



## ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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BRYANSTON 2021

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## RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS – WEEK 297 27<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2026

### GREETINGS:

“No fuel crisis!!!!”, but prepare to pay... Rand rocked by volatile oil prices... Sibanye-Stillwater lawyer shot dead outside CCMA... SA Children go hungry while R336m for early childhood nutrition remains unspent... “billion-rand blunder” - NSFAS’s suspicious student housing outsourcing saga... Eskom in death spiral as customers leave... commercial crime quietly becomes SA’s most dangerous growth industry... 12 top cops cuffed over ‘Cat’ Matlala’s rigged R360m police tender... Foreign travellers are ditching Joburg’s OR Tambo for direct Cape Town flights... big money rules at LIV Golf SA... South African university not offering witchcraft course... Marshmallow Easter eggs with satanic demon embryos that ‘hatch inside your child’? – this is Fake news.

Trump postpones strikes on Iranian power plants... oil prices fall... The US presents Iran with a 15-point plan to end the war... Putin’s war machine is being tested by heavy losses including Zimbabwean soldiers tricked into going to Russia - unprecedented surge in Ukraine frontline losses... 1,560 personnel in 24 hours... North Korean troops struggle in Ukraine... Iran social media strategy pivots - an all-out information war launched by the country’s Islamic rulers... 3 US employees have been charged with helping to smuggle at least \$2.5-billion in US AI technology to China... Nigel Farage pilloried over call to ban public prayer for Muslims in the UK... FIFA forecasts record revenue of \$14-billion for the 2027-2030 cycle... Bristol bomb disposal unit blew up suspicious package - it contained leaflets about “what to do when you find a suspicious package”... Researchers find traces of cocaine in every shrimp tested in British waterways... Venezuela beats wins Baseball World Cup in USA...

### MANAGING THE SKIES:

As military activity and security pressures continue across the Middle East, maintaining control of the skies has never been more important. For the Royal Air Force, this is delivered through air battlespace management – the system that coordinates aircraft, drones, missiles and every other airborne activity within a defined area of operations, as well as identifying every single aircraft within it.

In his recent, forthright speech to RUSI, Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Harv Smyth warned that winning control of the skies is now "harder to achieve and easier to lose than at any time in modern history."

Put simply, air battlespace management ensures friendly aircraft can operate safely, threats are identified early, and coalition forces can work together without interference. With multiple nations flying in the same airspace, alongside increasing numbers of unmanned systems and long-range weapons, the environment is now busier and more complex than at any point in recent years.



A key part of this system is Air Operations (Control), split between Air Traffic Controllers and Air Battlespace Managers (ABMs). Some RAF Air Traffic Controllers are currently deployed supporting regional partners, including Qatar, to assist in airspace management and opening airspace. While Air Traffic Controllers keep aircraft safely separated, ABMs provide a different but complementary function — they can bring aircraft much closer together when required, particularly during complex or time-critical missions.

ABM (Control) teams direct and control aircraft to achieve specific mission types. They manage fighter jets, surveillance platforms, refuelling aircraft and remotely piloted systems, calling the 'air picture' to fast-jet pilots, pointing out threats and deconflicting the battlespace. They also provide specialist air battlespace management support to allies. The RAF maintains a longstanding presence at KINGPIN, where tactical air command and control is executed, reporting to the Combined Air Operations Centre. ABMs are also deployed to Cyprus and other regions as part of long-running commitments. Alongside them are ABM (Surveillance) specialists, whose role is to identify every aircraft entering the area of interest. They ensure their systems remain 'battle ready' to provide the best air command and control picture possible. Working hand-in-hand with ABM (Control) teams, they form the backbone of the UK's Air C2 architecture in theatre. *Full article at:*

[Managing the Skies: Why Air Battlespace Management Matters for UK Operations in the Middle East | Royal Air Force](#)

## **RAPID SENTRY:**

While Royal Navy Wildcats armed with Martlet missiles are patrolling the skies over Cyprus, the RAF has its own counter-drone missile system – Rapid Sentry.

Gunners from the RAF Regiment, the unit tasked with protecting bases, aircraft and personnel, use a variety of kit to detect, disrupt and defeat hostile uncrewed aircraft.

And if the last option is the one that's required, that's where Rapid Sentry comes in.

But before a hostile uncrewed aerial vehicle is shot down, other factors need to be taken into consideration – the first being detection.



*Flying Officer Will Pickles explains how the Rapid Sentry air defence system works – the launcher has not yet been loaded with Lightweight Multirole Missiles (Picture: MOD)*

Systems such as Orcus, the RAF's integrated counter-crewed aerial system, enable operators to detect, track, identify and defeat drones operating near protected locations.

