

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 129. Sunak at a crossroads, weaponising 'woke', and the Wagner Group

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Welcome to The Restless Politics with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

You are back to your old days of doing back-to-back media interviews. This is the day of the launch, but what can I do?

Oh, Rory, we stop plugging my books relentlessly, just because you want me to do the same in September, which I will, by the way. No, the launch is Thursday, but I did the first broadcast interviews this morning with Good Morning Britain, where I was quizzed about your dress choice at the coronation. We'll come on to that. And then I did the today program, where I was also able to discuss something which we're going to talk about, which was a rather interesting speech that Justin Trudeau, the Canadian Prime Minister, made at his party conference about how to deal with this whole woke as a political challenge. We'll come on to that. And we're going to, I think, talk briefly about the coronation, because we just come out of the coronation, local elections in Britain, and Russia and Canada onto the coronation. So I was there sitting in the the transept, so the sort of side bit of the church, looking at the side of his Majesty's head on his crown. Right. And I actually had to watch the whole thing again on the television,

because you get a much, much better view with the BBC cameras than you do sitting in it.

Were there not big screens around the place? I saw some screens.

No, no, there was a little, little screen, quite a long way ahead. And it didn't really help me much. How long were you in there before it started? What happened if people of a certain age needed to, you know, go to the loo? Well, this was the big, big problem. So set off at seven, got there, I suppose, about 745. And the service didn't start and proper until just before 11 when his Majesty turned up, didn't finish till one. So you had a pretty long run. And as you can imagine, there are, you know, senior generals and members of the House of Lords. There was a one of the central figures in the whole coronation. Lord Singh, I think, is in his early 90s. And he was involved in having to hand one of the key bits, the Royal Ruggedia River. So this is a big problem. And it was even more of a problem with Queen Elizabeth's coronation, which went on for, I think, something like five hours. But there was a bit of an opportunity for people to nip out to the loo up until about half past nine. But I did notice that somebody told me he brought along a special device to pee into. I didn't want to ask too many questions about what that device was or how that works. But this was clearly a big problem for people.

So who did? Who did?

One of the older men, one of the older men said that he had a special device to pee into.

Okay, well, this is very interesting. And listen, what about the kings and queens and the macrons and the Jill Bidens? Did they have to sit around for hours as well?

They got to come in a little bit later than us. So they began to show up, I suppose, just after 10. And that's when the sort of half past 10 is when the members of the Royal Family turned up. So we'd been there, I suppose, a couple of hours before the heads of state, and the Royal Family started turning up.

Talk us through the reactions that your Privy Council uniform was getting. I was getting a lot

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of very, very funny reactions, some of them from your former parliamentary colleagues, it has to be said.

So just to explain what I was doing for those who haven't been following this full thing, I decided to wear the uniform that Privy Council has traditionally wore to coronations. And someday, I should tell you the full chaotic story of spending three days trying to get hold of this thing. Because as at the beginning of last week, the king had said that he didn't want people wearing formal garb for the coronation. And then that changed on Monday. So on Monday,

it was suddenly announced that he was happy with people wearing coronation robes and this sort of stuff. So I then tried to work out from Jordan, how was I going to get hold of this? And try to find somebody who could actually tell me what the correct dress was. So two central things happened

a man called Keith, who's the senior tailor in Henry Poole, which is the last proper traditional outfitter in London. I can't believe you said that sentence. Say that again. Henry Poole, the last what? Proper traditional outfitter in London that does all this stuff. So he was equipping the Earl Marshall and the Lord Chamberlain sort of thing, was able to tell me what I was supposed to wear because actually what I was wearing was actually a little bit more informal than was written in the regulations, the regulations I've supposed to be in in white silk stockings and white silk britches. But he anyway, this this man Keith very kindly explained that because the Earl Marshall was wearing trousers that would be proper for me to wear trousers with a gold band down the side, and then this extraordinary jacket. And I had to have a ostrich for the hat, a pair of white gloves. And I was supposed to have a sword on. Now my sword was my father's sword, because he used to wear the same uniform when he was a colonial officer back in the 1950s. Did you have a sword? I didn't see the sword. No, so well, this was the problem. So my father wore the sword for the Queen's coronation. And I wanted to wear his sword, but then suddenly it became clear on the regulations, they weren't going to let anyone in with a sword. Well, even you, even, even for security reasons. In case you chopped the king's head off, or they think you were going to do the sword. Exactly. I love this. So got this uniform on and then began going down a very weird rabbit hole on the internet where you can see pictures of Churchill and Chamberlain and Lloyd George and all these people wearing this uniform.

