additionally, the document approaches Russia with a particularly harsh tone, while the language on China is drafted more carefully.

In response to this proposed escalation, Russia's ambassador to Britain, Andrei Kelin, went so far as to say that the diplomatic ties between the two countries are "nearly dead".

## NATO'S NUCLEAR SHIELD

The review reaffirms the U.S. as UK's most important strategic ally and partner across the spectrum of defence, intelligence, cyber power, counter-terrorism, and nuclear issues. America is already UK's biggest single bilateral trading partner, with over £230 billion in trade and was the largest single source of FDI in 2019.

Conforming to the extortions of

former President Trump, who called on NATO members to enhance their defence budget, UK has indicated that it would increase its defence budget by over £24 billion over the next four years.

Along with France, UK is a lynchpin in the NATO defence structure, bearing nuclear weapons, offensive cyber capability and a small but very effective military that is armed with top-notch, state-of-the-art precision strike weapons.

Britain's power has traditionally flowed from its control of the oceans and this philosophy will extend into the 21st century with a "new generation of warships" to support its historic role in keeping the North Atlantic open. NATO also expects UK to participate in its efforts to tackle climate change and the security threats manifesting due to it.

However, there is no mention of the level and type of cooperation with the European Union (EU) in

the document. UK and France generally share foreign policy ambitions, like much of the EU. They all wish to invest more in research and development that deals with cyberwarfare, climate change, and future pandemics. Yet, only one sentence in the review is devoted to the EU-UK security cooperation specifically, focusing more on the Euro-Atlantic region as a whole, which is critical to UK's security and prosperity. The document mentions collaborations with Poland, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey on a focused set of interests on a bilateral basis.

In 2010, the British government's target was to reduce the overall nuclear stockpile ceiling from not more than 225 to not more than 180 by the mid-2020s. The new decision runs contrary to this intent. However, UK may review this number "if the future threat of weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological capabilities, or emerging technologies that could have a comparable impact, makes it necessary".

## THE RUSSIAN BOGEY

There is a clear and unambiguous recognition of Russia as "the most acute threat in the region". The document categorically says that Russia will be held accountable for breaches in security along with its international partners whose military capacity is being shored up by Kremlin.

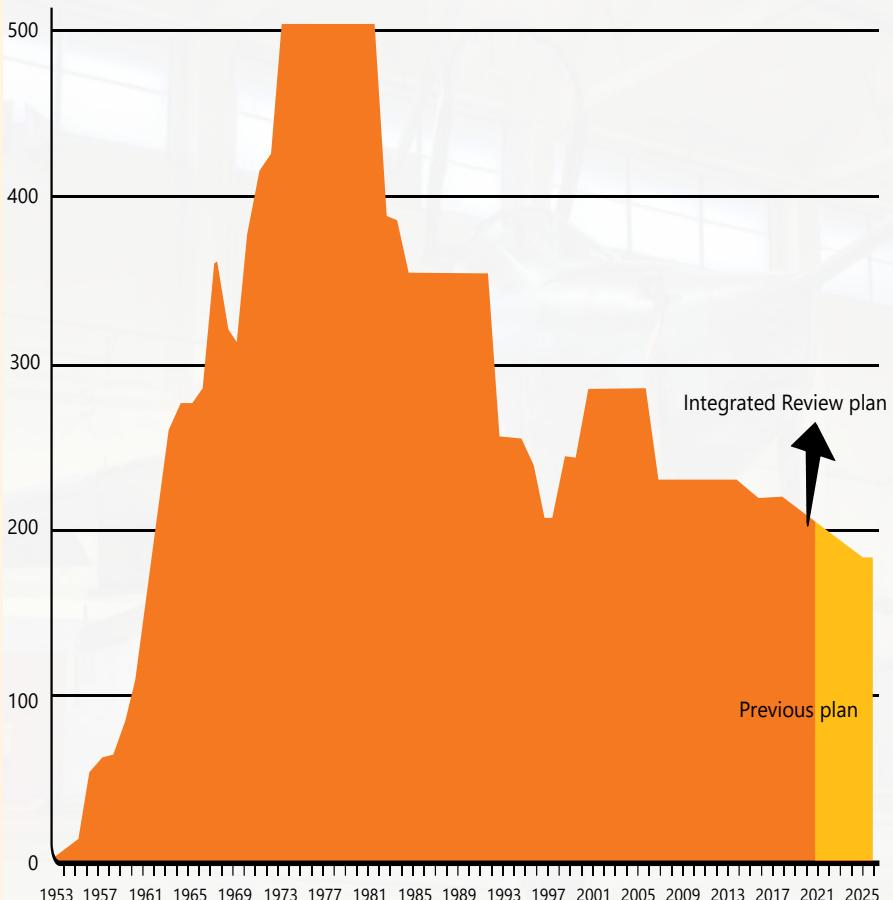
To deal with the Russian challenge, Britain commits to "working with allies to deter nuclear, conventional and hybrid threats to our security."