By identifying potential threats early, RAF Regiment teams can decide on the most appropriate response to a hostile drone.

Electronic warfare plays a vital role in counter-drone defence. RAF Regiment gunners use systems such as Ninja to interfere with or even take control of the communications links that control many types of UAS. (RAF News)

## **UKRAINE SENDS DRONE EXPERTS:**

More than 200 Ukrainian military experts are in the Gulf region and wider Middle East helping governments in their defence against Iran's drone attacks, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said. In an address to dozens of members of the United Kingdom Parliament in London last Tuesday, the Ukrainian leader said 201 Ukrainian anti-drone experts are in the region and another 34 "are ready to deploy."

"These are military experts, experts who know how to help, how to defend against Shahed drones," Zelenskyy said in his speech, referring to the Iranian-designed "kamikaze" drones that Russia has been using in its war against Ukraine since 2022.

"Our teams are already in the Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and on the way to Kuwait," the Ukrainian leader said.



"We are working with several other countries – agreements are already in place. We do not want this terror of the Iranian regime against its neighbours to succeed," he said.

Last week, the Ukrainian leader said military teams had been sent to several Gulf States and Jordan.

Zelenskyy, who met with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and NATO chief Mark Rutte earlier on Tuesday, said Russia had received the Shahed-136 drones from the Iranians, who had “taught Russia how to launch them and gave it the technology to produce them”. (*Al Jazeera*)

Full article at: [Ukraine sends 201 military experts to counter Iranian drones in the Gulf | US-Israel war on Iran News | Al Jazeera](#)

## IRAN’S PARALLEL SYSTEMS:

Iran operates a deliberately complex military structure designed to prevent coups and absorb shocks. The country maintains two parallel armies - the regular Artesh and the ideological Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) - alongside multiple intelligence services and layered command structures, all ultimately answering to the Supreme Leader. The IRGC's Aerospace Force controls Iran's missile and drone arsenal, whilst the Quds Force manages regional networks across Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Yemen and Iraq. The system has proven resilient even after the killing of senior commanders, though its ability to adapt to faster, more complex challenges remains uncertain. These parallel armies and intelligence services are designed to protect the regime.

Quds Force, the elite expeditionary arm responsible for training, arming, and directing proxy militias across the region, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, groups in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, and Palestinian factions. This “forward defense” approach extends Iran’s influence far beyond its borders while avoiding direct conventional confrontations. (*News Nest*)

## PUBLIC PRAYER OR POLITICAL DEMO?



When several hundred Muslim men, including Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, conducted a mass prayer in Trafalgar Square this week, it ignited a fierce debate. Nick Timothy, the Conservative shadow justice secretary, labelled it “an act of domination... straight from the Islamist playbook”. In response, Sir Keir Starmer told Tory leader Kemi Badenoch that Timothy should be sacked, while Reform’s Nigel Farage gave the MP his support. Elsewhere, columnist Charles Moore writes “Public prayer isn’t just a matter of devotion, for Islamists it’s about domination” (*Telegraph*)

## **DC-3 GATHERING:**

The Mid-America Flight Museum has announced plans to host a DC-3 Gathering over the weekend of September 19, 2026, at its home base of Glover Field (XS70) in Mount Pleasant, Texas. The event will take place on the museum's expansive grass runway, recently extended to nearly 7,000 feet - believed to be the longest grass airstrip in the state. Organizers anticipate a strong turnout of Douglas DC-3 aircraft and crews, with plans already underway for formation flights and aerial photography opportunities, supported by the museum's B-25 photo platform. Logistical arrangements are also being carefully considered, with buses and drivers available to transport visitors between the airfield and local accommodations, minimizing the need for individual vehicles. In keeping with the museum's reputation, the weekend is expected to include a variety of engaging activities and unique experiences for participants.

The Mid-America Flight Museum was founded in 2013 by Texas businessman and lifelong aviation enthusiast Glover, whose vision extended well beyond the preservation of historic aircraft. Established as a way to give back to the community and the nation - particularly to military veterans - the museum is dedicated to honouring service, inspiring future generations through aviation history, and preserving the stories behind each aircraft in its collection. Located in the heart of East Texas, the museum has grown into a living tribute to aviation heritage. Its collection and programming reflect a deeply personal mission, offering visitors not only an opportunity to see historic aircraft up close, but also to connect with the legacy of those who built, maintained, and flew them.

