

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 121. Chaos in Sudan, Biden vs. Sunak, and the fall of Braverman?

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Welcome to The Restless Politics with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

We are, we're together, unusually.

In Belfast.

In Belfast, yeah, which is the 25th anniversary of Good Friday, Grim.

We're doing a live event for the 25th anniversary celebrations.

And you are surrounded by the great and the good. It's pretty extraordinary.

I came in on the, through the police security to get in to see me, and I found my name sort of slotted in between Shree Blair and Senator Mitchell and all these kind of people.

So it clearly wasn't done alphabetically.

No, it was pretty, pretty odd. I don't know quite how the whole thing worked.

Anyway, here we are. And it's pretty amazing.

It's a moment where Belfast is, I suppose, a moment of economic optimism, but political uncertainty. Economy going gangbusters really seems to be benefiting from having, I don't know, it's become quite a political thing to say, but anyway, in a sense, the best of both worlds in relation to its trading with the European Union and with the United Kingdom, the economy growing some maths faster than anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Others as fast as London.

I think it's going to looking at extraordinary like 6% growth this year, which is the sort of figures that you get in Southeast Asia, not in Britain usually.

I think you'll also see them predicted in the Republic of Ireland this year.

Amazing.

So in today's podcast, we're going to talk about soft power in the context of Joe Biden's visit to Belfast and then the Republic of Ireland.

We do a little bit of what Roy and I are doing here in Belfast.

We're then going to talk about the terrible situation developing in Sudan, where two very, very powerful, well-armed guys are tearing lumps off each other.

And we're then going to close with a bit on the fascinating developments in the Franco-German relationship.

So what did you make of Joe Biden's visit north and south?

Well, very interesting.

I mean, one thing is we were slightly selfishly hoping to catch him here in Belfast because back a few months ago, the assumption was that he would be here with everybody else, with Bill Clinton and everybody for the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Groom, instead of which he decided to come a few days earlier and spend very little time in Northern Ireland and instead head to the Republic where he's had an extraordinary rapturous welcome.

I mean, 27,000 people lining streets to see him very much being celebrated almost at the kind of scale at which a sort of Kennedy would be celebrated.

But oddly, he hasn't decided to associate himself that directly with probably the most dramatic and extraordinary achievement of the last 25 years, which is the Good Friday

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Agreement.

And he sets on why he decided to lean into the Republic of Ireland and not focus, just come three days later with everybody else and do the events here.

Yeah, I think in terms of the actual date of the anniversary of the agreement, he was closer to that than this event that we're at.

We're about a week after the actual anniversary.

Look, I think there's all sorts of kind of theories doing the rounds and I don't know.

These things are often very, very fraught and all sorts of rumors fly around as to why such a position was taken, why such a visit happened in the way that it did.

But my hunch is that he was always wanting, at some stage in his presidency, in this term of his presidency, to have a big visit to Ireland, to the Republic of Ireland, that he was very, very keen to come to the UK, particularly if the institutions were back up and running.

And I imagine that if they had been up and running, he'd have done a big speech at Stormont and the Assembly would have been packed a bit like the door was in Dublin.

And the sense I get from some of the Americans is that they feel that Biden, like Clinton before him and like other presidents, kind of put the hours in, got in the parties to see them and really tried to sort of use whatever leverage he had to get the Windsor deal, which he soon adds Windsor deal, replacing Boris Johnson's wretched protocol over the line.

And the pictures of his arrival were, they were kind of stunning because I mean, look, I've been involved in quite a few presidential visits, the preparation that goes into these visits is ludicrous, every single minute is prepared.

And they know where he's going to be, they know how it's going to look, they know who's going to be there.

So I think to have him arrive at Belfast Airport, walk down the steps, have the car, the beast in the way of Rishi Sunak, that really bizarre meeting in a cafe, what looked like a cafe, might not be the cafe, it was probably a hotel, but it looked like the Windsor sort of cafe.

Again, for listeners who haven't been following this very closely, there was a sense in which Rishi Sunak was there to receive him, he's the United Kingdom, he's the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, receiving the present United States when he lands in the United Kingdom.

It's a big deal.

A big deal and you would have thought was going to be a big photo opportunity, but actually what Biden did is come down the steps, as you say, the car slightly got on the way, did a very, very brief greeting of Rishi Sunak and then wandered off to talk to the Lord Lieutenant and then spend most of his time flirting with the US Ambassador, who he clearly thinks is terrific.

Well, I think she's an old friend.

An old friend, very good.

And then he did a speech at Olsdyn University, which was a pretty good speech, but I was a little bit surprised that Rishi Sunak wasn't at that.

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Now, I know Prime Ministers are incredibly busy, they've got stuff to do, but I also find it a bit strange that Rishi Sunak is not that involved in these proceedings because, yes, Biden has a role as president and we've seen the fact that Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton are here, the Americans have taken the peace process very, very seriously.

But at the moment, the actual institutions in Northern Ireland are stuck.

The Windsor framework has not got the backing of the people that need to back it to get it up and running.

And it seems to me that I just feel there must be, there's a missed opportunity here.

