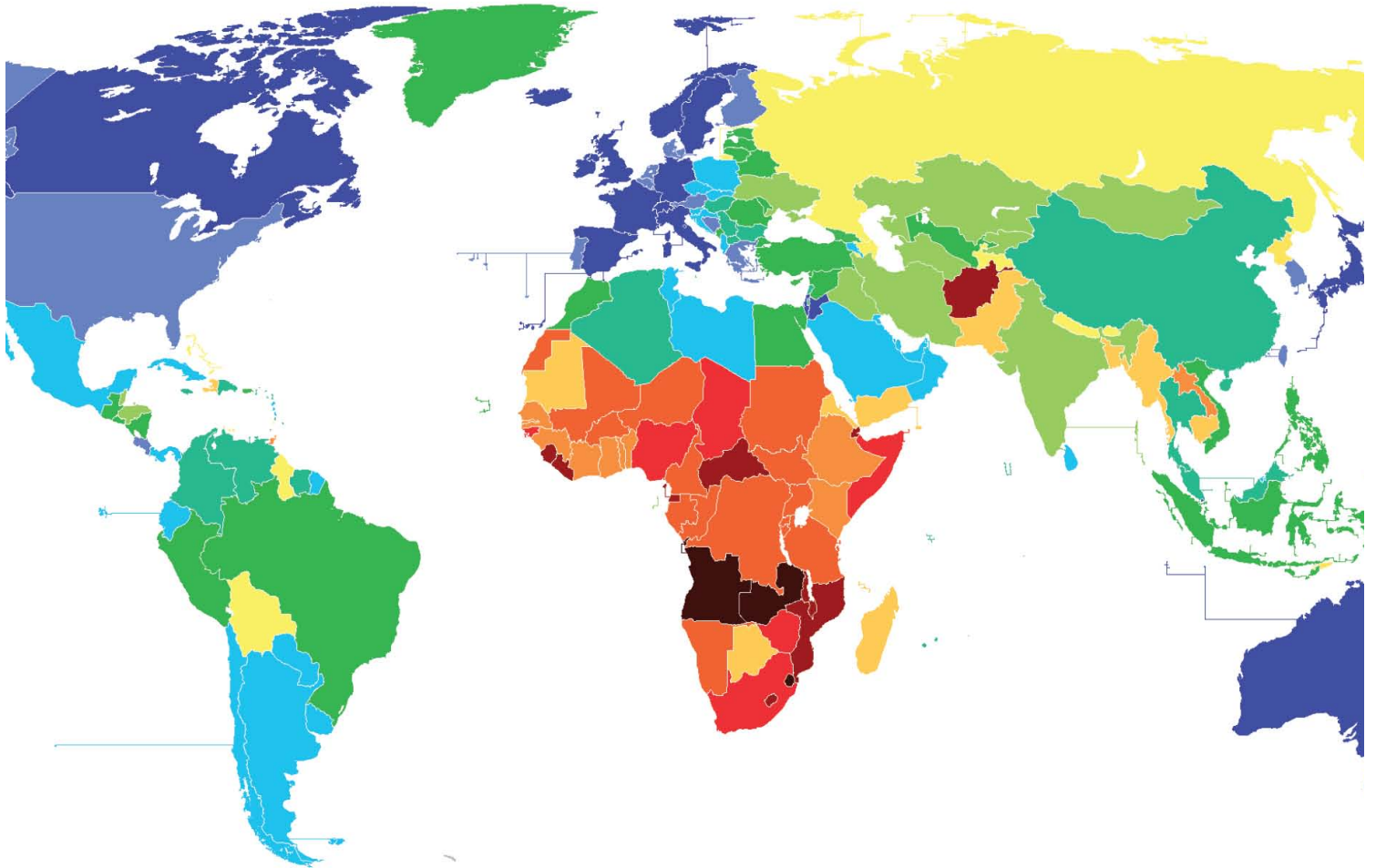


UNDER THE MACROSCOPE



T3
W3

**REACTIONS TO IRAN'S NUCLEAR
PROGRAMME DEAL**

**POUND HITS NEW HIGH AGAINST FALLING
EURO**

FOR QUERIES, PLEASE CONTACT US AT UNDERTHEMACROSCOPE@GMAIL.COM

RECAS
We do news

Headlines

REACTIONS TO THE DEAL ON IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

- The Iran nuclear deal was welcomed by world leaders like David Cameron of Britain, Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Pope Francis.
- Israeli leaders swiftly condemned the agreement, saying it frees Iran to pursue nuclear weapons and regional mischief unhindered.
- Republican leaders and presidential candidates are denouncing the deal and saying it will not go through Congress easily.
- Democratic reaction is more guarded, with support for President Obama but cautions about Iran's intentions.
- The prospect of wider Iranian access to world energy markets drove oil prices down.

