

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 131. Erdoğan fights on, 'Clause IV on steroids', and the fall of military rule

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Welcome to another episode of The Rest is Politics with me, Alistair Campbell.

And with me, Rory Stewart. And we're sitting, we're sitting in a very strange bar stool on a round table looking at each other in Harrogate.

Through two very large microphones.

Through two very large microphones. You're fortunately tall enough for me to be able to see you over the top. You can't see me.

You can't see me very well, no. And we're going to, later today, doing a live show in Harrogate.

Very exciting. This, of course, is a place which was the home of the Gilberton-Sullivan seasons here.

You're not doing Max Miller again, are you?

No.

That's fine, isn't it?

Maybe you could do Max Miller. We have actually had a request for tonight for me to play Happy Birthday on the Backpipes.

That's very good.

I might do that.

Now, there's a lot to get through. We had a, I think, quite a significant speech by Keir Starmer at the weekend. We've had these, frankly, bizarre conferences by groups, factions associated with the Conservative Party. We'll talk about the Turkish elections. I actually found elections in Thailand more interesting. I've seen next to no coverage in the UK media of it. We should talk about that as well.

Very good.

But let's start with Keir Starmer. I don't know if you've had time to read his speech, but he actually talked about how he felt the Conservative Party is no longer conservative.

Well, I liked all that stuff. I couldn't agree more with him on that. I thought that was very strong.

So the centre of his speech, he says, as you said, that they've given up on family, they've given up on their international reputation. And he said, if people call me a conservative, I'm not going to be ashamed of being a conservative means those kind of things. So it was a nice push at that part of the speech towards the kind of conservatism I care about. However, what do you think about the speech as a whole?

I thought it did a lot of things that I want him to do. It set out, it was much more rounded about the kind of state of the world and the state of politics than he's been up to now.

It's still, I think, deliberately short on the big ticket policy stuff. But I think this line that he used about, you're going to get clause four on steroids, clause four, the big thing that Tony Blair did in 1994, changing the Labour Party constitution. I think what he's doing there is setting up the next stages. And he's going to have to be held to that now. I think once you start to say things like that, you've got to come up with the big policy ideas.

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That's the tricky thing, isn't it? Just tell us, where was it? Who was he speaking to?

What was this?

So it's a conference organised by a relatively new group called Progressive Britain. We're on the Progressive side of the Labour Party. You probably do want to push more on the big bold, radical side of things rather than the Ming vahs. But I thought it was one of, I really do think it was one of his better speeches. And I quite like that boldness of saying, we're bringing tanks onto your lawn. And do you know the other thing I think, this thing about the Conservatives? Like, if I think about you being a Conservative, I think your Conservatism is very much rooted in history, culture, tradition, not changing things unless you really need to. And they come along, they want to change the sort of wreck the hell service, change the BBC, pollute our seas and rivers with unimaginable quantities of human wastage. And it's not very Conservative. And I thought that was a, that was a smart place to be. But then the next bit of his kind of journey of leadership, I think is going to be about taking three or four big areas where the big policy ideas come. And that's what we have to see. Because as you say, if you're going to talk about Clause Four on steroids, I mean, Clause Four was huge, probably the biggest thing that Labour Party had done. So Clause Four on steroids, I didn't quite understand what that can be that's going to be bigger than Clause Four.

Clause 12.

Clause 12.

I mean, I think this is another problem, isn't it, for all these politicians that they have in their minds these radical moves. So the Conservatives, obviously, completely obsessed with Margaret Thatcher. And one of their problems is that they keep working at how they can outdo Margaret Thatcher. But of course, the thing she's done, can't be done twice, privatisation, setting off council houses, the restructuring the economy, they're going to be able to do them again. He's not going to be able to get rid of Clause Four twice. What's the big reform that he's going to bring to the Labour Party equivalent to Clause Four? What he's talking about, the reform of public services.

But Clause Four was reckoning with the party, right?

Yes, it was. But that's what, you know, we've talked a lot about how leadership is about telling the party things it doesn't want to hear. People go on about Clause Four, I think much more because of the symbolism of that change. It wasn't, it didn't really indicate.

Remind us what Clause Four was.

What did it say? Oh, God, the ownership, common ownership and means of distribution and supply come and production, distribution and supply.

But it was a sort of faintly Marxist sounding force.

Yeah. And it was something which the Labour Party no longer believed. Even Dennis Skinner didn't really believe in that as a kind of, you know, economic policy. So it was symbolic.

And then the policy change followed from that. And I think with these missions, I did an event last night with Beth Rigby from Sky of the How-To Academy. And so about 500 or 600 people there, obviously coming out on a Tuesday night to listen to me and Beth Rigby talk about a book about politics, their interest in politics. Somebody asked a question about the missions, the five Labour missions. And I asked for a show of hands in the audience who has heard

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of the five Labour missions. It was a minority. So my point on that is that they've still got to communicate the basic features they're trying to get over.

