A Tale of Two Wars What does the Iran war mean for Ukraine - page 2

It's too easy to blame Trump alone for US madness - page 4

Habermas: The Philosopher Of The Public Sphere - page 5

EAST AND WEST

www.eastandwestnewspaper.com

No. 6 21 March 2026

THE EMPIRE OVERREACHES

It's war! Israel and the US start "major combat operations" against Iran

Empires rarely collapse at the moment of defeat. They erode, caught in the gap between what they attempt and what they can actually control. The current Iran war is not, in itself, exceptional. What is exceptional is how predictable its structure is: a major power projecting force into a complex regional system, with limited political instruments beyond that force, and with objectives that extend well beyond what military means alone can secure.

This is the essence of overreach—not expansion, but misalignment.

For more than two decades, U.S. strategy in the broader Middle East has operated on a widening perimeter. Military infrastructure stretches from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Gulf: permanent bases, rotational deployments, naval patrol routes, integrated air defense systems. This network provides reach, speed, and redundancy. It also creates exposure. The more assets are distributed across a region, the more points of vulnerability emerge.

That shift is now visible. Installations designed for deterrence are being tested under real conditions. Missile and drone technologies—cheaper, more precise, and easier to proliferate than a decade ago—have reduced the asymmetry that once defined U.S. military advantage. The cost curve has inverted: defending fixed assets is more expensive and more complex than threatening them.

At the same time, the political architecture that once supported American primacy has thinned. Regional partners are less predictable, not because they are unreliable, but because they are recalibrating. Gulf states hedge between security dependence and economic diversification. Turkey pursues autonomous positioning. Even close allies act with increasing tactical independence. Alignment is no longer automatic; it is negotiated, conditional, and often temporary.

This matters because overreach is not only military. An empire assumes that its priorities will be internalized by others. In practice, they are filtered, adjusted, or quietly resisted. The result is a fragmentation of strategy: multiple actors operating in the same space with overlapping but non-identical goals. Coordination becomes episodic. Outcomes become harder to control.

Military operations move quickly; political effects do not. Strikes can be planned and executed within hours. Their consequences unfold over months and years. In that lag, new variables enter: leadership changes, economic shocks, secondary conflicts, domestic pressures. What begins as a bounded operation acquires a longer trajectory, one that cannot be managed solely through force.

This is where the language of "credibility" becomes misleading. The imperative to act—so as not to appear passive—often substitutes for a clear definition of success. Action itself becomes the metric. But credibility without a defined endpoint is a trap. It locks decision-makers into sequences where each step is justified by the previous one, rather than by a coherent long-term objective.

There is also a further constraint: attention. Global powers operate across multiple theaters simultaneously. Resources can be reallocated; attention cannot. Strategic focus is finite. When several regions demand sustained engagement, prioritization becomes unavoidable, even if it is not publicly articulated. The risk is not immediate defeat in any single theater, but cumulative dilution.

The current conflict draws in naval assets, intelligence capacity, diplomatic bandwidth, and political capital. None of these are unlimited. Each commitment has an opportunity cost.

The assumption underlying overreach is that superiority in capability compensates for dispersion. That assumption is increasingly difficult to sustain. Technological diffusion, regional adaptation, and shifting alliances all reduce the margin that once allowed for simultaneous dominance across multiple fronts.

Empires can operate under conditions of overreach for extended periods. They adapt, retrench, and reconfigure. But the costs accumulate, and the margin for error narrows. Small miscalculations carry larger consequences. Events that would once have been contained become harder to manage.

The critical point is not whether the current war can be "won" in a narrow sense. It is whether it fits within a sustainable strategic framework. At present, that framework is unclear. Military action is evident; political end states are not.

A TALE OF TWO WARS

As the war in Iran takes the forefront, Ukraine may be struggling to stay relevant

The latest European tour of Volodymyr Zelensky does not mark a diplomatic breakthrough. It marks a change in tone, scope, and urgency. What used to be wartime coordination now resembles something closer to political preservation and strategic rearticulation—an effort to keep Ukraine anchored within an increasingly distracted West. Since late 2024, Western capitals have balanced Ukraine with other crises, creating a more complex agenda for European foreign policy. From meetings with Emmanuel Macron in Paris to talks with Keir Starmer in London and Pedro Sánchez in Madrid, the choreography is familiar. Governments reaffirm past commitments, sign letters of intent, and outline future cooperation. But the strategic context has shifted. Ukraine is no longer the only strategic emergency shaping Western agendas; the conflict involving Iran has introduced a competing theatre—one that demands similar military tools, diplomatic bandwidth, and production capacity.

This overlap is not abstract; it is material. Air-defence systems like the Patriot missile system and NASAMS, interceptor missiles, and long-range radars are finite in supply and capacity. Western industrial bases expanded after 2022 but still operate at limits. The drive to replenish stockpiles depleted over years of Ukrainian support coincides with rising demand for the same categories of equipment to protect forces and critical infrastructure in the Middle East. Even without a formal reprioritisation, the strain is visible in delivery timelines, production bottlenecks, and procurement debates across NATO members and European states.