I wonder whether there isn't something going on in the conversations between Rishi Sunak and the American administration where they're both deciding to slightly hold back from a big, big push until the institutions are up and running again.

I mean, how are they going to get them up and running?

How are they going to get them up and running unless Geoffrey Donaldson and the Unionists decide that they're going to get them up and running?

And I don't see where that's coming from.

And you know, I was at a dinner at Hillsborough Castle, it was a really nice event actually.

I'm interrupting again, but just again, for listeners who aren't concentrating, when we say the institutions aren't up and running, what's happened is that Rishi Sunak got through this thing called the Windsor framework, which is a very, very detailed, quite creative way of trying to deal with the incredible mess that was caused by Brexit in terms of Northern Ireland's trade with the United Kingdom and Europe.

But what didn't come out of it, which people was hoping, was the DUP re-entering the Stormont Parliament and having a proper functioning devolved parliamentary government here in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is still basically being run from London because these institutions are not functioning yet.

And that's the thing that we're all concentrating on.

And of course, the last elections, Sinn Féin did better, and the DUP may have to face the reality of a First Minister who is Sinn Féin, Jullo Nill.

And again, to remind people, the convention from over the last 25 years was always that the First Minister was a Unionist and the number two was somebody from the Republican nationalist community.

So that's a big change.

Right back in the day, the agreement was that they'd be equals, okay?

And it was actually the Unionists that got that changed.

I think it was the St Andrews that got that changed.

Whichever party did best in the elections would be the first and the second would be the deputy.

And of course, Michel O'Neill would be the First Minister.

So I get why psychologically that's extraordinary difficult, but I do honestly think, I know people probably think I'm obsessed with Brexit, but the extent to which the Brexiteers and the right-wing media were pretty vile about Biden.

You know, this was, and he hates the English, people were saying.

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This is just a pathetic snub.

Why isn't he going to the coronation?

You have people like Andrew Neil, I think it was saying, oh, this is all about American politics and getting the Irish vote and all this sort of stuff.

And the fact is, he does wear his Irishness on his sleeve, no doubt about that.

But I think there was something else going on there.

The optics for me were of him being greeted by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, looking very defensive, very sheepish, not really clear what he was there for it looked like.

Whereas the minute Biden got to Ireland, he had this sense of not just from Biden, but from the public and from the politicians, energy and vibrancy.

And I'm afraid I think a lot of that comes from the fact that they feel very, very secure inside the European Union and they feel pretty secure inside their own political skins.

Yeah.

I mean, I think you're right.

It was a very odd, insecure reaction from Britain.

It is also true that they had something to complain about, which is what we touched on at the beginning of this pod.

Biden was not making a real effort as he should have done as a guest, as a guest in somebody else's country.

You have to manage that.

The special relationship has to be managed 100% when you take it less seriously than we do.

100%, but when you're a guest in somebody else's country and you're the President of the United States, getting the optics right, with somebody else's Prime Minister when you're landing, it's pretty incumbent on you as the guest.

And as you say, this was a very carefully arranged visit and it was on the verge of being pretty rude.

I've never seen a US presidential visit feeling quite like that.

That is the big moment.

The cameras are there.

And I think one of the discomforts of it is that it's Biden trying to use the US status as a superpower to push and bully an influence.

And I think what's happened here in the background, which you were hinting at, is they basically said unless you get the institutions up and running, we're not going to come and do a great photo call for you.

And he was slightly reinforcing that with the way that he arrived.

So this is the US throwing its weight around.

Look, this is what happens if you don't tend that relationship incredibly carefully.

And normally what happens, certainly in our lifetime, when a British Prime Minister is with an American president.

So look, my, Thatcher and Reagan was a clear ideological, personal, political relationship.

They were incredibly close.

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Tony and Clinton, close.

Actually, I think John Major with the first George Bush, good relationship.

And Tony Blair wrote a thing recently pointing out that one of the tragedies of Brexit is that when something big is happening in the world, the American president can pick up the phone to whoever they want in the entire world and it matters who they pick it up to. And at the moment, it certainly wouldn't have been Johnson.

It certainly wouldn't have been trust.

And so that's the politics that they've been looking at.

And they think they think we've become a bit of a basket case.

Well, I think there's a bit of that.

I mean, obviously, I spent a lot of time in the US.

I taught at Harvard, taught at Yale, and I'm very close to Democrats.

And I remember, even when Henry Clinton was running, that the key parts of the foreign policy machine, this is back when Trump's coming in for the first time in 2016, were already saying our key relationship in Europe is with Germany.

That's the big growing economy.

That's the special relationship, not Britain.

So that was already going on some years ago.

It's also true that Biden enjoys playing up his Irishness and enjoys playing up his anti-Britishness.

I remember when he was...

But I don't think he projected himself as anti-British.

Well, I don't know what he said.

So let me give you an anecdote.

So when we were briefing him on Iraq back in the mid to late 2000s, when you'd go in to see him, and one of my friends went in to brief him and came out completely sort of shocked because she'd gone in to try to explain the Sunni Shia dimension in Iraq.

And he, then vice president, working for Obama, said, I completely understand the situation.

They hate each other.

I'm Irish.

I hate the English.

