

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 150. Sunak's path to victory, Trump's stance on Ukraine, and the future of Palestine

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Welcome to The Restless Politics. I'm me, Alistair Campbell.

I'm with me, Rory Stewart.

Where are you, Rory, that you slept in? I can tell from the fact, one, the fact that we're late, two, the fact that you look exhausted. Tell me where you are.

Thank you. And many, many, many apologies. So first thing is I'm in San Francisco.

And it's just after eight in the morning. I hadn't realized that I got my entire timing wrong.

So Alistair has been sitting. You may be able to hear from his incredibly patient tone of voice.

Poor man has been sitting for 45 minutes waiting for me to come on.

I think I've told you before, one of George Butch's many endearing qualities was that if anybody was late, they just didn't get in the meeting. So I should have just done the whole thing myself and pretended to be you, come out pro-labour as you.

It would have been absolutely brilliant.

Attacked, eaten as you would have been great. Yeah, absolutely.

Anyway, I'm in the UK where the American president just flew over my house in a helicopter.

So I was able to wave at him while I was waiting for you, which was nice.

It did, did he wave back?

It's very, very hard to tell. I suspect he didn't.

But I suspect he has a, you have a better view from a helicopter than people on the ground have a view of inside the helicopter. He's been to see Rishi Sunak and he's been to see the king. Very good.

Something rather weird going on with our media, which is that there's this sort of needy desire to project the special relationship as being still very, very, very special.

And I don't know whether this is number 10 pushing it. To be absolutely honest, I doubt it.

They might be doing it a bit, but it seems to be sort of almost inbuilt now and to end the media coverage of any presidential visit, no matter how brief. And this one, I think you went to number 10 for about just over half an hour and they're off to see King Charles.

And then of course he comes out and says, we have a very solid, rock solid, close relationship.

And I've just seen the evening standard, which is like, you know, massive picture of Sunak and Biden. You'd think this was some kind of historic gathering when it's just a sort of a short trip on the way to the NATO summit where the real business is going to get done.

And so how should people have played it? What would be a more sensible, thoughtful way of thinking about these kind of brief visits? Because I guess the anxiety is there was a brief visit that we talked about before, which was the much briefer visit than people hoped in Belfast where when he then went on to a very successful trip to Ireland.

Yeah.

How many visits has he now made to the United Kingdom in, I guess, nearly three years as president?

I don't know, off the top of my head, two or three, I guess, he came for the Queens funeral, didn't he? Not for the coronation. I think he's seen Sunak five times since he became prime minister, which is, you know, quite a few, but it's just this, it's almost like they want to

make it something that it's not. So when you say watch, would it be in a more interesting way to do it? I think it's just the fact that there are some really, really serious issues to do with the NATO summit. And this was a visit on the way to that. You've got the difference of opinion over the use of cluster bombs. You've got the fact that they're on the different side in relation to this argument about Ukraine's membership. We've had the issue of whether or not Biden, veto, Ben Wallace is the next NATO general secretary. Now, I'm not suggesting that you make it into a sort of big difference, but at least be grown up about it and be seen to be talking about the things that really matter as opposed to it's all just, you know, for the cameras. So just to go through the issues then, Alistair, which you've raised, cluster bombs, I guess, is the first one. So as we've discussed in the pod before, there is this almost First World War position developing in Ukraine, the Russian lines heavily, heavily dug in and entrenched. And apparently it seems quite deep. So minefields, then big, defended positions and a real sense of a kind of grinding stalemate and huge pressure on the Ukrainians to mount a counteroffensive to punch through those Russian lines in order to take back those bits of Ukraine, which the Russians have seized. And of course, Zelensky keeps saying he wants to go back to the pre-2014 Ukraine, which would mean retaking Donbas, retaking Crimea. In order to do that, the Ukrainians and their American advisors think they need to use cluster munition. They need to drop these cluster bombs into the trenches. And they're arguing that this is an exceptional situation. You're not using them against civilians. You drop them into trenches and you kill the soldiers in the trenches. But cluster munitions are horrible things. They remain around for a very, very long time. I mean, famously, they're often picked up by children. And so the United Kingdom and over 100 other countries were signatories to a pact banning cluster munitions. Now, Ukraine, Russia, the United States did not sign up to banning cluster munitions. And of course, the Russians have been using cluster bombs too. So I guess that's the first thing. What's your sense on this? What's your sense on how we balance moral outrage against the weapon system with support for Ukraine? Well, it's interesting how long it took Joe Biden to make the decision to send them. And it was obvious as well from the way that Jake Sullivan, his National Security Advisor, made the announcement that they are cognizant of the worries that people have about this. But I guess they're in that position where the Ukrainians are saying, I mean, this may be something that they know that we don't. But I mean, I imagine that what's going on is perhaps that the counteroffensive is not quite going as well as they thought it was, in partly because as you say, the Russians are so well dug in. So they want to be able to take out a whole load at one time. And you've got the Brits, you've got French, you've got the Germans, you've got lots of other major countries that are totally opposed. So I think what Biden is trying to do is to say we're going to do whatever it takes. But at the same time, he's doing it in a way trying to hold together the alliance that he effectively is leading. And I think on the policies of it, he's handled it pretty well, to be absolutely frank. And what would you be doing? Do you think if you were a French or British Prime Minister, I mean, how much do you think the public in France and Britain really care? Do people know what cluster munitions are? Are they going to be horrified and angry? Is it going to turn people against the Russian-Ukraine war when we begin seeing images of Russian soldiers torn apart by