While both China and the UK benefit from bilateral trade and investment, the former is also a threat to the nation's economic security. However, Beijing is still an increasingly important partner in tackling global challenges like pandemic preparedness, biodiversity, and climate change.

The decision to increase the number of nuclear warheads could be linked to this perceived enhanced

ESTIMATED UNITED KINGDOM NUCLEAR WEAPONS STOCKPILE 1953-2025

### Warheads



Source: Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, Federation of American Scientists, 2021

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Russian threat, and perhaps even Iran, yet no explicit explanation is provided. Expectedly, both Iran and Russia slammed UK's decision to increase the nuclear stockpile.

Since the 19th century, Britain has been a popular destination for Russian political exiles and refugees, who are hunted down by Russian intelligence operatives. In 2010, UK intelligence officials claimed that Russian spying activity in the nation was back to the Cold War level, and in 2014, relations soured massively following the Ukrainian crisis, with the British government imposing punitive sanctions on Russia.

Johnson has been accused of presiding over a cover-up wherein No. 10 refused to clear a publication that examined Russian infiltration in British politics, including the Conservative party, before the elections.

Britain's response can be interpreted as a counter to Russia's

improved ballistic missile defences. Since the new START treaty was agreed upon in January between Russia and the U.S., it does put the UK at odds with U.S.

Most of the threats that have emanated from Russia, and China, have been in the grey space between open conflict and peace, such as the use of cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and mass surveillance to wage "political warfare" on the West.

It is, therefore, surprising that greater reliance is being placed by the UK on an enhanced nuclear arsenal rather than building resilience in the cyberworld and emerging technologies.

UK's reduction of the stockpile was seen as its commitment to disarmament obligations enshrined in Article VI of the NPT, which is due for a review this year. It will be interesting to see what stand is taken by the UK during the discussions.

# PATH TO PEACE?

Although an interim government in Libya offers a glimmer of hope, the massive costs of post-war reconstruction will loom over this geopolitical minefield



**A**fter a decade of violence and political acrimony, an interim government has been sworn in to lead Libya. With a mandate to govern the war-ravaged nation until democratic elections are held later this year, this transitional regime replaces the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli as well as the parallel eastern cabinet headquartered in Cyrenaica.

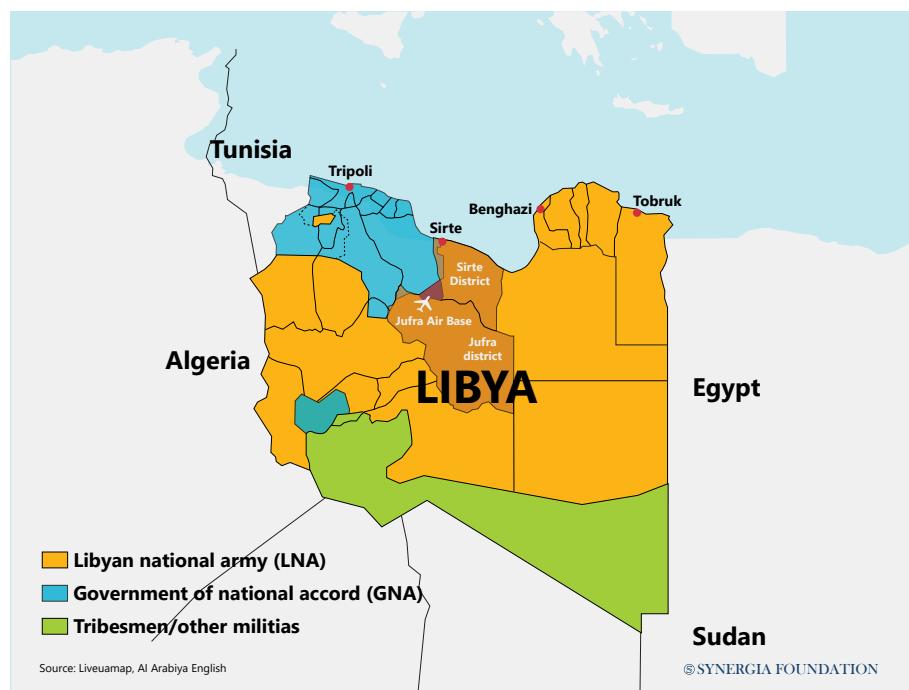
Much of the credit goes to the United Nations (UN), which has worked assiduously behind the scenes, to build on an October 2020 ceasefire. While Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, a prominent businessman from Misurata, has been appointed as the new Prime Minister, a three-man presidency council headed by former diplomat Mohammed Al-Menfi will also be working alongside him.