Hillary Clinton Tells Democrats That 'It's a Deal Worth Supporting'

Hillary Rodham Clinton unequivocally embraced the Iran nuclear deal in a meeting with House Democrats at the Capitol on Tuesday, according to people who were at the meeting.

Mrs. Clinton, who was secretary of state from 2009 to 2013, reminded the Democrats, many of whom are nervous about the agreement, that she helped assemble the international coalition that imposed crippling economic sanctions on Iran. That, she told them, was what forced the Iranians to the bargaining table.

According to notes taken by one Democrat and given to The New York Times, Mrs. Clinton told them the deal is "not perfect," but its core provisions are sound. The United States needs to keep pressure on Iran over its support for terrorism and its destabilization of the Middle East, she said, but "would you rather confront them weaponized or nonweaponized?" She concluded, "It's a deal worth supporting."

Earlier in the day, Mrs. Clinton, a former senator from New York who is running for president in 2016, lauded the American negotiators.

"Based on what I know now — and I will be being briefed as soon as I finish addressing you — this is an important step in putting the lid on Iran's nuclear program," Mrs. Clinton told reporters at the Capitol.

Still, she said, there were issues to be addressed: “I think we will have to, immediately upon completion of this agreement and its vigorous enforcement, look to how we build a coalition to try to prevent and undermine Iran’s bad behaviors in other arenas.”

Disagreements Over the Bottom Line

The much-anticipated nuclear deal with Iran spawned any number of wish lists from President Obama’s allies and critics, many of whom weighed in beforehand to lay out their bottom lines for an acceptable agreement.

On Tuesday, as the White House embarked on an elaborate campaign to sell the deal, Mr. Obama’s team boasted that it exceeded all five of the benchmarks for a “good deal” laid out by a bipartisan panel assembled by one influential outside group, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

In a two-page side-by-side comparison prepared by the administration, officials argued that the deal reached in Vienna had each of the elements that the institute’s working group had insisted upon, such as “timely and effective access” for international nuclear inspectors to sites in Iran, measures for setting back Iran’s ability to advance its nuclear program and a clear mechanism for automatically reimposing sanctions should Iran violate any aspect of the deal.

The working group gave rise to an open letter that emerged last month in which five former members of Mr. Obama’s inner circle of Iran advisers expressed concern that the pending accord “may fall short of meeting the administration’s own standard of a ‘good’ agreement,” and laid out a series of minimum requirements that Iran would have to agree to for them to support a final deal.

But Mr. Obama’s bottom line does not match that of critics of his agreement, who have already listed their far more sweeping requirements. In a statement on Tuesday, Aipac, a pro-Israel group, said it worried the agreement had fallen short of a different five must-have requirements, including “anytime, anywhere inspections” of Iranian sites and a duration of multiple decades.

While the pact would allow inspectors to have access to any location they request “within a predetermined, limited time period,” the side-by-side comparison says, that falls short of the “anytime, anywhere” standard skeptics have demanded. And most of the strictest restraints on Iran’s nuclear program will last a decade, not “decades.”

By New York Times

Economics

WINDFALL FOR TOURISTS AS POUND HITS NEW HIGH AGAINST PLUNGING EURO

Talk of interest rate rise fuels seven-year high against euro but makes life tougher for UK exporters and puts unwelcome focus on household finances



A strong pound means greater spending power abroad and cheaper imports.

Britons holidaying in Europe this summer were handed a windfall by the Bank of England after the prospects of higher interest rates sent the pound to a seven-and-a-half-year high against the single currency.

With the euro already weakened by the Greek debt

around the New Year pushed sterling to levels last seen in the month following the collapse of Northern Rock in the autumn of 2007. Visitors to Spain, France and Italy will find they get 10% more euros for their pounds than a year ago, with UK consumers also benefitting from cheaper imported goods.

On the foreign exchanges, the pound was trading at €1.4411 against the single currency, up around 0.5% on the day. It also increased in value against the US dollar and hit its highest level against a basket of global currencies since early 2008.

