

The first lesson of war is 'know your enemy' – and Britain's enemy now is Donald Trump

By Simon Tisdall, *The Guardian*, Sun 8 Mar 2026

Nine days in, the conduct of the unjustified, illegal US-Israel war against Iran grows ever-more disproportionate, dishonourable and deranged. Diplomacy, treacherously sabotaged by Washington, has been replaced by unceasing airstrikes that are murdering and maiming hundreds of Iranian civilians. Trump's White House increasingly resembles a madhouse. War aims shift daily. A clueless, rambling president insists he must help pick Iran's next ayatollah. Meanwhile, his "secretary for war", Pete Hegseth, rants manically about killing without mercy.

Nine days in, it's clear Iran's leaders are not going to roll over in a repeat of Trump's Venezuela coup. Their forces, though drastically outgunned, are succeeding in spreading pain across the Middle East with waves of drones and missiles. Trump is now at war with US allies, too, having adopted George W Bush's crude Iraq war "for us or against us" maxim. The Gulf Arabs – and cruelly battered Lebanon – just want it to stop. Britain and Europe mostly want no part of it, but are being sucked in anyway. The global economy is tumbling into crisis. In Trump's war on the world, there are no heroes, only victims.

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump must face prosecution by the international criminal court for atrocities perpetrated in Iran, notably the appalling 28 February bombing of a school in Minab. They should both be sanctioned by the UK and all other governments that still respect the UN charter, human rights and the rule of law.

Trump and his administration must now be considered an enemy. Just look at the facts. The US (like Russia in Ukraine) has launched an illegal war of aggression against a sovereign state. Its armed forces are unrestrained, lacking any rules of engagement. Moral and legal considerations are ignored; it has brazenly assassinated a head of state. This US-led rampage is terrorising and displacing millions while disrupting trade, travel and energy supplies. What more proof is needed that the US, an outlaw state like Israel, is a hostile power that fundamentally threatens the UK?

It's not in Britain's national interest that Iran be reduced to smoking ruins. It is not in the UK interest that the Tehran regime, vile though it undoubtedly is, be driven to adopt asymmetric tactics (such as terror attacks in European cities) in order to survive. Most saliently, it is not in the UK interest that the rule of law, and the laws of war, be casually eviscerated, thereby accelerating disintegration of the "global order".

Iran desperately needs a fresh start. The theocracy symbolised by its assassinated supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, has long ago had its day. Many, probably most, Iranians yearn passionately for an open, freer, more prosperous, pro-western society. But this destructive, unthought-through US-Israeli regression into the worst excesses of imperialist vandalism crushes hopes of peaceful change.

Nine days and counting. How much longer? Weeks? Months? Trump and Israel's manipulative Trump-whisperer must be stopped, both for Iranians' sake and for the future peace and security of the Middle East, Britain and its remaining allies. The existential threat to democratic values, laws and freedoms posed by Trump, Netanyahu and authoritarian bedfellows such as Vladimir Putin is ubiquitous – and growing. For Britain's Keir Starmer, this is the biggest, most important lesson of the war: know your enemy – and act accordingly.

This is Trump's war of choice. But Britain has choices, too. Two hundred and fifty years after the American colonists broke free of empire, it's time for a British declaration of independence.