



A region on the brink, a secret life in wartime and Jodie Foster deals with fame

The assassination of a Hamas chief in Lebanon. A terror attack on mourners of an Iranian former general. Commercial shipping in the Red Sea targeted by Yemeni rebels, and a US airstrike in Iraq. All were separate events in the Middle East last week but all were linked, in one way or another, to the presence of autonomous but Iranian-backed militia forces in the region.

As Peter Beaumont and Patrick Wintour write, the chances of a wider war may now rest on Iran's opaque intentions, and how much control it really has over its "axis of resistance". Opinion writer Nesrine Malik argues that fears of escalation miss the point that war is already in the Middle East.

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Two very different long reads are at the heart of this week's edition. For years, Julian Borger thought of his great-aunt Malci as a gentle eccentric - until he discovered the secret role she played in the Austrian resistance against the Nazis.

Then, for those of us deep in new year abstinence, Adam Phillips brings a philosophical consideration of what it means to give things up.

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In Culture, the actor and director Jodie Foster tells Emma Brockes about films, family and fame over her remarkable 58-year career. And in the Books pages, Bibi van der Zee casts a critical eye over an optimist's guide to the climate crisis.

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On the cover When asked to visualise the threat of war engulfing the Middle East, illustrator Carl Godfrey took a literal approach. "I wanted to convey the tense and unpredictable situation," says Carl, "and there's nothing more tense than looking down the barrel of a gun. Especially when those barrels are pointing in all directions, and the risk of war is expanding in all directions."

Illustration: Carl Godfrey

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