Competing Demands

Ukrainian leaders and defence industry officials repeatedly cite production constraints. Supplies of ammunition, drones, and missile interceptors face delays not only because of raw material scarcity but also because Western defence firms are servicing multiple conflict zones simultaneously. Ukrainian President Zelensky publicly warned of missile shortages as Western inventories are diverted to the Middle East theatre.

Domestic Ukrainian manufacturing has surged. In 2025, Ukraine's defence companies produced between 2.5 and 4 million drones and are targeting around 7 million in 2026; some estimates suggest that Ukrainian drone production could reach millions annually, with much of that capacity still dependent on foreign capital, certification, and integration into Western supply chains. But even this production boom is shaped by resource bottlenecks: Ukraine still lacks its own gunpowder and propellant production, and complex systems require imported components.

Russia's Economy

At the same time, Vladimir Putin benefits from a geopolitical environment that works in its favour without requiring direct military action. Higher energy prices—bolstered by instability in the Gulf and disrupted supply routes through the Strait of Hormuz—have supported Russian export revenues. Although some analysts argue that a short-term surge in oil earnings will not fundamentally alter Russia's war economy or compensate for years of sanctions and military expenditure, elevated revenues still contribute to fiscal resilience.

That revenue feeds directly into the sustainability of Russia's war effort, allowing the Kremlin to maintain military spending and absorb attrition that would be more destabilising under tighter market conditions. Russian defence enterprises have increased turnover, and exports to Asia continue to soften the impact of Western sanctions.

The result is a strategic asymmetry: Ukraine depends on external continuity; Russia increasingly draws strength from external market instability and diversified fiscal streams. This divergence is also evident in defence industrial bases—not just the number of systems produced, but the predictability and reliability of supply, where Russia's centrally orchestrated wartime economy can allocate resources more flexibly than Western bureaucratic procurement systems.

Ukraine's Recalibration

Faced with these pressures, Kiev has begun to recalibrate its approach. One of the clearest signs is the shift in its defence-industrial posture. After years of legally restricting military exports, Ukraine is now exploring selective openings, particularly in areas where it has developed operational expertise—most notably drones and counter-drone systems. Ukrainian defence firms are engaging in joint production agreements with Western partners; for example, Spanish and Ukrainian companies recently agreed to co-produce drones, radar systems, air defence components, and missiles.

This is not simply about revenue. It is about repositioning Ukraine within international security markets. By offering capabilities shaped in direct confrontation with Russian forces—many adapted to counter Iranian-designed technologies—Kiev seeks to insert itself into the security calculations of states beyond its traditional partners.

This approach has already yielded tangible cooperation: Zelensky announced that Ukraine has deployed up to 200 military experts to the Gulf region to share anti-drone defence experience, and Ukrainian firms claim capacity to produce up to 1,000 interceptor drones a day if adequately financed. These systems cost a fraction of Western missile interceptors and are in high demand amid ongoing threats from Iranian drone networks.

But this strategy has limits. Many of the states Ukraine is courting operate within a framework of strategic ambiguity toward Moscow; their support, if it arrives, is likely to be transactional rather than aligned with Kiev's broader objectives.

Europe: Reinforcing Commitments

This makes Europe the decisive arena—not because of enthusiasm, but because of necessity. Zelensky's presence in London and Paris is less about persuasion than about reinforcement: ensuring that existing commitments do not erode under the pressure of new conflicts. European governments are grappling with aid package debates, budget constraints, and domestic political cycles that influence how quickly and how much support can be delivered.

Discussions increasingly revolve around future capabilities rather than immediate supply. Projects linked to artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and data-driven warfare illustrate this shift. Ukrainian defence industrial achievements are now being pitched as laboratories for next-generation conflict technologies, rather than simply recipients of Western armaments.

Yet wars are sustained not just by long-term innovation, but by short-term continuity: ammunition, maintenance, logistics, and political will.

HUMANOID SOLDIERS IN UKRAINE

Prototype or a Glimpse of the Future?

The war in Ukraine has already redefined modern combat. It has turned cheap drones into precision weapons, transformed satellite data into real-time targeting systems, and accelerated the integration of artificial intelligence into battlefield decision-making. Now, a new and more unsettling development is emerging: the testing of humanoid robots in active war zones.

Unlike aerial drones or ground-based robotic platforms, humanoid machines represent something qualitatively different. They are designed not just to assist soldiers, but to resemble and potentially replace them.

From Drones to Humanoids

Since the early phases of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, both Ukrainian and Russian forces have rapidly adopted unmanned systems. Ukraine, in particular, has relied heavily on first-person-view (FPV) drones, autonomous reconnaissance vehicles, and robotic logistics platforms to offset manpower disadvantages.

