

#"BAA, BAA, BLACK SHEEP"

The Dark Economics Behind a Nursery Rhyme

"Three bags full" symbolize how the wool was divided. One portion went to the Crown as tax, another to the Church, and the remaining share to the farmer



At first glance, *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep* appears to be a simple and cheerful children's rhyme about a sheep sharing its wool. Yet, beneath its playful tone, some historians and commentators have suggested that it may echo a far more serious chapter in English history, one tied to taxation, economic control, and social hierarchy.

The most widely discussed interpretation connects the rhyme to medieval England's wool industry, which was once the backbone of the nation's economy. During the reign of King Edward I in the 13th century, the Crown imposed heavy taxes on wool, known as the "Great and Ancient Custom." Wool was England's most valuable export, and controlling it meant controlling immense wealth.

According to this interpretation, the famous lines, "three bags full," symbolize how the wool was divided. One portion went to the Crown as tax, another to the Church, and the remaining share to the farmer. In this reading, the rhyme reflects a system where producers bore the burden while powerful institutions claimed the largest benefits. In extreme

conditions, lacking adequate wool or the means to produce or retain it contributed to hardship, exposure, and vulnerability, particularly during cold seasons.

The phrase "black sheep" has also been examined through an economic lens. Some suggest that it may refer to wool that was less desirable because it could not be dyed, reducing its market value. Others interpret it more symbolically, hinting at individuals or groups marginalized within a rigid economic system.

The broader context of medieval taxation was often harsh. Peasants and producers frequently faced heavy levies, and failure to pay could result in severe penalties. In that sense, even if the rhyme is not a literal account, it can be seen as a cultural echo of a time when economic systems were deeply unequal and tightly controlled.

Over time, Baa, Baa, Black Sheep has endured as a nursery staple, its darker interpretations largely overshadowed by its simplicity and rhythm. It serves as a reminder that even the most innocent-seeming cultural artifacts can carry layers of meaning shaped by the societies that produced them.



HOW IRAN WAS ABLE TO SHAPE THE STRATEGIC OUTCOME



The Iran war has demonstrated that the US and Israel could strike Iranian targets at will and with precision. But Iran proved far more resilient than anticipated and showed that it could impose costs in return. The important aspect is the manner in which the battlefield has shifted and the degree to which warfare accelerated by technology algorithms and AI can remain controllable. Although this conflict has been framed as conventional, the way it panned out points to hybrid warfare. According to the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, "hybrid threats are methods and activities that are targeted towards vulnerabilities of the opponent" where the "range of methods and activities is wide."

The Iran War showed how this type of warfare is no longer confined to proxy attacks, covert action, terrorism, sabotage, or grey-zone pressure. Those remain central, but they now operate inside a wider strategic environment: commercial shipping, insurance markets, data centres, production of missiles and ammunition, rare earths, AI-enabled targeting, and alliances.

The targets are those that enable the use of military power. This was visible in the manner that Iran did not need to defeat the US but created conditions that made the surrounding political-economic system unable to absorb unsustainable pain. Simultaneously, Iran developed the capability to absorb strikes and preserve the critical elements of its military capabilities. The funeral ceremonies for Ayatollah Khamenei and his family members are evidence that the joint US-Israeli attack has rallied Iranians.

It is not simply that Iran leveraged the Strait of Hormuz but there are broader lessons for warfare.



Centre of Gravity

The first strike by the US and Israel was on the Iranian leadership identified as the centre of gravity and it was presumed that their elimination would create a power vacuum and create a popular uprising against the regime.

Iran's strategy was not to win a conventional military contest against the US and Israel. It was to make the war harder to contain. Gulf capitals, shipping insurers, energy and fertilizer markets, data centres and US allies all became part of the battlefield.

Tehran responded to the strikes vertically and horizontally. They identified and attacked sensitive targets and widened the geographic scope of the war. Vertically, it meant placing consequential economic and political interests at risk, thereby raising the potential costs of the conflict far beyond the immediate battlefield.

Horizontally, this meant expanding pressure across additional geographies and systems, including nations hosting US bases, commercial shipping, energy markets and insurance networks and infrastructure.

By doing so, Tehran shifted the war away from areas where the US held clear military advantages and to economic and commercial systems that had cascading effects. Thus, an adversary that could not otherwise match US military power directly imposed costs geographically, economically, and politically.

The objective was not necessarily battlefield victory. The objectives were survival, cost imposition, and the displacement of pressure beyond the immediate battlefield. Iran shifted the centre of gravity to the Strait of Hormuz which 'strait jacketed' the US ambitions in the war and then shifted the focus to create conditions to reopen the crucial waterway.

In a future conflict, the adversary may not need to defeat the attacking force. It may only need to make the surrounding system too costly to sustain. The fact is that without airpower can dominate the battlefield, but it can still leave the strategic system contested.

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#WAR



Commercial Confidence and Sea Control

One of the most important lessons pertained to sea control. The US was able to strike military targets, but commercial transit through the Strait of Hormuz remained functionally impossible not only because of the blockade, but as insurers, shipowners and energy markets believed passage was unsafe.