And essentially, they wore it a lot. I mean, this was their standard uniform to going to Privy Council meetings. Actually, it was slightly different Privy Council meetings, less gold Privy Council meetings, more gold for these kind of royal ceremonies. Turned up in it and then found slightly to my astonishment that I thought lots of other people be wearing it. The person who was really meant to be wearing it was Penny Mordent, who was walking in front of the king. So she decided to my astonishment not to wear what this black thing with gold frogging down the front, but instead to wear, maybe describe what she was wearing. Well, it was, it was sort of like a cape look with a, she looked great. I thought she looked absolutely fantastic. And unfortunately, there's lots of stuff doing around on social media that she's taken the Privy Council gold bit on your tunic and put it onto her part of her headgear. But apparently it's also the logo of Poundland. And it's also the same, it's also the same color. But I have to say, Roy, I was in awe of her arm and shoulder strength. I do think, however, it is evidence of the total madness of the

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conservative party and indeed of our media that from that basis of her being able to hold a sword for a couple of hours in an upright position and look great, like she was in some sort of amazing James Bond film, is that the headlines within hours became, is are we looking at the next leader of the conservative party? And of course, bear in mind, she was given that job, Lord President of the Council, by Liz Truss as a way of getting out of public attention, because Liz Truss was a bit worried about how popular she might be.

No, pretty, pretty amazing. Pretty amazing. I saw someone in Twitter saying that, given that we weren't living in King Arthur's Round Table, they weren't certain that being able to hold a sword for a long time was necessarily the best qualification for leaving the country.

I've got to say, Roy, I thought you looked very, very splendid in many, many ways.

I think Humza Yousef stole the show in terms of fashion.

I met him there. It was amazing. A Diamante jacket on top of his kilt.

So hold on, Roy, we've got to our first crucial question here. So you were face to face with Humza Yousef. And I presume you said, now that you're the first minister, I'm sure Alistair would be very interested in having you on the podcast. I'm sure you said that, did you?

I didn't, Alistair.

What about the heads of state and government? I completely failed. Andy Burnham was very keen to come on. If you'd like to get, I'd like to get Andy Burnham on. How about Andy?

Andy, if you're listening, I think what would be good with me and Roy from different sides, what about if we've got Andy Burnham and Andy Street on together?

Very good. Very good idea.

Let's just talk very briefly about whether you, we've got quite a lot of questions, Roy, asking whether you and Shoshana going to Pizza Express in the Privy Council uniform was an act of trolling of Prince Andrew?

No, it was not. It was an act of massive frozen cold. It was really cold in there.

And Shoshana wasn't wearing a coat and no cars can get anywhere near Westminster Abbey.

So we were walking down Millbank getting colder and colder.

And stopped in Pizza Express for a meal.

The other question which a lot of people ask was, did you have the dough balls?

I didn't. I did not have the dough balls.

Okay. Now, should we talk about the one issue related to the coronation, apart from your address that I was asked about on Good Morning Britain, which is the policing? Yeah.

And in particular, the policing of the protests by the anti-monarchy group Republic.

What did you make of that? Were you aware it was going on until you got out of church?

Wasn't aware until we got out of church. So a little bit of, again, history for listeners who've not been concentrating on all of this. A new public order act was passed, just came into effect four or five days before the coronation.

And it was particularly focused on a new offence of locking on.

So locking on, as everybody will be aware, is a way that protests slow down things by attaching themselves to roads or to railings. And this was particularly, I think, prompted by Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil. Just Stop Oil in October blocked almost every day the traffic on London's busiest streets. And you had Keir Starmer, in fact,

