

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

Thank you for listening to The Rest is Politics for ad-free listening, early access to episodes, membership to our chat community. Please sign up at [TheRestIsPolitics.com](https://TheRestIsPolitics.com) or if you're listening on Apple Podcast, you can subscribe within the app in just a few clicks.

Welcome to The Rest is Politics Question Time with me, Rory Stewart and me, Alistair Campbell. So before we go on, just to thank everybody who bought tickets for the Albert Hall in December, sold out in under a day, thousands of people trying to get through who couldn't. We are so grateful. We're actually quite shocked to be honest that yet again we've sold it out. We've also already sold out Bath and Edinburgh that we're doing in September. Sorry to those who didn't get tickets but we will hopefully be doing more shows in 2024.

Alistair, I'm apologizing if this comes over the podcast. I'm sitting in blazing sunshine in Cape Cod and there's some very hardworking American out there with some kind of lawn mowing device buzzing in the background and you have a bit of a sniff I'm picking up. Are you ill? Got a really, really bad hay fever and I'm breathing badly.

Have you always had that?

I've always had it but some days I get it. The last couple of days has been horrific and I barely slept last night. It's been horrible. This is what happens if you spend too much time watching Cricket.

It's a hay fever particularly bad. It's because they keep mowing the lawn or something. I don't know what is. I think there's something going on in the air at the moment. Grace, my daughter has got it really badly as well.

It's been horrible here in the States. In New York, I went for a walk along the Highline which is that amazing planted tram line. The Canadian wildfire particles in the air and all the websites saying, do not go outside dangerous levels and people taking their kids out of playgrounds. It's very, very unpleasant.

I do know that Sadiq Khan's you, Lez, extension plans are quite controversial but I do feel when I'm in London compared to say when I'm in Scotland or Scottish Highlands or the countryside around Burnley, I find it much harder to keep my breath at the levels that it needs to be and not get weasy. I do get very weasy in that if I spend a lot of time in London.

Oh, it's a terrible thing. I know my criticism, Sadiq Khan, actually is that he didn't move more quickly. I think the air quality in Britain is a total disgrace. Probably 26,000 or more people a year dying prematurely because of all types of pollution. That's the nitrogen dioxide, that sulphur dioxide. This is particulate maca. But here's the facts on this one. The forest fires in Cannes this early May have generated nearly 600 million tonnes of CO2. That's equivalent to 88% of the country's total greenhouse gas emissions from all sources in 2021.

Well, talking of total disgraces, James Reese, I watched the Dispatches program on Johnson Lebedev. Why hasn't there been immediate action taken to investigate treason?

I thought that was a really, really strong series of things. I thought they did it well. Did you find it incredible? I think it got picked up by the rest of the media because it was a channel for documentaries. The BBC didn't cover it as far as I saw. I thought it was absolutely scandalous.

Actually, they told the story very well. They had some very strong people to interview, including

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

some MI6 figures and Simon McDonald, who was the permanent secretary in the Foreign Office. They told the story well. It was a shocking story. But anyway, we've talked about that so long, so anyone interested, they can go back to last week's show. Here's a question.

Jesse Grimond. Jesse Grimond, I think I might know Jesse Grimond. After many years of debate about Europe, is it time to wage a weary peace on Brexit and devote the oxygen of politics to waging a climate and biodiversity war? As Zach Goldsmith has pointed out, the PM is clearly not committing his troops in the small window of opportunity for mitigation. To remind listeners, Lord Goldsmith resigned as a junior environment minister and in doing so criticized Rishi Sunak for not doing enough on climate. We should point out, Zach Goldsmith is a big, big supporter of Boris Johnson. This may well have played into this. What did you make for that?

I think Zach Goldsmith, despite those connections to Johnson, I think he does have relatively serious credentials on the environment. But I've been involved in a few resignation letters in my time, ministerial resignations. I thought it was one of the most brutal I've ever seen. It really was quite personal about Sunak. Obviously, there is politics involved in that, probably related to Boris Johnson.