And that was his absolutely off-the-cuff, normal comment back in the 2000s.

Do you have absolute cast iron saucy?

100 cast iron saucy.

Was it ever written?

I don't know.

I'm not sure she's written it up.

But when you tell the story to anyone who's close to Biden, they laugh.

He makes those jokes all the time.

That's his running joke.

I mean, one of his favorite stories that he tells in campaign speeches is that his mother refused to stay.

Sleeping in a British bed?

Yeah.

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Would sleep on the floor rather than sleep in a bed that the queen had once been in. So he will have, everything else aside, apart from US foreign policy, have really enjoyed being celebrated in the Republic.

And it won't have been displeasing to him to seem as though he was a bit cold and off hand when he landed in Northern Ireland and was very, very warm and excited when he got to the Republic.

Which I, okay, and there's one, if you look through a particular lens, through the British special relationship lens, you can say, well, that's very rude and that's very bad. But we have to accept, as those previous prime ministers have done, that we are the lesser power.

My point is, I think that that has been exacerbated by Brexit.

So they just don't quite know what we're for.

And I think that when he got here, he just decided, yeah, he was kind of going through the motions.

He went through the motions.

Then he got to Ireland and he found all this energy.

And I just think the reaction of some of our media and some of our politicians just shows this incredible sort of, they're still locked in this world that we have to be treated like with a big power in the land.

And I'm afraid, you know, we've got to grow off of it.

And that relationship, you can't mess with it.

You have to tend it all the time.

I'm with you.

Although on the other hand, I guess, I'm getting the balance right on that and how far do you go and how far do you bend to the United States and paradoxically, we're in an age where and we'll move on to this at the end of this podcast where American power, soft power is waning all over the world.

I mean, it's so striking.

They're making no progress on Israel, Palestine, very little progress on conflict in Ethiopia, made no progress on the conflict in Yemen, haven't really got anywhere over the Iran nuclear deal.

And Sudan is a real example of total inability of America to exercise global efforts.

Do you see that as a failure of soft power?

When we said before, you know, planning the podcast and said, we'll talk a little bit about soft power, I was thinking much more of, and we'll definitely come back to the stuff about America, but how relatively very small country like Ireland does seem to be emerging with a sense of its own identity and is developing a soft power that I think was fully on display in that visit.

Oh, I think Ireland is a miracle, isn't it, in every way?

And it was a miracle that seemed as though it might have been totally thrown off balance in the 2008 financial crisis where the Irish economic miracle looked like it had become completely off the rails, and now it seems to be back again.

And it's extraordinary.

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The change from the 1950s to today makes it feel, I mean, I think this comparison with the Asian Tigers is a good one.

It's a country that does often feel like Singapore, a place that has completely transformed its identity and its reputation.

The same is true, of course, in the Nordic countries, I mean, I'm always very, very jealous of how Norway, Finland, Sweden, these countries managed to top every single international chart ranging from the stuff that you love talking about like education, but also things on happiness, human rights, democracy.

Then we'll get these little sort of right wing, far right boosting parties at the moment, which I think doesn't suggest major happiness to me all the time.

And don't forget as well, Norway has got money that, you know, I mean, you could build quite a lot of economies on the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund.

But it's of course, I mean, for someone like me who's passionate about the United Kingdom, this is of course, exactly what the S&P, what Scottish Nationalists keep pointing to.

They look at Ireland, they look at the Nordic countries, and they think, oh, maybe if we separated, we too could build this wonderful brand and find this great identity in the world.

And your point about American, so soft power, if you think about what soft power is, it's rooted in this idea that whether people are attracted to you and see the values that you have and they see those values being lived out.

And the big countries can, you know, they've got armies, they've got history, they've got all, so America, China, they're right out there, but your sense is of American soft power declining.

How much has that, do you think, got to do with the rise of China?

And how much actually might it have to do with the fact that they maybe don't work as hard at soft power as they did?

Well, I think a lot of things have happened, haven't they?

So as you say, Joe Nye, who's this Harvard professor, produced this extraordinary, I mean, you know, as one of the great masters of communication, I'd say you should be jealous of this word soft power, extraordinary how you managed to get this concept across the world.

I think I dreamt it in the bath before, I just didn't, I just didn't put it out there.

I actually came up with, have a break, have a Kit Kat, but I just never managed to get it out there.

So I think the United States had its glory days in the 90s, early 2000s.

And fundamentally, the Iraq war and the 2008 financial crisis broke it.

It broke the vision of that U.S. model of liberal democracy and open markets being the thing that the whole world wanted.

And you can feel it in Africa, and you'll be able to hear in the background, there's soft power going on.

There's Bill Clinton.

There is the real soft power.

There's Bill Clinton's voice speaking while we're here, kind of through the thing.

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I've just had a text message saying, your name is on a chair in the front row.

And Bill Clinton's actually written a whole speech thanking you, and you won't be there.

No, I don't.

I don't need to worry about that.

On your podcast.

But I think those things hit it very hard, and you feel it in the Middle East and Africa.

I mean, surveys, for example, of the Tunisians and people in North Africa and the Middle East, suddenly you see them rating China and Russia above the United States very, very significantly, and people increasingly excited by these authoritarian economic growth stories.

