

# **Prerequisites for Political Understanding and Policymaking**

## **Political Information, Following the News**

### **(Part 2)**

(Translated)

<https://www.al-waie.org/archives/article/19855>

**Al-Waie Magazine Issue 467**

**39th Year, Dhu al-Hijjah 1446 AH / June 2025 CE**

**Luqman Harzallah**

Since political analysis is based on understanding rather than imagining, it is essential to obtain a volume of necessary information to achieve that understanding. The information required for political understanding is of two types. The first type is the news about current events, and the second type is the information related to and surrounding these events. This second type is what we refer to as political information.

#### **Political Information**

Political information refers to the information connected to and surrounding an event, including its historical context, political geography, the people involved, the countries effected by the event, and their mutual relations. This information is not approached theoretically. Instead, only the aspects relevant to the political dimension are considered.

#### **The political information related to the event is as follows:**

##### **First: Political Geography**

A country's location, geographical features, and resources influence its politics, and therefore play a role in understanding the political events related to that country. A state that is geographically open to global trade routes is positioned to establish relations with countries around the world, which in itself is a factor that can help it become a major power. A country located near key geographical features, such as straits and maritime routes, can use its position to influence those passing through the area, and to accumulate wealth. If a country possesses significant resources such as oil, gold, rare earth minerals, or uranium, its potential for wealth and influence is high. Similarly, rough, hard terrain within a country can enhance its ability to defend itself, and so on.

##### **Second: History**

Global issues often have historical dimensions that cast their shadow over current events, or current events emerge by invoking the historical memory they carry. For example, when examining the relationship between Europe and Russia, one must note that it is a relationship marked by hostility, a hostility rooted in history. Russia has been invaded three times from its western front by European powers, which contributes to this historical enmity.

##### **Third: Characteristics of Peoples**

A country's general political orientation is not separate from the traits of its people. For example, if a people lack the quality of taking responsibility for others, and tend to focus solely on their own affairs, then their state's policies will lean more toward defense rather than offense or expansion. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the characteristics of peoples when engaging in political analysis.

##### **Fourth: The International Scenario**

This refers to the structure of relationships between countries around the world. The countries that influence the international scenario are those with foreign policies capable of impacting other nations. When one or more powers emerge with the means to influence global affairs, they become the most capable of shaping this structure of relations, thus defining the international scenario. The country that succeeds in shaping the international scenario is considered the leading power in the world, and it is essential to identify this state.

Since an event may occur in a country other than the leading one, it is necessary to understand the reality of the country directly involved in the event, as well as its relationship with the world's leading power and the nature of that relationship. Neglecting the international scenario or isolating events from the leading global power narrows one's perspective and results in a flawed understanding, reducing a global event to a mere local incident.

For example, a coup took place in Niger in 2010. It is well known that Niger was under French influence and exploited by France for uranium extraction. The coup overthrew France's agent, Mamadou Tandja. At the time, Niger was a subordinate state to a major power, France, while the leading power in the world was the United States, which was seeking to undermine France's influence in Africa. When we examine American statements, we find that they placed the blame on Tandja, did not call for his reinstatement, nor for dialogue between the coup leaders and the ousted president. This information points to the conclusion that the United States was behind the coup.

#### **Fifth: Political Projects Related to the State Involved in the Event**

For instance, when conflict erupted in Sudan in 2023, understanding the international scenario, and Sudan's relationship with the world's leading power is important, but not sufficient. One must also examine the political projects designed for Sudan. A historical project immediately comes to mind: the plan to divide Sudan, which dates back to the British colonialist rule, where administrative divisions were structured in a way that would facilitate future partition. This project is agreed upon in Western circles.

Another, more recent project is Europe's attempt to bring Sudan under its influence through the push for civil rule, a project that exploited the Sudanese revolution against Omar al-Bashir to advance its goals. It would be incorrect to ignore these political projects when analyzing such events. Without recognizing them, the analysis would lack depth, and take an entirely different, and potentially flawed, direction.

#### **Sixth: Immediate Circumstances**

When an event occurs in a country or region, and the international scenario is understood, as well as the relationship between the state involved in the event, and the world's leading power, and if there is no direct political project related to the state carrying out the event, then one must consider the immediate circumstances.

For example, when the United States revived its alliance with Australia, India, and Japan in 2017, and it was known that the US had no specific political project for any of these countries individually, but this alliance was revived during the same period when the US had launched a project to contain China, initiated during Donald Trump's first presidential term and continued thereafter, then the mind must turn to that project as the relevant immediate context. Thus, it becomes clear that the revival of this alliance occurred within the framework of the US effort to contain China.

#### **Seventh: The Individuals Directly Involved in the Event**

Since politics is shaped by individuals, it is essential to examine those directly involved in the making of events. By understanding the inclinations of these individuals, one can discern the direction in which the event is headed.

For example, during the 2023 war on Gaza, the Prime Minister of the Jewish entity was Benjamin Netanyahu. At that time, we were aware of the international context and the immediate circumstances. However, it is also necessary to take a closer look at who Netanyahu is. We find that he has strong ties to AIPAC in the US and receives support from them. He is also connected to Trump's Republican camp, which was fiercely competing against then-President Joe Biden, in what was an election year in the US.

Netanyahu had a political agenda for the Jewish entity, that contradicted the American two-state solution. He actively worked to maintain the separation between Gaza and the West Bank. Additionally, he faced corruption charges in court. With all this in mind, we can understand why he obstructed ceasefire and prisoner exchange deals that the US was trying

to implement. Had another figure, one of America's strongly loyal men in the Jewish entity, been Prime Minister instead, the state's behavior would likely have been different.