According to Ukrainian government figures and independent military analysts, thousands of robotic missions are now conducted monthly. These range from resupply runs to explosive delivery and casualty evacuation. Some platforms are already armed, capable of firing machine guns or detonating payloads remotely.

In this context, the idea of deploying humanoid robots is less of a sudden leap and more of a continuation. The logic is straightforward: if machines can already perform discrete battlefield tasks, why not design one that can perform all of them?

The Promise of the "Robot Soldier"

Companies working on humanoid robotics argue that such machines could reduce human casualties. A robot does not fear death, does not suffer trauma, and can theoretically operate in environments too dangerous for human troops.

This argument echoes a broader trend in military thinking: the gradual distancing of human bodies from direct combat. From long-range artillery to drone warfare, the trajectory has been consistent—kill at a distance, survive at all costs.

However, the humanoid form introduces new complications. Unlike wheeled or tracked robots, humanoid machines are mechanically fragile, energy-intensive, and difficult to maintain. Walking on uneven terrain, climbing obstacles, or operating in mud and snow—all common conditions in eastern Ukraine—remain major engineering challenges.

More importantly, humanoid robots are not necessarily more efficient than specialized machines. A tracked robot with a mounted weapon is often more stable and reliable than a bipedal system attempting to mimic human movement.

The appeal of the humanoid form is therefore not purely functional—it is symbolic. It reflects a desire to replicate the human soldier, not just replace him.

Ukraine as a Testing Ground

Modern wars have always doubled as laboratories for emerging technologies. The Iraq War saw the widespread adoption of drones and improvised explosive countermeasures. The Syrian Civil War became a proving ground for urban drone warfare and hybrid tactics.

Ukraine now occupies that role for the 2020s. Its frontlines are saturated with sensors, electronic warfare systems, and autonomous devices. The intensity of the conflict, combined with Western funding and technological support, creates ideal conditions for rapid experimentation.

For private companies, this environment offers something no laboratory can replicate: real combat data. A robot tested in a factory can be impressive; a robot tested under artillery fire, electronic jamming, and extreme weather is something else entirely.

This raises uncomfortable questions. When private firms deploy experimental systems in war zones, where does testing end and combat begin? And who bears responsibility if these systems fail—or cause unintended harm?

The Ethics of Delegating Violence

The introduction of humanoid robots into warfare touches on a longstanding ethical debate: should machines be allowed to make life-and-death decisions?

So far, most military systems remain under human control. Even armed drones typically require an operator to authorize strikes. But as autonomy increases, the line becomes blurred.

A humanoid robot equipped with advanced sensors and AI could, in theory, identify targets, navigate complex environments, and engage threats with minimal human input. This would fundamentally alter the nature of accountability in war.

If a robot kills a civilian, who is responsible? The programmer? The commander? The manufacturer?

International organizations like the United Nations have already debated restrictions on so-called "lethal autonomous weapons systems" (LAWS), but consensus remains elusive. Major military powers are reluctant to limit technologies that could offer strategic advantages.

Psychological and Strategic Implications

Beyond ethics, humanoid robots could reshape the psychology of warfare.

For soldiers, facing an enemy that does not tire, hesitate, or fear death introduces a new kind of stress. For civilians, the presence of human-like machines carrying weapons blurs the boundary between combatant and non-combatant in disturbing ways.

There is also a strategic dimension. If one side successfully deploys effective humanoid soldiers, it could trigger an arms race. Other nations would be compelled to develop similar systems or countermeasures, accelerating the militarization of robotics.

At the same time, the actual battlefield impact of humanoid robots remains uncertain. War tends to favor reliability over novelty. Many highly publicized military technologies fail when exposed to the realities of combat.

It is worth considering that the announcement of humanoid robots in Ukraine may serve multiple purposes. Beyond testing technology, it signals innovation, attracts investment, and shapes public perception.

In modern warfare, information is itself a weapon. Demonstrating cutting-edge capabilities—even in limited or experimental form—can influence morale, deterrence, and international support.

The image of a humanoid robot holding a weapon is powerful, regardless of its practical effectiveness. It evokes science fiction, but also inevitability—the sense that war is entering a new phase where human fighters become optional.

Humanoid robots are unlikely to replace human soldiers in the near future. The technical, logistical, and ethical barriers remain substantial.

The war in Ukraine has already shown how quickly military innovation can move when driven by necessity. What begins as a prototype can become standard equipment within months. The real question is not whether humanoid robots will fight in wars, but when—and under what constraints.

MADMAN TRUMP

Blaming Trump Is Easy. But He Did Not Attack Iran Alone

Ever since the first hours after the American strikes on Iran in February 2026, the story seemed to reduce itself to a single figure—a volatile president, erratic and unrestrained, dragging his country, and perhaps the world, into yet another war.