coming out saying he wanted longer sentences against this and had been very clear that he, and I guess this is a part of his appearing, appealing to Middle Britain, he hasn't taken the extreme progressive liberal view on this. He said that he gets fed up with people delaying. Now, with the Public Order Act when it passed, the idea was for the police to be able to deal with disruption and deal with it before it happened. And it's been very controversial for very good reason, because it gives the police much more power to get in the way of demonstrators. And in this particular case, they arrested for conspiracy to lock on a series of people from the Republican movement and held them for 16 hours, having detained and searched them. And essentially, all they were doing was unloading placards. And it's very, very, very worrying. It was a massive overreaction by the police. Do you think it's possible that the police did that because they were trying to test this new legislation or because they were reading or possibly misreading political signals from the lights as well as from the government? Well, I think they're obviously in a difficult position. They were obviously under a lot of pressure to make sure the coronation went smoothly. They deployed a very, very large number of officers. I met officers down from Police Scotland, as I said, who'd come down to help. But we cannot end up in a situation where lawful demonstration is stopped. And we can't just use the excuse of disruption to do this. And I'm a passionate, passionate monarchist and I would have been very sad to see the coronation disrupted. But equally, I passionately believe that people should have the right to be able to demonstrate. And also, I didn't, you know, as I know from the People's Vote campaign, and other campaigns I've been involved in, when you organize protests and marches and so forth, you go through the police. You have to apply for licenses. You have to get permission and so forth. And according to Graham Smith, the head of republic, they've been talking to months for months to the police about what they might do. And right up until the day, we're told that what they were planning was perfectly fine. So, something obviously changed. He's now demanding a sort of proper inquiry. But what did you think about Lee Anderson? Sorry to bring him up again, but what do you think about him saying, if you, we live in a monarchy, if you don't like it, you can just emigrate? I mean, part, a lot of those people, I suspect, if they did emigrate, would like to emigrate to the European Union, but we can't because of people like Lee Anderson. But what do you make of that as a sort of? I think it's, I think it's a terrible, it's a terrible type of political messaging. I mean, you can use that for almost anything. You know, if you don't like it, leave the country is a horrible way of approaching people who've got a perfectly legitimate right to challenge the current constitution. I support them, you know, for example, I support the monarchy, but I don't like our electoral system. I want to push for proportional representation. I don't want Lee Anderson saying to me, if you don't like the first past the post electoral system, move to another country, I have every legitimate right to protest the way the constitution works. Presumably when women were fighting for the right to vote, he would have said, look, if you don't like living in a country that where women don't vote, leave the country, but then the country would have died because there would have been no further procreation. I wonder if Lee understands that basic point about humanity. Now, listen, shall we, can I just say to you, or this penny modern thing, Lord, presidents of the council, I looked up the list, just it's quite incredible. Alec Douglas Hume, in the year when I was born, he was the Lord president, Quentin Hogg, Richard

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Crossman, Willie Whitelaw, your predecessor, Michael Fort Christopher Stomes, Francis Pym, John Wakeham, Jeffrey Howe, Peter Mandelson, Margaret Beckett, Robin Cook, some pretty big names have done that job. So maybe Penny is the one.

It's a funny title just to explain to people what it is. It's largely ceremonial, but it has been used in two ways. Sometimes it's been used for moving people sideways. So it's a move that they did, for example, with Chris Grayling when they moved him out of running a full department. In other cases, as with your friend Peter Mandelson, it's sometimes done to reinforce the ego of the person and make them feel even more important by giving them this grand title alongside them. Oh my God, what a slur.

You're talking about a deputy prime minister. Exactly, he was called first secretary of state as well. As he was, he did have a very long title at one point. I, as you know, am not really into titles. You're not really into titles. Quickly on the local elections, we did quite a lot of that, refer people if they want to our local elections special, where I think we did pretty well, and I think we laid out most of the arguments around it. But any other thoughts that you've had since on the local elections? Well, a couple of things. First of all, I got picked up rightly by quite a lot of people saying that I sounded very dismissive of the Greens. And I know it was actually, I was just trying to shut the conversation down because I was getting the message to say, let's move on. But the Greens did do very well. But I think actually, I've been reading, as you know, I have a son who works in the gambling industry and mainly in sport, but he also follows the betting markets very, very closely. And I think I've said to you before that the betting markets are a much more reliable way of looking at some of this stuff than the polls. And what I think is important to understand is that the first thing is that the results genuinely were worse than the Tories are expecting. And those who are being, I'm sure you would have talked to others, you know, that those who are being honest about the outcome are saying it was worse than they expected. And the point about this projected national vote share is that you're talking about local elections, where I think I'm right in saying that independence others were on 19. Now, in a general election, that is not going to happen. And the other thing to remember, even though this is millions of people voting, far more people didn't vote. And so the question then is where do they break? And if you look at the polls on that, the majority would break for labor rather than Tories. And also this tactical voting thing, I think is really important because and you know, some people may not understand what's going on here. But essentially what's happening is that people who are driven mainly by a motivation to get rid of the government are looking to see which other candidate is most likely to win that seat. Now, that happened in a local area. But once that starts to happen through national politics, and once the parties start to make clear they're quite happy about that, I think that becomes a real problem for the Tories.