There is a messaging problem. I'm not sure he's quite tightened his language enough. So there were three big words that he was selling in the speech. Do you remember what those words were? I mean, I can tell you what they were.

Respect. Yeah. I don't want to put you on spot, but it's service, respect and stability. But even when you said service, respect, but I mean, obviously I love that stuff. Sounds very conservative. I love service, respect, stability. But it doesn't exactly trip off the tongue, does it? Service, respect, stability. There's a lot of essays going on.

It's kind of him, though. I think this respect thing I know goes very deep with him.

Sibilance, service, respect.

No, okay, okay. That's a binolinguistic point, I suppose, the major political strategic point.

This respect thing is massive for him.

They're also not action words. That's another thing, maybe, as a communications expert.

If I came to you and said my three big words, I'm going to run a campaign on service, respect and stability. It's not cool to action, exactly, is it?

No. But Gordon, listen, Gordon ran on stability and did very, very well. But as a chancellor, rather than as the leader of the party.

You would want to say stability, and this is what Gordon Brown did, if you are the government, because as George Osborne was saying in our, just to plug it, our leading interview, which is out this week, just go to your podcast feed, search for leading.

Leaving George Osborne.

Leaving George Osborne.

Yeah. In that, he pointed out that basically you've got two strategies. Either you're in opposition, which case you say things got to change, or you're in government, in which case you have to say stability, basically.

But Gordon, Gordon, in opposition, you had a good phrase for it there, didn't you? You said, lot done, lots done, lots to do, lots to lose.

Very good.

And by the way, my friend Eddie Ramer in Albania has just had the best election, local election results ever, 55 municipalities to six on the lots done, lots to do, lots to lose.

Now, obviously Kirstam is not going to be particularly listening to me, but I think I do represent a certain kind of floating voter.

And when I saw that speech, I felt there was still not enough optimism, vision and hope.

There was quite a lot of, I mean, he did quite a lot on how dare they bail out the bankers and make poor people pay to bail out the banks.

Now as far as I know, Labour Party policy at the time was to provide state support for those banks.

Not laying out what the alternative is there.

That's a grudge from 2008-09.

Well, who's he playing to there?

Where's the constituency for that stuff?

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I think that's the sort of a sort of strong tribal labour base that really wants to hear the Tories getting the boot put into them.

And did Tony Blair do that?

Did you feel you had to do that in 95-96?

Oh yeah, I mean, Tony didn't like doing the sort of nasty negative stuff, but he could do it.

I remember when he once, do you remember when he did John May drove the dispatch box, weak, weak, weak, and you could feel the blow, laddy, with each word.

I remember he came out and said, I didn't like doing that, I said, yeah, but you did it.

And I guess he did it on the ERM.

He would have done it on the bailing out of the European exchange rate and all that sort of stuff.

I think a little bit of iron has entered Keir Sol post-SUNAC.

I think he's been quite taken aback by how quite nasty SUNAC can be, all his lefty lawyer stuff and constant misrepresentation.

He did it again the other day about the police numbers and the crime figures.

So I think, I don't know, I feel Keir has moved into a different gear, but I still,

I agree, where I agree with you, I still want more in that speech that says this is what Britain's going to be like if you have 10 years of an open government.

And we like, I think there's a lovely phrase that John McCain loved, which is that people like voting for a politician who's a happy warrior.

They like the sense of the confident, happy optimism.

Well, that was Johnson's strength.

Unfortunately, but it would be nice to see a little bit of that.

Now, shall we talk about the Tories?

You're a lot.

I mean, horrifying.

So I'm looking at the list.

So this is, this is something that you've, you've raised with us here called the National Conservatism Conference in London, May 15th to 17th led in the confirmed speakers, Soella Braverman, Douglas Murray, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Senator JD Vance from the US, Lee Anderson, Theodore Dowrymple, who writes these articles and spectator grumbling about generally grumbling about people and benefits.

As far as I can remember, David Frost, John Hayes, Melanie Phillips, Nigel Bigger, who's the Steele-Ocean Oxford, who's been doing revisionist history on the British Empire.

Darren Grimes, it's a pretty, pretty astonishing group of people.

Horrific, horrific.

Also, I mean, Soella Braverman, she's the Home Secretary in a government led by Rishi Sunak, who yesterday was meeting Zelensky, the leader of the Ukraine, to talk about the next stage is an incredibly important military confrontation with Russia.

And his Home Secretary is topping the bill at an organization, an event organized, essentially to tell Rishi Sunak that his domestic political strategy is auto cock.