The politics on that was that Sunak's reply said, didn't he, that in his first paragraph before he thanked him for his service, he said, we'd asked you to apologize for your attacks on the privileges committee. This is the privileges committee, which had criticized Boris Johnson and you declined to do so. Although I think Zach Goldsmith's then subsequently come out saying he had apologized for his attacks on the privilege committee.

But Sunak doesn't really, you don't get the sense when Sunak is out there talking about things that matter to him, you don't really get the sense that he has any real commitment on the climate. And it's not one of his five priorities that he takes around with him in that backdrop. I actually look at, for example, I can recall David Cameron making speeches about the environment. I can recall that photograph of him up in the Arctic Circle. I can recall him, even though he didn't deliver it, I can recall him saying he was going to lead the greenest government ever. I don't sense that Sunak is on this pitch or thinks that he should be on this pitch. And I think this goes back to this problem with the right wing, who frankly think this whole net zero thing is for the birds. I mean, the right wing papers are always sort of, you know, taking the side that I would argue is sort of pretty close to climate change denial.

One of the things that's made me very sad, and this actually is another listener who wrote in who's asked to remain anonymous. But a friend of mine has said that one of the things that we should focus on is how sad it is that by leaving the European Union, Britain has dropped out of some of the very good moves that the Commission's now making on reuse of glass, for example. I mean, one of the disgraces in Britain is that the glass companies under both Labour and Conservative run these extraordinary lobbying operations to try to convince politicians that somehow it's not economical to recycle glass or reuse glass, which is mad. I mean, all the way across Europe, people do it. Glass can be reused a hundred times without any degradation in it. And yet it suits the bottom line of these companies to pretend it can't be done at all and keep making new stuff.

Now, here's a great question. Steve Phillips, was there ever a meeting where you felt completely

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

out of your depth and didn't know what to do? And how did you react? Panic, bluster or other? It's something we've likely all encountered at one time or another, interested to know if you two have and how you handled it. I can remember going to a lecture at university by somebody called George Steiner. George Steiner, I can do a good impression of George Steiner. Can you?

I'm not going to hear him at university as well. He said, in the Talmudic tradition in which there is a prohibition not just on the name of God, but on the name of the name of God, we approach Plato's *Nomoi*, his latest and most terrible work, whose only word I can find to describe it is enormity in which the epsilon stresses not privates, emphasizing that which is outside the norms.

How can you remember that?

Well, it's rather struck me at the time.

What I was going to say is that I went to see this lecture and I then sort of hung around thinking I'd like to sort of have a chat with him afterwards. And then I just felt completely unworthy. I thought, this guy is just too clever. I cannot go and talk to him. I'm not on his level. Nobody in politics has ever had an effect on me, I have to say.

I think the experience of a politician as a working politician is that we're perpetually out of our depth and we're completely out of our depth all the time. I mean, the idea that we can actually have our minds around all the different countries in the world, all the different departments of government. And of course, that's the assumption. You go on question time or somebody sticks a microphone in your face and you're supposed to have a snappy answer to which taxes would you cut if you had a choice? Or what are you going to do about the ambulance service in the northwest of England? And so you're perpetually kind of blanking. And one of the reasons why politicians seem so grotesque and artificial is that we're very bad at saying, frankly, I don't know.

No, that is absolutely right. I mean, I look on a more superficial level. So when we were talking to Paul Nurse, the great scientist at the Crick Institute, which is for a future episode of *Leading*, I mean, I felt out of my depth in that when he talked about, you know, cell splitting, I didn't really have a sense of what he was talking about. But the great thing I think about being in in the political world or being in the media is you can ask questions. And, you know, that's how you get on their level is in a way by asking questions. But I felt, I felt with George Steiner that there was any question I asked, he would sort of look at me and think, you know, that's a really stupid question.