So yes, we may be having a little spat here about the United States snubbing Britain.

But all over the world, increasingly, people don't give a monkeys really what the United States think.

Oh, I think they give monkeys.

Well, I had a classic example in Tanzania.

So Tanzania, a tiny little country.

And when I went out there as the African minister, the Tanzanian president, Maga Fuli, had refused to take a call from John Kerry.

The US ambassador had gone in to see the Tanzanian president to protest, and the Tanzanian president

threw out the US ambassador.

And the US had to come back three years later with a billion dollars worth of development assistance to try to get their way back into even Tanzania.

And Tanzania is a pretty tiny place.

The knowledge which sometimes sponsors, which is very nice of them, I saw something on there the other day, it was a quote from somebody that said it was an African, a spokesman from an African government saying that the Chinese give us an airport, the Americans give us a lecture.

So maybe there's a little bit of that going on as well.

Yeah, absolutely.

And of course, the moral authority of the United States, its ability to talk confidently about democracy and values has been shattered over the last 25 years.

And that's why I think in a way we're at a wonderfully optimistic moment here in Belfast, but also it's a little bit sad because it's difficult to imagine a US senator doing again what was done there.

So just to explain, if you can hear anything strange in the background here, outside our window, and we're not making any jokes about the day of the jackal, but literally we opened the window and found 10 feet from us just below us, Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, Tony Blair, Senator Mitchell, Bertie Ahan, all standing there and giving a speech which is still going on.

So you'll hear that.

Well, you've had Bill, Tony's going on at the moment.

They're unveiling a bust of George Mitchell.

An enormous head.

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Yeah.

George Mitchell, who did a speech this morning that was mind blowing for his, I mean, for a 90 year old man to deliver the speech with the energy.

And it's been quite interesting because he's been here a couple of days.

He's actually not made a speech for three years because he's had leukemia.

The vibe was a little bit, this is probably the last speech I'm going to make, and probably the last visit to Northern Ireland as well, and he got an incredible reaction.

And he just told the story.

He told the story from start to finish.

You know, he actually at one point just listing the leaders of the parties and who their teams were and what they did and what the arguments were.

And he had just had some wonderful, wonderful, he said that, you know, when he was first asked by Bill Clinton to be his, as it were, special envoy and ended up chairing the talks, you know, we go on about politicians.

This is real public service.

So he gets sent here and he's flitting backwards and forwards, and his wife is also outside watching the bus being unveiled.

She felt pregnant.

When he was 65.

He was very hot.

He was getting on a bit.

That's my age.

Are you ready to have a baby?

New baby?

Certainly not.

I can't.

I mean, how do these old guys do that?

I don't know.

So his wife was pregnant.

And so he went to see Clinton's National Security Advisor to say, look, you know, I have given a lot of time to this.

There's been literally zero progress.

It's just, you know, I can't do it anymore.

I've got a new baby on the way.

And it was his wife who said to him, look, we're having one child, but you've got whole thousands of children over there who need this thing to work, so you've got to keep going.

And it was like, you know, there was barely a dry eye in the house.

It was just, so I think when we talk about public service, there's a lot of it involved.

How much did the US matter on this?

How did it been possible without the US?

When we get on to talk about Sudan, I think all of these situations benefit from proper political support from the big powers, where they don't become proxies.

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So you might say that a peace process might be made more difficult if you had China and America involved, but it might not.

But I think that the American support, I think, was at times considerable.

And I do think George Mitchell is rightly recognized for having just had the patience to, there was another wonderful thing he said, David Irvine, who, another sadly who's died since 1998, who was unionist on the loyalist side.

And George was telling the story about when he first met David Irvine and he said, Senator Mitchell, there's one thing you need to understand about this place.

Oh yeah, what's that?

He said, we're very reasonable people, but we will try 100 miles to receive an insult.

And he said that he noticed that he started laughing.

He thought that was very, very funny, but he looked around the room and nobody else was laughing.

Everyone's nodding seriously.

Nodding along to this.

And that sort of sense of the divisions and the divides between people, and Hillary Clinton, she was speaking on the same platforms, George Mitchell, and she was saying that when she first came here with Bill, that they literally were in that same room where we're doing our thing, Protestants on one side, Catholics on the other, and they were literally flitting between the two.

It must have taken actually, in retrospect, quite a lot for the British government to really accept the central US role in Northern Ireland.

I guess if you'd gone back to the late 60s, early 70s, Britain probably would have been a bit prickly and defensive.

They would have thought this is part of the United Kingdom.

It's nobody else's business coming in telling us what to do, which is what obviously many countries in Africa feel when the US turn up and try to get involved in peace process.

I think it's a sense of a certain kind of openness and generosity on the British side, too, to be so acceptance of the centrality of this.

Because certainly my friends in the US who worked on George Mitchell's work here, and the people like Megan O'Sullivan, who's a head of a centre now at Harvard, it's one of the proudest moments of her career as working as a staffer on George Mitchell's work here in Northern Ireland.

