



UK seeks to galvanise the home front in the face of looming threats



The UK government may have tapped into a mood of doomer-era angst with its appeal to the public to stock up on essentials to see them through emergencies ranging from extreme weather events to cyber attacks.

The checklist for its recently launched **Be Ready campaign** includes canned food, torch batteries and first aid kits, enough to survive the first three days of disruption rather than to stave off an apocalypse.

The duty of elected governments to put the safety of their citizens first is increasingly highlighted in an uncertain world of expanding and diversified threats.

But, to those citizens themselves, stocking the larder might seem an inadequate response in an era when they are constantly being invited to contemplate whether climate catastrophe or rogue AI will win the race to wipe them out.

Along with climate change, uncontrolled and autonomous technology must now be added to the existential threats of war, pestilence and famine that persist on much of the planet.

Self-serving nationalism and the crisis shopping list

Microsoft founder **Bill Gates** was the latest tech titan to sound the alarm about the trajectory of the potential monster his sector is rushing to create.

In an August essay, he wrote that the transition to an AI era would be one of the most turbulent times in human history. Alongside the initiatives of individual governments, a global organisation would need to be established to set the rules and manage the risks.

If the world took the right steps, he was confident AI would be a force for good that would leave everyone better off.

Sceptics might regard that as a big “if” at a time when global cooperation is arguably at its

lowest ebb since the Cold War, with a proliferation of regional conflicts whose impact is spreading beyond the territories of the combatants.

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That has been coupled with the revival of a self-serving nationalism in which the interests of the state and the tribe it represents are viewed as paramount, regardless of the impact on the rest.

Even those more benign administrations that regret the weakening of the old world order now feel obliged to adopt a batten-down-the-hatches approach to proliferating threats.

Hence the UK government's crisis shopping list.

On one level, the Brits are simply catching up. Other European countries are viewed as better equipped when it comes to dealing with short-term emergencies.

The **2026 Global Trade Resilience Index** from the Whiteshield consultancy showed the UK trailing many of its EU neighbours when it came to navigating trade and supply chain disruptions, some linked to continuing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Threats natural and man-made

The threats, both natural and man-made, are evident.

In the week the government announced its resilience plan, 160,000 customers had their power cut off due to the impact of two named storms, while consumers were denied access to services after dozens of official websites were taken down in a global cyber alert over a flaw detected in the **PHP programming language**.

So, what does the government think the public can do to help?

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The guidance urges households to stock up on essentials such as drinking water and non-perishable food as well as having an FM radio and cash on hand.

Although the campaign is officially aimed at coping with so-called everyday emergencies, Defence Secretary **Wes Streeting** said the UK also needed to prepare for the threat of state-sponsored terrorism by hostile powers targeting national infrastructure.

He struck an even more ominous note when he went on to say that the UK and its allies must be ready to fight a war that might come by 2030. His warning follows signals that Russia is intensifying its hybrid warfare against Nato.

Scaremongering or preparedness?

On the home front, reaction to the calls for increased preparedness has been relatively muted.

While retailers have trumpeted a surge in demand for canned food and wind-up FM radios, some cynics have suggested the government is merely trying to engineer a growth spurt by pushing up demand for stockpiled essentials.

In social media responses, some have accused the government of scaremongering while others have suggested that perhaps the authorities know something they are not telling the public.



We can all play our part in making Britain more resilient - Wes Streeting

Some prepping outlets (they used to be called camping suppliers) are having a field day as at least a minority of consumers rush to fill the government's wish list.

In some **stores**, sales of torches are said to have almost trebled, while one supermarket chain reported canned product sales were up by 40 per cent at the weekend.

Mercifully for the government, there has been none of the panic buying that preceded the Covid-19 lockdown.

One lesson of the pandemic was that even when governments are prepared, they don't always get it right. That is because emergencies that erupt are not always quite the ones that have been planned for.

Another lesson that was learned but has not been adequately acted on is that the just-in-time (JIT) supply model of modern commerce and production is a major weakness in global supply chains that are increasingly subject to disruption.

Although such issues are clearly beyond the capacity of individual households to resolve, defence minister **Streeting** nevertheless welcomed the uptick in sales of stockpile essentials. "We can all play our part in making Britain more resilient," he told the BBC.

The reality is that, in the absence of global governmental cooperation on existing and emerging threats, with AI perhaps now topping the list along with climate change and

techno-charged war, it will take more than such comforting fixes to prove the doomers wrong.