Right. And I'm not sure I pretty, pretty, probably wouldn't like you, probably wouldn't like you. Right. Are Labour to blame for Russian influence in UK politics? Next one. The whole Russian influence in UK politics in the ex KGB sky. So this is Alexander Lebedev buying British newspapers started while Labour were in power. Boris Johnson was the end destination, but Labour helped get it all started. Alistair always seems to gloss over this. I think that's a bit unfair on you actually, to be honest, in the last thing you did actually mention the fact that Peter Manorsson was involved. Anyway, never seems to want to discuss it at length. I'd be interested in hearing about more about this, why Labour let it happen, what they hope to achieve from letting ex KGB spies settling and buying influence, and also what should be done about it now. Okay, well, maybe a question related to that from John Dennis,

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

how might a Labour government reform the media? What could Starmer do to stop the likes of GB News doing to the UK? What Fox News did to the US? I've said before, I do think that actually, there would be nothing wrong in having some sort of nationality recognition in relation to media ownership. I do think it's wrong that so much of our media is owned by people who have got, who don't pay tax here, who are parts of bigger global political entities, they're players not, I mean, the numbers that the figures of the sums that are being lost by the people back in GB News, because they don't care about the money, it's about buying influence. When you see Peter Manorsson's speech in the House of Lords justifying Lebedev taking over the standard and the independent.

Which was on the documentary?

Yeah, which was on the documentary. He points out that of course, without him, these things are going to crash. And one of the fundamental problems is these things are massively loss-making. And so long as you're asking for people to take over completely loss-making enterprises, you are inviting people either with unbelievable sums of money, many of whom live overseas, or people with an incredible conflicts of interest who are prepared to invest hundreds of millions of pounds into loss-making enterprises to achieve political objectives. So one of the problems structurally is that these things are not going businesses, are they?

No, exactly. And that's why people like Rupert Murdoch have made themselves not as powerful, but one of the, you know, he's also incredibly wealthy. But I think today, you're not going to get rich by one of these old-fashioned newspapers. Indeed, I don't know if you saw that the Venus Seitel in Austria, which is the oldest national newspaper in the world, it's printed its final edition after 320 years. Oh my goodness.

So the, you know, newspapers are struggling. And if you look at the even standard, I mean, it's a very, very, very thin paper now. So somebody like Lebedev wants it, in part, as the, as Nick Swan rightly says, to be an influential player within British society.

Well, I mean, there's an incredible graph online on the decline of newspapers.

So on billions of today's dollars, it rises from 1950, newspaper print revenue, \$20 billion, by the year 2000, it peaks at \$70 billion, and then it falls off a cliff by 2015 down to sort of just over \$11 billion. And it's, this is partly, isn't it, about the collapse in advertising and one of the things that the rise of social media has done is move a lot of the advertising revenue away from printed newspapers to other places.

Absolutely. And, you know, newspapers, a lot of newspapers are fighting for their life. And, you know, some of them, frankly, it wouldn't bother me if they went to the wall. But I do think at the moment we need good, healthy journalism more than ever because we're living in this post-truth political world. The problem is that a lot of our media are part of that post-truth world. They're not actually challenging the liars, they're part of them.

And what financial strategies they have to pursue is very difficult, isn't it? So most newspapers around the world dropping a readership by two or three percent a year, year on year. The number of newspaper firms is absolutely extraordinary. The US, if you look at a graph, goes from 6,202,000 to about 4,200 today. So, I mean, it's just in every bit of the industry is collapsing. And that leads you very vulnerable to unscrupulous billionaires coming in. Absolutely. Yeah. So, yeah, I don't think I've glossed over it. And I think I broadly agree with the thrust of the question. But I think I guess the point was the one that Peter Mandel