The statistics are telling. Within twenty-four hours of the US and Israeli attacks on 20 February, transits of all vessel types through the Strait of Hormuz were down 81 percent. There were only four Crude tanker movements on 01 March compared to a January daily average of twenty-four. By 12 March, Kpler vessel-tracking data showed tanker transits had collapsed by approximately 92 percent compared with the week before the war began. On 02 March, approximately 6 percent of global tanker capacity was stranded in the Persian Gulf.

By early March, it recorded outbound trade in crude oil down 95 percent, LNG down 99 percent, and fertilizer almost completely halted. This highlights the chokepoint's significance.

From the first day of this conflict, Iran's drones and missiles were aimed not at preventing American air superiority over Iran, but at rendering it irrelevant. It shifted focus on the air littoral over and around the Strait of Hormuz, where inexpensive drones and missiles made the world's most important energy chokepoint too costly and dangerous to transit, for commercial vessels.

Iran did not need conventional naval superiority to disrupt movement in the Strait. It needed mines, missiles, drones, small vessels, and threats that demonstrated willingness to raise the perceived cost of transit. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Ukraine sank its own flagship (dest it be seized by Russia) and was left, in effect, without a navy.

There is also a lesson from Ukraine, which within two years, had driven the Russian Black Sea

Fleet from Sevastopol and sunk over one-third of Russia's ships on the Black Sea. Ukraine accomplished this not by acquiring traditional ships but by devising a means of contesting the sea without them: using aerial drones to find the Russian ships and maritime drones to sink them. The key question is not only whether the US Navy could defeat the opposing fleet. It is whether the US can convince commercial shipping to believe that movement is safe enough to resume. Commercial confidence is now part of sea control.

Precision Attacks

The rapid diffusion of precision technologies is transforming the nature of war and empowering the weaker side. Advanced military technology, once the preserve of powerful nations, is now enabling weaker states and non-state actors to impose disproportionate costs on a stronger adversary.

Precision guided munitions, loitering systems, AI enabled targeting are fundamentally altering assumptions about military power: A nation possessing these resources can generate battlefield effects that were earlier available through overwhelming superiority.

Missiles are reshaping warfare, making conflicts faster, cheaper, and more political. A limited conventional missile strike can paralyse a country, disrupt critical infrastructure, and complicate decision-making. Coupled with this is the fact that even inexpensive drones can result in the deployment of expensive air defence systems, thereby raising disproportionately the costs of defence.

Iran's primary weapon of disruption was the Shahed drone. By US standards, it's slow, low-flying, easy to shoot down, and doesn't cost millions. Yet, these drones destroyed much more expensive radar and command and control facilities, disrupted oil production and struck key infrastructure across the region. The disruptive power of precision capability is immense and this was witnessed in



Targeting The Gulf

Iran's pressure on the other Persian Gulf littoral states was not only about US military bases. It also aimed at shattering an illusion that Gulf states can function as secure, investable, globally connected countries while hosting US bases.

The attacks disrupted services and forced operators to reroute workloads. For the first time, core cloud infrastructure, once seen as abstract and largely as commercial technology was directly struck in a military conflict.

The cloud was no longer some weightless digital mist. It was and is a physical system built from land, concrete, transformers, cooling systems, cables, and electricity. Data Centres are now at the forefront of the targeting list. This means the cloud is vulnerable to the logic of war.

Much of the infrastructure that enables modern operations is privately owned, and globally distributed. The companies involved may not think of themselves as combatants, but adversaries may not grant them that distinction.

Historically, the outcome of war depended on a side that had a larger and more capable military, superior industrial capacity and the depth of national resources to support and sustain a conflict. Operation Epic Fury has taught us that the equation is changing and modern war runs through various systems that were not part of the traditional battlefield milieu. In 'Art of War', Sun Tzu uses water as the central metaphor for a military force when he wrote about 'expanding torrents.' Unlike static formations, water adapts to the landscape and gains destructive power through accumulation and release.

The central challenge is therefore not only how to strike, defend or deter. It is how to maintain strategic control when adversaries can impose costs through systems that sit outside the traditional battlefield but inside the matrix of war. Modern warfare contests the conditions under which military power remains usable. The side that understands these issues will be in a position to control the strategic outcome.

Cloud Is Part of Campaign Geography

The Iran War highlighted a major shift. Data centers, internet cables, commercial AI providers, logistics platforms, and software infrastructure are now part of the battlespace. They help enable military operations, financial flows, communications, targeting, logistics, and regional economic confidence. They are no longer rear-area background systems.

Iran identified US technology firms that maintain offices, data centers, cloud infrastructure, and research facilities but had no strikes on AWS-linked facilities in the UAE



and in Bahrain illustrated how commercial digital infrastructure increasingly occupies strategic terrain.

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Conclusion

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#IMPACT

Bizarre Inventions From the Past In Use

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Throughout history, many inventions have seemed strange, quirky, or downright bizarre at the time of their creation. However, some of these oddities have stood the test of time and continue to be integral parts of our everyday lives. Let's take a look at some of these fascinating creations, things we still use today that were once considered outlandish.