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And some of the speeches, Douglas Murray, who you mentioned, said, it was talking about the, you know, there's nothing wrong with, she had this thing about, there's nothing racist about wanting to stop immigrants coming into the country. I always have a problem with people who start their centers with, there's nothing racist about, usually means they're going to go and exploit racism if they can. She, Douglas Murray made this speech where he said that just because the Germans mucked up a couple of times in the last century, which doesn't mean we should stop feeling proud about our nationality. I mean, that is a pretty amazing historical analogy. Jacob Rees-Mogg, who sat in the cabinet when the voter ID registration bill was being put through, attacked Sunak for doing it and said it was gerrymandering. And Braverman, this lot, honestly, if this was the left-wing equivalent, the right-wing papers would be going insane with this stuff. Braverman made this joke about Keir Starmer, who doesn't know the difference between a man and a woman. Maybe he'll end up being the first woman leader of the Labour Party. I mean, they're just, it's pathetic stuff. And then Danny Kruger had a big speech on the centrality of family and how... Stick together when you hate each other for the kids. It's pretty odd because it feels, including the inclusion of a U.S. Republican senator in this. And also funded by an American think tank. It's all this sort of, you know, where's the money coming from stuff, which never gets asked of the right. But very much this is people leaning into American cultural issues. And of course, Lee Anderson, very central to all of that. Who's the vice-chairman of the party. Well, he's the guy who said out loud, you know, the last election we had Boris, Brexit and Corbyn. We've got none of those at the next. We've got to have culture wars and trends. But this is why I was talking to a Conservative Cabinet Minister yesterday, who was saying that it seems likely, of course, that the Conservatives will lose the next election. Is that what they think now? It's not not exactly that's what they think. That's not a big revelation to anyone. But what was striking is how completely confident he was that when they lose, the leading candidates will be from the right and the party will lurch to the right in response to the loss and that Swallow Brownman and Kenny Badenock are the leaders to take over the party. Which, you know what? If Labour do get in, even with a small majority, it could be good for Labour. I think if the Tory party lurches into some sort of post-Faragist eukipary of culture war nonsense.

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I think it's very, very bad for the country.

Well, I agree with that.

I agree with that.

I agree with the country.

So I did that politics live program.

And Danny Kruger was on the panel.

And so was Shammy Chakrabati.

And Shammy and I didn't always agree about a structure in the economy.

Danny Kruger was a big supporter of Boris Johnson.

Was one of his private secretaries before he was elected was one of the key members of his administration.

I wonder how he reconciles his very strong Christian views on marriage with being a strong supporter of Boris Johnson.

Heaven knows.

But what was really fascinating was Shammy and I at one point were looking at each other because Danny Kruger was coming up with this stuff about, he was looking at us and pointing us and saying this leftist, I think he said something like morally transformative agendas.

What the hell is he talking about?

And then he comes up with this speech about couples who stay together for the kids.

And I just thought the whole thing felt weird.

I'll tell you, I think it really made me laugh.

You know, the other organizers, we've talked about the Nat cons as they call themselves.

But the day before, you had the other one, the Bannerman,

Crudus, Lord Crudus, Boris Johnson fan club.

What's he called?

Organization of democratic something or other.

And somebody sent me the clips of Priti Patel, Nadine Dorris, Andrea Jenkins, and Crudus speaking.

You know that thing they have in the corner of the screen, which tells you how many people are watching online live?

The highest was 66.

And you were one of them?

Well, I wasn't one of them.

Somebody sent me.

I reckon 25 of them were Tory MPs who've now got shows on GB News, where they talked about this amazing conference that they were all at.

But we do give them, we're probably doing it the same now.

We give them far too much attention.

But on Pratherman, what, so when Rhys Mod came out and said to that conference yesterday, he said, we will be toast, we'll be finished if we try and change the leader again.

I wonder if actually he was trying to signal in a very misleading way to Sunak that his position is safe when actually it's not safe at all.

Well, and of course, one of the extraordinary things is that Tory MPs always say that,

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and then often go on and change leaders.

I mean, it's a knee-jerk reaction.

They said it will be toast if we get rid of Boris Johnson, will be toast if we get rid of this trance.

I think Rishi Sunak did something which was brave and correct, which was to get rid of this bill, which was going to rip up EU legislation.

But it's a very, very risky, dangerous thing he did within his party, because he got elected on a manifesto.

You remember he had a video of a shredder,

and that has really wound up the Brexit right, who feel profoundly betrayed.

And actually in this extremely bad tempered exchange you had on Newsnight, you had, you had a, was it on Newsnight?

What bad tempered exchange?

Anyway, with that lady on, it was Newsnight, right?

Yeah.