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

was making, and I can't remember at the time, to be honest, was there anybody else that was into buyer? I think you always find people who want to buy newspapers. But those figures you've just given us show that it's a story moving from their perspective in the wrong direction. Fee Posnert, has Alistair ever thought of returning to the classroom and teaching as Rory did, but not the Royals? I think he means not for me to teach the Royals. He, that's me, always seems so great with the students he means. Thank you very much. Beautiful. And they need more languages teachers. I am going to a lot of schools at the moment. And I'm actually, I can't tell you, Rory, I don't know whether you're going to do something like this with your book when it comes out. But it's giving me so much sort of hope that things might not be as bad as I thought when I was writing the first part of the book. Because I just think there is, you know, I was in a school last week where the kids were just like, they were on it in a way that I just think we don't maybe sometimes feel when we're with older people. Well, I think almost any time I get out and meet anyone, I feel cheered up. It's generally the graphs that make me gloomy. But you'd be a great teacher. Do you ever thought of teaching there, did you? No. I taught, I did teach for a year when I was a student because I did languages and I taught in Nice. I was an assistant dogle. I don't think I am a very good teacher. I think I'm a, I think I'm a good motivator and I can hopefully inspire a few people. But I think my kids would admit I'm not very patient when it comes to. Patience, that's right. That's it. You're not famous for your patience. I don't have that patience to think, you know, I want people to, if I explain something once, Rory, that should be enough. I've explained it clearly. Why can't you understand it? So, no, I don't think I'd be a great teacher, but I do love going to schools and and I love the fact that I'm feeling so much kind of political passion in there right now. On language teaching, just quickly before we move off it, I really loved learning languages after I left school, really enjoyed it. And I really enjoyed just chatting to people, learning to talk. But I didn't adjust the tool world to the way in which languages were taught at my school at Eaton, which was much more about formally memorizing 60 words an evening, focusing on the grammar rules, very, very kind of structural approach to it rather than sort of chit-chatting away. Do you think that sometimes people are put off or is it just that sudden people's minds work differently and maybe the more structured approach works for some and the more chatty approach for others? I think you have to have both. And luckily, I did have both, but when I was at school, because we had, you know, it's interesting how you remember your teachers. I mean, my German teacher, Mr. Webster, I just, I loved the way he taught. But at the same time, we went out and had conversations with real Germans and we went, you know, this is the other wretchedness of this bloody Brexit thing, the whole kind of school trip thing. You know, the first time I ever went abroad was on a school trip. And it was, I was able to speak French and German on both on the trip because we went to Belgium and went to Germany. And we had both. And then we also had students who came from France to, you know, to be in our school. And, you know, if you're interested, you could have conversations with them as well. So I think you need both. But let's be honest, we're just not, we are not good at languages. And I think it's part of the whole post empire thing. You know, we expect everybody to speak English. And, you know, I'm with you, I get such, you get such joy out of learning new, new things in foreign languages. It's an amazing lecture. And it's, it's obviously difficult to



**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

afford. But if you can do it, my, the best experience I ever had was I had three months in, in Indonesia and jog to Carter. So a few hundred miles outside the capital city, where I did two hours, one on one with one teacher, then two hours, one on one with another teacher, then two hours, one on one with a third teacher every day. So I do six hours conversation practice every day with three different voices, homework in the evening, do it again the next day. And I found within three months, I'd made so much progress in a way that I never would have been able to in a couple of lessons a week in school.