So I think one way of summarizing it is that the Conservatives did badly worse than people predicted. So Colin Rayling was predicting 1000 losses. John Curtis, who's another famous pollster, Sir John Curtis, was saying that actually the Conservatives could be worse than 1000 when he predicted it. But they did do worse than 1000. On the other hand, the same people who were predicting the Conservatives could lose 1000 were predicting that labor would take more than 700 additional seats and they didn't. They took 536. And compared to 2012 where they gained 847 seats. So I think the summary should be Conservatives did badly, Lib Dem and Greens did very well. I

mean,

this was the best result ever for the Greens, best result for the Lib Dem since 2010. And that's interesting for someone like me, who's very interested in the centre ground and whether there is room in the centre ground to build. But you're absolutely right, it's nothing to depress Keir Starmer about. I think what you would say though, is that labor needs a seven-point lead to have a majority. They've got a nine-point lead here. But there's nothing to be complacent about either because there's some time to go to the general election. And if Rishi Sunak began to improve his performance, you can get to a situation quite quickly where labor could end up with the most seats, but not an overall majority. Yeah. I think that's right. I think the current betting odds have got labor majority five to six on. That means, you know, basically the market thinks the likelihood is very, very high of a labor majority. No overall majority, 13 to eight, and a Tory majority seven to one. That is almost becoming like a kind of outside bet. But I also think though that from labor's perspective, and this speech that I'm doing on Thursday at Europe House, it's the Julian Priestley lecture. Julian was a British guy who was a very senior civil servant, sadly died very, very young in Brussels. And there's an annual lecture in his name. And so, you know, the speech isn't all about Brexit, but obviously given the audience, a lot of it is. And I really do believe now that Labour and the Lib Dems can afford to be a lot more confident about taking them on over Brexit, not by saying we're going to go back in, but actually by saying Neil Kinnock has this wonderful line, which I think Labour ought to use, you know, we're paying the price, the real bills of the bungalow Tory Brexit. And I think Labour, I think young people in particular, this is part of what the book is about. But I think that so many young people sort of feel their future is being stolen. And yet there's nobody really articulating that for them. And so I do think that Labour and the Lib Dems can be a lot more robust in campaigning against the Tories on Brexit. And don't forget Rishi Sunak, unlike Johnson, Sunak believed in this. And he actually did the media do this sort of, you know, old Sunak unlike Johnson, he sort of looks at the numbers, he's a great technocratic problem solver. Let me just give you a quote from him at the time. I'm not ideological about it. Somewhat analytically, I sat down and looked through the numbers on Brexit. Well, the numbers don't look very good now. So that was his first big political call and he got it badly wrong.

You're going to be, I guess, saying that Labour can move into a more confident position and the Lib Dems are more confident position on Brexit and that they should do before the next election. Definitely, definitely. And I think it's a Labour at the moment, we've got this line, we're going to make Brexit work. I think that doesn't speak to where the country is on Brexit. I think they've got to say we're going to fix the problems that Brexit has created. Brexit has created real big problems for the country and we've got to fix them.

But if you don't admit them, then how can you begin to fix them?

Let's just talk briefly about your old party. Maria Probert asked this question, which I think is really interesting. After the awful local election results for the Conservatives, do you think Rishi Sunak will get rid of Soella Braverman or move further to the right of the party? Interesting how John Redwood was one of the first voices out, sort of laying the blame a little bit soon, saying it's got to be more tax cuts, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But do you think Braverman is becoming a bit of a symbol of the politics of the 20th century? She is a symbol. I think the problem is that Rishi Sunak is in a very, very tricky situation