But they talk about it, of course, as though it's the South Sudan peace process, which must have, for some British people, been a little bit difficult to hear, given that it was an integral part of the United Kingdom.

When you talk about soft power, I think there was an extraordinary display of soft power. The fact of Mitchell doing what he did.

The other guy I think was mentioned, who, to be fair, George Mitchell did pay significant tribute to General De Shastle, the Canadian military guy who ultimately was part of the thing the whole way through and eventually oversaw the decommissioning of weapons. But I think that's what I'm finding a little bit sad about this thing, is that you're seeing all this sort of positive, good public service at a time when there's very little of it around.

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Well, the international community doesn't exist in the same way.

So this was the glory days of the 90s when Canadian generals were popping up all over the world.

My friend, General Romeo de Lair, was involved in Rwandan genocide and wrote a very, very moving book called *Shaking Hands with the Devil* about his experience then.

It was a period where Canada was very involved in Haiti, Australia and Canada were very involved in the East Timor peace process.

I mean, all these things that you'll remember.

And of course, most dramatically of all, Bosnia, Kosovo, these extraordinary ends of wars.

And it feels so, so different now.

I mean, maybe this is an opportunity to segue on to Sudan because that's the moment that should have been the 1990s moment, this being the 1990s.

What's happening in Sudan would have been the classic example of where you would expect the UN, the US, Canada, Australia, Britain, Norway to be really leaning in and they're not.

Well, as they applaud the end of Tony Blair, well, not the end of Tony Blair, the end of Tony Blair's comments, let's take a break and then we'll come back and talk about what's going on in Sudan.

The Restless Politics this week is sponsored by The New European again.

And as listeners know, this is a paper very close to my heart as I'm one of the two editors at large.

We have a new one, Matthew Dankona.

Even for me, absolutely brilliant to see their cover story.

I claim no credit because I've been here in Belfast.

The headline read, *Hate Mail*, one newspaper's century long quest to demonise migrants.

And inside a truly splintic wonderful analysis by Liz Gerard on the way the Daily Mail has over the course of its history, methodically supported hard-right nationalism and helped create a culture of fear and loathing for migrants in our country.

I can rarely remember reading such a hard-hitting attack by one British newspaper on another and it's very refreshing to see a small newspaper like The New European have the guts to call out the Daily Mail for what it is with such clarity.

It was certainly a very, very powerful cover and I'm also a great admirer of Carousell, which you know, well, it is smorgasbord of stories from around the continent.

So lots of reasons to get The New European and there is a special offer just for listeners of the rest of his policies and I think you're going to like this one, but you have to be quick because stocks of this particular giveaway are going to be limited.

They're offering new subscribers a full digital subscription for just £1 a week or if you want to get their excellent newspaper delivered to your door each week, that's just an extra pound a week, which is a saving of 75% of the high street price.

And if you subscribe now, they'll send you absolutely free of charge one of their beautiful burgundy bollocks to Brexit passport covers, which sell for £24.95 and an excellent quality and make it quite clear to everyone when you're going in and out of Britain, who's side you're on in the Brexit debate, just go to www.TheNewEuropean.co.uk forward slash trip.

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And sign up now. You'll be supporting great independent journalism. You'll get a fantastic passport cover into the bargain. Hurry while stocks last.

Welcome back to the rest of his politics with me, Alistair Campbell.

And with me, Roy Stewart.

And I think we should update the ceremony for the George Mitchell statue unveiling is now being addressed by Chris Heaton Harris.

That's it. And actually, I mean, I'm a bit bit envious of Chris. He's colleague of mine joined in 2010, but he's managing to deliver a very long speech as far as I can see with Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, Tony Blair, all standing behind him listening quietly.

Given a half chance, I would have delivered like a three hour Castro style.

Would you?

What would you do?

Well, he's going on quite a bit. I mean, I don't know whether he's explaining how he's going to get the Stormont institutions up and running and and possibly might be Caesar is rabid Brexitea wasn't he wasn't the ERG was he was the Brexitea?

Yeah, he's a Brexitea. Yeah, he's precious.

Chief whip to for it.

Right. OK. The latest episode of Leading, David Miliband.

Yeah, I think we should give a shout out to that.

But people seem to be liking these interviews.

Are you enjoying them, Rory?

I think it's probably one of the better things we do.

Oh, OK.

I think it is one of the better things we do.

And I think you don't like talking to me.

You want to talk to other people.

Exactly. Exactly.

That's right. Exactly.

Yeah, we don't have anything to say to each other, interview each other.

No, no point in that at all.

No, I think it's good because I think we're avoiding the confrontational.

We're giving people space to talk, which I'm not sure exists in conventional media, but maybe in the New World podcasting, we shouldn't be comparing ourselves to conventional media anymore.

But I don't think David Miliband would have been given an hour to really talk openly in the way that he did.

And the feedback suggests that a lot of people find what he said, particularly about impunity, it's very, very interesting.

We can do a little plug of an article he's just written, which he's been sending all of us.

It's called The World Beyond Ukraine, The Survival of the West and the Demands of the Rest.

That's kind of what we talked about.

Now, should we talk about Sudan?

Because it seems to me...

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It sort of comes out of it, doesn't it?