It is an explanation that reassures. Yet this reflex, repeated with remarkable consistency over the past decade, obscures more than it reveals. The attack on Iran did not emerge from a vacuum, nor from the impulses of one individual. It was the product of a system, of habits, of a strategic culture that has long outlived any single presidency.

The scale of the operation alone should have been enough to dispel the illusion of improvisation. The strikes were coordinated, extensive, and synchronized with Israeli forces. Military infrastructure, command nodes, and high-value targets were hit within hours. This was not a sudden outburst of presidential anger. It was the execution of plans that had existed, in one form or another, for years. War with Iran had been rehearsed in think tanks, simulated in military exercises, and debated in policy circles long before 2026. Trump did not invent these scenarios.

Even more telling was the timing. The strikes came not after the final collapse of diplomacy, but during a phase in which negotiations—however fragile—were still underway. This paradox is not new in American foreign policy. Diplomacy and force are often presented as alternatives, but in practice they frequently coexist, each reinforcing the other. Negotiations create the appearance of restraint, even as military options are refined in parallel. When the moment comes, the shift from dialogue to destruction can be abrupt, yet it is rarely accidental.

Inside Washington, the decision exposed divisions that further complicate the idea of a single, driving will. Intelligence officials disagreed on the immediacy of the Iranian threat. Some argued that Tehran posed no urgent danger that would justify such an escalation. Others defended the strikes as a necessary response to a long-accumulating risk. These tensions are not anomalies. They reflect the fragmented nature of American decision-making, where competing assessments, institutional rivalries, and political calculations intersect in ways that often produce outcomes no single actor fully controls.

Beyond Washington, the role of alliances cannot be ignored. Israel's strategic concerns regarding Iran have shaped American policy for decades, sometimes subtly, sometimes decisively. The February strikes were not an isolated American gesture but part of a broader alignment of interests. To attribute them solely to Trump is to overlook the network of pressures, expectations, and shared assumptions that bind the United States to its closest regional partner.

Yet the deeper continuity lies elsewhere, in the long history of American interventions that have defined the post-Cold War era and, in truth, much of the period before it. From Southeast Asia to the Middle East, from the Balkans to North Africa, the United States has repeatedly turned to military force with a confidence that borders on habit. Each intervention is framed as exceptional, dictated by unique circumstances, justified by urgent necessity. And yet, viewed from a distance, they form a pattern that is difficult to ignore.

The pattern is not simply one of intervention, but of miscalculation. Again and again, the initial premise is the same: that decisive, technologically superior force can reshape political realities on the ground. Again and again, the outcome resists this logic. Regimes targeted for removal adapt or survive. Conflicts expected to be brief become protracted. The regional consequences spread in ways that are neither fully anticipated nor easily contained.

The attack on Iran fits this trajectory with unsettling precision. The use of advanced weaponry, including bunker-busting munitions designed to penetrate fortified facilities, demonstrated the extraordinary reach of American military power. But as in previous conflicts, tactical effectiveness did not translate into strategic clarity. Iranian retaliation followed swiftly, not necessarily in symmetrical form but through a network of regional proxies and asymmetric capabilities. The result was not resolution, but expansion—a widening of the conflict space that drew in actors and risks far beyond the initial targets.

What makes this continuity particularly striking is its bipartisan nature. The path to confrontation with Iran was not laid in 2026, nor even in the Trump years alone. It was built over decades, through sanctions, covert operations, proxy confrontations, and the gradual erosion of diplomatic frameworks. The collapse of the nuclear agreement removed one of the few mechanisms capable of stabilizing the relationship, but it did not create the underlying hostility. By the time the strikes occurred, the confrontation had acquired a kind of inevitability, shaped by accumulated decisions across multiple administrations.

In this sense, Trump's role appears less as that of an originator than of an accelerator. He did not create the conditions that made war thinkable. He operated within them, perhaps pushing further, more abruptly, but along a path that had already been traced.

To insist on his singular responsibility is therefore to misunderstand the nature of the problem. It reduces a structural phenomenon to a psychological one, transforming a question of policy into a question of personality. This reduction is not merely analytically weak; it is politically convenient. It allows critics to condemn the excesses of one administration without confronting the deeper assumptions that persist across them.

Those assumptions remain largely intact. They include the belief that American power, if applied with sufficient precision and determination, can impose order on complex regional dynamics. They include the conviction that adversaries will respond in predictable ways, that escalation can be managed, that unintended consequences can be contained.

If the Iran war is treated as an aberration, a deviation caused by an exceptional leader, the remedy appears straightforward: restore stability by restoring normal leadership. But if the attack is understood as part of a longer continuum, then the implications are far more unsettling. It suggests that the impulse toward interventions is a recurring feature of American strategy.

The real question raised by the attack on Iran is not why this president chose war. It is why, across different administrations, under different political conditions, the United States continues to arrive at the same conclusion: that force, despite its record, remains the most reliable instrument of policy.