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because there are obviously the Braverman right-wing faction, the Conservative Party, which remember that faction of Conservative Party generally has the majority of Conservative Party members. They tend to be to the right of the general population and they will feel that Boris Johnson's successes in 2019 and the general election and then in the last local elections vindicate their view that voters want more right-wing red meat stuff and that that's why the Conservatives won seats in the Northeast and they'll be disappointed they're not getting that out of Rishi Sunak. And then on the other hand, you've got me and people on my side who are, you know, the sort of centre-left of the party who are horrified by Swella Braverman and who feel that we're going to lose all the seats in the commuter belts around London that are going to the Lib Dems because we are not detoxifying the party and we need to get back to the centre ground if we're going to have any hope of defeating Labour in the next election. So he's stuck between a rock and a hard place and you can see that in the local election because in a sense we're both right. He is losing unfortunately votes in the core areas of the red wall that he wanted to keep because they don't feel he's being passionate enough about Brexit. And of course the Conservatives are losing a lot of votes to the Lib Dems with voters like me who feel that they need to get rid of Swella Braverman and move more to the centre. So he's in a very tough situation and he's but then famously it was it LBJ who said if you can't ride two horses at once and don't get into the political circuits? Just maybe a final point on this which I think is worth reflecting on. I still believe that the reason one of the big reasons Johnson won in those seats was nothing to do with Johnson, a lot to do with Jeremy Corbyn and people's fear of Jeremy Corbyn as his prime minister. It was a very interesting moment when we were watching the coronation

and where Keir Starmer and Ed Davy they were sitting together and as the procession was coming down the cameras were following it down and you just saw this in the background almost Keir Starmer

and Ed Davy sitting there. My Fiona just saying they look quite safe together don't they? And I think there's something about it's not Corbyn and it's you know and I think both Ed Davy and Keir Starmer look quite solid as characters. I think that's a big change. Well listen should we have a little break? Very good. Welcome back to The Rest is Politics with me Alistair Campbell and me Rory Stewart and we're going to just encourage people to search leading Jerry Adams. Alistair and I did an interview with Jerry Adams when we were in Belfast so Jerry Adams

who was the the leader of Sinn Fein very very controversial figure very closely associated with the IRA and the terrorist attacks in the 70s 80s 90s and of course a key part of the Good Friday Agreement too because him and McGinnis coming on board was was vital to bringing peace to Northern Ireland so it's a tough lesson I think particularly for people like me that feel that he is still completely unrepentant about terrorist attacks on civilians killing you know completely innocent people I feel in things like the Brighton bombing but worth the listen because it's also a reminder of what it took to make peace. I think it was a tough lesson for a lot of people and that's coming through and a lot of people are listening to it there's no doubt about that it's getting a lot of traction. We recorded the interview and then did the kind of our little chat afterwards there was quite a gap between them because we were running around all over the place in Belfast and I got a very the other Rory the main Rory in my life Rory he sent me this

message really enjoyed your interview with Jerry Adams my favorite bit though was after he left and Rory asked you how he's changed and you said he's a lot more empathetic now that was literally 15 minutes after he'd basically told Rory he deserves to be dead for being in the British Army.

I'd forgotten that bit where he did it he was it was quite menacing when you said you weren't you weren't a soldier for very long and he said you were very smart so yeah no but I think I think it's difficult this and there are a lot of people who feel that quite a lot of people saying we shouldn't have given him airtime I don't believe that at all I think he's an important historical figure without him the peace process would not be in the place that it's in and I don't think we skirt we didn't skirt round or run away from the difficult questions the point about somebody said you know you only asked him once about being a member of the IRA the fact is he's been asked it a million times and we could have asked him it for half an hour we'd have got the same answer again and again and again and again exactly and he lies every time I mean he was a member of the IRA but he doesn't want to say he was a member of the IRA. Correct and he was involved in some very bad things but doesn't want to say it. Search Jerry Adams leading wherever you get your podcast

now talking of somebody who is I mean it's quite extraordinary as you think about it Putin Victory Day in Russia is celebrating the defeat of fascism and yet here we are with the fascist in charge. And very loyalists as the rest of politics will remember that we did a long session on the last Victory Day parade. Never mind loyal listeners Jerry I forgot what we did.