It comes out of the Miliband Reflections because...

Well, let me, if I can be cheeky and give my sort of one minute update on what's happening in Sudan and then over to you.

So, Sudan was once the largest country, one of the very largest countries in Africa, a slightly smaller now since South Sudan seceded.

It's this huge territory south of Egypt and on the margins between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, a country which had a strong tradition of a great intellectual class in Khartoum, a country with enormous oil wealth and some gold wealth, came to international attention, I suppose, with Darfur, so the horrors of the early 2000s, where people remember maybe the Janjaweed militia, which were mostly ethnically Arab nomadic groups who were fighting groups who looked more traditionally African, who were more settled in Southern Sudan, and then the breakaway

entirely of the world's newest country, South Sudan, which was completely different from the North. So, the North was Arab-dominated, Muslim in identity, South Sudan very much traditional Sub-Saharan African and Christian, credible proxy wars which everyone was involved in, from the Israelis to the Libyans to the Ugandans to the CIA, and referendum was held, South Sudan separated off and very, very sadly, after a great burst of optimism based on South Sudanese oil has collapsed into its own horrendous civil war, and Sudan has been through a similar cycle. Its president was indicted by the International Court, Criminal Court. He was toppled in an amazing revolution led by young people and civilians, brought him down. There was a moment of optimism, but we have to say the US and the international community were pretty slow to take advantage of it, to lower sanctions, embrace the civilian government, and pretty soon it collapsed into a military government, and the military government has now torn itself into two factions, one of which is essentially the commander of what used to be the Janjaweed militia, and the other half of which is the commander of the traditional armed forces, the Egyptians backing the second, the Saudis, UAE and the Russians backing the first, and it's on that that I'm handing over to you. Well, it's yet it's another proxy, essentially. Now, when we were talking earlier about the importance of, in the context of here, Northern Ireland, of that international support, I'm afraid if the big powers turn away, and I'm not saying that they turn away and that they will be tracking it, it'd be very interesting, you have all the ambassadors out there doing all the things they can, all the military days on guys doing all the stuff that they can, but ultimately this feels like a situation that could spiral very, very quickly into something as catastrophic as we've seen there before. You probably know these characters better than I do, but essentially you've got the military guy who's effectively running the place, and his deputy have now taken different sides, both pretty well stocked with all sorts of arms, and they're killing each other. The deputy comes from the Darfur region in the south, so he's from a different ethnic group, and he runs this rapid reaction force, which basically was the Janjaweed militia. It was these mounted Arab pastoralists who conducted a lot of the atrocities and were then brought into the army.

He also controls the government's gold reserves, and he was sent off to fight in Yemen, paid for by UAE in Saudi, which is where his connections to UAE in Saudi came from. He used to travel openly to Russia, so as these two men, essentially the leader and the deputy have broken

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apart, taking their own military units with them, they've kept those international relations too, and underlying it is the fact that Sudan, like the whole chain of this whole territory called the Sahel that stretches all the way over from Chad, Niger, and Mali, is an extreme victim of climate change. There's desertification moving across the whole region, there's been a drought basically for six years, now stretching right the way across the Horn of Africa, and very similar conflicts between pastoralists, people moving with their livestock and settled communities, happening across nine or 10 different countries of which Sudan is now one.

I'd have thought of a particular interest to you with your charity hat on. I think I'm right thinking that among the dead so far, there have been three people who work for the World Food Program, who as a result have halted their program there.

That's heartbreaking.

So what happens in those situations? Because this is again something we talked to David about. He's operating in some of the most dangerous and difficult parts of the world, his charity, rescue, and they have to make decisions about whether they can effectively and safely do the things that they have to do. So how do you make those decisions?

Well, it's horrifying. We're having to think about it with give directly, which as he says, the charity that I now run because we've got staff in Goma and the Congo, where the M23 militia have been on the edge of the city.

But perhaps the most dramatic example that I had in my in life was our charity in Afghanistan, Turquoise Mountain, which I set up with my wife. We were having to make decisions in four or five days and staying up all night trying to make these calls on which staff you needed to get out and which could remain with the Taliban taking over the country with our staff screaming that they were going to be killed in their beds with 14 hour delays at the airport fence with people being shot in the crowds with no planes to put people on. And the question of do you keep operating in Turquoise Mountain decided to keep operating, decided to keep going in Afghanistan.

A lot of our staff were understandably felt utterly betrayed because they'd lost an opportunity to leave Afghanistan and move to a better life in Europe with the United States.

We are now running again. We now have women back being educated. We're very proud of what we're doing on the ground, but it's incredibly difficult. And going back in the day, when the Taliban with the insurgency, we were having to make decisions.

One of my key members of staff came to work one morning and found a hand grenade under his desk.

He then went back to his guest house and found a man in a suicide vest to try to talk his way in and blow up the whole guest house. And at what point do you decide this is too dangerous?

Our staff are going to get killed. And we're going to leave

effectively abandoning all your recipients who are no longer going to receive any support

or do you risk your life to continue delivering development assistance? And every time I've had to make this decision going all the way back to Iraq where I was having to decide whether to evacuate people into the middle of gunfire in 2004. And I thought I'd made completely the wrong decision. I pushed my civilian staff out in vans and they were immediately attacked by shield militia with me watching from the roof. You have this counterfactual going in your head.