### **Eighth: The Beneficiaries of the Event**

Studying who benefits from an event can be useful, but it requires supporting evidence from other sources, to truly understand the reality of the situation. This is because when an event occurs, multiple parties may benefit from it some may have planned it, while others may have had no involvement in the planning. Therefore, if one's understanding is based solely on identifying who benefits, the resulting analysis becomes unreliable, and cannot be depended upon.

These are the types of information necessary for political understanding, and we will explore some of them in more detail.

### **Following the News (Mutaabia tul-Akhbar)**

We mentioned that political understanding requires information in order to be produced. This information includes both the following of current events and political information. Following the news should not be a matter of casual browsing, but rather a deliberate and purposeful tracking of developments.

The word "mutaabah" (following, following-up, pursuit) in Arabic language implies connecting what came before with what comes, after just as pursuit footsteps requires knowing the first step, and then following it to the next. The same applies to following the news, which involves listening to and reading news reports. Following the news means following all news both important and seemingly trivial and making the effort to search for useful information. A seemingly unimportant report might contain information connected to a key event, or it might not. Since the observer doesn't know when or where the useful piece of information will appear, they must diligently search through the news to uncover it.

A person following the news may either search for a specific piece of information they believe likely exists, or they may search for any potentially useful information. The information that is presumed to exist arises in the mind, when there is an incomplete picture of an event, and a certain missing angle is needed to complete that picture. In this case, the search becomes targeted and specific. However, when the image in the mind is still initial, or not yet fully formed, one must search broadly for any important information, even if its features are not yet clear. Once found, its importance will be recognized by its nature.

There are political pieces of information that speak directly about the event itself, and there are those that relate politically to the event, such as information about the individuals involved, the political project connected to the event, or the immediate context surrounding it. These are the types of information that must be gathered. On the other hand, information not falling within these categories, like emotional stories or dramatized narratives aired by media outlets merely to attract viewers, must be disregarded.

The news followed by a political researcher may come in various forms: a direct report on the event and its related developments, an article describing the event and its connections, or an opinion piece in which a writer expresses their personal view of the event. Here, it is essential for the political analyst to distinguish between what must be taken from this content and what should be disregarded.

Listening to or reading a news piece must be followed by an intellectual operation of classification, whether it is information to be retained or discarded. The information to be kept is that which is directly connected to the event. Any information unrelated to the event, as well as any analysis or opinion, must be left aside. This is because a political analyst must construct their own analysis independently, and must not rely on someone else's interpretation. An opinion writer may not necessarily share the same political concepts as the analyst. In fact, many analysts base their views on assumptions, speculation, or mere logic, some even intentionally mislead, while others let their biases toward one side of the event, or emotional responses, influence their perspective.

Therefore, straightforward news reports and descriptive articles are more valuable than opinion pieces. However, opinion articles may still contain valuable pieces of information that the writer may have obtained, which is why they remain part of the news sources worth following, though with lower priority compared to direct news reports and analyses.

As for the sources from which a political analyst draws news and articles, they must be reputable news channels and credible newspapers that is, sources known for verifying their reports. However, a political analyst must never accept what these sources present with blind trust. They must always remember that their goal is to search for useful information, which may or may not be found in these sources.

It is also essential to pay attention to the biases of these channels and newspapers. Right-leaning publications tend to present news with a right-wing slant, and the same goes for left-leaning outlets. A single piece of information may be reported by both sides, but each will frame it differently. The analyst must not fall into the trap of biased linguistic framing.

Attention must also be given to the author of the article. Some writers and journalists are clearly connected to the event, or its key figures, and show a strong commitment to the accuracy of their reporting. These writers deserve more attention than others, when it comes to reading their articles and news pieces.

A political analyst must also follow everything issued by those directly involved in the events or affected by them. For example, if an event takes place in the Middle East and the US Secretary of State holds a press conference about it, the analyst must listen to that press conference. The same applies to statements from the President of the United States, the National Security Advisor, the White House spokesperson, and others involved in shaping the event, especially considering that the United States is currently the leading power in the world, and maintains broad control over the Middle East.

At times, we may encounter contradictions between the statements made by officials, or between their words and their actions. To resolve this dilemma, it is essential to distinguish accurate information from misleading statements. This can be done by examining the context in which each statement is made. For example, if the US president makes two seemingly contradictory statements, one may be intended for the domestic audience while the other is directed toward the issue or event itself. When each statement is placed within its proper context, it becomes easier to determine which is accurate and which is misleading.

Additionally, it is necessary to compare the verbal statements, with actual actions on the ground. This is to analyze them in light of the available information about the event, and the objectives set by the state issuing the statement, with regard to that specific event or region. If a statement aligns with the broader political project, while the action contradicts it, then the statement is likely truthful, and the action may be intended as a deception. Conversely, if the action aligns with the project, while the statement does not, then the action is truthful and the statement is misleading. In short, news cannot be separated from the overall context or the broader picture surrounding it.

Deception occurs in actions just as it does in words, and recognizing it is one of the essential skills a political analyst must possess. A disbelieving (non-Muslim) politician may lie in order to deceive, but a Muslim politician does not lie. Instead, he may use deliberate ambiguity phrasing things in a way that suggests something close in meaning, while actually intending a more distant meaning, or even a deeper, concealed meaning.

For example, the Messenger of Allah (saw) would sometimes send a military expedition in a direction different from its true target. Once the expedition reached a point where the enemy felt secure, and assumed they were not the intended target, the expedition would then redirect itself toward the actual objective. The same principle applies in political actions as it does in military operations.

Following the news, selecting what is accurate, and extracting what is useful, is a matter that requires practice and experience, until the skill is developed and the process becomes easier for the one who possesses it. **(To be continued)**