But the strength of sterling will make life tougher for exporters, widening the UK's record current account deficit and making it harder for the government to achieve its aim of rebalancing the economy away from consumer-led growth.

The Resolution Foundation thinktank warned that even the limited increases in interest rates envisaged by Carney in a speech in Lincoln Cathedral on Thursday would push 1 million households into "debt peril", with the higher cost of servicing debt offsetting the pick-up in wage growth seen in recent months.

Matthew Whittaker, the foundation's chief economist, said: "Although the impact of higher rates on borrowing costs is likely to be limited at first, even relatively modest increases will pose a significant financial challenge for more than a million 'highly geared' households, some of whom are already struggling to make repayments even with rates at historic lows."

Interest rates fell sharply between 2007 and early 2009 in response to the UK's worst recession of the postwar era and have been pegged at a record low of 0.5% for more than six years. Carney stressed in his speech that the Bank would be cautious when the moment came to start raising rates, predicting they would peak at little more than 2%.

Even so, Resolution Foundation research conducted last year found that an increase in the base rate to 2.5% by 2018 would send the number of people who spend more than one-third of their income on home loan repayments rocketing from 1.1 million to 2.3 million – equivalent to one-in-four households with a mortgage.

Mortgage payers in "debt peril", which the thinktank said meant they spent more than half of their post-tax income on debt repayments, will increase from 600,000 to 1.1 million, it said.

Whittaker said the chancellor needed to put in place safeguards for mortgage borrowers who have become "mortgage prisoners" – trapped on variable rates because stricter lending rules limit their options for remortgaging.

The expected rise in mortgage costs will come as the government prepares to cut tax credit payments, affecting 13 million families, and a real terms freeze on the public sector, hitting around 5.5 million workers.

Carney acknowledged the vulnerability of households to rising interest rates in his speech, noting that fixed-rate mortgages were less common in the UK than in the US. The governor said there was a "greater sensitivity" to floating interest rates, where lenders increase the cost of home loans as soon as the Bank announces a move in official rates.

If interest rates rise in line with City forecasts, more than half of the UK's 12 million mortgage borrowers would be paying higher interest rates in a year's time and close to three-quarters in two years' time, Carney said.

Threadneedle Street commissions its own study of mortgage distress and found that a disturbingly high level of the UK's total mortgage debt is held by households where loans are a high multiple of income. Households with loans worth four times their income account for 20% of total UK mortgage debt, while those with five times loan-to-income ratios account for 10% of the total.

The independent Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that household debt will rise to a new peak in 2019 after a modest fall following the banking crash in 2008. The rise to 182% of disposable income will exceed the pre-crisis peak of 169%, according to its analysis.

A report by Moody's, the credit ratings agency, emphasised the precarious state of many household finances when it warned earlier this week that a boom in credit card lending could quickly turn to bust.

It said credit card borrowing had increased by 7% a year since 2010 "leaving borrowers increasingly vulnerable to economic shocks".

It added: "Low interest rates are hiding the risk to consumers, making consumer debt appear more affordable on the surface, but masking potentially negative long-term consequences."

Carney also stressed the dangers of a strong pound to British exports, a concern shared by business groups. "Sterling has appreciated around 18% over the past two years and around 7% since the turn of the year. This will exert a drag on inflation both through lowering imports costs and by lowering world demand for UK goods", Carney said.

However, Angus Campbell, a senior analyst at brokers FxPro, said there was an immediate benefit for British tourists travelling to the continent.

"It is tremendous for people going to the continent. [On a year ago], your holiday is going to be 10% cheaper," he said. "We are at levels last seen before the credit crisis – 2007 was when the euro sterling [rate] was at this level. It is quite a significant breakthrough ... It is a technical level that makes euro investors fear exposure to the euro even more."

By The Guardian

Environment

SINGAPORE BOTANIC GARDENS DECLARED UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

It is Singapore's first World Heritage site and the third Botanic Gardens to be listed as a World Heritage Site, after Kew Gardens in England and the Padua Gardens in Italy.



BONN, Germany: The Singapore Botanic Gardens is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, after it was inscribed at the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee in Bonn, Germany on Saturday (July 4). The decision was met with cheers from a jubilant Singapore delegation, led by Culture, Community and Youth Minister, Lawrence Wong. Others in the Singapore delegation included chief executive of the National Heritage Board Rosa Daniel and CEO of the National Parks Board, Kenneth Er.