It is hoped that this national unity government, which includes five women representatives in key posts, will steer Libya into an era of peace and stability, as envisaged under the UN-brokered roadmap.

## THE GHOST OF NATO INTERVENTION

Libya is the living embodiment of how a resource-rich nation, with a manageable population and a long coastline, can be devastated to its very foundations when an externally supported intervention goes wrong.

The nation has been engulfed in turmoil ever since a NATO-backed intervention ousted its long-time leader Muammar al-Gaddafi. Alleging that he had brutally repressed pro-democracy protestors in the wake of the Arab Spring and that he was



preparing to commit mass atrocities in places like Benghazi, the U.S. and its Western allies had pushed through Resolution 1973 in the UN Security Council.

As can be recalled, the said Resolution had authorised the use of force in the country as well as the enforcement of a no-fly zone 'to protect civilians'. Interestingly, countries like Russia and China had refrained from exercising their veto power, allowing the resolution to sail through unimpeded.

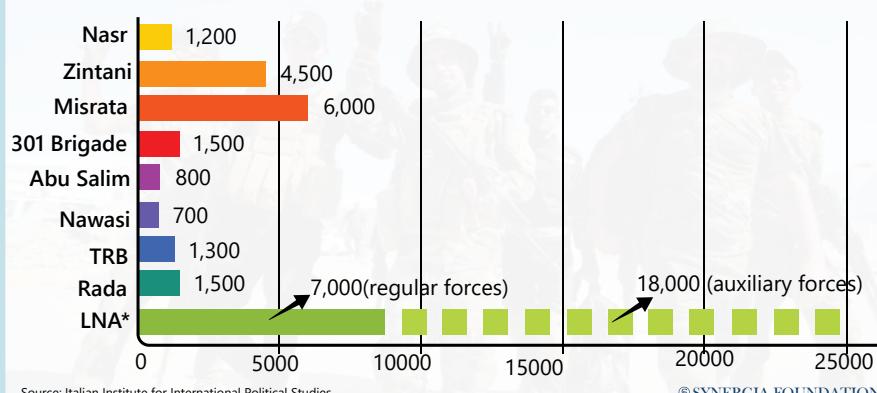
Following this, the NATO, along with other vested parties in the Middle East, played a prominent role in foisting an internecine conflict on the oil-rich nation, which eventually culminated in the brutal killing of Gaddafi by one of the warring groups. In the presence of a host of conflicting interests, the violence soon spiralled out of control. Militias, backed by NATO airpower, went after the supporters of the Gaddafi regime with renewed vengeance. They laid waste to the country's urban areas and its infrastructure, not even sparing its critical petroleum installations.

This chaos was to prevail over the next decade, with the conflict turning into a full-blown civil war by 2014. A gaggle of mercenaries, militias, jihadis, along with foreign military powers, moved into the vacuum, further adding to the volatile mix.

Finally, a deal was brokered under the aegis of the U.N., which created the GNA in 2015. Hopes for a political settlement were short-lived, however, due to the military offensive launched by forces loyal to the Libyan warlord, Khalifa Haftar. Two rival seats of power emerged in Tobruk and Tripoli, with the former being controlled by Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) and the latter being subject to the authority of the GNA.

These events were also keenly watched in India, as Libya was one of the few Arab states to support its bid for a permanent seat in the Security Council. From the 1980s, Indian companies were also involved in several infrastructural projects, including the building of hospitals, power plants, airports, dams and transmission lines. When the civil war broke out in 2000, around 20,000

## THE MAIN MILITIAS BY NUMBER OF FIGHTERS



Indian expatriates were estimated to be spread throughout the country.