*(Vintage Aviation News)*

## **RINDERPEST?**

Tens of thousands of cattle have been culled in Russia, with fears that the animals were infected by a leak from a bioweapons research plant. Thousands of animals have been killed amid furious protests from farmers in Siberia, with authorities giving differing accounts as to the reason why. Some have cited an outbreak of 'pasteurellosis', which can normally be treated with antibiotics.

Disease control specialists have told farmers there was also an outbreak of 'incurable rabies', without citing evidence. Farmers haven't been shown the order from the Kremlin's agriculture ministry, and are now claiming the organisation is trying to conceal the true cause.

There have been no outward signs of illness, and farmers insist their animals are healthy.

Despite this, the cattle have been burned in pyres, with some claims that the Putin regime is seeking to hide an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. *(msn)*

## **“VIBE CODING” – always something new in software:**

In February 2025, Andrej Karpathy posted six words that redefined how developers think about writing software: "fully give in to the vibes." Within months, vibe coding went from a tweet to a movement. By the end of 2025, Collins Dictionary named it word of the year. By early 2026, it became the default way millions of developers start new projects.

Vibe coding is not a fad. It represents a fundamental shift in how software gets built. Instead of writing code character by character, you describe what you want in plain English and let AI generate the implementation. You focus on the product. The AI focuses on the syntax.

*(Business Insider and others)*

## THE FARMER’S (LUCKY) DOG:



Jeremy Clarkson has secured a planning permission win for his Farmer’s Dog car park following a desperate fight to save profits.

The Clarkson’s Farm star, 65, opened his Oxfordshire pub and restaurant in 2024, instantly attracting floods of visitors. Its popularity has remained steady since, but Clarkson has also encountered obstacles along the way, which he’s made no secret. As customers have continued flocking to the boozer, he has had no option but to rent out a neighbouring farmer’s field, which

has served as an overflow car park for the hundreds of vehicles pulling up each day. Clarkson then applied to West Oxfordshire District Council for retrospective planning permission, seeking for the overflow car park – which can hold 360 cars – to remain for at least a few years.

Being granted planning permission would prevent gridlock on the surrounding country lanes, it was argued, and the council seemingly agreed.

Clarkson has now won his battle, *The Sun* reports, and he can freely use the space as an overflow car park until December 31, 2029.

‘Having previously engaged in discussions about the car park and the barrow, we are pleased to see that an application has now been submitted,’ said Historic England. (*Metro*)

## CHEERS FOR NOW:

Our next lunch is the Annual Lunch on Saturday 11 April 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers. In April each year we celebrate the founding of the Royal Air Force in April 1918, and also the significant influence of the “Oubaas” General Smuts... (*Please Note: Date moved one week later due to the Easter Holidays*)

This will be the last issue of *Rambling* until after Easter, and not just because of the Easter break. Your scribe and family are in the course of moving out of a house they have happily occupied for the last 40+ years. As those readers who have undertaken this challenge will know, like Holy Matrimony, “it is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of God”,

## TAILPIECE:

Bemoerda Triangle?: News24’s “On the Record” summit revealed a country heavy on tactics but lacking the strategic vision and political will to make the hard policy trade-offs – from labour market reform to BEE changes – needed to break free from its self-imposed “Bermuda Triangle” of high unemployment, low growth, and scarce investment,

(*Tony Leon in News24*)