In his thank you speech, Mr Wong said he was “deeply honoured” to have the Singapore Botanic Gardens inscribed as the nation’s first World Heritage Site. He added: “This is a very humbling experience ... and I thank the Chairperson and all the members of the World Heritage Committee for the unanimous and wholehearted endorsement of the recommendation.”

"A great Jubilee year gift to Singaporeans," said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in his Facebook page. "The Gardens played an important part in making Singapore a Garden City. Besides supplying shrubs and trees for our parks and roadsides, the Gardens also trained horticulturalists in the school of ornamental horticulture."

Mr Lee congratulated the National Heritage Board, NParks, and Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth which had worked hard for the successful inscription.

The 156-year-old Singapore attraction joins more than 1,000 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in some 160 countries. It is the third Botanic Gardens to be listed as a World Heritage Site, after Kew Gardens in England and the Padua Gardens in Italy and Singapore's first World Heritage Site.

Singapore's bid was the fifth to be discussed on Saturday, after China, Iran, Mongolia and South Korea.

The inscription comes almost five years after a feasibility study by the authorities found that the Botanic Gardens was Singapore's best candidate to achieve UNESCO World Heritage status.

Singapore officially submitted the Gardens' nomination dossier to UNESCO in January last year.

Last September, a technical assessor from the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) visited the Gardens. In May, ICOMOS recommended the Gardens to be inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, saying it was an "exceptional example of a British tropical colonial botanic garden in Southeast Asia".

Still, the final decision lay with the 21-member UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Before he left for Bonn, Minister Wong said he was optimistic about the bid, and said the World Heritage status would strengthen conservation efforts at the Gardens.

The Botanic Gardens spans 74-hectares and includes the National Orchid Garden which has over 1,000 orchid species and 2,000 hybrids on display.

Nestled in the heart of Singapore, the Botanic Gardens is the only English-style garden in the tropics. It was also the site where crops were developed for commercial use in Singapore and the region.

Dr Nigel Taylor, director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, said: "The trial of various crops, including rubber, was done behind closed doors. Nowadays, we can go into these areas of the Gardens and see ancient trees that are part of the plants tested for their timber or latex or other properties, and realise that these remnants of this once great economic garden are actually a testimony to the economic survival of the region."

It was once home to a host of animals, including a sloth bear, emu and a leopard.

The Gardens is also home to Burkill Hall, a colonial house which was built almost 150 years ago. "It's an example of a very rare architectural form, possibly the last surviving example anywhere of what we call the Anglo-Malay plantation-style house," Dr Taylor said.

Next to Burkill Hall lies one of the Gardens' most popular sites - the National Orchid Garden. It was officially opened in 1995 and home to thousands of orchid species including 2,000 hybrid orchids, which are also Singapore's goodwill ambassadors.

More than 200 orchid hybrids are named after celebrities such as Jackie Chan, and foreign dignitaries such as Nelson Mandela and Margaret Thatcher.

Beyond heritage, the Gardens is also a place that has been intricately woven into Singapore's social fabric. On weekends, friends and families enjoy a stroll at the Gardens, or watch musical performances at the Symphony Lake - a long-standing tradition that dates back to 1861.

By Channel NewsAsia

local

SMRT IMPLEMENTS PRIORITISING MEASURES AFTER TUESDAY EVENING'S MASSIVE MRT BREAKDOWN



People queueing up for bus rides opposite Bishan station after train services on the North-South Line went down on Tuesday evening, July 7, 2015.

SINGAPORE - Measures to avoid a recurrence of the massive MRT breakdown on July 7 will be prioritised, and longer-term track upgrade and renewal programmes will be rescheduled, transport operator SMRT announced on Friday.

This is so that "the priority for track access during the limited maintenance hours at night can be given to immediate remedial actions that can safeguard the system against a recurrence", it added. SMRT will continue its testing and investigations through the weekend by repeating

the full cycle of checks. Where possible, it will re-enact the conditions under which the series of power trips were observed on Tuesday (July 7), when both the North-South Line and the East-West Line were down for more than two hours.

It was the first time both major MRT lines were down, and the worst train breakdown since two major disruptions in 2011 triggered a public inquiry.

SMRT said it is working with external experts to review the design robustness of the power network, and to find ways to further segment it in order to avoid a similar power failure.

They have brought in a number of retired SMRT staff with experience in network power issues to help with investigations, and will hasten the acquisition of additional condition monitoring systems.

These systems can detect changes that give warning of an imminent component failure.