### EXTERNAL MEDDLING

Libya's strategic location as a gateway to Europe as well as its blighted petroleum reserves acted as a catalyst in the great power competition within the region. Suspecting that the Muslim Brotherhood had entrenched itself in Tripoli under the GNA, regional powers like Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) put their financial heft behind Haftar to gain control over the entire country. Russia, which had been close to Gaddafi since the 1960s, also stepped into the conflict, by selling Mirages and other high-tech weapons.

However, any chimaera of a swift military victory for Haftar was soon laid to rest, as Ankara entered the fray in 2019 and aligned itself with the GNA. By leveraging its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya, as well as by supplying the GNA with weapons and fighters, Turkey placed the conflict on a more even keel. When Turkish armed drones started to take a deadly toll on Haftar's weaponry, the latter sought to strike a deal.

Meanwhile, Washington was disenchanted from working for peace in the country, following the September 2011 attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, which killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other American officials. In fact, former President Trump sought to maintain a hands-off approach in Libya, by narrowly focussing on its

fight against the Islamic State and the remnants of Al Qaeda in the Levant. In a surprising statement released by the White House at the height of the civil war, Haftar was recognised for fighting terrorism and securing the country's oil resources.

Strategic confusion was also prevalent amongst the EU members. Overcome by these events and threatened by a flood of migrants transiting through the Libyan coastline, the EU had launched Operation Irini in 2020 to enforce the UN arms embargo. It remains doubtful whether this seaborne operation was effective, as General Haftar continued to receive his weapons through the Egyptian border and Turkey switched to air supplies, once the sea routes were interfered with. In any case, the Operation was more concerned with stemming the flow of refugees who fled to Europe.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE

Although an interim government has now been installed in Libya, the road to peace will not be easy. Disillusioned by years of international interference, Libyans are critical of a process that is managed from abroad. Rival militias have acquired a taste for unbridled power and will be loath to shed it, given that they are amply supplied with arms by their foreign patrons. Despite a January 23 deadline for the withdrawal of foreign forces, there are several fighters and mercenaries from countries like Syria, Sudan, Chad, Russia, and Serbia, who continue to

remain in the region.

Meanwhile, Haftar and his supporters are wary of the new Prime Minister, whose family is reported to have close ties with Turkey. In this atmosphere of suspicion, Dbeibeh will have his work cut out in preventing the fragile power-sharing arrangement from relapsing into a political impasse.

It does not augur well for the new administration that the credibility of its Prime Minister has already been thrown into doubt by a UN inquiry into allegations of bribery. The manner in which this crisis is handled in the days to come, will be closely watched by relevant stakeholders.

More broadly, the government will have to address a crippling economic crisis in the region, along with rising inflation and unemployment. Delivering essential services and facilitating vaccination amidst the COVID-19 pandemic is yet another area of priority. Unless these issues are tackled effectively, Libya's transition from conflict to cooperation will not be a smooth one.

### S Assessment

For the interim government, it is important to maintain transparency and undertake confidence-building measures in the run-up to the national elections in December. Reforming the armed forces and accelerating the disarmament of illegal groups are equally critical.