I don't know. I think labor, well, there's a lot of stuff to do in education, but I really do wish we'd get back on the, on the languages front. What about this one? John Daniels, Australia has now legalized the use of psychedelics for treating mental health, mental illness. Do you perhaps think the UK government is sleeping on their potential? Another one, Jack Webb, Australia has legalized psychedelics and MDMA for use in mental health conditions off the back of evidence, largely from the UK. Some US states and parts of Western Europe have already moved on this. When will we catch up to implement the science done here? Fun enough, in this very building where I am, I'm in Chiswick, on the way I was walking in here, a guy stopped me and told me he was on a research program for psychedelics starting tomorrow. So he's had to come off his antidepressants. I was actually offered the chance of doing it, but I was too scared to come off my antidepressants. You have to come off the antidepressants before you go on the psychedelics program. But it is really interesting that the, you know, most of the research work has been done here and now Australia has taken that huge step forward. And is this something you'd advise the Labour government to talk about in the lead-up to election? Would it just create too much controversy and distract from where they're going? Well, I'd love to hear the Labour government talk about more about mental health, but I don't know whether it would. I mean, I think people are kind of ready for a more grown-up discussion on mental health and, in fact, on drugs. I mean, when we were talking in the main podcast about France, we didn't really get into the issue of drugs, but there's a lot of people in the Marseille area saying that they could stop all this trouble down there, they think, or most of it, if they just took the crime out of drugs and, you know, created a market in it and then created proper healthcare system around it, et cetera. When I made a BBC documentary

about depression, I followed this guy who was on this psychedelics program and he had such awful depression and had had it ever since a really horrible, abusive childhood. And he said that when he was on this program, it was the best he's ever been, but then he had to come off it because it's not legal because it's a class A drug. Yeah. Okay, Neil Lawson, so Mark Rabbit asks, when 83% of Labour Party members want proportional representation, but a small clique at the top of the Labour Party try to hound out people like Neil Lawson? What should members trade unions and

local parties do? So what's this Neil Lawson story? Because we had another Labour Party, senior Labour Party figure hounded out about a month ago, didn't we, for getting on a stage with Ken Loach? What's Neil Lawson done? Oh, that's right. He retweeted people. Then he retweeted

somebody suggesting that they might want to vote for another party to do some tactical voting. Is that right? I think he's been expelled. I think he's been sent a letter asking for an explanation

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

because it is against the rules of the party to recommend voting for somebody else. However, this is one of the reasons why I'm perhaps a little reluctant to rejoin the Labour Party, because when it comes to the general election, I am going to be urging tactical voting. We've got these violations coming up shortly. If I were living in Somerset, Labour are not going to win this by election in Somerset and Froome. So I would vote Lib Dem. If I was up in Selby, I would vote Labour. But I don't know the full story. I do remember Neil Lawson when he was running Compass. He was a thorn in our side at times. Tell us about Compass. Tell us a bit about Compass. Well, it's a think tank. It's sort of a left-leaning think tank. Come up there occasionally, come up with some good ideas. Like a lot of think tanks, they get coverage and attention sometimes legitimately by criticising government policy. And we were the government at the time, and they could be quite critical. But I don't think we'd ever have thought of kicking them out of the party. The one we talked about before, Jamie Driscoll, I did have quite a lot of people in the Northeast contact me and say, look, I get what you're saying on the point of principle about sharing a platform with Ken Loach, but Jamie Driscoll has not been a very effective mayor. That's not a reason to expel him, is it? No. But if we go back to the Australian winner or costs mentality point, put it this way, that to me is a better reason than the fact that he shared a platform with somebody. So I think Labour's got to be a bit careful on this front. The Neil Lawson article in The Guardians says that they've got rid of their even mildly radical policies. They seem to be backing away from policies on rank controls, backing away from the £28 billion a year green transition flirting with Rupert Murdoch. At the same time, putting so much effort into this sort of cleaning house business of asserting the authority or the discipline of the party leader, and why is that? Is that that Keir Starmer feels sort of traumatised or haunted by Labour's disunity in the past? Does it make sense to pick a fight with Neil Lawson? Why would you want to do that when the guy can immediately write an article in The Guardian saying this is outrageous attack on progressive politics? I don't think to be that worried about Neil Lawson, as it were in particular, as an individual. But I think there's no doubt that Keir Starmer wants to keep communicating to the public the message that this is a changed Labour party, this is a serious Labour party, this is a party that's not going to allow the sort of nonsense that we had in the Corbyn years. So I guess that's what's behind this. But I'll be honest, I haven't followed it as closely as it sounds that you have. So here's another question, Celia Richardson. The Times reports today that national trusters are the key to winning the next election. So what should the main party's been saying to convince the nearly six million members of the national trust and then Brackett's clue? We know they care about nature protection and clean waterways. The clue's an interesting one, isn't it? Because of course, I love the national trust. One of the jobs I've always dreamt of is being chair of the National Trust, things the most incredible institution. And I guess it is incredible. I mean, to have that number of members paying whatever it is 50 pounds a year is absolutely unbelievable in this day and age that so many people, particularly when their finances are under pressure, really want to contribute to preserving not just nature protection, clean waterways, but also one of the bits I love about them, which are their historic houses. Well, Rory, I think the current chair of the National Trust, if I'm right, is called Rene