Are you going to get your staff killed moving them out? Are you going to get them killed staying?

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And is what you're doing worth the risk? And if you look around Africa at the moment, they're different in type. Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, DRC, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda and Yemen, all currently with some sort of terrorist insurgency going on. These are countries that are some of them desperately in need of support. At the center often, not least Yemen, which we've talked about before, of another proxy war between bigger powers and the help that they need can only really come through international political support alongside the support of organizations like David's, like yours, et cetera. And the heartbreaking thing is... And if the political support isn't there, it makes it a lot harder for you guys to do it. Completely heartbreaking. So take Britain. When I was the Minister for Africa, I had a bilateral budget of over £4 billion a year for Africa. This year, the equivalent bit of the budget will be less than a billion. At the same time, the UK government will be spending well over £3 billion on Ukraine and looking after Ukrainian refugees in Britain. So at a time when Africa's needs are at their most extreme, under the fourth year of drought in Somalia, these military governments are taking over right where across the Sahel, we've cut our aid to the bone. And my Africa strategy, I mean, I've been quite self-centered here, but in 2016, was a large part of it was about the Sahel. It was about recognizing that because of climate, these were the places that Britain needed to concentrate on. We put the structures in place, we were opening embassies, we were moving troops into that region, and we've basically given up as have... And the French have been kicked out of these countries and the US have given up. And the truth is that many of those countries that you mentioned in that long list have now been taken over by military governments backed by the Wagner Group, which is this very unpleasant Russian mercenary group. And this is the soft underbelly of NATO. This is NATO's southern flank. And when those countries go wrong, you will see a lot of migration coming across the Mediterranean into Europe because of our short-sightedness. Okay, well, on that happy note, it's pretty grim, isn't it? Let's just talk maybe to close off today the Franco-German situation. We talked about it very, very briefly on the Q&A last week, but I think there's something quite profound going on at the moment. And I can't quite put my finger on it. That relationship, there's always been tensions, but by and large, we were talking earlier about the US-UK relationship and the importance of that to both countries. And yes, it's more important to the UK than the US in many ways. Franco-German probably closer in terms of the needs of each other, but the sense that maybe Germany is a little bit more powerful and therefore the French maybe need them a bit more. Okay. Macron, we talked last week about his trip to China where the criticism, I guess, if you had to boil it down, was that he was positioning himself. I don't think this is fair, but this is what happened, and sometimes you have to manage these situations, is that the criticism is that he positioned himself too much as Europe between the US and China, particularly when it came to Taiwan. And the Americans, some very, very vulnerable. I heard one American senator saying, you know, is this guy speaking for himself? Is he speaking for France or if he's speaking for Europe? Because if he's speaking for Europe, you know, we're not on the same page. Germany, meanwhile, Baierbach, the foreign minister, been in China this week with a much tougher message. But then again, she also has a much tougher message than Schultz, her chancellor. And although Macron gets a lot of the stick in the European media for being the guy who's not fixing this relationship in the way that maybe it should be because he has his flights

of fancy and he talks about European strategic autonomy. And there's also a sense, I think that Schultz is maybe not tending the relationship as he should as well. And he's also got real problems which are not getting that much attention in the UK with these part of his coalition, the three Democrats who are being absolutely hammered in state elections. And I think they've got another two coming up quite soon. So he's they're having to take positions that aren't necessarily going to be fitting with what Macron's trying to do. And therefore, it seems to me that they're almost like in a standoff at a time when they need to be kind of getting together.

Well, it's interesting how China seems to be the trigger point for all of this because we were talking about Schultz's visit to China a few weeks ago, where again, he got in a bit of trouble, seeming to cozy up too much to China, setting off there without the EU with him. But it's a sign in a sense of Europe's has got an issue with China, because I think China is bringing into focus fundamental questions about what Europe wants to be in the world. Is it prepared to stand up for the human rights of the weaker people, Tibetans, democracy, and indeed stand against Chinese aggression towards Taiwan in the way that there is a total consensus across every part of the political divide in the United States? Or is it going to be pursuing its own economic interest? 50% of the profits of the European automobile and luxury goods manufacturers now are made in China.

50% of the growth of most European sales are in China at the moment. And therefore, there is a huge temptation for the Europeans to think, well, as the US is standing off against China, we have this amazing economic opportunity to cozy up to them and get fantastic economic benefits from doing so. But at the same time, I guess, they're feeling pretty yucky about it, and they're a little bit disturbed about what they're actually up to. And you can see these fractures or these sort of fractures within Germany, within France, because there are opposition groups saying we shouldn't be doing this. And of course, the particular problem that Macron has was two problems I foresee. One is that he, I mean, it was a pretty extraordinary achievement to get his second term and put it pretty well. Since when he's had these strikes that we've talked about before over a reform that seems fairly modest to us, but to the French is a really big deal about raising the pension age from 62 to 64. I think his other big problem is there's no sense of succession. And I do think that just as to some extent, Barack Obama's legacy has to be partly defined by the fact that Donald Trump became the American president.