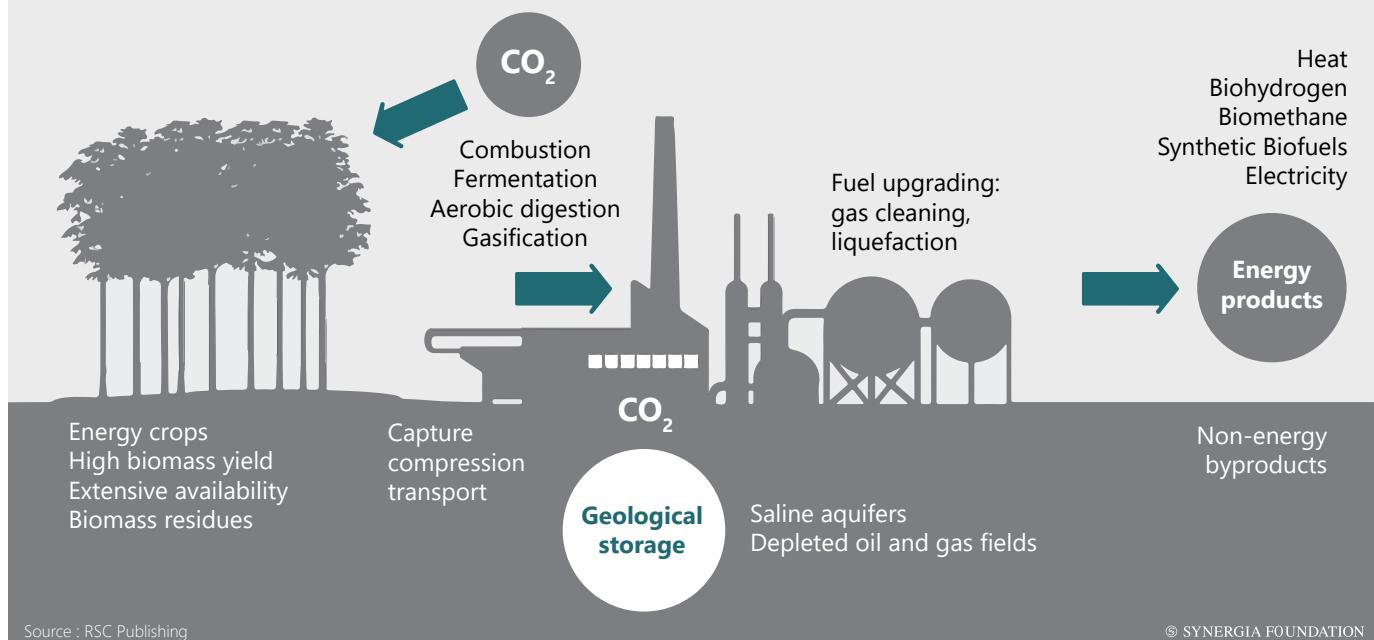
It will also be imperative to minimise external interferences in Libya and prevent foreign players from wielding undue influence in the interim government.

When it comes to 'humanitarian interventions', Libya has served as a bitter lesson for the U.S. The new Biden administration will have to tread carefully in this minefield. Without its diplomatic backing, however, no solution will succeed in Libya, especially when it comes to keeping competitors like Turkey, Egypt and the UAE, at bay.

# CLEANING UP THE BIG OIL

In the fight against climate change, the oil and gas business must transit to cleaner modes of production and adopt renewables as its new lifeblood

## How does Carbon Capture & Storage technology work?



Source : RSC Publishing

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**SYNERGIA FOUNDATION**  
**RESEARCH TEAM**

**A**s oil prices plunge and the protests over climate change arise in crescendo, Big Oil can no longer ignore the cost that the planet has to pay, to keep them in business.

While major oil and gas companies, both American and European, publicly concede that climate change is a real threat and fossil fuel is part of the problem, there is no common game plan across the entire industry to transform their business models.

There is a disparity in the responses from the oil giants of Europe and North America. David Goldwyn, an energy official in the Obama administration, commented, "Despite rising emissions and societal demand for climate action, U.S. oil majors are betting on a long-term future for oil and gas, while the

European majors are gambling on a future as electricity providers."

In the 21 Sep 2020 issue of The New York Times, Clifford Krauss wrote how the European Big Oil—BP, Royal Dutch Shell and other European Energy companies were selling off oil fields and preparing fresh business models to bring down emissions in their industry. On the other hand, American giants like Chevron and Exxon Mobil were reportedly doubling on oil and gas while investing only trifling amounts on climate-oriented efforts like carbon capture. Obviously, President Trump's declaration that climate change was a 'hoax' did not help matters.

Using the Paris Agreement's target — to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C — oil consumption must drop 34 per cent in this decade alone. While these goals are extremely ambitious, seeing Big Oil commit to processes that are, in a sense, antithetical to their business practices so far, is quite a turnaround.

However, caution is advised against accelerating the process too rapidly to avoid 'transition risks' — the implications of transitioning to a low-carbon economy goes beyond the global oil industry and affects a wide range of stakeholders.

