

# Foreword

In a fractious and rapidly transforming world order, consensus is breaking down at every level, and across nearly all issues. States themselves are internalising falsehoods in the age of fake news, manipulated communications and information overload. The most fundamental values, long held to be ‘self-evident’, are disintegrating, even as a resurgence of noxious ideologies afflicts the entire globe. As uncertainties multiply, fear rules, and people are driven into ancient attitudes of tribalism and hate. The ‘end of history’, itself a manufactured falsehood, has been no more than a new and bloody beginning of another phase of human frailty and failure, fuelled manifold by a technological blitz that much of humankind can, even now, hardly comprehend. Our greatest idols have had feet of clay.

It is not clear whether information and analysis can create clarity within the Tsunami of disinformation flooding across the world, but the effort to seek the hard ground of truth in the deluge of fabrication and deceit cannot be abandoned, and must, indeed, intensify.

When the political cultures of falsehood mingle in with conflict, the outcomes are the more unpredictable and lethal. Powerful tools have been harnessed by those who seek to create and sustain conflict, and the advocacy of peace, of democracy and of a rational politics has failed to keep pace with the wreckers. In this feverish environment, the challenge of separating ‘truth’ from ‘hype’, as one of the papers in this volume expresses it, is extraordinary.

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This, as the paper on nuclear energy in India illustrates, is also the case where such a separation should be possible simply on grounds of verifiable evidence. But in areas such as nuclear energy and the entire array of issues relating to the environment, the discourse has been muddied by sentiment, even as the scientists' hubris has precluded effective engagement in the public and popular discourse. Worse, as the near-fantastical debate on climate change ignited by Donald Trump and his adherents demonstrates, science itself is being everywhere brought into question, challenged by faith systems that admit neither to proof nor falsification.

Then again, is the enduring corruption of language, the selective and perverse use of terms such as 'terrorism', 'peace process', 'conflict resolution', 'justice', 'equality', 'democracy', among others, which mask complex motives and are opportunistically harnessed by polar opposites in the political and global spectrum.

Each of the papers in this volume explores themes that tread ambiguous and contested ground. Each challenges the established narrative between conflicting perspectives, attempting to bring some clarity to issues that have long been intentionally obscured. Each, finally, is intended to take the discussion forward, seeking further engagement and disputation, in the only process available to humankind, to move from darkness into the light.

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