It was Newsnight.

In that, I noticed she was also laying into Rishi Sunak, and questioning whether he was really a Brexiteer, and saying, you know, that he had betrayed his promises, and he didn't really believe in the whole project.

So he's got a very, very difficult job trying to hold that connection together.

Well, she probably talked a little bit about the Newsnight thing, but did that not damage Badnoch as well,

because she's the one who had to present the whole thing to the commons as being banned?

Yeah, I think it must be difficult for her.

So that helps Bravaman?

Probably does, yeah, probably does.

Although it might make Kenny Badnoch paradoxically, there are still probably a hundred Tory MPs who see themselves more in the centre-left of the party.

So do you think I strayed from the disagreeably path of enlightenment in the Roy Stewart era of my life?

Well, I don't know. I occasionally do it myself.

What I notice being a sin of myself is that certainly Shashana watching it doesn't like seeing either of us getting shouty.

She didn't, I mean, when she was watching with me, she didn't particularly blame you for it,

but she thought the whole tone of the thing as a watcher.

You cease to take in the arguments and you begin to focus on it.

I'm just very glad that Fiona was in bed and didn't see it.

And when she saw I was trending on Twitter the next morning, she said, what have you done?

I said, on Newsnight last night, it was a bit of a problem and got a bit aerated.

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She didn't watch it.

So explain, tell us a bit about it, for people who didn't watch it.

So I'd put out a speech, as I was doing that night, about Europe, which I wanted to be about my desire that Labour become a bit bolder on calling out the Brexit disaster.

And because the Sunak announced that they were scrapping the retained EU law bill, they asked me if I would go on.

I thought I was going to go on with a Jacob Rees-Mogg or a Farage or something like that.

Maybe I don't follow these things as closely as I should,

but I'd actually, I didn't even know who she was.

I couldn't quite believe.

And she was an MEP.

She was a former MEP.

She's now an advisor to Richard Tice, the reform party.

A UKB MEP?

Yeah, yeah, or the Brexit party.

Brexit party.

And before we went in there, the Israeli MP was about to go on after us with the Palestinian ambassador.

I was talking to the Palestinian ambassador about Middle East peace process and such like.

And she got into the conversation and started to try to tell the Palestinian ambassador

that people in working class areas in Britain, their cost of living was rising because of

Brexit, to which he looked and said, do you know anything about inflation and how the economy works on inflation?

So that, I just thought this is not going to be.

So it wasn't going well in the green room?

It wasn't going badly, but it wasn't going great.

And then in the interview, she just came out with stuff that was just utter bilge and in fact, inaccurate.

And he just gets sick of it after a while.

What I didn't like myself for doing was turning on Victoria Derbyshire.

I think I probably did that because.

And Victoria Boucher, the BBC interviewer.

Yeah, who actually, I do think there's been a problem with the BBC not calling out these Brexiteers.

I mean, you know, the fact that Nigel Farage has been on question time more than any other politician in history is ridiculous.

They very rarely get pinned to the wall.

Well, even last night, New Farage on News Network last night saying,

Brexit's a disaster.

He's now just commenting on it, despite having been one of the great creators of it.

So I got very aerated with Victoria.

But to be honest, he's one of those things end of a long day.

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And do you find the process of publishing your book and the reviews and the interviews and all this stuff, is it stressful?

Because sometimes what's happening is people are kind of dredging up your past, chucking the Iraq war at you, chucking your time and down his route.

Is that unpleasant for you?

Do you have quite a thick skin?

Do you worry about it?

I don't know.

I quite enjoy.

Look, there will come a point, probably in a couple of weeks, where I'll think, right, I've done the book and that move on to the next thing.

So on the way here, I went to a school just down the road.

And I really enjoyed it.

Young kids really engaged in politics.

All of them getting a book asking a question, all that sort of stuff.

And it was so that sort of stuff I enjoy.

I should, I don't know if you're aware, Rory,

but I did invent another new word yesterday, podultery.

Podultery.

Podultery.

I committed podultery yesterday.

Oh, yes.

I was invited on that show.

I was supposed to be asking a surprise question to you on that show.

You went on News Edge.

I did.

I did.

So you have to do certain things.

You will find out when politics on the edge is published in September.

You have to do all sorts of things.

A bit of podultery.

So I did a bit of podultery.

And what was interesting, you mentioned Iraq,

they actually taught a lot about the exchanges that we had around.

They were singing your praises as an interviewer.

And they were saying, they thought that you got more out of me on Iraq than anybody else ever had.

Very kind of.

I don't agree with that.

But that's what they thought.

Listen, I don't find it that difficult.

I know when I'll have reached the end of a move on.

But it's not been too painful.

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No.

I was in Paris yesterday.