SMRT said it is looking into possible degradation in three areas: the insulation of a power substation, the power cable or the third rail, which provides electricity to each train.

It added that it was "highly unlikely" the disruption was caused by a defective train, as initially thought.

In the meantime, rectifications made on the night of July 7 have stabilised the system.

"However, until the root cause can be conclusively determined, SMRT is taking all possible precautionary and preventive measures to safeguard the system in terms of safety and service reliability," SMRT said.

It provided a more detailed account of what happened on the night of the breakdown.

From 6pm on July 7, repeated power trips were detected for an hour at multiple locations across the two lines, which total 100km in length.

Despite efforts to isolate the suspected source of the problem, the power trips persisted.

As the power trips were linked to the voltage protection circuit designed to safeguard commuter safety, SMRT made a deliberate decision to halt train services on both the North-South and East-West Lines.

Since then, SMRT has completed checks on all equipment that could have contributed to the disruption, with priority given to the higher probability 'hot spots'.

The Board chairman of SMRT, Mr Koh Yong Guan, said: "The SMRT Board apologises for the disruption that affected the entire North-South and East-West Lines on 7 July. The Board and Management of SMRT take full responsibility for the disruption.

"It is of great concern to us that so many commuters were affected by this disruption during the evening peak hours when many were making their way back home.

"In particular, we apologise to our Muslim commuters who were returning home to break fast.

"The Board gives its full support to the management and staff of SMRT to establish the root cause of the incident as quickly as possible, and to prevent a recurrence."

By The Straits Times

Science & Tech

THE GUARDIAN VIEW ON ROBOTS AS WEAPONS: THE HUMAN FACTOR



Lethal autonomous weapon systems could be deployed within 20-30 years. Above, a German drone on a training exercise in Afghanistan, 2013.

The future is already here, said William Gibson. It's just not evenly distributed. One area where this is obviously true is the field of lethal autonomous weapon systems, as they are known to specialists – killer robots to the rest of us. Such machines could roam a battlefield, on the ground or in the air, picking their own targets and then shredding them with cannon fire, or blowing them up with missiles, without any human intervention. And if they were not deployed

on a battlefield, they could turn wherever they were in fact deployed into a battlefield, or a place of slaughter.

Such machines could turn wherever they were deployed into a battlefield, or a place of slaughter

A conference in Geneva, under the auspices of the UN, is meeting this week to consider ways in which these machines can be brought under legal and ethical control. Optimists reckon that the technology is 20 to 30 years away from completion, but campaigners want it banned well before it is ready for deployment. The obvious question is whether it is not already too late. A report by Human Rights Watch in 2012 listed a frightening number of almost autonomous and wholly lethal weapons systems deployed around the world, from a German automated system for defending bases in Afghanistan, by detecting and firing back at incoming ordnance, through to a robot deployed by South Korea in the demilitarised zone, which uses sensing equipment to detect humans as far as two miles away as it patrols the frontier, and can then kill them from a very safe distance.

All those systems rely on a human approving the computer's actions, but at a speed which excludes the possibility of consideration: often there is as little as half a second in which to press or not to press the lethal button. Half a second is – just –

inside the norm of reaction times, but military aircraft are routinely built to be so manoeuvrable that the human nervous system cannot react quickly enough to make the constant corrections necessary to keep them in the air. If the computers go down, so does the plane. The killer cyborg future is already present in such machines.