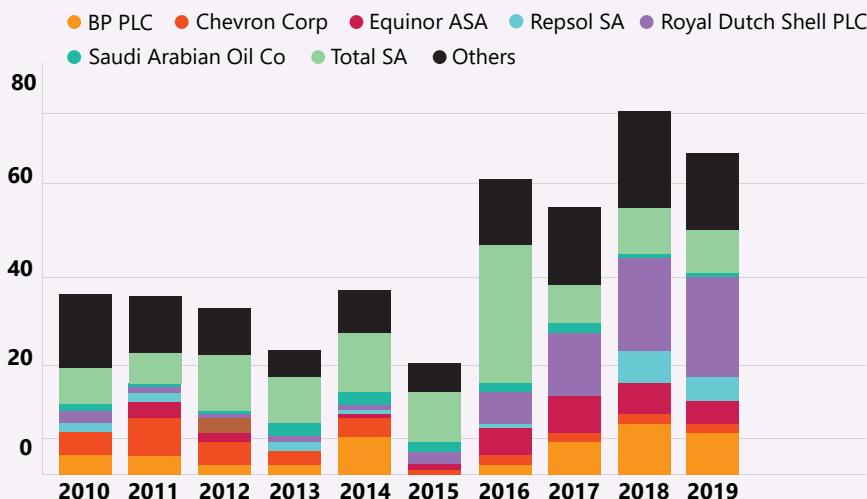
### CATCHING THE CARBON

Essentially, emissions can be divided in their scope and scale. Scope 1 emissions are those that oil companies themselves produce on-site. Scope 2 emissions are what other parties produce on the company's behalf — such as coal burnt in a power plant catering to the electrical needs of the oil company. Scope 3 is all of the rest — emissions customers produce when they burn the oil and gas produced by oil companies.

Most oil companies have committed to reducing their operational CO<sub>2</sub> footprint, focusing on reducing flaring/venting, improving operational efficiency, using renewable and alternative energy, and employing

## Race to Diversify

Shell is taking on Total after closing a record number of clean-energy deals this year



Source: BloombergNEF

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carbon capture technology (CCS). ExxonMobil is reported to have spent about \$8 billion since 2000 for low-emission energy equipment across its operations, along with looking to invest in CCS. In 2017, Shell announced that it would shrink its carbon footprint by one-fifth by 2035 and cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in half by 2050. BP announced that it would become a "net-zero" company by 2050. The industry is also looking to liquid natural gas (LNG) to serve as a transition fuel, especially in energy-hungry markets like China and India, where coal is still integral.

### BACK TO SPECIFICS

A big part of the problem with these goals is that there isn't a single definition of what "net zero" really means. A report from Transition Pathway Initiative (a global asset-owner-led initiative, which assesses companies' preparedness for the transition to a low carbon economy) found that none of Big Oil's climate plans comply with the goals set under the Paris Agreement, of keeping average temperature rise to below 2C.

While a lot of the focus is on Scope 1 and Scope 2, the goals don't largely focus on Scope 3 emissions — where the company looks at what

its suppliers and customers are responsible for.

CCS technology is proven but not commercial yet. Policy support in the U.S. and UK is favourable but not high on the EU's agenda. Additionally, the cost of carbon will need to increase, to motivate more companies to use this technology. Other offsets, like planting trees or reforestation, are hardly the solution since this is not a goal that can be tracked easily.

An example of collaboration for transition programmes is Malaysia's CORAL (Cost Reduction Alliance) 2.0 initiative. It promotes collaboration among upstream producers. The programmes include the reduction of drilling costs through optimisation and the application of new technology. Producers explored joint sourcing and implementation strategies, and scheduling logistics resources through an operating control tower. PETRONAS, Malaysia's national oil company, calculated that CORAL 2.0 has led to savings of nearly \$1.2 billion since its inception in 2015.

Big Tech companies are turning out to be early adopters of clean energy. Shell recently agreed to sell Amazon about half of the power generated in its new wind farm in the North Sea.

### FUTURE SCENE

Moving to cleaner energy production, offshore wind farms have made a niche in the market for zero-carbon electricity. In 2020, Total announced plans to build one of the world's largest wind farms off the coast of Denmark, and BP won one of the biggest renewable energy deals in U.S. history for an offshore wind farm in New York.

The EU also plans to spend \$558 billion towards switching to hydrogen by 2050, while the oil & gas sector usually spends around \$500 billion developing new fields every year. Shifting a part of the fossil fuel sector's spending into hydrogen could drastically increase the technology's scale, thus foregrounding yet another plausible alternative. Here also, however, the focus should be on green hydrogen instead of grey hydrogen — particularly the variety made from the gasification of coal.

### (S) Assessment

The global oil and gas industry has faced difficult times before, but the situation in the post-pandemic world is unprecedented. The long-term outlook is also uncertain, yet pressures for decarbonisation and structural changes could push the industry to significantly reinvent itself.

Establishing hubs to facilitate the sharing of logistics and warehousing, development of common standards of data architecture, and a push for higher utilisation of infrastructure could help Big Oil make a smoother transition to renewables.