Likewise, I think that for all the good stuff that Macron's done and for all the credit he gets as being a pretty stellar political politician in many, many ways, if Marine Le Pen is the legacy, that is a very, very bad legacy. And I heard something very, very interesting from somebody who lives and works in Paris and who operates in the political world, who was describing a visit recently to a pretty swanky restaurant near the French National Assembly.

And having lunch with a politician and in walks Marine Le Pen. And what she said was that it was really interesting because she was expecting some kind of reaction that Le Pen would attract a kind of level of hostility and a sense of hostility that would be marked. And she said she just walked in very nicely dressed, carrying a lovely handbag and sat down with these five pretty youthful, very smart parliamentary assistants and had lunch and nobody really bat an eyelid. There's Marine. There's even me saying there's Marine. She's completely defined herself as Marine without the Le Pen, which still carries the baggage of her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The worry I would have if I was in France. Sorry, I'm going to be boring here. But again, for American and other listeners, it's American and other listeners, but people will be very, very aware that what she represents is the far right nationalist element in French politics. And that was very explicit under her father when it was a much more obviously offensively far right nationalist party, deeply, deeply anti-immigration and anti-semitic. Often, it's been anti-EU taking big loans from the Russians who've clearly been using this party to mix stuff up. And she's been trying to give it more of an acceptable face and came second to Macron the last elections. And as you say, difficult to see who's going to be able to beat her next time around because there's no other big political figures emerging. And Macron is not succeeding in creating a clear deputy. There's no Gordon Brown to his Tony Blair. No, the other thing I say about French politics, Macron being a very good example of this, they do have a greater capacity for breaking molds and new forces and new parties emerging. They've all basically changed their names in the last few years, including Macron. But I think that without that sense at the moment, I guess what I'm saying about the thing in the restaurant that really stuck with me is the sense of the idea of the normalization of Marine Le Pen, the idea that she's actually a legitimate political figure who you can see standing up there on the world stage a bit like, look at Maloney in Italy, Maloney, I think not as probably not as hard right as Le Pen, certainly not as hard right as John Marie Le Pen, but very, very much on the right. But did the same thing, a sense of normalization, a sense of getting rid of the worst elements of the party and its baggage, surrounding herself with some, you know, fairly young, attractive looking people who don't go around saying terrible things about Jews or the Germans, but actually just sort of talk about how terrible the government is and how we need housing and of jobs and a fair deal. Nevertheless, the subliminal dog whistle, which is they're perpetually benefiting from the sense that a lot of their supporters like, yeah, well, we know where you really are, we know where your sympathy is really like. Interesting also, it's something I sometimes think with Suella Breverman too, how women are often part of the rebranding of right wing projects and giving legitimacy or acceptability to some of these movements in Europe. Am I detecting a bit of a selling in Breverman shares within the conservative fold? Am I just, is that wishful thinking? I just noticed, was it Greg Hans the chairman being pressed at the weekend on how her policies on immigration are not going down terribly well, which is not seen as effective? And he was actually put on the spot about whether she shouldn't be sort of moved on or moved out. And I just wondered whether that was coming from somewhere. I think they dearly love to get rid of her. I think she's seen as profoundly disloyal, profoundly disruptive. Disloyal to Rishi Sunak. In what way? Conservative party. Oh, because she is frequently out there saying things that aren't government policy. I mean, she's not clearing them with a grid. She's deliberately getting out there and doing things. How dare they go against the grid that was established in 1997. How dare they do this? And you know, and deliberately appealing to factions, the Daily Mail and putting out stories that number 10 is not keen to put out. So they would really like to get rid of her. You really think Sunak would like to get rid of her? 100%. And he brought her in at a period where it seemed as though the ERG, so this right-wing Brexiteer faction, the Conservative Party felt like it was very strong and she was their standard bearer and he couldn't afford to leave her out. But I think as he showed with the Windsor framework that the ERG was losing its teeth and that that part of the party is less of a threat to him than

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he maybe thought they were. He may begin to feel that he can flex his muscles more and she's definitely,

I mean, he's somebody who, I was talking to a Conservative minister yesterday on the phone who said one of the things that one doesn't understand about Sunak is this guy was a minister under Cameron, under May, under Johnson, and actually even under Truss. And he's- Right, well, we're too old to worry about this. Change?

We're not going to push it too far. But he said to me that this is the first time that he's really felt there's a well-run number 10, better than it was under David Cameron. He said, I mean, obviously better than it was under this trust of Boris Johnson, which is complete catastrophic chaos. But Rishi Sunak is running things better than anybody's seen internally, just the way the number 10 works than people have seen since 2010.

I actually, one of the people I met going into the event earlier this morning was Simon Cases here. Very good. Yeah.

Cabinet Secretary, because he used to work in the Northern Ireland office.

Did he forgive how rude we all are about Simon Case all the time?

I basically said, look, Simon, I mean, Rory goes on about it the whole time. I do my best to try and do it.

No. Well, look, I think the demise of Soella Braverman is a very, very good place to end this week's The Rest is Politics.

Very good. Thank you very much.