IN REASON WE TRUST

Jurgen Habermas And Philosophy of The Public Sphere

The death of Jürgen Habermas on 14 March 2026, at the age of ninety-six, closes an entire intellectual horizon. With him disappears perhaps the last major representative of a tradition that stubbornly believed in the emancipatory power of reason. His work shaped postwar Europe's moral vocabulary, yet the world that emerges after him seems structured precisely around the failure of his central intuition—that communication, if sufficiently rational, can ground social order.

Habermas belonged to a specific historical wound: the collapse of Germany in 1945. As a teenager during the final phase of the Third Reich, he witnessed not only defeat but the moral disintegration revealed by the Nuremberg trials. Unlike earlier thinkers of the Frankfurt School, notably Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Habermas refused to accept that Enlightenment reason had culminated irreversibly in domination. Where Adorno saw reason collapsing into instrumental rationality, Habermas insisted on rescuing another kind of reason: communicative reason. This distinction is crucial. The early Frankfurt School diagnosed modernity as a catastrophe. Habermas attempted to salvage it. In this sense, he was less radical than his predecessors, yet more ambitious, for he did not merely criticize modern society; he tried to reconstruct its normative foundations.

His first major work, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962), is often read as intellectual history, yet it is more than that: it is a diagnosis of decline. The "public sphere," for Habermas, was not simply a space; it was a fragile historical achievement, a zone where private individuals could come together to discuss matters of common concern, guided by reason rather than power. Its golden age, in his telling, was bourgeois, defined by salons, coffee houses, and newspapers, and its decline began when communication became colonized, first by the state and then by the market. Already here, the pattern is visible: communication stands against power, reason against system, discourse against manipulation. The public sphere is both historical and normative; it existed only imperfectly, is largely gone, yet remains the standard by which we judge the present. Habermas was not merely describing the world—he was measuring it against a lost possibility.

The culmination of his philosophy arrives with The Theory of Communicative Action (1981), a work that attempts nothing less than a reconstruction of rationality itself. Here, Habermas introduces his most famous distinction between the system and the lifeworld. The system encompasses the domains of money and power, from economy to bureaucracy, while the lifeworld is the domain of shared meanings, culture, and communication. Modernity, he argued, is defined by the colonization of the lifeworld by the system. This is not merely sociological; it is ontological. Society is structured by competing logics: instrumental rationality, oriented toward efficiency and control, and communicative rationality, oriented toward understanding and consensus. For Habermas, communicative rationality retains normative primacy, for legitimacy depends on discourse. A norm is valid only if it could, in principle, be accepted by all participants in a rational exchange. In this sense, his discourse ethics replaces metaphysics with procedure. Truth becomes what survives ideal communication. Yet even this "ideal speech situation" functions as a kind of hidden metaphysics, an unreachable horizon that regulates judgment without ever being fully realized.

Habermas's most visible intellectual battles were fought against postmodern thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. For them, reason is inseparable from power, and critique is always entangled with domination. Habermas insisted otherwise. If all discourse is power, critique itself becomes impossible. He maintained that communication carries an implicit claim to validity; when we speak, we appeal to truth, sincerity, and rightness. Without this, language collapses into manipulation. His project, in its deepest sense, is conservative: it defends the conditions of critique itself. Postmodern objections, however, never fully disappear. Is communication ever truly free of power? Can consensus ever exist beyond disguised domination? Habermas acknowledged that such conditions are rarely realized, but philosophy, for him, was the articulation of potential rather than description of actuality.

Unlike many contemporary philosophers, Habermas never retreated into academic isolation. He intervened constantly in political debates—on German reunification, European integration, war, memory, and democracy. In the 1980s, during the Historikerstreit, he opposed attempts to relativize the Holocaust, insisting on Germany's unique moral responsibility. Later, he became a defender of the European project, seeing in it the possibility of a post-national democracy grounded in shared norms rather than identity. Even in his final years, he remained engaged, writing on crises from Ukraine to the Middle East, sometimes controversially. His persistent engagement reflects something essential: Habermas did not merely theorize discourse; he practiced it.

No serious account of Habermas can ignore the criticisms of his work. Postcolonial critics pointed out that "universal" discourse often reflects Western norms. Postmodernists insisted that power saturates communication at every level. Moreover, the very conditions of rational discourse seem increasingly hostile: digital fragmentation, algorithmic manipulation, polarization, and the collapse of shared truth all challenge the world Habermas envisioned. In this sense, he appears today less as a guide than as a relic.

Without some idea of rational communication, democracy collapses into pure competition, law into procedural force, and truth into strategic narrative. His philosophy functions as a counterfactual anchor, a reminder of how society must speak if legitimacy is to exist. Habermas may be wrong in practice, but he reminds us of what we must aim for if political life is to retain its dignity.

