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I don't think current instability of the world order can be overestimated

I've said it before but one of the problems with writing a newspaper column is that often by the time it's published, it's out of date. So I write this knowing that we are currently two days into a very worrying and escalating situation in the Middle East, and also knowing that it is impossible to predict exactly what comes next, and what will already have come by the time you read this.

What scares me so much about the bilateral action against Iran by Donald Trump's United States and Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel, is the idea that this had very little to do with what will make Iran a better place.

It seems to me that for Donald Trump this was far more likely to be about distraction. Jeffrey Epstein anyone? Look over here at these bombs in the Middle East instead!

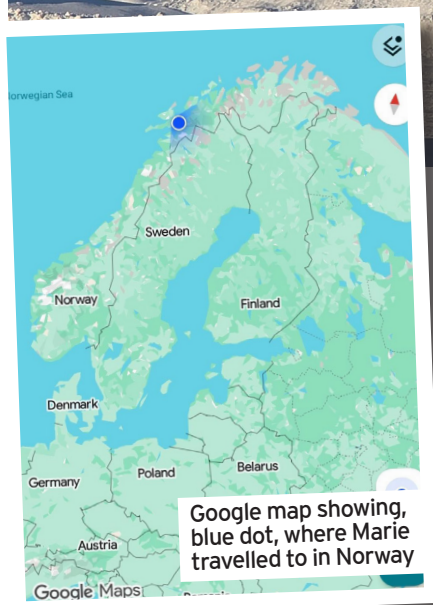
As far as I can see, this is a huge advance on the 'dead cat' strategy employed so artfully by Boris Johnson during his time as Prime Minister in the UK. In short, if you're a politician in trouble because of a story about something over here, make sure something more outrageous and newsworthy happens in a different direction. And the media seem to fall for it every single time.

Of course, I'm not saying that missile strikes raining down aren't newsworthy, but we mustn't stop reporting on the other stuff too. So, while the wall-to-wall coverage of buildings and people will, understandably, continue - don't forget what came before it and what might be hiding behind the top news stories.

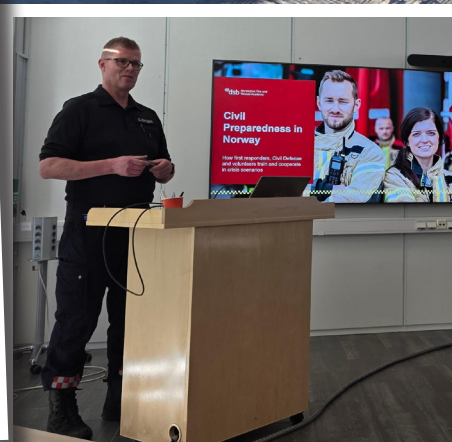
As we look at events in other parts of the world - even if they are surprisingly and worryingly close, such as Ukraine or the Middle East - it's tempting to see them just as events on the TV. If you don't have friends, relatives or loved ones in those countries, somehow it doesn't seem completely real. But it is. And I worry that in the UK, we are not where we need to be when it comes to recognising the incredibly dangerous state of the world right now. We could learn a lot from other countries when it comes to this.

I've written before in this column

“We are not where we need to be when it comes to recognising the incredibly dangerous state of the world.”



Google map showing, blue dot, where Marie travelled to in Norway



Marie Goldman was part of a delegation of MPs on a visit to the High North in Norway, within the Arctic Circle, at the Norwegian Fire and Rescue Academy just outside Evenes

PHOTOS: MARIE GOLDMAN



about the programme that I'm taking part in as part of my role as an MP: the Parliamentary Knowledge Scheme (PKS) for Frontline Services.

In October, we visited the RNLI in Poole, and met some of their fabulous staff and frankly heroic volunteers. In December, we travelled to Scotland to find out more about the Coastguard and Mountain Rescue Services - who

rescued me when I fell from height in Scotland many years ago. We've also visited the London Fire Brigade and we'll soon be spending time with the air ambulance and the police. But while it's critical to understand how our emergency services operate in the UK, we must also recognise that we don't have the monopoly on good ideas. Other countries sometimes do things very differently, and understanding why and how is a really good way of evaluating our systems and decisions.

That's one of the reasons why I was privileged to join a very small delegation of MPs on the PKS Frontline Services Scheme on a visit to Norway last week - and more precisely to the High North, within the Arctic Circle.

The initial purpose of our trip was to visit the Norwegian Fire and Rescue Academy just outside Evenes. The Norwegians take a very different approach to training their fire fighters than we do in Britain.

The Norwegians undergo a two-year course, with about 18 months being residential in their purpose-built academy in the far north of Norway, and the remainder being on placement out on the job. It was fascinating watching some of the training and assessment sessions as the students were put through their paces.

But we also spent quite a bit of time talking to leaders from the fire and rescue sector about Norway's approach to defence, including civil preparedness. It was extremely clear from our discussions how seriously Norway is taking the threat from Russia.

It's important to understand the

geographical context here. In the far, northern reaches of the country, Norway shares a land border with Russia. Over the decades, relationships between the two countries have been historically very good.

Many of the people living in the border towns and villages have family members from each country. Some of the street names on the Norwegian side have Russian equivalent also written below the Norwegian name.

So when, in almost every briefing, the Norwegians talked about the very real threat from Russia and how they were preparing their entire country to deal with that threat, the seriousness of the situation really came through.

They described the Norwegian concept of 'Total Defence' as a whole-society approach to security, rooted in the country's unique position sharing a land border with Russia and the deep historical ties between the communities on both sides.

It was clear from every discussion that Norway prepares not just its armed forces but its entire population to respond to potential threats,

weaving civil and military responsibilities together in a way that strengthens national resilience. This comprehensive model, referred to by Norwegian officials as Total Defence, underscored just how seriously they take the current geopolitical climate and how different their approach can be from ours.

While I'm not saying that Norway does everything perfectly, I think our leaders in the UK would do well to carefully study and learn from what Norway is currently doing. It would be naive of us to think that what happens in the High North doesn't affect us in the UK. Indeed, while I was there, a NATO exercise was already underway.

Given the situation in the Middle East, I don't think the instability of the world order can be overestimated at the moment, so anything we can learn from our friends and allies in other countries should be seized upon to strengthen our own country - either through collaboration with other countries or through our own civil preparedness. Ideally both.

Thanks for reading.

Marie