More pertinent to the issue is to focus on how the industry can work together to address transition challenges. Collaboration is the key to the industry's future, and operators must join forces not only with each other but also with the ecosystem.

# DOES WFH HAVE A FUTURE?

The pandemic induced culture of Work-From-Home across many work profiles may not be a transitory phenomenon if it can enhance efficiency in tandem with the 'return to office'



**T.M. VEERARAGHAV**  
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If businesses could survive the shock of the Coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing lockdown, they have the Work-From-Home (WFH) concept to thank as they could bank on technology to keep their workforce productive and safe.

Online meeting platforms boomed as millions embraced the WFH revolution, for work, for studying, for pleasure and even to transact social interactions like engagements, marriages, and funeral wakes/ prayer meetings!

Spared the omnipresent fear of the virus and long commutes in crowded public transportation, working in pyjamas from the security and comfort of one's home became the norm for the last year.

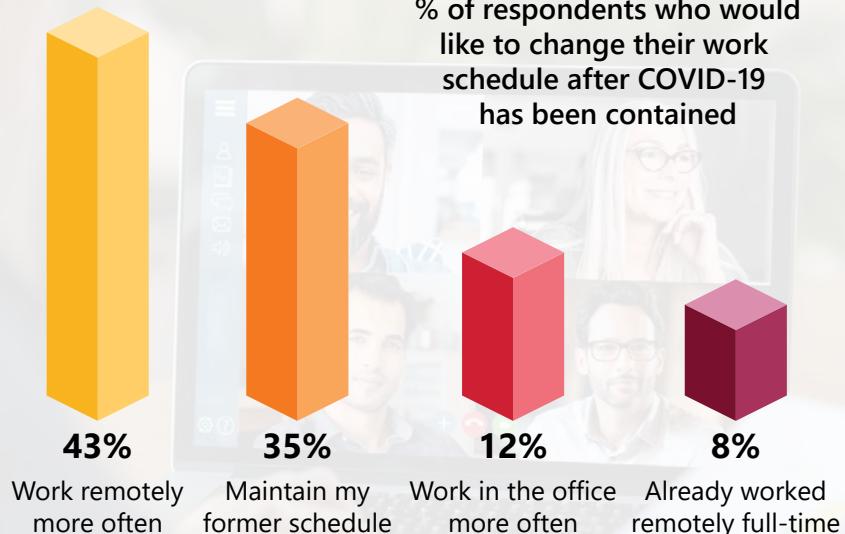
Now, as the vaccines stem the tide of the pandemic and bring the world back to normal, the question being asked is whether the pandemic has irreversibly changed the way people work for their employer. As corporations the world over are reassessing their post-pandemic strategies with an eye on cost savings and profit margins, the future of WFH hangs in the balance.

## NOT SO NOVEL

The concept itself dates back to the late 1980s when it was called 'remote working', but then there were many kinks to straighten out as Internet was not there. In the 1980s, the U.S. government ran a pilot project called 'Telecommuting' or in official terms 'Flexible Workplace Pilot Project.' As a

## IS WORKING FROM HOME HERE TO STAY?

% of respondents who would like to change their work schedule after COVID-19 has been contained



Source: getAbstract

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successful consequence of the project, the American Congress even appropriated funding for 'flexiplace' working for federal employees annually till 1995, when it was made a permanent feature.

In the 2000s, as broadband penetration deepened, remote working was adopted by many federal agencies in the U.S., and its apparent advantages attracted corporations also. As early as May 2020, Silicon Valley giants led by Facebook and Twitter announced plans to make WFH a permanent feature for a large section of their employees. Studies indicate that permanent WFH employees have doubled in 2021. Facebook estimates that within the next decade, more than half of its employees would not need to come to an office.

