MEMORIES ARE SHORT

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Some thoughts about the way in which our news media have a narrow focus and short attention spans.
Category: Observations

Three months' ago, Russia invaded Ukraine and the news was all over the press in the UK. The initial Russian advance towards Kyiv was followed in detail as was their retreat towards the east when they were rebuffed. People who, only a few months earlier had become experts in viral epidemiology, turned out to be experts on anti-tank warfare, too.

Meanwhile, in the background, there were other threads of thought rumbling around. There were those who were complaining that the Western press were paying loads of attention to the situation in Ukraine, while more or less ignoring equally deadly conflicts elsewhere in the world. There were also a bunch of end-time enthusiasts who were joyful because they saw the Russian war as presaging the return of Christ. In this narrative dead and dying civilians are a price worth paying and Putin was transformed into a Christian hero.

Three months later and things have changed. The killing goes on in Ukraine, but it is no longer front page news. We've got bored and things have moved on. You can still find out what is happening in Ukraine, but you have to work a bit harder, or perhaps listen to the end of the news bulletin, rather than just catching the headlines.

Now my point is not to opine on the war in Ukraine, but to reflect on the way that the news media work in this country - and perhaps across the West. Firstly, it is true that what happens in Europe and North America is prioritised over everything else. The war in Ethiopia hardly warranted a mention, when there was saturation coverage of Ukraine. But even a war in which we are heavily involved by proxy can't hold media attention for long. Royal Jubilees, celebrity court cases and football matches all call for headline attention and our attention wavers.

If you want to take an interest in events that don't make it into our media, or if you want to follow a story beyond the point at which the newspapers and broadcasters lose interest, then you need to find alternative sources of information.

Al Jazeera is one source of broadcast news which has a wider scope than most Western media and tends to have a longer attention span. I realise that some people will find its coverage uncomfortable as it doesn't follow the normal West-friendly line of our own media sources, but it's never a bad thing to get an idea of how other people see you.

I use an app called Flipboard on my phone to read the news over breakfast. It feeds in media from a wide variety of sources and you can set filters so that it concentrates on the things that interest you.

However, I find the best source of news is actually Twitter. I realise that many people find Twitter to be ephemeral and argumentative. However, I follow a lot of journalists (particularly African ones) and political analysts and they often point me to sources that dive deep into issues that interest me.

The online magazine UnHerd is a good place to find analysis of issues; though it has a mainly UK focus.

Finally, Christians who are interested in world news, especially concerning how it impacts the church would do well to subscribe to Justin Long's phenomenal weekly round ups. There is more information here than anyone could ever consume, and I can only imaging how much work it is to draw it all together.

If you are aware of good sources of news that cover world events, I'd be interested to know about them.