

OPINION

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Calibrating for Fake vs. Real News

Document and consider sources for reliability

BY TOM H. HASTINGS

I teach between 300-400 students every year and one of the most frequent concerns expressed by them is source reliability.

Welcome to the era of mass gaslighting. Infowars. Trump. Putin. Bin Salman. Fox News.

My advice to those inquisitive students is to consider following or subscribing to at least three sources and making them ideologically different from each other and note the difference in coverage, the contrasting frames and facts.

Then, for particularly close questioning of gnarly issues, check with factchecking sites like Snopes or the Annenberg Public Policy Center's factchecking site. By the time the curious citizen has read from liberal, conserva-



tive, and mainstream sites, and gone to reputable factchecking sites, that citizen is operating with a fairly high degree of reliability, and when you cantilever that over years of experience, validity threats are minimized.

So, for instance, when I read extreme leftist distress over the link between the Trilateral Commission and "chemtrails," I can (eye)roll my way past that fairly quickly. Reading rightwing hyste-

ria over George Soros paying protesters may take an extra few minutes, but I can now confidently say that the gasp-reflex rightwing rage on this is needlessly combustible, as many social movements routinely cover activists' traveling expenses and, for potential resisters, even bail money, as we learned in the Civil Rights era. Of course, all the gains from the Civil Rights era are pretty much what many of the Soros traducers seek to roll back.

This is not to claim that no nefarious schemes, even conspiracies, exist, but it is to note that they should be thoroughly investigated

before declaring them convincing. That investigation may come from independent journalists, independent government investigators, or even from opinionated but sincere sources.

The key is to document and cite actual evidence, not to cite Alex

of critical thinking and common sense to the admittedly massive raw data stream coming at us 24-7, a person can develop a decent sense for authenticity.

But I still caution that the need to (in the words of Ronald Reagan) trust but verify never evaporates. I

strands of argument and analysis.

In short, yes, I hope we can at least avoid the spectacle of a bitter partisan debate over whether the sun rises in the east, but let's at least allow for some context and nuance when judging our opponents' views.

After some years of engaging in information verification at a sincere and non-ideological level, and after applying the principles of critical thinking and common sense to the admittedly massive raw data stream coming at us 24-7, a person can develop a decent sense for authenticity.

Jones or Snoop Dog or anyone at all from the Trump organization, Mohammed bin Salman, Kim Jong-un, or Vladimir Putin. Sorry, no cred for you.

After some years of engaging in information verification at a sincere and non-ideological level, and after applying the principles

like Rachel Maddow but on some issues I follow up to check. I like Anderson Cooper—same thing. Jake Tapper—him too. National Public Radio is my go-to daily news but I factcheck them before I make a claim based on their analysis and I often listen with chagrin as they miss seriously important

I believe Trump is a peerless disgrace, but I get his survival techniques and can let them just roll into the dustbin of lies without letting them catch my hair on fire.

Dr. Tom H. Hastings of Portland is director of PeaceVoice and on occasion an expert witness for the defense in court.

Killing Thousands and Enriching Arms Sellers

The lives lost in Saudi-led war in Yemen

BY ALEX POTTER

The other day, over 20 people died in an airstrike in Yemen's coastal city of Hodeidah.

The bombs, dropped by a Saudi-led coalition hit a farmers market where men from neighboring villages sold their goods, hoping to at least break even and bring some food home to their families. In the aftermath of the attack, families gathered to pick up the pieces of their loved ones and hitchhiked to the local general hospital in search of the wounded.

These were only a few of the uncountable thousands of civilian casualties in Yemen's war, which I've followed closely since living there for years as a journalist.

The frequent strikes on markets, school buses, and hospitals seldom make news in the United States. Is it because Yemen seems so far away, that the blood of chil-



dren doesn't seem to reach our fingertips?

Or is it because arms sellers' profits from Yemen's war are so substantial, we don't dare cut ties?

Yemen's been on a downward spiral since a failed transition period after the Arab Spring led to a civil war. Since early 2015, a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's exiled president

family in their sleep.

All of these airstrikes were supported by the U.S., which supplied training, targeting support, in-flight refueling, and the bombs themselves. Yet American politicians mostly stay silent. Why?

Is it because the war in Yemen is so complicated? This is a cop-out — it's our elected officials' job to understand these intricacies, and to act when situations are unjust.

I would argue it's the cost-ben-

efit ratio. Carrying even greater weight, especially by President Trump, is the financial benefit of this war. The U.S. sells billions of dollars' worth of weapons to the Saudis.

Deaths for dollars. The lives of tens of thousands of Yemenis for the financial gain of a few corporations. While there are obviously more reasons for the ongoing conflict than this, it's an undeniable component.

Yet this last month has brought

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"With the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, it's time for the United States to halt all weapons sales and military aid to Saudi Arabia," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., who introduced a bill to do just that. "Our democratic values are on the line here — and we need to step up as a country and do the right thing."

On the other hand, President Trump so far refuses to stop arms sales, even though the Saudis now admit Khashoggi's murder was premeditated. "We don't like it, not even a little bit," Trump said. But canceling the sales "would not be acceptable to me."

The war in Yemen will continue until those in power decide their costs outweigh the benefits — and until the rest of us insist on a cost for civilian lives.

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As the tragic details of journalist Jamal Khashoggi's abduction and death emerge, more lawmakers are calling for direct and tangible action against Saudi Arabia. Khashoggi's death, first denied then whitewashed by Saudi officials, has brought together a bipartisan group calling for a cancellation of arms sales to the kingdom.

has rained down air raids on the country — more often than not, hitting civilian targets.

A school bus bombing in July killed 40 children. A hospital bombing in August killed over 50 civilians. An early attack on the capital Sana'a wiped out an entire

Leaving the on-the-ground fighting to Yemenis paid by their Gulf counterparts, and leaving the actual air-striking to Saudi pilots, American officials are separated by enough degrees to not take direct responsibility.

more change from one man's death than the deaths of thousands before him.

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