

## Mayhem continues

Published: March 5, 2026, 8:26 am

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We are, without doubt, living through a moment that might properly be described as World War III.

Israel and the USA opened an illegal war against Iran late last week.

Most Gulf states are now involved.

Yesterday, the USA sank an Iranian warship off Sri Lanka, considerably extending the geographic scope of the war.

We now know from reliable sources that some claims already made, including that Iran launched a drone strike against the UK base on Cyprus, were false. This raises questions about where the drone in question was launched from, with the possibility that this was a false flag operation by Israel clearly being left hanging as a result.

The UK has been compromised as a consequence, not least by reinforcing that base for what might be false reasons.

A few states have had the sense to criticise the USA. Spain has stood out for doing so.

To give him credit, Keir Starmer has put distance between himself and Trump, although he has hardly gone for the full Love Actually approach.

And the economic implications continue to roll. I am aware that stock markets rallied last night on rumours that Iran was seeking talks, but quite what the source of those rumours was is not clear. Oil prices continued to rise as a consequence.

Israel is sending out signals that it thinks this war will last for several more weeks. Whether food and water supplies to some Gulf states will last that long is open to question, because so much of their supply routes depend on the Strait of Hormuz.

Targeted attacks on desalination plants are also raising questions about whether current lifestyles in many states in the Middle Eastern region are now viable.

Sometime soon, the flows of refugees from this area are going to rise considerably, creating stress in many countries, including the UK.

And this, of course, is not the only consequence that is going to arise for the UK. We are already seeing a significant risk of increases in oil and gas prices. That will have implications both directly and indirectly for all households, as heating and transport costs rise, and this will affect the economic spectrum across the board.

At present, the likelihood of an inflation increase is high. The risk that the Bank of England will, wholly inappropriately, therefore increase, or at least sustain, current inappropriate levels of interest rates is also high. The knock-on effects will be serious, including financial stress, weakened household resilience, business failure, and more.

On top of this, the naive stock market belief that all of this will be resolved soon looks naive in the extreme. As a consequence, the stock market rally later yesterday looks to be misplaced. Israel is, after all, talking about this lasting for weeks, and there appears to be no reason to think otherwise. In that case, the consequences can only get worse.

What is more, there is no stated political endgame to this war when no justification for its commencement has yet been offered. What we therefore have to presume is that the conflict will end only because someone, as a result of circumstances, will eventually give way.

A lack of water and food in the Gulf states might force them to demand that there be an end to hostilities.

Attacks on desalination plants in Israel and Saudi Arabia might be so significant that they are forced to seek an end to hostilities.

And then there is the simple arithmetic of missile supplies to consider. Iranian missiles might be of fairly low calibre, but they still need to be knocked from the skies. Right now, the cost of the defence systems is much higher than the cost of the attack systems. Iran appears to have a deep stockpile of missiles available to it, and whether the cost ratio is really on the side of Israel and the USA, as they claim, is hard to work out.

What we therefore have is a complex situation of profound uncertainty in which the outcome of this conflict cannot be predicted.

What we do know is that Trump began this believing that his success in Venezuela made him invincible, and that his need for a war to distract from the Epstein files was overwhelming.

We know that Netanyahu has the same urgent need for continuing war.

We know that the US population is not convinced by Trump's arguments.

We now know that the UK cabinet rebelled against Starmer's instinct to warmonger, because he, too, needs a war, and they wish to be rid of him.

We know that Europe is in turmoil over where to go with regard to this policy. All the time, NATO is weakened, whilst the position of those who question it is strengthened.

And there is one overwhelming conclusion to reach. If the role of government is to act on behalf of the people it governs, then we are not seeing evidence of that in action at this moment. Instead, what we are seeing is government acting on behalf of privileged elites in the USA, in Israel, and in Iran. If there is one thing that each of these leaderships shares, it is their contempt for the people they are meant to govern, and for everyone else in the world. They are equally worthy of condemnation as a result. Their failings are apparent to everyone but themselves.

Will any good come of any of this? That, to me, is perhaps the most interesting question, and my answers are deeply contingent.

If we now realise (again) that war is profoundly damaging to civilian populations, there may be a change of attitude towards it.

If it is appreciated that regime change from the air is not actually possible, there may be a change of Middle Eastern policy, with wider implications.

And if people realise that leaders who are only concerned with their personal well-being should not be trusted, we might get a shift in politics.

There are, however, a great many maybes and straightforward doubts in those three statements. The simple fact is that war rarely produces good outcomes.

The question is when we will realise that, and when will our armed forces actually begin to doubt whether what they are asked to do is legal, beneficial, or appropriate to follow.

When that happens, we might get a total reappraisal of what defence means.

Until then, this mayhem will continue.