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

Olivieri. Oh, yes. Now, if I, I reckon, given that the right, the hard right have been running this huge campaign against the National Trust on the grounds that they're too woke, it's one of those campaigns I just do not understand. But surely you with your good British name, Rory Stewart, should be better for the National Trust in this woke era than somebody with such a frankly foreign sounding name. So I think you're home and dry. Just get Lee Anderson behind you and you're home and dry. Lee Anderson is the key, isn't he? Always the key to everything.

You can be the king of the National Trusters. By the way, Celia Richardson, I know, and she works for the National Trust and she does a brilliant job, not least in fighting these ridiculous right-wing people who are trying to take the whole thing over. But I'm a bit suspicious of these things. It's like when it's, you know, Mondeo man, Vauxhall man. Do you remember the Tories at one point had, it was working to a rugby league man. That's right, yeah. So National Trusters. Well, the serious answer to the question is the main parties should be persuading all of us, not just people who are members of the National Trust, that they care about the environment, that they care about our landscapes and that they care about our heritage. And I just thought all three of those things are vote winners. Here's another bit of free advice for Lee Anderson and the right of the Tory party going around saying that, you know, this is woke to care about heritage and care about landscapes. Not a very good idea. I think so. You may be simplifying the nature of the discussion. I don't think they're saying it's woke to care about landscapes and heritage. In fact, I think the debate is actually about a tension within the conversation about whether it is all about nature protection, clean waterways and how much it's about historic buildings.

Okay. Okay. Okay. Now, here's one, Ian Hamilton. And Ian with two eyes. So, clue, it's about Scotland. Being that the next Holyrood elections aren't for another three years, what would your strategy be for defeating the SNP compared to beating the Tories?

I'd basically say chaos, corruption, incompetence, inward-looking, being in power too long, losing the plot. I'd run on that.

I think if you're Labour, I think in a way, there's a case for drawing the SNP and the Tories together. Oh, yeah. How would you do it by connecting them in the same way?

Well, you mentioned the factors, chaos, division, incompetence. And I also think the sense that being together, we can get things done. And a strong Labour presence in Scotland working with the UK Labour government will be able to focus on things like the economy and jobs and the health services and so forth, rather than just this sort of never-ending independence question. And I think you're right. I think basically after almost 20 years of SNP government, 13 years of Tory government, it's time for a change to get rid of both of them.

Time for a change. That's it. It's got to be time for a change, isn't it?

I think so. I think so. Yeah.

Plenty more questions to come. Let's take a quick break.

Oh, here we are. Here's one I'd like a little bit to go off, and then I'm going to give to you.

Cassandra Najee, recently on the show, you've discussed Spain,

Cambodia and Ireland, three countries that had 20th century internecine conflict.

What are the components of an impactful peace and reconciliation process?

