

# ICRA DISCUSSION NOTE

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## 'Hate,' & 'Disinformation', versus 'Truth'

by

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We hear a lot about 'hate' these days. People in several countries are being charged with 'hate' crimes. 'Hate' is a manipulator, a catalyst, a facilitator, and a broadcaster of conflicts. Democratically elected politicians use the word with scant regard for the actual truth, or the effect of the word 'hate' on the collective mind of people including children who are constantly receiving information on mobile phones. The 21<sup>st</sup> century human brain is receiving information in volumes exponentially greater than ever before.

*Discussion point: Can the modern brain cope with this amount of information in a balanced and objective way? And if not, is it not more easily influenced by bad influences?*

*Discussion point: What do you think about this aspect of conflict? How do you define 'Hate'?*

*Discussion point: Do we mis-use, or over use, the word?*

### PAST

The way 'hate' is used to inflame emotions is not new. In 12<sup>th</sup> Century Britain as in other places the signs of antisemitism can be found, with members of the Jewish community being targeted and slaughtered for their identity. The Jews were generally well-off people, being hardworking and organised in comparison with the majority in the British population of the day; many were jealous of the wealthy Jews, and their separateness within society. **Jealousy**, one key aspect of 'hate,' was deep-seated and easily manipulated by the perpetrators of 'hate' against the minority.

**Disinformation** as driver of hate is not new. A young child went missing in East Anglia, and was found dead – probably having drowned accidentally; but his death was laid at the doors of local Jews with the false accusation being broadcast through a web of conspiracy. There was no telephonic or electronic media, yet the message spread like wildfire from mouth-to-mouth, infecting and inflaming biased minds.

*Discussion point: What is your view of religion and belief systems in general in this context? Is religion a reason or an excuse for conflict and 'hate speech'?*

*Discussion point: Is it that 'hate' is directed at people who are different from us in ways that we regard as threatening? Do we as human beings simply dislike certain individuals because of who they are, how they look, their gender, colour or race to an inexplicable extent that drives us to harm them?*

### PRESENT

The same picture can be seen in today's conflicts. The ethnic majority using 'hate' against an unfortunate deprived minority is a common aspect of conflict. Or it is used to support the hubristic ambitions of leaders of states wanting to take territory from neighbouring states.

State actors and individuals acting in their own interests from a distance using **cyberspace** to spread 'hate' messages further and faster than would have been the case in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century so that the conflict can cross regional and continental boundaries quickly and with impunity.

And so, to the modern way of broadcasting 'hate.' The cyber revolution has greatly enhanced the ability of 'hate' perpetrators to spread conflict. 'Disinformation' and, to use another modern phrase –

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'Fake news' – is everywhere and every day it fills our computer screens and therefore, our minds. The ability to discern truth from lie is being tested to its limits. Also, there is a phenomenon of politicians and commentators, who may lack the necessary background experience, acting and speaking without care, often raising hatred against a group by implication. Such is the nature of the high-speed communications environment which is mostly uncontrolled.

*Discussion point: The Greek philosopher, Epictetus suggested that ".....our reactions to events, are not determined by the events themselves, but by our opinions of them...." The questions are how, do we form our opinions? And how do we separate fact from fiction?*

*Discussion point: Do leaders, political or otherwise, need to receive training to enable them better to express issues and opinions likely to inflame target audiences?*

What about our own personal 'conflicts and societal conflict in general?

Manipulation through media is rife. The great majority of people carry mobile phones with access to the internet with all its messaging and information gathering capability. This is often the 'transport' system and facilitator of hate in all its various forms. At a societal level, from children to the elderly, 'bullying' on social media is easy, instantaneous, and allows the 'bully' to act with impunity not having to confront the target physically as used to be the case when 'bullying was a physical act normally associated with children. Now, the 'bully' carries out psychological violence with impunity.

### **FUTURE**

The future may provide an even better environment for the spreading of 'hate' and disinformation. **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is the latest human invention that has been spawned seemingly without any regard to how it can be controlled. The inability to control dangerous inventions is a historical failing in the history of mankind. Nuclear weapons were invented in the full knowledge of their potential catastrophic effects; but with no safety mechanisms in place until catastrophe was imminent, and a flurry of diplomatic and academic activity brought about a collection of treaties controlling the technological development and deployment of these weapons. Today, these treaties are being circumvented by nuclear powers threatening Armageddon in their own material interests.

Then there is the internet which was also invented with the knowledge that it could cause damage to the world in general; yet without any controls to limit its destructive potential. And so, to AI, the child of the cyber mother, with a seemingly unlimited potential to do harm as well as good. The scramble to develop international protocols and mechanisms to limit this potential is a sure sign that world leaders are concerned about the potential harm that could result in an unrestrained environment within which AI has the potential to write its own rules.

Behind all this is the stark truth (not 'fake' truth) that there is one algorithm that cannot be changed – the human predisposition to cause conflict.

*Discussion point: Is it possible to construct a control regime limiting the power of the internet and AI?*