What dies with Habermas is not only a philosopher but a certain confidence: that modernity can justify itself through reason. His work represents the last great attempt to reconcile Enlightenment ideals with critique, universality with plurality, reason with history. It is an unfinished project and perhaps an unfinishable one. Today, as communication fragments and public discourse degrades into spectacle, his central intuition appears both fragile and urgent: society depends ultimately on the possibility of understanding. Habermas believed that speech could redeem history. He knew that communication is always threatened by power, by systems, and by silence itself, yet he insisted that within language remains a fragile, structural opening toward agreement.

THE POPULATION BOMB

How Paul Ehrlich's Ideas reshaped the World

The death last week of Paul Ehrlich closes a chapter in the history of environmental thought, but not the story he helped set in motion. If his name is still invoked today, it is less because of the accuracy of The Population Bomb than because of its extraordinary political and institutional impact. Few scientific books of the 20th century moved so quickly from bestseller lists into the bloodstream of public policy.

When Ehrlich published The Population Bomb in 1968, the argument was stark and unambiguous: rapid population growth would outstrip food supply, producing mass famine within decades. The book sold millions of copies and was translated into multiple languages. It appeared at a moment when governments, particularly in the United States, were already beginning to link demographic growth in the developing world to questions of stability, development, and geopolitical risk. Ehrlich's intervention did not create these concerns, but it sharpened and popularized them, providing a scientific vocabulary for what became a global policy agenda.

The immediate effect was to accelerate the institutionalization of population control as a central objective of international development. In the United States, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a rapid expansion of federally funded family planning programs, both domestically and abroad. Agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development increased funding for contraception, sterilization, and demographic research in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. While these programs had begun before Ehrlich's book, the success of The Population Bomb contributed to the political climate that made large-scale expansion possible.

At the multilateral level, the same shift was visible. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities—today known as UNFPA—expanded significantly in the 1970s, coordinating international efforts to reduce fertility rates. Population conferences organized under the auspices of the United Nations increasingly framed demographic growth as a global problem requiring coordinated intervention. By the time of the 1974 World Population Conference in Bucharest, population control had become a central, if contested, pillar of development policy.

Perhaps the most direct and controversial policy outcomes associated with this intellectual climate emerged in countries such as India. During the mid-1970s, under the state of emergency declared by Indira Gandhi, the government implemented an aggressive sterilization campaign aimed at reducing birth rates. Millions of men were sterilized, often under coercive conditions. While these policies cannot be attributed to Ehrlich alone, they were justified in part by the same logic he popularized: that unchecked population growth posed an existential threat to economic development and food security.

In China, demographic concerns also translated into sweeping state intervention. The introduction of the One-child policy in 1979 followed a decade of internal debate about population size and modernization. Chinese policymakers drew on a range of sources, including domestic research and international discussions shaped by neo-Malthusian thinking. Ehrlich was not a direct architect of Chinese policy, but the global diffusion of population alarmism formed part of the intellectual environment in which such measures became thinkable.

The influence extended beyond individual governments to the broader architecture of international aid. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, population control was integrated into development strategies promoted by institutions such as the World Bank. Loans and assistance programs increasingly included components aimed at reducing fertility rates, expanding access to contraception, and promoting smaller family norms.

This shift was also visible in the emergence of organized advocacy. In 1968, the same year his book appeared, Ehrlich co-founded Zero Population Growth, which campaigned for population stabilization through voluntary family planning and public awareness. The organization, later renamed Population Connection, claimed a role in shaping public debate and influencing fertility trends in the United States, where birth rates declined sharply during the 1970s. While multiple factors contributed to this decline—including economic change, women's increased participation in the workforce, and wider access to contraception—the normalization of smaller families was reinforced by a cultural climate in which overpopulation was widely perceived as a threat.

If the policy influence of Ehrlich's ideas is well documented, so too are the controversies they generated. Critics argued that the focus on population diverted attention from issues of consumption and inequality. The data supported this concern: high-income countries, with relatively stable or declining populations, accounted for a disproportionate share of global resource use and environmental impact.

There were also ethical objections. Reports of coercion in sterilization campaigns, particularly in India, provoked international criticism and forced a reassessment of how population policies were implemented. By the late 20th century, the emphasis in international forums began to shift from "population control" to "reproductive rights," reflecting a broader recognition that demographic targets could not be pursued at the expense of individual autonomy.

Meanwhile, the feared global famine did not occur. Advances associated with the Green Revolution significantly increased food production, allowing global supply to keep pace with population growth. Caloric availability per capita rose in most regions, and large-scale famines became less frequent and more closely linked to political factors such as conflict and governance failures.

This outcome fueled a powerful intellectual backlash, exemplified by the work of Julian Simon, who argued that human ingenuity and market mechanisms would prevent the resource constraints predicted by neo-Malthusian models. Yet the retreat of overtly catastrophic predictions did not eliminate the policy relevance of population. Instead, the focus evolved. By the end of the 20th century, concerns about food scarcity were increasingly intertwined with environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and water scarcity.