What did we say? We looked at Putin's body language we said that he's looking elderly we were struck by the fact that people had expected him to provide a very very aggressive speech that had been less aggressive last year than people expected but that's also where he gestured towards the general mobilization. Quick update on where we are in Ukraine because we don't

we don't speak about it a great deal and we should do more on Ukraine and one thing I did manage to do this morning is reach out to my friend General David Petraeus ex-head of the CIA and we're going to try to get him on the podcast to talk about this because he's been concentrating very hard on it. Two words that people need to concentrate on if they're thinking about Ukraine the first is Bakhmut Bakhmut is where the Russians have been driving a very very heavy offensive over the last few months and the second word you need to focus on is counter offensive the Ukrainian

counter offensive which is being brought together so quickly on those two. Bakhmut is a city that was originally about 80,000 people only about 10,000 people left in it and since the end of last year there has been this horrifying fight and if people look at photographs of what's happening around Bakhmut you can see scenes that literally look like the trenches of the First World War blasted mud and trees probably 20,000 Russians killed over the last few weeks trying to get into the city 80,000 injured March 23rd they managed to capture the eastern half of the city up to the river on and on it goes very stubborn defense by the Ukrainian very aggressive attacks by the Russians news just in the last day that the head of the Wagner group which has played a big part there is complaining he's not getting ammunition resupply which slightly disrupted the May Day events and nobody quite sure what the limited value what the military value of the city is at all I mean it's on a couple of roads and it brings them a bit closer to being able to show Ukrainian positions but there's a horrible feeling that this is about

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sunk cost that so many lives have been sacrificed so many people have been injured that neither side is prepared to blink in their fight for the city. When I was doing the interview with the today program

on before me was Steve Rosenberg who's the BBC's Moscow correspondent who I think has been excellent

in this this whole business and it must be incredibly difficult covering it there when you know that you see what's happened to some of these American journalists who've been carted off

and so forth but he was making the point and this is another thing that I write about a lot in the book is that Putin has as a symbol of post-truth politics he is the main guy I mean he and Trump really are the ones and you know yet again today he's talking about this they're protecting the Ukrainians it's about tackling the Nazis it's about Russian motherland being under attack and so forth and it's very very very difficult to counter that when you have now such repression going on and I don't know if you saw but there was a situation in recent days that this is the this is the first in since the Ukraine war started where there've been arrests at a theatre for people who are putting on this play the brave falcon which has won lots of awards and it's actually based on transcripts of Russian women a bit like Shamima Begum I guess who have joined ISIS and their offenses are radical feminism and justifying terrorism amazing and then and the other thing Steve Rosenberg was asked about how many Russian lives have been lost in this war and he said we don't we don't have a clue we don't have a clue the last figures were six thousand and it's clearly way way more than that I think this dispute with Krogosian the leader of the Wagner group is very interesting he had an I don't listen I've never met the guy I don't know but he strikes me as somebody who is very very good at using profile I mean he feels like I think most people following this would think he's kind of running the show militarily and yet he's recently been standing in front of lots of dead bodies of Wagner soldiers mercenaries who've been killed and shouting and sort of swearing at the generals who are meant to be in charge of the whole thing who basically are saying you know and he's saying that you're not giving us what we need yeah very very dangerous figure I think for for for Putin to deal with because he's clearly got an independent view he's quite a nationalistic he's he's a man who was a he was a convict he was meant to be very close to to Putin he was known as Putin's chef because he had a lot of restaurants he was meant to be involved in interference in the US elections the FBI actually has a reward of \$250,000 for arresting him at the moment he's a professional cross-country skier he robbed upscale residences heavily involved in the grocery store business I mean it's an extraordinary story a loss is now resting on whether Ukraine can mount what's called a combined arms counter offensive and this is a very very complex attempt and a lot's riding on it because Ukraine to keep its support from the west to justify the tens of billions of dollars it's received from the United States and others now needs to demonstrate this year that it can recapture territory and it had that great success the end of last year you remember with Kharkiv and Kherson which they took in November last year but those were taken largely by surprise and this time Russia is not likely to be surprised and Russia's got 500,000 half a million troops on the ground and the Russians traditionally are supposed to be quite good in defense so what Ukraine is trying to bring together is a massive combined arms response and that's going to be armor so tanks of which they've now been supplied with quite a lot supported by artillery and mortars to suppress

