**OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) is revolutionizing the World**

**Beginning with Bellingcat, OSINT, has changed the world.**

It began in 2014, when Bellingcat, a Norwegian reporting organization began collecting information, imagery and rumors from many sources, including satellite images, that heretofore was in the domain of national governments, and providing their information to to public organizations, the press and even including government organizations. While open source information has been available for many years, open source reporting organizations utilizing information collected all types of sources including technical sources is/was new.

Few people realized the importance and impact Open Source Intelligence would have.

Today, satellite sourced intelligence is available to the public, and used for influencing many issues and events, including war, human right abuses, tracking both government and public events, and even criminal activities. With available OSINT, almost anything that happens on the surface of our planet can be photographed on cell phones, or by high tech cameras in satellites.

In the Ukraine war, reportedly information has been provided to the Ukraines on Russian activities that has helped the Ukrainian resistance. Since the information (intelligence) is from non-government source, the Russians cannot blame the US government. It is even possible that our government provided this type of information to OSINT organizations so that these organizations would take the responsibility for furnishing intelligence to the Ukraines. We live in a very different world today!

We must be aware that OSINT can also be used against us. Our enemies could provide information, true or false, to undermine our efforts around the world.

Because OSINT has become so important, it has been recommended that we should create OSINT organizations to gather data of interest to our own government, if it hasn’t already done so.

Even we private citizens must be aware of being manipulated by false or misleading information and information sources. Today, we also must be acutely aware that information from social media can be misleading or inaccurate. No one wants to be fooled, or made a fool, so we must constantly be on guard.

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**Source:**

**"Open Secrets, Ukraine and the Next Intelligence Revolution," Amy Zegart, Foreign Affairs, January-February 2023, p 54-70**

**Wikipedia:**

Bellingcat (stylised as bell¿ngcat) is a Netherlands-based investigative journalism group that specialises in fact-checking and open-source intelligence (OSINT).[5] It was founded by British journalist and former blogger Eliot Higgins in July 2014.[3][4] Bellingcat publishes the findings of both professional and citizen journalist investigations into war zones, human rights abuses, and the criminal underworld. The site's contributors also publish guides to their techniques, as well as case studies.[6]

Bellingcat began as an investigation into the use of weapons in the Syrian Civil War. Its reports on the Russo-Ukrainian War (including the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17), the El Junquito raid, the Yemeni Civil War, the Skripal poisoning, and the killing of civilians by the Cameroon Armed Forces have attracted international attention.[5]

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Name

The name derives from the idiom "belling the cat", which comes from a medieval fable about mice who discuss how to make a cat harmless. One mouse suggests hooking a bell around the cat's neck, making it unable to move without being heard. All the mice support the idea, but none is willing to do it. In Higgins' 2021 memoir We Are Bellingcat, he wrote that "That was it: our name and our mission. Belling the cats."[7][8]

History

Eliot Higgins and Alina Polyakova (Atlantic Council Associate Director), presenting "Hiding in Plain Sight"; Andrij Melnyk (Ukraine Ambassador to Germany), at "Russian Disinformation in the 21st Century" Conference, Berlin, 2015[9][10][11][12][13][14]

Eliot Higgins' interest in OSINT began in 2011, when he was arguing in comments of The Guardian and found out that it is possible to verify videos with satellite imagery.[15] In March 2012, he started a blog under the pseudonym "Brown Moses", named after a song by Frank Zappa,[16] through which he published his research into video footage of the Syrian Civil War.[17] He looked at hundreds of short clips on the Internet, localised them, and examined details of the weapons used. As a result, Higgins demonstrated that the Syrian regime was using cluster munitions and chemical weapons.[18][19] In 2013, Higgins linked the chemical attack in Ghouta (the Ghouta chemical attack) to Bashar al-Assad.[20]

Bellingcat's first major investigation, done mainly by volunteers without external funding,[21] was the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) in 2014. Their conclusion that Russia was responsible was later confirmed by the Dutch-led international joint investigation team (JIT), which found in a report dated 25 May 2018 that the downing of MH17 was initiated by the Russian military.[22] In other investigations using Google Earth, volunteer investigators working with Bellingcat said that they had discovered the coordinates of an Islamic State training camp, as well as the site where an American journalist was killed.[23][24]

Kristyan Benedict, an Amnesty International campaign manager, told The New Yorker in 2013 that many organisations had analysts but that Higgins was faster than many established investigation teams.[25]

***Higgins launched the Bellingcat platform (in its beta version) on 14 July 2014***,[3][4][26] raised £50k of private donations in the following month through the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter,[27] and performed additional crowdfunding in 2017.[21] Half of funding comes from grants and donations, the other half from running workshops training people in the art of open-source investigations.[28][21]

Since 2018 the Bellingcat website is operated by the Dutch Stichting Bellingcat [Wikidata].[1] (tr. Bellingcat Foundation).[29][30] Bellingcat has received grants from Civitates-EU,[31][32] Porticus [Wikidata] the Brenninkmeijer family philanthropy, Adessium Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), PAX for Peace,[21][33] Open Society Foundation (OSF), the Dutch Postcode Lottery, the Digital News Initiative,[1][34][21] Zandstorm CV and Sigrid Rausing Trust.[35] Higgins has said much of the grant money does not directly fund investigations and is used for support services such as document translations and training.[21] The organisation publishes guides on how to analyse data and how to create reports, such as "How to Scrape Interactive Geospatial Data" and "How to Identify Burnt Villages by Satellite Imagery".[28]

Bellingcat received a €500,000 cash prize from the Nationale Postcode Loterij of The Netherlands; it used these funds to open a new office in The Hague in 2019.[36]

The Bellingcat website also lists the in kind support in the form of 'software access and platform resources' from the software firms Datayo, Hunchly, Maltego, Mapbox, Planet, RiskIQ, and Vizlegal.[35]

Higgins told Polygraph.info that grants from the NED and OSF pay for Bellingcat programmes to help journalists and researchers in their investigations.[21] He said that "Most our funding from grants covers stuff that isn't related to investigating anything Russia related."[21][5][37][38][2][36]

According to the i newspaper, Bellingcat is notable for its transparency, as Bellingcat investigative reports describe "how they found out the story and which techniques they used".[39]

As of approximately 2019, the organisation had sixteen[5] full-time staff plus Higgins, and at least 60 contributors.[28] Its office was previously located in Leicester;[28] however in 2018, Bellingcat shifted its main office to Amsterdam, in the Netherlands as a result of the impending Brexit and concerns over staff recruitment and mobility.[40] Since 2021, Bellingcat has also had a presence in a new Investigative Commons centre in Berlin, Germany.[40]

As reported in Foreign Policy, one of the unintended consequences of open-source intelligence outlets such as Bellingcat (and others) is that it gives the US intelligence community freedom to discuss Russian intelligence operations publicly without revealing their own sources or methods.[41]

On 8 October 2021, Bellingcat was designated as a "foreign agent" in Russia.[42][43] On 15 July 2022, it was banned in Russia alongside its partner The Insider, which is headquartered in Latvia. Following this restriction, any Russian citizen who aids Bellingcat or The Insider may face criminal prosecution; they would also be restricted from citing their publications. The office of the Prosecutor-General of Russia said that they were banned due to "posing a threat to the security of the Russian Federation". Higgins responded to the ban by stating, "Bellingcat has no legal, financial or staff presence (in Russia), so it's unclear how Russia expects to enforce this."[43][4