And I was in a square outside the Senate where for five months Catholic protesters were protesting a change on surrogate mothers.

And I was reminded how very different the cultural wars are in places like France from the cultural wars here.

In France and the United States, so much of it is driven by religion.

And whatever's happening in the National Conservatism Conference and the Cultural Wars that Lee Anderson and Swela Bravman are stoking up here, it feels to me as though Britain is still a much, much more secular society.

And so despite the fact you get, you know, JD Vance, who's a US senator, wanting to talk about keeping the family together and all that stuff, it's got a completely different resonance in the US.

Or even, I think, in Catholic countries in Europe.

So what's the issue in France?

So that was, I'm just reminded of it again.

And again, I keep forgetting that one of the things that is a continual challenge is that there is still a conservative religious Catholic element in French politics that doesn't like liberal progressive reforms brought in by François, your friend François Hollande, on things like surrogate mothers.

And I was just reminded that for five months, they'd sat in that square outside the Senate protesting it.

What about the assisted dying thing?

Is that not seen as a religious thing?

Because Macron's moving the dial on that pretty fast.

I think it's a huge thing.

And I think we underestimate how much in all these countries, when you and I naturally applaud progress in Ireland or France on all these issues, how there is often 40% of the population that remains very, very uncomfortable about these things and probably very resentful of the politicians that introduced them.

Right on that note, we'll take a break.

Welcome back to The Rest is Politics with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

And Alistair looking extremely sort of fresh, notwithstanding the middle of his book tour.

Looking fresh.

Yeah, I think you look pretty fresh.

Okay, I did a good swim this morning.

Doing well.

You weren't for another one, you're cold swims?

I did.

Very good.

It's not really cold the most, 16 degrees.

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Was that in London or here in Yorkshire where we're recording?

It was in Lido.

So now I find somewhere in West York tomorrow.

Now, what's the population of Turkey?

Population Turkey, I don't know, what's the population?

85.2 million.

Very good.

Thailand, 71.6.

Which is roughly the same as the United Kingdom.

Yep.

And how much have you heard on the British media about the elections in Thailand?

Very little.

Are you going to tell us about them?

Well, I think they're fascinating because the party that's been running the place, which is very pro-military.

And pro-king.

And very pro-king have been absolutely battered.

A party that's clearly taken a lot of lessons from Emmanuel Macron, calling itself the Move Forward Party.

You could almost say En Marche.

Progressive, youth-led.

Actually, at the heart of their campaign, something that could be seen as a crime, because they're actually calling for reform of the monarchy, and they have the whole Les Majestés thing that you're not allowed to, it's 15 years top sentence for criticizing the monarchy.

Or indeed their pets.

Or indeed their pets, exactly.

Or anything they wear.

They have campaigned on reducing the power of the military, ending conscription, new constitution.

And they've done incredibly well.

One way I saw it described is that what made them different from the party that came second, which is the traditional populist party, is, as you say, their focus is on institutional reform.

People didn't really think they were going to get anywhere.

Institutional reform is not usually a sexy subject.

People argued that the reform to the constitution and the election rules made it very difficult for this party to come through.

And despite new types of electoral system,

which is a parallel system that first passed the post, a bit PR, they've managed to come romping through over 30% of the vote.

And then the parties with which the former prime minister, Prayat Chinacha, is associated, between them, he's got two parties,

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one that he used to run and one that he now does, 766 between them.

So they're finished.

But what's terrible about this whole system is that the prime minister now has to be chosen by a, by 250 members of the Senate who have been appointed by the military.

So even though these guys have won, it's not clear how they're going to put together a coalition.

But it isn't absolute.

We go on about populism, we'll obviously talk about Erdogan.

This is a total defeat of the populists.

Well, it's extraordinary.

It's a defeat for the populists and it's a defeat for the crusty military conservatives who are sort of two different bits of Thailand for a new progressive movement that's very exciting and took credible numbers of seats in Bangkok, took a lot of seats in Chiang Mai, which is the second largest city, led by this charismatic graduate from actually the Harvard Kennedy School, where I used to teach a bit.

He was there when I was there.

I didn't think he took my classes.

This is Peter Limgeroi Nat.

And then the other guy, one of the candidates who led the youth movement in the protest against the government in 2020, is still in his 20s.

And he won one of these seats in Bangkok.

And I think they won all but one of the constituents in Bangkok.

So it's a pretty big story.

But and then you've now got this whether they'll be able to form a government on the basis that they can they're going to deliver on some of these promises of reforming the military and reforming the demonica we'll wait and see.

So a little little potted history of Thailand.

So the Thailand was ruled for more than 70 years by the current king's father, who ruled at the kind of length that Queen Elizabeth II or the Emperor Hirohito ruled all the way from just after the Second World War through the 2000s.

