

On war: a reflection

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There is, I think, a necessary twofold response when something as significant as last night's US attack on Iranian nuclear facilities takes place.

The first, [as I have already noted](#), is to note that such an act is almost certainly illegal and should not, therefore, have happened. It is my wish that, in due course, those responsible for it are held to account for what I believe are criminal actions.

The second reaction is more personal. It's the desire to take a long walk and consider just where the world now stands as a consequence of an action that is, to me, so obviously wrong. But that, of course, forces me to consider why I think it is wrong. There are several reasons, and my purpose here is to explain them.

Most straightforwardly, I believe that this action is wrong. That is not just wrong because of its illegality, although that matters. Instinctively, this is an action that anyone of sound mind can also tell is mistaken.

That is because, in no small part, it is obvious that no one has any idea what the endgame of this action might be. As many have pointed out so often, it is remarkably easy to start a war. Ending one is much harder. And let us not pretend this is anything but war. Iran will, inevitably, respond. Whether we think that right or wrong, this is now part of a broader, more dangerous reframing of the international political environment. And from that, I cannot see how any good outcome can follow.

Then, we have to ask why the US is reacting in this way. Ignoring the very obvious fact that it would not have taken such action if Iran already possessed nuclear weapons, which is a reality that strongly suggests nuclear arms do, in fact, provide a form of security (reluctant as I generally am to admit it), and that is precisely why Iran wants them, there are deeper political forces at play.

The three principal actors in this conflict—Netanyahu, Trump, and the Iranian theocratic leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, are all elderly men. They have, as a result, little personally at stake. They have little time left in this world, if we are candid: they can

take the risk of fighting wars as a result.

They are also, I suspect, men with overwhelming egos. They are seeking to create what they would think to be a legacy for themselves, consequently trying to make a life in perpetuity for themselves based on their war gains, which is the sort of thing that profoundly vain men do.

Then note that all three of these leaders are totalitarian in their instincts. Netanyahu and Trump have both made their disdain for democracy abundantly clear. Iran, meanwhile, is ruled by a theocratic regime that denies fundamental freedoms to vast numbers within its borders. What unites these three men is their shared desire to impose their will on the people of their respective countries, even though we can be certain that many in each of those nations are appalled by both the beliefs and the actions of those who claim to lead them.

There is, however, something that differentiates Trump and Netanyahu from the Iranian leadership, which is that they believe that they have the right to impose their will on other countries, and most especially those that are populated by people who do not appear to be of European descent. That is a profoundly paternalistic, racist, arrogant attitude that is absolutely undeniable in what Trump and Netanyahu are doing. That they are driven by not just indifference, but even hatred, of those who do not conform to their view of what people should look like is, I think, equally undeniable. For the last few hundred years, arrogance of this sort has been utterly destructive within the world and has led to the creation of so many of the tensions that now exist, including almost all of those around the Middle East. Unless and until white men, in particular, and of a certain age, can give up these pretensions that they alone have the right to dictate to the world what it is that everybody else must believe and adhere to, we will remain in the most profound trouble.

All this leads to the conclusion that this war will solve nothing. The Iraq war proved that. So did Afghanistan. So did the attacks on Libya. So have so many other conflicts. For all the bluster of the likes of Trump, Western powers have neither the resources or the willing to actually impose regime changes on countries where they know that they cannot achieve that goal, because popular sentiment amongst the people in those places will always be opposed to the actions of so-called democracies that they know do not really represent the wills of their people. That is, therefore, the reality to be faced at the end of the day by Trump and all others engaged in this action.

And then, let me offer one final thought in this first consideration of this issue, to which I am quite sure I will have to return. This is that around the world, the billions of people who populate this planet have vastly more in common with each other than they have things that separate them.

Most of us simply want to live in peace. We want a home. We might want to share that. If we have a family, we want to provide for it, care for those who are close to us, and

ensure their well-being.

The vast majority of us can extend these feelings towards those who are not in our family, but whom we know, or meet, or simply come into contact with in the course of our daily lives. Very few of us carry very much ill will, if any at all, towards the vast majority of people in the world.

What we would wish for them is what we would want for ourselves, which is simply the ability to live in peace with sufficient to meet our needs, and maybe some of our wants, whilst simultaneously having the opportunity to enjoy all those things that GDP will never measure, but which are so important, like love, laughter, care and wonder.

It's not naive to point this out. Nor is it wrong. This is the almost universal desire of humankind, which our leaders failed to understand. It is from that perspective that I condemn this war.

I reiterate that what the people of Iran, Israel and the USA, as well as all the other countries that might be drawn into this conflict, have in common is vastly more than what can ever divide them. It really is time that we remember that and act as if this is the most important motivator for action that we have.

When we have political leadership for that looks for what people have in common, rather than what might divide them, which can be used to provide an opportunity for exploitation (which has always been the motivation for war, because there never has been a war that did not have as its underlying cause the desire for economic exploitation and the command of tax revenues) then we might make human progress. Until then, we have to suffer the disastrous actions that we saw overnight.