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infantry moving forward anti-aircraft batteries to disrupt Russian aircraft electronic warfare to disrupt their communications logistics close up to get the water and the food and the ammunition resupply all of this moving together to try to crash through the Russian frontline and there was been some very interesting comments by the the Czech president who's uh was actually a famous

ex-soldier on how difficult this is going to be trying to warn them not to rush it because a lot is now resting on this this year. Did you say you talked to Petraeus or you just been in correspondence

with him? I've been emailing with him. Did he give you a sense of where he sees it going? Yeah so Petraeus would hopefully get him on the podcast soon he remains pretty confident that Russia is in an impossible situation that it's going very very badly going miserably for them as the phrase that he uses and he's pointed out that the support they were hoping to get from China military support

hasn't really come through that it's quite an unequal partnership that Russia's supplying China with oil and precious minerals at a discounted rate but China has held off providing real proper lethal support unlike the Iranians of course who've provided these these drones very effective Shahid

drones. So listen can we talk a little bit about Canada? Yeah we don't we it's quite interesting Canada's G7 country part of the Commonwealth but if you think about how often we've talked about Australia and New Zealand we don't really talk about Canada very much and I was invited to speak at their at the Liberal Party conference and I I wonder whether if I was still a member of the Labour Party I'd have been allowed to do that because the Labour Party's actual sister party is the NDP the New Democratic Party which is to the left of the Liberals but Trudeau I think you and I would agree is a pretty important figure in the centre left of of politics around the world and of course his dad very very famous Prime Minister Trudeau Mania and all that yeah Trudeau I think he won four elections and but what was so obviously because I was invited to speak at it I followed it a lot more closer than I might otherwise follow the Canadian Liberal Party conference but I really do recommend that you have a look at Trudeau's speech I found it very very interesting because he took on this woke business they've got a new leader of the concert well not new but they've got a leader of the conservative party called Pierre Poilievre and when you watch some of his stuff particularly on social media he's got a touch of the ferrage about him and he's constantly going on about about Trudeau being woke whatever that means and he's got this I'll just read you this very brief section in the speech hey Pierre it's time for you to wake up and of course if you remember the original meaning of woke is being awake and alert wake up to the fact that a gender balanced cabinet is a good thing that women fully participating in the workplace is a good thing not something to snub when it gets a shout out from the President of the United States and the House of Commons in Canada is wake up to the fact that under our government few people with disabilities are facing poverty wake up to the fact that more mums are building careers because we've made childcare affordable and let me tell you something \$10 a day childcare is not woke policy it's economic policy and I read that and I thought hmm that's interesting he can see the attack coming for the campaign against Poilievre and he had another line when trolls is saying to the party members when trolls try to bait you into their culture war talking points don't fall for it and I noticed in the local elections you

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may not have seen this but the Sun in particular they had a I think it was a huge front page just but before the local elections where they did a big poll on woke and the front page headline was you know Britain says no to softy Starmer's woke Britain woke policies that it were so I think that you know the Tories here are going to try and do the same thing so I would recommend to the Labour Party here that they have a good read of that speech just done on Canada quickly I mean it is fascinating it's a really really interesting party the the Liberal Party has dominated Canadian politics in 70 years the 20th century it was in power it's almost in the same oddly the same way that the Conservative Party has actually historically dominated British politics it's the left Liberal Party that's dominated Canadian politics and partly because a little bit like the Conservative Party in Britain it's reinvents itself very dramatically every generation I mean it went from being the the great party of sort of local patronage to big pan-Canadian party then it became a regional party then it reinvented itself for four party systems Trudeau again very interesting the Liberal Party was basically wiped out or felt as though it had been wiped out in the period leading from 2006 through to 2013 almost disappeared off the map had become third in the polls and Trudeau in 2015 took them back with an astonishing 39.5% of the vote 184 seats since then

