

# GET SMART

John Breen explains the importance of adopting an intelligence-led approach for your organisation

**O**n 15 January the undersea volcano Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai erupted, sending a plume of ash, steam and gas 30km into the sky, while tsunami waves of up to 15m hit the capital of Nuku'alofa on Tongatapu Island, 'Eua and Ha'apai Islands within minutes.

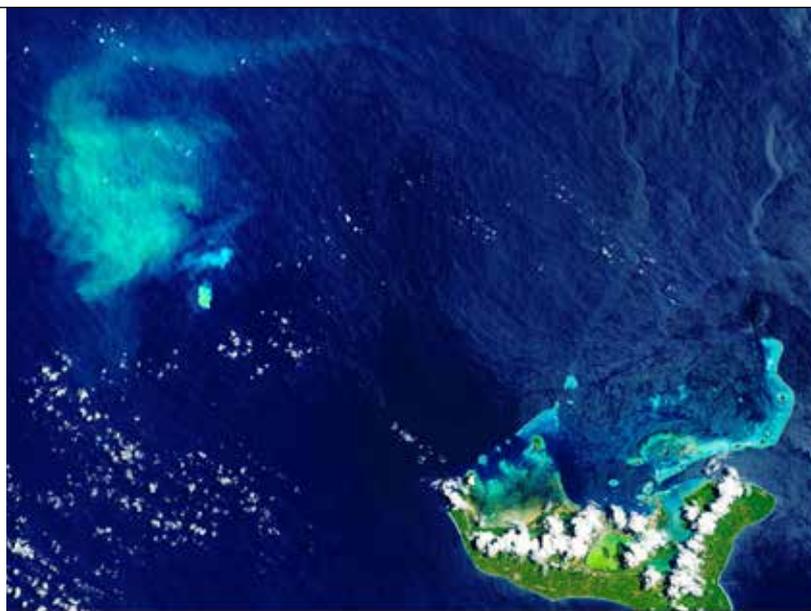
The Tongan government confirmed three deaths and announced that the tsunami has destroyed almost all homes on two smaller outer islands. The full extent of the damage remains unknown as the eruption and subsequent tsunami damaged an undersea fibreoptics cable, severing the country's telephone and internet while satellite communications experience disruptions from the lingering ash cloud.

On the back of the Covid-19 pandemic, the eruption demonstrates the complexity of cascading global risks posed by our natural environment. In the intelligence sector, the risks posed from our natural environment pose a challenge for teams who tend to focus on the political and security sphere. Traditionally speaking, an overarching tenant is that individuals are the main drivers of political and security risks, and this informs most processes with good analysts spotting the signposts that indicate how events may unfold, including forecasting ensuing risks. However, the picture becomes more complicated when the drivers of political and security risks stem from complex environmental interplays and feedback loops outside human agency.

In the case of natural disasters, pandemics or climate change, the complexity of variables at play can make it impossible to forecast with real accuracy when such events will definitively occur.

While this poses challenges for many organisations, adopting an intelligence-led approach that utilises horizon scanning and actively looks for warning signs can help decision makers understand the directions of events, and inform strategies that identify risks and opportunities. Some organisations have already invested in such approaches. Since Covid-19, intelligence teams are now using their skills to provide more strategic intelligence on the threats posed by our natural environment that inform board level decision-making on risks and opportunities.

Sibylline is helping organisations strengthen their intelligence through its extended learning programme. We provide methodologies and tools required to challenge cognitive biases and focus on crucial data points; skills that are now vital in a world where contradictory and misleading information is pervasive. We also help intelligence teams break down the silos within organisations to ensure they understand the needs of decision makers. Doing so allows analysts to communicate the direction of travel and associated risks to multiple audiences within an organisation. This may seem a daunting task for new analysts who may be entering the intelligence sector for the first time, so we are now



offering scholarships to military veterans and those from disadvantaged backgrounds to get a foothold in the industry.

When it comes to environmental risks, functional modes of thinking can help intelligence teams adopt a more holistic approach to the intelligence cycle that confronts group think and cognitive biases. New forms of data such as seismic stations in the case of natural hazards or consulting scientists and local communities on climate change can prove vital. For example, the eruption of Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai and the subsequent tsunami are both extremely rare events, but they are not unprecedented. Governments aware of these risks implemented early warning systems that monitored seismic data, which triggered tsunami advisories across Pacific states from New Zealand to the US.

Connecting the dots between Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations and security will also help decision makers mitigate risks stemming from our natural environment, and Sibylline is now at the forefront

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of consulting organisations on the unquestionable link between security and ESG. In November we compiled a report: *Health, Hazards and the Environment: How Corporate Decisionmakers Can Survive*, which uses data and scenario analysis to support decision makers as they consider approaches for ensuring the safety and resilience of staff, market access, assets, reputation and technology in the face of diverse and complex environmental risks.

Organisations not implementing an intelligence-led approach often fail to notice shifts or events that indicate a much larger future event. As a result, decision makers not consciously using intelligence to shape their decisions can result in mitigation strategies that fail to manage strategic risks and identify opportunities.

In a rapidly changing world where global risks are posing greater challenges for organisations, decision makers require timely, accurate and actionable insight. Incorporating a diverse set of views not confined to traditional intelligence approaches and adopting new modes of thinking will strengthen situational awareness within intelligence teams and support organisational resiliency ●

**In the case of natural disasters like the undersea eruption of Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai, the complexity of variables can make it impossible to make accurate forecasts**

**John Harley Breen** is Lead Analyst for Global Risks and Special Projects at Sibylline Ltd.