Was very much caught up in U.S. Cold War politics because you remember the domino theory and the whole idea was that if Vietnam fell, Thailand was going to be the next to fall.

So the U.S. really invested in the 50s and 60s in China back generally quite right-wing anti-communist governments in Thailand.

In 92, it had its breakthrough into democracy, which the old king was incredibly important for.

A bit like I think the king of Spain coming in after Franco.

It was a very famous image where the general and the main opposition leader

knelt in front of the king and the king basically told him to get on with the elections.

And this vision of these two people kneeling in front of him was incredibly important.

And it was of course one of the real economic miracles.

This is a country which in 1980 had a GDP per capita about \$1,500 and it's now up at \$10,000 per capita in not even in purchasing power parity terms in absolute dollar terms.

Was hit very hard by this financial crisis in 97, bounced back by about 2004-5.

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And even with all these changes, because there were these horrible military coups, which have happened now twice since 2000, at a time when you felt the world was ever more democratizing, Thailand was the exception to the rule of military coups happening, but still hasn't basically thrown it off the course of very, very impressive economic growth. Slightly reduced by the military, but still one of the great miracles of the world. It's an extreme poverty rate in Thailand now, something like 0.03% of people living under \$2.00. No, we don't, because it's much too wealthy. Now, given that we want to be prosecuted under the

Thai Laysay Manchester rules, let me just tell people a little bit about the king of Thailand, which nobody's allowed to talk about. We don't want to be prosecuted.

We don't want to be prosecuted. No, we like the fact that we can criticize our own king, though very, very few people do, especially you. Have you ever criticized our king?

Uh, no. And is that a point of principle? Well, I do really admire him. I do think he's wonderful.

King Vajira Longcombe, who's the current king, do you know where he lives?

No. Munich, lives in Bavaria.

Why? Well, it's actually a sort of family tradition. His father largely, until he became king, lived in Switzerland. But it appears that he has a lady love, and he has been spending most of his time living in Bavaria. And this is one of the large objections of the Thai people that they're king.

Do they all know that? Yes, everyone knows that. How do they know that if you can't criticize them? Well, it's difficult to get the news out, but occasionally it comes out. I mean, some of it comes out for things like WikiLeaks. So the US ambassador wrote this wonderful report about Air Chief Marshal Fufu, who was the poodle belonging to the king, who turned up at a diplomatic

reception dressed in a full evening gear, including Diamante little shoes that covered, I guess, his paws, and was allowed to dance over the tables drinking from the US ambassador's drink.

Also in WikiLeaks was a famous video of Fufu's birthday hosted by the king and the queen who appeared topless for the birthday party. So anyway, the king's reputation as a party boy, he's now 70 years old, living in Munich, and the relationships with Fufu and what's called his profound moments of eccentricity, compared to the very, very revered status of his father, who for 70 years was seen as an extraordinary sort of force for good and religious propriety in Thailand is at the heart of some of these remarks. But does the king not have to do stuff in Thailand?

Does he keep him to flip back to Thailand to do ceremonial stuff? No, he doesn't do very much of that. No. And in fact, there was a tradition in the Thai Royal House of not doing very much of that. Quite a lot of them in the 20s and 30s were ruling from Europe. Turkey? Turkey.

Erdogan's going to win. Erdogan's going to win because he, so it's gone to a runoff May 26, I think. 28th. May 28, very good. But he almost got it 49% of the vote. So it's going to be very, very difficult for him not to make it through. Also the guy who's taken the 5% the third guy, he's even further to the right than Erdogan. So it's very hard to see that 5% going back to the opposition. Absolutely. And the opposition leader, to add to his problems, had support from the Kurdish party. And Erdogan's whipping up the fact he had support from the Kurdish party to turn up the conservative. I mean, there's a small hope that now people see Erdogan as vulnerable. They may change their minds in the election. So I wouldn't completely write it off,

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but it looks like he's going to be able to win. The other thing that's interesting, we talked a bit about the, I mean, I think we have been consistent about saying that we think that Erdogan probably would end up winning. But he actually did incredibly well in the earthquake zones where there'd been an assumption that they'd handle it so badly. So you remember, we did a podcast when I was in the earthquake zones and I was actually quite struck by how much the Turkish state mobilized. He'd moved governors who were like French prefects, they're sort of appointed people down and I was in a room with one of these Turkish governors running the response

near Gaziantep and it was pretty impressive. He had all the military and the police and they lined up, they had the maps out, they were and trucks were pouring in. So I can see that working. In a sense, that's what he made his reputation on. He made his reputation. Erdogan made his reputation Istanbul in the 90s as a guy who got things done. He was and even when he was president,