2019-2021 he's been in a position where the Conservatives have had a bigger share of the popular vote in the last two elections and he's had to rule through a coalition and you can sense his own party getting a little bit I mean this part of this woke stuff a little bit uncomfortable with whether he's going too far to the left he's had to pull back on medical assistance and dying he's had to pull back on a bill recently on gun control because people are clearly feeling a pressure from the Conservative Party and from this as you say this very very disturbing slightly unpleasant Conservative leader who came originally from something called the Reform Party who was the

attack dog of the right who's been very brutal about carbon taxes and again there's been some quite interesting comments about the way the Conservatives got their funding together and the way that they were reading out a Trump's playbook on social media and attack ads last time around so Canada is a big big centre point for this discussion and one of the problems with Canada I guess is Trudeau has been perpetually struggling to reconcile the fact that his opponents want to portray him as this sort of pretty boy image bit of a dilettante not tough on policy not really delivering and that I think remains the challenge as he goes into the next election the thing they asked me to talk about at the conference was the differences between campaigning from opposition and campaigning for elections when you're in government and in his case in government and having won three times and I was explaining that the frame that we always used was lots done lots to do lots to lose lots done you focus on your record and I think he has got a pretty good record in all sorts of different areas lots to do it's always about the future and lots to lose that's about your opponents if you go that way that's what you lose and and I think he's he's good enough to sort of work that frame and it was it was um the guy though poly ever because the thing I think the Canadian politics I guess if Australian politics sometimes comes across as being a lot rougher even than ours Canadian politics historically has maybe come across as being a maybe a bit more gentle but this guy poly ever is definitely taking it to a different place and Trudeau had this word that he used to define poly ever's vision which was brokenist basically he wants everything to be broken because that's the way that he thinks he can

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he can get into power but it's going to be really interesting to see how that plays out because the right for some reason I think the right are focused on this woke thing I think we see the same here with the kind of Leanne and Braverman types is that they don't really have a great record there's not if you know putting party bias to one side as objectively as I can if you compare most governments of our lifetime they have achieved more they have more to point to than this government has over 13 years I'm not really clear about the vision for the future what it is I don't I wouldn't know how to explain it and so therefore the cultural stuff is where a lot of them tend to go they feel more comfortable there and that's definitely what's happening with this guy probably ever finally we'll get him on the podcast soon Michael Ignatiev if you want her a route into understanding Canadian politics for listeners has written a couple of books fire and ashes which is a very very painful personal account of his evolution from being a Harvard academic to becoming the leader of the Liberal Party in Canada and leading the Liberal Party into this catastrophic defeat before handing over to Trudeau and it's a wonderful way of describing things that really have relevance to the United States and Britain because it's a story of how as you say the very thoughtful measured style of Canadian politics that was associated with figures like Leicester Pearson and in a more charismatic way with Trudeau's father beginning to be torn apart particularly by the populist conservative right initially under Stephen Harper and now on a poly over and the way in which the Liberal tradition sometimes struggled to respond to that and reinvent itself as a way of doing that so Michael Ignatiev definitely worth reading on Canada. Another theme perhaps for us to explore is this theme of intellectuals and politics so he was this academic who became a Harvard became a went from Harvard to become a Canadian politician in an instant a bit in the tradition of Vargas Losa who ran for the Peruvian Presidency, Gabriel Garcia Marquez who kept resisting running for the Colombian presidency and of course Vaslav Harbour in Czechoslovakia. But so here's it I always thought I always thought about me Michael Ignatiev watching I thought I thought he was when he wasn't a politician and he came on

television I thought god that guy's really smart that guy really understands the world that guy's really impressive when he became a politician I didn't feel the same and I don't know why that is he probably was speaking in the same way but I wonder I mean who can we who can you think of in the British scene that is like that that you look at somebody you think they're they're really smart they really understand the world but are they really cut out for for politics or do we not need more people like that who go into politics and basically change it so it does become cleverer and more intelligent and less kind of what it is now. It's very interesting like I guess many people who are deeply fond of David Miliband probably see in David Miliband a lot of the intelligence and articulacy and a lot of their nostalgia and their desire for him to come back is partly arranged around that. But Michael's book and we can get into this when we interview him is very much about the gap between being a very very thoughtful person and the skills that you require for the sort of brutal hand-to-hand combat of daily politics. Anyway something to push into when we get him on so I think time to move to a wrap and you probably have to go and do another seven interviews don't you. Well I want to thank you for being so patient I cannot believe that the BBC did not have reliable Wi-Fi for our connection so I had to run around the corner I'm sitting in the basement of Tony Blair's office around the corner. For once you were waiting for me as opposed to the occasions when I'm waiting for you to log on from various airport lounges.

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That's true I'm glad that occasionally I can wait for you and have a very good rest of the day and very good luck with the proper formal launch of but what can I do.
Plug of the day thank you all the best. Thank you and goodbye.