And what processes have either of you been personally involved in? So before I hand you,



**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

I mean, you were very much involved in Northern Ireland, and we interviewed Jonathan Powell. I have been part of an initiative sort of happening alongside the UN called the Principles for Inclusive Peace, which have been involved in for a couple of years now with peace activists, ranging from grassroots activists in the Philippines to women of Iranian heritage, to great Dutch ex-foreign ministers and many, many others. And it's a really interesting world because it's shifting very quickly from an old world that used to focus quite a lot on heroic peacemakers who were often people from the global north who would sort of swoop in to an African country and win the Nobel Peace Prize for knocking heads together towards an increasing understanding of the role of women, civil society, grassroots movements, and their role from the bottom up in trying to bring peace. But that then needs to find a kind of synthesis which is to recognize that it's difficult to make that operate, honestly, with the Taliban or with Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and that violence and guns and money. There's an amazing guy called

Alex DeWile who writes about this, how much of these conflicts is actually about the cash economy and the way in which the militia groups and the men of violence are simply benefiting from money. And if you could find a way of tapping into the money in a different way, and in fact, he's been quite interesting linking to the nonprofit I run, give directly about thinking about how direct cash payments to people could actually reduce the likelihood of them joining militias and bring a form of peace. Anyway, back to you on peace and reconciliation.

Well, I guess, yeah, Northern Ireland, you mentioned. The Balkans, some of the peace process in the Balkans I was involved in, and Jonathan Powell kindly reminded me of my he seemed to blame me for the failure of the referendum that was part of the attempt to bring peace to Colombia. I think the single most important component is probably the desire or the existence of a kind of a stalemate where both sides feel they have to make change. And then within that, to try to find the areas of compromise where you can take people.

But I mean, let's be frank, there are plenty of peace and reconciliation processes that haven't concluded successfully and are still ongoing, most, you know, most obviously given what's happened in the last, just in the last 24 hours, yet another kind of terrible situation in Israel, Palestine. It's totally, totally heartbreaking. And I remember going to Yemen, and I arrived in Yemen pretty gloomy. So we're now back in 2014, thinking this is I had a pretty prejudice view of Yemen and thought it was always kind of inherently pretty chaotic and violent. And I turned up and there was a very, I liked very much the UN negotiator at the time, a guy called Robin Ali, who I think was a North African. And I remember meeting these amazing women's groups and sonar and civil society leaders and thinking, God, I've really got this wrong. There's actually very impressive groundswell of, of Yemeni activism. And then very rapidly that all then felt a pieces again, and Yemen sort of slightly collapsed back into the kind of cliches that I'd had about it in the past. Do you think we're going to need a, a peace process between the United Kingdom and Norway to resolve the, the issue of the Orkneys? Have you thought of this story today? No, no, I can't tell you about the Orkneys. So the Orkney, the, the leader of the council up in Orkney, the Orkneys in Orkney is saying that, you know, they might look at alternative government arrangements. Ooh, might, might return to the Norwegians. Well, they're not happy with

the way their relationship with the UK government or the Scottish government. They think that they

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

don't get a fair deal. And it may be time to look elsewhere. That's fascinating. Well, so to remind listeners, obviously, Orkney was part of Norway until the middle ages. And there are these great Viking sagas, the Orkega saga, which is all about an amazing Viking hero from the Orkneys. So I think there's a, there's a real possibility of that. Do you think anyone in Britain would fight hard if the Orkneys tried to join Norway? Well, we fought pretty hard over the Falklands. Yeah, yeah, but I think that that was because the people of the Falklands didn't want to join Argentina. But if the people of the Orkneys wanted to join Norway. But more interestingly, I think, is would the Scottish government put up a fight? Or would they think actually it would be a good way of showing that it's possible for these kinds of changes to be given, the opportunity for change to be given. They have had, they have had debates about this sort of thing in the past. Bizarrely and coincidentally, this story sort of emerged out, I felt out of nowhere this morning, at a time when I'm literally halfway through a novel at the moment called Orkney. You recommend it?

It's really good. I really do recommend it. I think you'd quite like it. And it's, it's a kind of, well, I'm only halfway through, but it's a sort of, sort of a love story-ish. But it's got lots of kind of Orcadian magic around the place. And it's written by somebody called Amy Sackville, one of the John Chlwellyn Reese Prize. So there you go. So I just thought that was quite weird that I was sitting there reading my book and up comes a newsflash about Orkney. To finish with my little literary contribution, I know I'm not allowed to say this, but I am actually rereading, probably for the fourth time, a book which I really think is extraordinary, which is *The Night Manager* by John McCarrie. And- All I can say to that is that I saw the teleprogram.