it was all about the fact he doubled the number of roads in the country. He massively increased water supply, bridges. He loves big public infrastructure. He also did a huge public sector pay deal just before the election. I mean, like huge for raising the minimum wage, big civil service pay rises. And I guess the other thing, I mean, Jonathan Powell's brother, Chris, who's quite involved in politics in different parts of the world and he was involved with the Istanbul mayor, Imamoglu, who we've talked about before, who I think would have been a much better opposition leader because they had managed to get him stuck away in jail for a bit because he criticized the election authorities, which are entirely appointed by Erdogan. And also it was strange watching, I watched the, I actually took a leaf out of your book and I watched it, the live coverage on Al Jazeera, which was pretty good to be fair. It was a channel between them and the CNN. But what was, when you saw the numbers, all being announced by the official Turkish news agency, which is pretty much controlled by Erdogan,

and it was clearly designed to try to make the opposition people who were watching the vote counting just give up. And so they held in and they're going to, they're still there, they're still in the fight, but I find it very, very hard unless, because the turnout was so high, it's not about 88.2%, 88.92%. And so it's very hard to see where those people who might think, oh my God, yeah, maybe we could beat him, given that the polls were saying that was going to happen anyway. So he's sort of- Those turnout figures are unbelievable, aren't they? I mean, I don't think anyone gets those kind of turnout figures. No, unless you have compulsory voting. The other thing I looked into, the Turks, a lot of Turks obviously living around the European Union, the vote for Erdogan in the 1.5 million Turks living in Germany, 65.4%.

So, very, very struck by how much German politicians are interacting with this, partly because, I mean, as you say, you had a figure of just over a million, but in fact, three million Germans, I think, were born in Turkey and seven million have Turkish ancestry.

Yeah, and because the Germans have been quite tight on giving them German passports, a lot of them will still be Turkish citizens, even more than that. And it was even higher in the Netherlands, 68% of the Netherlands, 64% of France, and 71% of Turks living in Austria.

Voting for Erdogan.

Voting for Erdogan. And a lot of them, I read a thing in Built Saiton where they were saying that

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the reason is because they really resent the way that European politicians talk about Turkey and talk about Erdoğan. I was thinking about his career. I was sort of thinking about the similarities with Imamoglu. Both of them went to quite conservative Islamist backgrounds. Erdoğan grew up as a teenager, literally on the streets selling water bottles, selling cimet, which is like a big pretzel, then didn't probably go to university. He claims he did, but there's no real record of that. Was a footballer. So you'd relate to that. And Imamoglu was also actually a semi-facial footballer.

Erdoğan's got a very kind of athletic build. He never smiles, does he?

Strange smile. But then he became, I remember from the 90s through to about 2014, was such a kind of hopeful figure. When he came in in the early 2000s, he very, very quickly did these amazing reforms. He said very progressive things about gay rights. He got rid of the death penalty. He tried to run a peace process with the Kurds. But a lot of this was about EU accession. And when that began going sour, in about 2014, and we talk about 2014 as beginning the age of populism in a sense, because that's when Modi comes in in India. That's when ISIS take Mosul. And that's the point at which things change with Erdoğan. That's the point at which he becomes president.

It's interesting we say that because I hadn't really thought about it because I've forgotten it. But when we've talked before about the first time with Tony that we met Putin, similar with Erdoğan, he was seen as a kind of reformist West Leaning or pro-Atlanticist. And this campaign, I mean, Biden has been a big part of this campaign is essentially he's been saying, you know, vote for me to put Biden in this place. It's almost a complete reversal of where he was. Obama's first international trip and first big speech was made in Turkey in 2009, because Turkey was seen as this fantastic example of moderate Islamists, Western friendly NATO members trying to join the European Union, and a model for what Syria could be, Iraq could be, all these other countries could be without an invasion, without an intervention, a sort of positive locally led move. And then suddenly from 2014 onwards, it all begins to go pretty horribly wrong. There's this coup, which there are so lots of questions about was it a real coup against him? Was it a coup he himself stage? He then drove this crackdown, which ended up with 91,000 people being

arrested. Whole areas of service cleaned out. Then he brought through a new constitution that he got

through on a 52-48 referendum. You can remember that kind of stuff, which basically strengthened the power of the presidency against judiciary built a \$300 million presidential powers, started flirting with the Russians, bought their air defense systems, started getting very, very aggressively involved in Somalia, in Libya, and this kind of Ottoman expansion muscle stuff. And then went full on eccentric on his economic policy in 2018.

It's still there?

Yeah, where he wiped out half the value of his currency in a year, drove incredible numbers of companies to bankruptcy with an absolute, and we talk about this, but it's the opposite of austerity. He was a great believer in borrow, borrow, borrow, and putting the interest rates as low as possible.