## A HYBRID MODE

So, what seems set to prevail is a

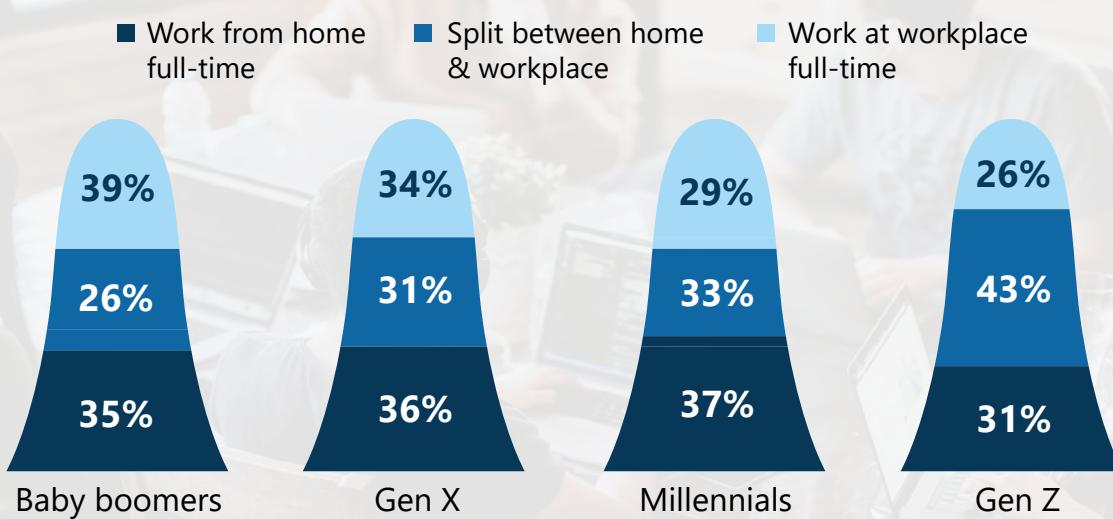
hybrid work model—a combination of in-person meetings and time at offices along with WFH.

Driven by the belief that office spaces will not be entirely redundant, Google is investing billions in real estate and building office campuses in the United States. The tech giant, which has been a trendsetter for work culture in the IT world plans to invest up to US\$ 7 billion in offices and data centres in different cities in the U.S. This is reflected in India too, where after a major fall in the value of the commercial real estate, prices are once again rising.

However, while companies save on office space and administration costs, there is a human cost to WFH. Studies conducted in November 2020 suggested that there was high burn out rates amongst employees due to WFH, and in countries like India, almost one-third of those surveyed blamed WFH for their burning out!

It is a major challenge for large

## MOST APPEALING WORK SCENARIO



Source: Salesforce

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managements to keep their teams motivated only through online platforms. Quality of work in creative sectors also took a plunge as the office camaraderie was totally missing.

Another factor in favour of office working is that the initial spurt in productivity generated by WFH tapered out with time. Face to face meetings, counselling sessions by managers and greater intervention by Human Resources experts were felt critical in maintaining high productivity along with high job satisfaction levels.

### A TRANSITION FOR THE BETTER

Ultimately, the peculiar pulls and pressures of each industry/business will finally dictate the modus operandi of working. Core sectors that deliver physical output and products and core managerial functions may have to return faster to the office space.

However, there seem to be trendsetters in manufacturing too. The Guardian reports that over 30,000 Ford Corporation employees in North America will WFH permanently. It is obvious that this facility will largely be extended to those operating IT and IT Enabled Services.

Human Resource professionals

and managers have their work cut out. Clocking man-hours and creating parallel pay structures will require a creative approach; using the workspace creatively will be a constant challenge.

There are already tools for time management that have hit the market specifically aimed at managing employees working remotely. Managements are also increasingly looking at work delivered over time spent in measuring performance.

Some analysts have even predicted a separate department to manage remote work, and this may well emerge into a career profile for the future!

### CYBER FEARS

Well placed fears of cyber and data security have always plagued work processes that rely heavily on the Internet, far removed from the relatively secure office complexes. Data breaches can be easily conjured within the privacy of a home.

Of course, the use of high-end laptops embedded with hard to decipher encrypting algorithms can make data skimming difficult and easily traceable to the offending machine, which can be a deterrent. But this will come at a cost that may

### Assessment

Companies may not be able to consign traditional office working to the past in its entirety but will have to reimagine the concept of the workspace. Every industry will have to tailor its solution to its own advantage, with many adopting the hybrid model coalescing WFH with in-office time. However, the return to office will certainly not be as complete as it was before the pandemic.

The abrupt start of the WFH model due to the pandemic did not allow enough thought into planning and building an eco-system for it. But now, this can be remedied. Long term sociological impact of WFH needs to be studied carefully. Office space was also a place for constant social interaction and had many intangible social and psychological benefits. People being cut away, especially those without family support systems, maybe face a higher risk for mental health issues.

New and more effective protocols will have to be evolved for cybersecurity. This will be spread across a wide canvas, from physical isolation of work WiFi connections to embedding work stations with strong anti-virus and data encrypting systems.



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