It was a great teleprogram. But the central character is actually, people will find if they read it, it's loosely based, I think, on Alistair Campbell. He's a hero as a man who speaks beautiful French and German, who's floating around in these hotels and also turns out a bit of an action hero. So there we are. And so I read *The Night Manager* and reflect on the analogies team Jonathan Pine and Alistair Campbell. Excellent. Thank you very much for that.

I think- No, I think it is. I think it's quite flattering. In your television series, Jonathan Pine was played by, one second, Tom Hiddleston.

Oh, he's another posh boy, isn't he? He's one of yours.

Well, that's possible, but possibly-

He's an Estonian. Was he or Harrow? He's one of them.

Yeah, one of those.

By the way, I almost raised this on the cricket. Given that, as I outline in my book, *But What Can I Do*, Eaton College has possibly the greatest set of collected sports facilities in the UK. Why do Eaton never produce any top sports people?

Good rowers, good rowers.

Matthew Pinson, I think was Estonian. Right, but apart from that, who else is there?

I don't know. Tim Henman was at my prep school with me, the tennis player.

That was not Eaton, but Carole.

That's not Eaton. I think it's a very good challenge. Why is it not producing better sportsmen? So, there was a guy, John Whittington of my year, who played county cricket recently. Oh, lots of people have done that. I mean, that's, you know-

**[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 149. Question Time: How to end a civil war, psychedelic treatments, and will the Orkney Islands join Norway?**

Yeah, but that's not- No, I agree with you. I'm absolutely with you.

So, they have all those amazing facilities which working-class kids don't have, and yet the working-class kids are better at sport than-

Well, they're definitely better at- I mean, I think that's the real thing where you see merit coming through is in football, because it's amazing how it doesn't matter how many facilities you've got. With a real mass sport like football, talent shines through. I mean, Maradona basically started with nothing, didn't he?

But I can't remember an Estonian rugby player. I can't remember an Estonian cyclist.

I'm totally with you. Rowing is the only thing I can really think about. I'm going to be criticised for people. Do you think possibly Eaton College sports department should be put into special measures? It's a good challenge for them. It doesn't have many boys from us, only 250 boys a year. So, it would be a bit improbable if they were dominating the world's sporting scene. Well, they dominated the bloody political scene the last few years, haven't they? And you're right about Tom Hiddleston. He did go to the Dragon School and Eaton,

like me. Oh, Lord. Oh, Lord. So, I'm not having him play me. No. I want to be played by whoever today's Albert Finney is. That's what I want. I don't, I don't want, or may I cheer Richard Burnham, because he's dead. This is a bit like me saying my favourite cricketer is Don Bradman.

You only seem to be able to think of actors who have been in the 1950s. This is extraordinary.

Oh, James Norton. I think James Norton would like to play me. He's quite good.

You're going to tell me Carrie Grant, James Stewart, Clark Gable.

Sean Bean. Sean Bean. You've managed to think of one actor alive today. That's very good.

Rory, what has happened? We were going to get Simon Henderson, the head master at Eaton, on to leading. He's very keen to come on. He's very keen to come on. I wasn't quite sure we were doing headteachers. I thought it was all about Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton.

Yeah, but he's interesting because that's a school that has created 20 prime ministers.

I think what we should do, Rory, why don't we go and do the headteacher, the headmaster at Eaton, on stage at Eaton in front of the kids? Gosh, well, that's a thought, isn't it?

Because they've been inviting me to go for years and I've always said,

I never do talks in private schools, but I'll do that one. We'll do that.

Let's get a go. All right. Thank you. Thank you, Alastair.

All the best. Bye-bye.

All the best. Bye-bye.