We still do with inflation. Well, it's coming down a little bit now. It's way, way, way beyond what most countries do. I mean, you've taken this neatly into that part. Another thing happening in

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that part of the world you've been talking about, which is Syria, back in the Arab League. Is this another string to the bow of David Miliband talking about the age of impunity? Well, it's extraordinary, isn't it? So that is an announcement that's just come out, and it's been led by Saudi Arabia and UAE and opposed by Jordan and Qatar. It's absolutely astonishing. I mean, heartbreaking for the Syrian opposition, because they famously gave speeches in the Arab League 10 years ago. They were given the Syrian seat, weren't they? Absolutely. And now find themselves absolutely out in the cold. Meanwhile, the Syrian economy, we've been talking a lot about Thailand, Turkey, Syria. I just had some figures that I was looking at about how these different countries have fared since 1980. So Thailand, GDP per capita, \$700 in 1980, \$8,000 today, 11 times richer. Turkey, \$2,000 in 1980, \$10,000 today, five times richer. Very, very impressive stuff. South Korea, 15 times growth. But Syria, Syria has gone from a situation in which they were at \$2,000 in 1980, reached \$10,000 in 2007, and are now down at \$1,200 per capita. They have basically pushed 30% of their population to extreme poverty, 70% now unemployed, and they've gone from being an upper middle-income country to being one of the poorest countries in the world due to that. Well, 300,000 of them are dead in the current situation. The other thing I didn't realize was the extent to which one of the reasons why the Saudis are so keen to get this thing sorted is because they, Mohammed bin Salman, as he goes towards his vision in 2030, doesn't want these neighbors kind of, you know, with all this trouble going on. But I hadn't realized that this drug, captagon, an amphetamine, is now Syria's largest export. It's effectively become a mafia state. And members of his family, Assad's family, are sanctioned because of their trade in this drug. And the British have put out a paper saying that 80% of the world trading captagon. So captagon is, as you say, it's an amphetamine related to fennel effrin, which some of us get in our cold medication, but obviously this is... You're the drugs expert on this podcast, having taken opium. What does this one do to you, this captagon? Well, so originally developed in the 1960s to deal with attention deficit disorder and narcolepsy. And then by the early 70s, people began cutting down on its use because of its psychotic effects. And by the middle of the 80s, almost nobody was producing it anymore. And then a Bulgarian gang began shipping it through with Balkan traders into the Middle East, developed a huge market for it in places like UAE and Saudi. They then moved their production facilities. The Bulgarians, the Turks cracked down on this in the early 2000s. Production facilities started again in Syria. And according to the British, the Syrian regime, and Assad is currently making three times the volume of trade of the Mexican drug cartels, this thing called captagon. It's incredible. But I mean, personally, everything in the world knows about the Mexican drug cartels, but I didn't even know about this until recently. It's extraordinary. And the Saudis just found, I think, 4.6 million pills hidden in flour. The UAE's just found pills hidden in green bean shipments. And it's all coming through from Syria. So the Jordanians, there's a new committee being set up with Saudis, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, who are looking at all of these issues, amnesties, return of refugees, drug smuggling, and how to rein in Russian and Iranian influence. That's quite a big agenda. And it seems to me they'll achieve none of those things. I think another thing that is difficult here is it's another sign of the way in which the Saudi-U.S. relationship is breaking apart. Because the U.S. has been very, very clear that they do not like the idea of normalizing relationships with Bashar al-Assad. And there's a pattern now of Saudi deliberately

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poking the United States in the eye, partly because they feel humiliated, partly Biden called them a prior state. Trump refused to support Saudi when there were these attacks from Houthi

Iranian-backed terrorists against oil terminals. But since Mohammed bin Salman's come in, there's been a lot of this stuff. You remember when the U.S. made requests on their oil production because of sanctions against Ukraine-Russia, they completely ignored it and basically helped the Russians with their move on oil quotas. We talked about the theatricality of Biden's visit to Northern Ireland and who greets them at the airport and how people behave. When he landed in Saudi Arabia, there was a very deliberate snap. They sent a very junior prince to meet him at the airport. Whereas when Xi Jinping arrived, everybody was there. Mohammed bin Salman, huge state, certainly. And this is another sign of the Saudis again and again saying, we're not going to be told what to do by the United States anymore. We want to be treated entirely as an equal partner. And actually, we care much more about getting our relationships right with Israel, Iran, Syria than worrying about what the U.S. strategy is. Well, the Americans put out a very, very strong statement saying they didn't believe Syria merited readmission. All sanctions remain. On that rather complicated note, maybe we're going to bring it to an end. We'll chat again at question time. Excellent. See you soon.