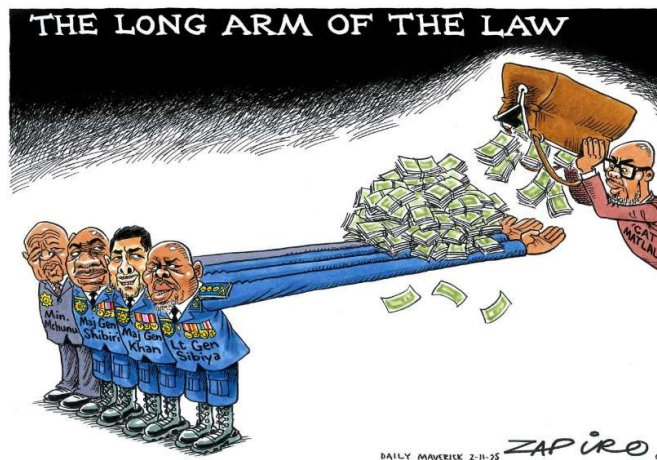
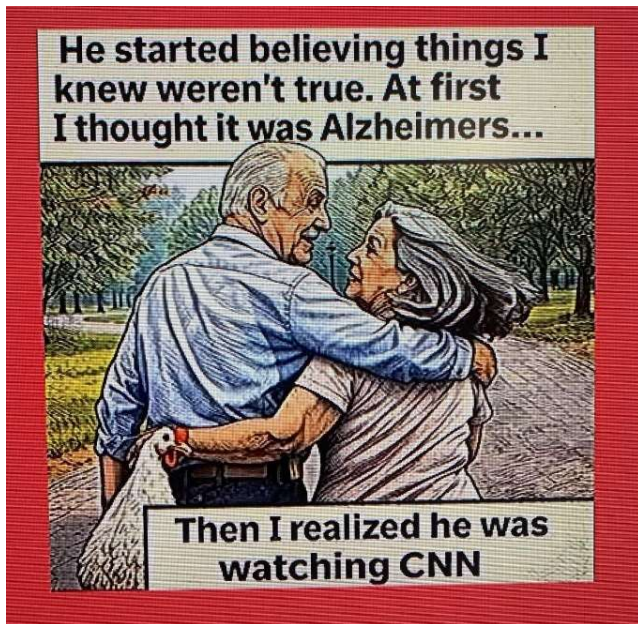
The first female Archbishop of Canterbury is inducted on Wednesday afternoon... Nou hier kom 'n ding...



'Somebody broke in, soft boiled an egg and fled with it and a piece of toast'



'Imagine the cup is a low-rate mortgage deal and this pen is an Iranian attack drone...'





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## A PERSPECTIVE ON IRAN:

After they were beaten and thrown to the floor, they were executed by shooting, one at a time, in cold blood. No mercy, just maximum distress – with each survivor watching the death of his mates until it was his turn. Such was the brutal fate of the six Royal Military Policemen in Majar Al-Kabir, southern Iraq, on June 24, 2003.

They were in that sun-baked town to keep order after the fall of Saddam Hussein and to help train local police recruits. Their killers were not Iraqi insurgents but heartless members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) operating covertly in the country, intent on destruction and ensuring Western attempts to stabilise Iraq would fail.

These Special Forces assassins from Iran ended the naive fantasy that the British Army could exert military influence in the Middle East by patrolling in berets and soft-skinned vehicles and drinking tea with local sheikhs.

It was a violent and expensive wake-up call. In Iraq, notwithstanding some exceptional displays of bravery – Victoria Crosses and Military Crosses were won deservedly – Britain lost 136 service personnel between March 2003 and April 2009 with the vast majority killed by the IRGC and their bloodthirsty proxies in the country.

All those carried in the flag-covered coffins through the patriotic ceremonies at Royal Wootton Bassett, were placed there at the express direction of Tehran. The regime's orders, relayed to their agents in Iraq and often intercepted by our intelligence beforehand, were simple and warlike: keep killing them, with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mortars, mines and shootings until they leave Iraq and the Iraqis to us.

Always ruthless in execution, merciless and clinical, they achieved their bloody aim, with our final exit marked by a grubby, undignified and humiliating deal that left the country in ruins and handed power in Iraq to one of their political allies.

I offer this insight about Iran's role in the Iraq conflict to highlight, in ways that only our countrymen's blood can, what we are dealing with in the Middle East at this moment. As a former commanding officer of 22 SAS Regiment in Iraq and Afghanistan, I witnessed the brutally effective and sinister IRGC at work close hand. It gave me an understanding of the utter evil that is the Iranian regime as it spread terror and carnage on a scale never experienced in the UK.

We have to take that evil seriously, which is why I believe that today's war on Iran is a just war. We have let the regime fester and grow since the Revolution in 1979 as a result of the cowardice and indecision of our political leaders.

As I watch the events unfold in the Middle East and the reaction to the predictable weaponisation of the oil price, and listen to the red-faced, wet-palmed performances in Westminster, I recall the raised voice of the then-Defence Secretary Des Browne in 2007, when he insisted to me as Commanding Officer 22 SAS that, in spite of all the intelligence and evidence to the contrary, 'Iran is not Britain's enemy in southern Iraq'.

He was wrong about that then, just as those are today who still maintain that the IRGC is not a terrorist organisation. Or who insist that negotiating with Iran will deliver anything other than further death and more humiliation. Or indeed that failing to support the US does anything other than strengthen Tehran's hand. Sometimes, the pearl-clutching international 'conflict resolution' experts are wrong. And the only way to save any dignity as a nation or as an individual is to face the evil and fight.

*(Richard Williams, a former 22 SAS Commanding Officer, writing in the Daily Mail)*