Today, the legacy of Ehrlich's ideas can be traced in multiple domains. Family planning remains a core component of global health policy. International organizations continue to monitor and project population growth as a factor in economic and environmental planning. At the same time, the framing of the issue has become more complex. Fertility rates have declined sharply in many parts of the world, leading to new concerns about aging populations and demographic imbalance. The problem, once defined as explosive growth, now includes stagnation and decline.

ESTONIA PREPARES FOR WORST

In the end, the test ran quietly. On March 18, the Estonian Rescue Services Agency and partners carried out a nationwide trial of the EE-ALARM public warning system, activating the siren network, sending notifications via the Eesti.ee app and the Ole valmis! (“Be Prepared!”) mobile application, and displaying alert tickers on public broadcasting channels. The exercise was explicitly aimed at assessing how effectively the sirens and digital notifications reach people, especially in the capital region.

Nationwide tests of the siren network were also conducted in December 2025 and May 2025, when all public warning sirens were activated simultaneously for the first time. Those exercises revealed practical shortcomings: in the May test, only about two-thirds of sirens sounded promptly, with some delayed or failing altogether, and app notifications also experienced timing issues. Sirens and digital alerts are part of a broader national system for warning the public about imminent hazards; official guidance notes that siren signals are intended to signal immediate threats to life and should prompt people to seek detailed information from other channels.

The most imminent danger for Estonia is, in the eyes of its authorities, Russia. Even if a recent report by the Estonian security services KaPo did not consider an imminent Russian invasion very likely. The developments in emergency alert testing occur against a backdrop of ongoing border security and infrastructure adjustments along Estonia’s 294 km long border with Russia. Estonia has in recent years adapted border crossing operations, including temporary nighttime closures at some crossing points, and has invested in physical infrastructure such as gates and barriers at the Narva bridge crossing to reinforce control and manage traffic flows.

Law-enforcement and border authorities have also discussed piloting water barriers on sections of the Narva River to complicate unauthorized crossings where the river forms part of the frontier. These are intended to complement existing land border infrastructure.

In parallel with civil emergency preparedness, Estonia’s military and defence planning have continued to evolve. Investments in airspace monitoring infrastructure, such as new radar installations designed to extend detection capabilities, reflect long-term efforts to improve situational awareness across the northern and western approaches to the country. These systems have both civilian and defence applications, enhancing flight safety and early warning coverage.

Participation in exercises and tests can prompt practical questions from residents about notification reach and clarity, authorities describe them as essential steps in ensuring that Estonia’s alert and response mechanisms function as intended.

This Week in History: March 21–April 3

On 21 March 1960, police in Sharpeville, South Africa opened fire on a peaceful protest against apartheid pass laws, killing 69 people. The **Sharpeville Massacre** marked a turning point in the struggle against apartheid, prompting international condemnation and pushing movements like the African National Congress toward armed resistance.

On 22 March 1945, the **Battle of the Rhine** began as Allied forces crossed the Rhine River into the heart of Nazi Germany. The operation signaled the imminent collapse of the Third Reich and accelerated the final phase of the war in Europe.

On 23 March 2001, the deorbiting of the **Russian space station Mir** ended an era of long-term human presence in space that had begun during the Cold War. Its controlled destruction in the Pacific Ocean symbolized both technological achievement and the quiet end of Soviet-era ambitions.

On 24 March 1999, **NATO launched an** ₀ₙ **bombing campaign against Yugoslavia during the Kosovo War**. Conducted without explicit UN authorization, the intervention set a precedent for humanitarian war — and controversy over the limits of international law.

On 25 March 1957, six European countries signed the **Treaty of Rome**, establishing the European Economic Community. This step laid the institutional foundations for what would eventually become the European Union.

On 26 March 1979, **Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in Washington, D.C.**, brokered by Jimmy Carter. The Egypt–Israel Peace Treaty ended decades of war between the two states, though it isolated Egypt in the Arab world for years.

On 28 March 1979, a partial meltdown occurred at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station in the United States. The **Three Mile Island Accident** triggered widespread fear of nuclear energy and led to stricter safety regulations.

On 30 March 1981, U.S. **President Ronald Reagan survived an assassination attempt** in Washington, D.C.. The shooting shocked the nation but also reinforced Reagan’s public image as resilient and composed.

On 31 March 1991, the **Dissolution of the Warsaw Pact** formally ended the Cold War military alliance that had bound Eastern Europe to Moscow. Its disappearance marked a decisive shift in the European security order.

On 2 April 1982, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, triggering the **Falklands War** with the United Kingdom. The short but intense conflict reshaped British politics and military posture.

On 3 April 1973, engineer Martin Cooper made the **first handheld mobile phone call** on a street in New York City.

CHINA'S WORLD ORDER IS DYING IN IRAN?