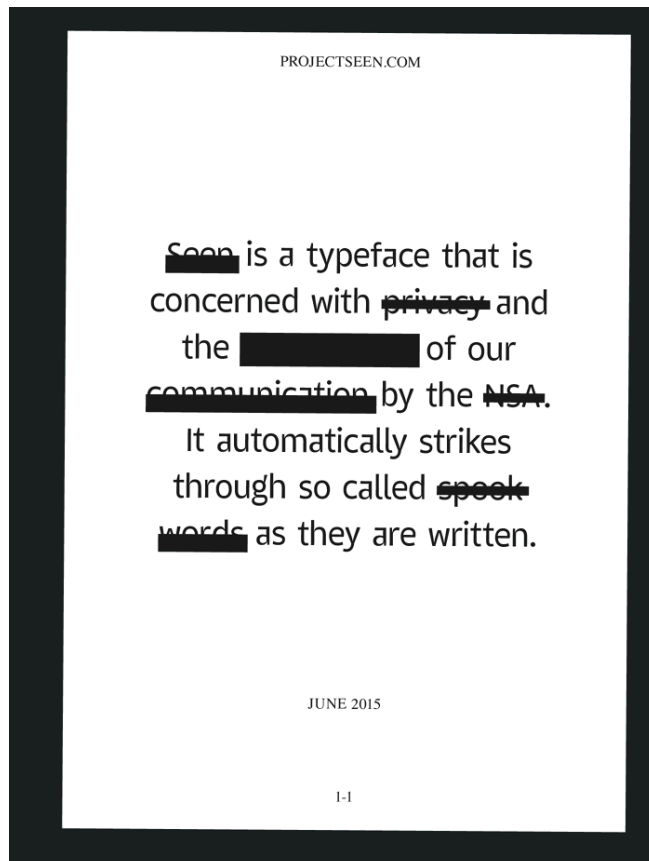
In some ways, this is an ethical advantage. Machines cannot feel hate, and they cannot lie about the causes of their actions. A programmer might in theory reconstruct the precise sequence of inputs and processes that led a drone to act wrongly and then correct the program. A human war criminal will lie to himself as well as to his interrogators. Humans cannot be programmed out of evil.

Although the slope to killer robots is a slippery one, there is one point we have not reached. No one has yet built weapons systems sufficiently complex that they make their own decisions about when they should be deployed. This may never happen, but it would be unwise to bet that way. In the financial markets we already see the use of autonomous computer programs whose speed and power can overwhelm a whole economy in minutes. The markets, in that sense, are already amoral. Robots may be autonomous, but they cannot be morally responsible as humans must be. The ambition to control them is as profoundly human as it is right.

By The Guardian

Science & Tech

A MAN CREATED A FONT THAT TELLS YOU IF THE NSA MIGHT THINK YOU'RE A TERRORIST



What you type tells a story about who you are. At least that's what governments think. So much so that antiterrorist organizations like the NSA and the UK's GCHQ have developed lists of words that they believe a terrorist is likely to type.

If you type the flagged words and the government sees it, well, you may have been added to some list.

Now there's a tool that shows just how often some of these suspicious words pop up in everyday conversations. It comes in the form of a font.

Created by a Slovenian artist, Project Seen is a typeface that automatically flags all the trigger words used by international law-enforcement agencies.

These trigger words were revealed back in 2013 as a way for enforcement agencies to deem someone a potential terrorist. The list is currently growing and, in fact, may top 40,000 words.

Emil Kozole is the artist behind this project. He made Project Seen as part of his master's in communication design at Central Saint Martins University in London. Kozole explained that he wanted to make a masters project that somehow highlighted the fraught state of security in modern times.

"The biggest news of the summer was Snowden's documents, where he exposed previously unknown practices of the NSA and British GCHQ," Kozole told me over Skype chat.

Security Education

With that as a backdrop, the idea of government surveillance began to permeate his work. "I still wanted to show and educate people on how 'normal' words we use in our online conversations on Facebook, emails or search queries on Google are all stored and could potentially get you in trouble," he said.

Thus came Project Seen, which, at first glance, looks like a pleasant enough sans serif font. But while you type, it actively analyzes the output for any trigger words. If a trigger word appears, it's automatically redacted. To Kozole, Seen is a way to show people the issue "in a more sophisticated way." Before, the trigger list was just a list of words. Now it becomes something people can experience.

Kozole first posted Seen on his Facebook page, and from there others shared it online. In just a week it gained some real traction. Someone put it on Product Hunt, and then it even landed on Y-Combinator's Hacker News. According to the artist, it was a top choice on the popular techie link-posting site for nearly a day.

Interest in the font has thus increased. Kozole said that within a week after it hit the viral sites more than 1,500 people downloaded the font (which admittedly isn't a huge number, but much bigger than one would think for a final project for a master's).

Additionally, Kozole has seen a marked interest in the product. "Few organisations [sic] have contacted me and wrote that they are interested in the project," he wrote. "And of course a few angry emails from the internet people," he added.

Kozole stresses that Seen is a service for people to better understand the state of the world around them rather than a security tool. "I don't see it as a tool that I would scan my email," he says.

Instead, "it is more a conversation 'trigger,' where people start asking 'OK why is the word on the list? Why is this one not?'"

By Business Insider



UNDER THE MACROSCOPE

Under the Macroscopic is a weekly summary of what's happening around the world and what's worth pondering. Stay on top of international and local news with this bulletin produced by the Raffles Economics and Current Affairs Society