1. The Toothbrush: A Small Stick with Big Impact

The toothbrush, as we know it today, may seem like a mundane item in our daily hygiene routine. However, its origins are far from ordinary. The first known toothbrush was invented in China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), and it was made from a combination of pig bristles and a bamboo handle. While it might sound like something from a horror movie, this early brush actually laid the foundation for the toothbrushes we use today.

The Chinese method of cleaning teeth evolved over centuries, and in the 16th century, Europeans were introduced to it through trade. However, it wasn't until 1938, when DuPont invented nylon bristles, that the modern toothbrush really came into being. The use of animal bristles eventually faded out, and today's toothbrushes are made of synthetic materials.

Although we might think of it as a basic tool for oral hygiene, the humble toothbrush has come a long way from its bizarre beginnings to a common staple in bathrooms around the world. We've come to rely on it for something as simple as brushing our teeth, but without the early experiments with materials, we might still be using crude methods today.

2. The Mirror: Reflecting on Ancient Innovations

Mirrors are a crucial part of daily life, whether we're applying makeup, checking our appearance, or simply mar-



veling at our own reflection. But the first mirrors weren't the sleek, silver-backed glass panels we use today. Instead, the ancient Egyptians used polished copper or bronze to create reflective surfaces. These metal mirrors were highly polished, and people used them primarily for personal grooming and as decorative objects.

The Romans took mirror-making a step further by using glass with a reflective metal backing, though they were still quite rudimentary compared to modern mirrors. The mirror as we know it today, clear, glass, and backed with a thin layer of silver or aluminum, was invented in the 16th century in Venice. It was originally a luxury item for the elite. While modern mirrors are not quite as "bizarre" as their ancient predecessors, the journey from polished metal discs to modern glass mirrors is a fascinating one, and it's a technology that continues to play a significant role in everything from interior design to scientific research.

4. The Hair Dryer: A Modern Marvel Born from a Strange Accident

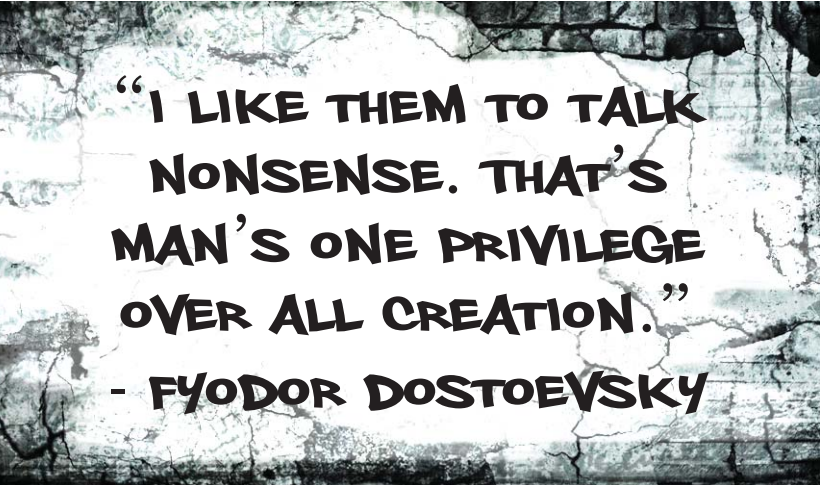
The hair dryer, which today is a must-have in many households, was once a rather bizarre invention. The first known patent for a hair dryer was filed in 1890 by a man named Alexander Godefroy, a French stylist. The original device, however, was far from portable. It consisted of a large, bulky machine that sat on the floor with a hooded attachment where the person's head was placed. The airflow was generated by a complicated system of heated coils and fans, making it an odd contraption by today's standards.

Godefroy's invention was actually inspired by a chance encounter with a client. He had noticed that hair dried faster when people sat under a heated contraption meant for hair treatments. The prototype was an early form of what we recognize as a hair dryer today, but it wasn't until the 1920s, with the invention of the handheld blow dryer, that the device became more common.

Though the first hair dryers were cumbersome and impractical, they paved the way for the lightweight, efficient devices we use today. What started as a strange, oversized contraption evolved into the small, powerful blow dryers that dry our hair in a matter of minutes.



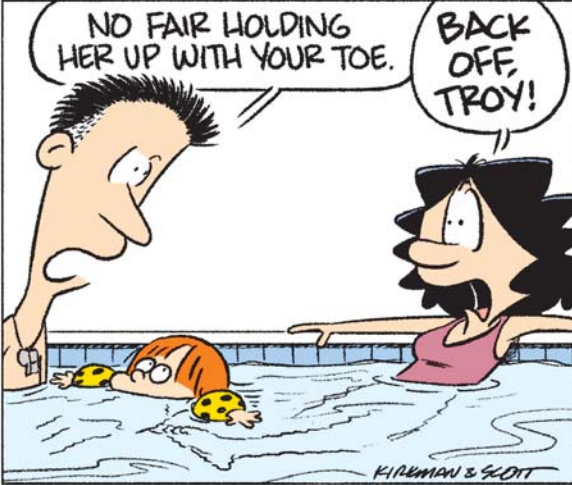
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS



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