The U.S.–Israeli military campaign against Iran — launched without prior UN authorization and striking deep into Tehran's power structure — killed not only Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei but also multiple senior Iranian commanders and political figures. These strikes, which included attacks on several cities beyond the capital, obliterated the carefully negotiated balance of power in the region and ignited a full-blown war in the Persian Gulf. From China's perspective, the eruption of hostilities signalled the collapse of a diplomatic architecture that China had quietly helped uphold — and a stark exposure of its own limitations on the world stage.

China's involvement with Iran was always multifaceted. Tehran was not only a source of energy but also a subtle counterweight in China's broader balancing strategy against U.S. hegemony in the Middle East. China had sought to profit from Iranian oil while maintaining good relations with Gulf states and avoiding direct entanglement with Tehran's regime. That strategy was built on a tacit understanding that economic leverage and diplomatic quietude could insulate Beijing from regional storms.

The U.S.–Israeli strikes laid bare a bleak truth for Chinese strategists: when hard power moves first, diplomatic hedges can shatter instantly. "Xi's world order died with Khamenei," the *Times of India* trenchantly put it.

For a country that touts its philosophy of "peaceful development" and persistent diplomacy, the war in Iran has become a practical and symbolic rupture. Beijing's measured official reactions have tried to thread a needle: condemn the use of force, call for restraint, and avoid direct confrontation with Washington — all while recognizing that its long-standing partner Tehran is under existential threat. Chinese state media and official statements have made two things unmistakably clear: the killing of Iranian leaders and attacks on civilian targets are "unacceptable," and the use of force cannot replace negotiated settlement.

China accuses the U.S.–Israeli military action of violating Iran's sovereignty and the basic norms of international relations, and call for an immediate cessation of military operations. China's emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity reflects its own anxieties about unilateral interventions.

But China has not moved toward direct military involvement, nor has it broken ties with the U.S. Instead, Beijing maintains it is playing a responsible role by advocating diplomacy and neutrality, emphasizing its long-term interest in keeping lines of communication open with all relevant parties. This strategic restraint is underpinned by two core priorities: preserving energy security and avoiding entanglement in a conflict where Beijing lacks decisive leverage.

No US-China summit

President Donald Trump was scheduled to travel to Beijing for a state visit and summit with President Xi Jinping at the end of March 2026. It was supposed to be the first such meeting of Trump's second term — a chance to reset bilateral tensions on trade, technology, Taiwan, and global governance. Instead, the summit has been postponed by five to six weeks, with the White House officially citing the need for Trump to remain in Washington to manage the war's unfolding consequences.

China had hoped the summit would reaffirm its role as a peer in global governance — a signal to the world that Sino-American rivalry could be managed and that China was ready to shape global outcomes.

Beijing has also had to respond to narratives — particularly in Western media — suggesting that Trump's China trip delay was conditioned on Beijing "doing more" to secure the Strait of Hormuz.

Strategic Straits

The war in Iran has thrown energy markets into turmoil. The Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 20 % of global oil passes, has been intermittently threatened with closure, causing deep anxiety in energy-dependent economies. China is one of the largest importers of Gulf oil, and any extended disruption would have direct repercussions for its industrial output and inflation outlook.

Chinese diplomats have communicated, publicly and privately, that ensuring the strait remains open is in all parties' interest — not as a concession to U.S. pressure but as a practical safeguard of China's economic continuity. Beijing's insistence on diplomacy over force in the Middle East is therefore not only principled but deeply rooted in pragmatic concern about energy security.

The conflict has also complicated Beijing's long-standing balancing act in the region. Iran was never merely a transactional partner; it was a strategic asset in China's broader push to diversify global alliances. Meanwhile, Gulf states — for all their grievances with U.S. policy at times — are central to China's vast energy needs. The war has forced Beijing to choose its words and actions cautiously.

China's Long Game

China has been careful not to escalate its involvement. Its official line remains one of advocating peace and negotiation while avoiding overt military engagement. This restraint is consistent with what independent analysts have termed China's "long-game" strategy: a patient bid to emerge from the crisis with its core interests intact and with greater credibility as a post-conflict stabilizer.

On one hand, China's restraint has allowed it to maintain stable relations with a range of Gulf states, keeping economic channels open and avoiding direct confrontation with the United States. On the other hand, Beijing's inability to influence outcomes on the ground — or to protect even its own nationals from harm in the initial strikes — refutes any notion that China can unilaterally reshape conflict dynamics far from its borders.

The war in Iran has crystallized an unwelcome reality for Beijing: the global arena remains, for now, dominated by actors willing and able to apply unilateral force. China's vision of a world order shaped by negotiation and shared development has been tested by an event that privileged hard power over deliberative diplomacy.

East and West Newspaper
Itinerant independent newspaper
Online since 2016

www.eastandwestnewspaper.com **Contact** **info@eastandwestnewspaper.com**