

It is time to imagine the worst

Published: January 13, 2026, 8:44 pm

This is the week when the UK has to agree a deal with the EU, or the inexorable March of time means nothing can be delivered by 29 March 2019. The clock is not just ticking. The alarm is about to go off.

That metaphor appears appropriate. I cannot recall a time when such a disastrous sequence of events was so clearly predictable and there was not a single leading politician willing or apparently able to address the need of the moment.

The need of the moment is to say that no one would have planned the Brexit that is on the table. That outcome was predictable given May's red lines, the EU's determination that the UK must be worse off after Brexit and the UK's existing obligations to Ireland. The consequence is a mess. Unsurprisingly no one finds that mess appealing. But no one is willing to back down.

Or not quite, I suspect.

I strongly suspect the EU would accept Article 50 renunciation, albeit at a cost.

And I strongly suspect a majority in Parliament would in a free vote accept that as the best deal that could be secured.

I do not think this is unsaleable in the country. It would just have to be admitted that Brexit was only possible at a price not worth paying.

And of course May would have to go.

Of course there would need to be an election.

And then what?

I wish I knew.

Given that Corbyn remains convinced by Leave, his alternative to May is unlikely to

answer a national need.

So, we have to look to parliament to decide. The breakdown of party allegiance is the necessity for surviving this mess. The creation of a mass of MPs who argue that in the face of failure collective action for the common good is the requirement is what is needed. This will necessitate the suspension of normal lines of difference. It does not require agreement over them. It simply requires agreement that there is a common crisis that parliament may have to resolve alone. If it wants to.

Is that possible given the failure of political leadership being witnessed in the Tories, and by Corbyn, who is actively ignoring his own party's chosen wishes and policy as if its membership do not matter?

I do not know. I am not optimistic, at all. Parliament is undoubtedly febrile right now, but not obviously able to act. And if it can't then it is time to imagine the worst.

NB: I am heavily committed to writing over the next day or two. Comment moderation will be intermittent.