cluster munitions? Well, I mean, I doubt whether we'll necessarily see those sorts of images. I think the thing that does, there was a lot of coverage here yesterday of what these bombs actually are. One bomb is dropped, and then the skin, as it were, disappears, and then all these little bomblets go out. And there's a lot of explanation as to why these so-called duds, particularly if it's soft or wet ground, they're just going to lie there. And then the next person who comes along and treads on them, or as you say, a child who plays with them, then is likely to be injured. And they have been emphasizing, as you just did, that this is part of a battlefield weapons. But the fact is that I think people are concerned about it. I think that we're in a way where the argument perhaps is weakened is the fact that the Ukrainians themselves are subject to being hit by these cluster bombs because the Russians are using. So I guess, I think a lot depends on whether there is this sense at some point that the counter-offensive is beginning to work. But listen, there's no doubt that that is, I thought, to be fair to Rishi Sunak, I thought the way he dealt with it simply by saying, he didn't criticize Biden directly. He simply said that we discourage the use of these cluster bombs. So he was being pretty diplomatic about it. I imagine that's what Macron's doing. And the other thing that's interesting as they go towards, so Biden's here for a few hours. I don't know if you can hear, but that's the helicopter's coming back, I think. But Macron is also seems to be slightly shifting his position in relation to whether Ukraine, the pace of Ukraine's entry into NATO. Joe Biden did an interview with CNN where

he seemed to be pretty reluctant to commit in any meaningful way at this point to take the process further forward. And Britain and the French are certainly in a far forward position. The Americans and the Germans are a little bit behind. And I guess the point about that is that if you take Ukraine into NATO, NATO becomes directly part of the conflict. I mean, obviously in many, many ways it is already. We're putting in so much support, so many weapons, and particularly the U.S.,

I think, as we've discussed before, I think the U.S. is putting in at any one time something like seven times the contribution of the second largest contributor. And more than half the total contributions going in in terms of money and weapons, I think over \$100 billion now. But there is still a fig leaf pretends that this isn't NATO at war with the Russians, and that if Ukraine joined NATO, you're then in a very different situation because NATO carries with it the obligation of all the other member states to get involved on the ground. Yeah. And you're into the whole Article 5 thing. You say it's a fig leaf. When you're talking about the levels of weaponry that's been provided now with these cluster bombs in particular, it does seem a pretty thin fig leaf. But then again, it does seem to be holding thus far. And then I think the final thing, which is an uncomfortable thing that we've talked about, but never quite got to an answer on, is what is the, as it were, the off-ramp? What's the end to this conflict between Russia and Ukraine? Because it feels like a pretty intense stalemate. We've talked in the past about it possibly being almost like the Iran-Iraq war, eight years of grinding conflict between these sides. And you're getting rhetoric, obviously, out of Washington that's very aggressive. We're winning. We're going to do whatever it takes, which of course is quite familiar from Iraq and Afghanistan, where also we heard we're going to do whatever it takes until we don't. Very possible. Maybe this is something we can talk about in the next part of the podcast that if Donald Trump came in quite quickly,

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the US position would shift very, very quickly. Well, that's why I imagine that Putin will be watching this summit pretty closely and will be enjoying the fact that there are these seeming divisions that are developing over certain issues. But there's no doubt at all in my mind that he's basically, he's going to try and hang on until, in his mind, Trump does win. Whether that happens or doesn't is up to the American people. But there is no doubt whatsoever. In our podcast interview on leading with Francis Fukuyama, which people can find now, that's one of the points he made was that a Trump return will be significant, not just for America, but liberal democracies right around the world. So maybe you should just give us your sense of having spent a bit of time. You've been in there for a while now. Give us a sense of how you see the American political scene. Well, thank you, assets. So I think there is a real sense, of course, of an obsession with a rematch. It's very, very, very odd to be going into an election where overwhelmingly almost everybody expects that it's going to be Donald Trump against Joe Biden. And it's also very odd because it's very difficult to talk about. I mean, obviously, I like you and many, many people around the world are completely horrified about the idea of Donald Trump possibly winning. So there's huge pressure in the United States not to say anything remotely critical about Biden. I mean, it's become so sort of existential for people that there's a real sort of self-censorship. But the truth of the matter is, and this is maybe something we need to be open about and get through, there is increasing worry, of course, about Biden's age and fragility. And people don't want to talk about it because the Republicans are exploiting it. And they're exploiting it because they're going to try to run in the next election, essentially saying that Kamala Harris is going to be the next president. Kamala Harris, the vice president is not popular. Biden said he's going to run again with Kamala Harris as his running mate. And sadly, I mean, many people I've been speaking to have been in meetings with Joe Biden recently, they are a bit worried. He does often seem quite fragile. He's 80 and he's not, he's not a young 80. And people, I think people who are worried about this would say he's been a really, really great, very significant one-term president. He's done some fantastic things. I mean, he's got this infrastructure bill through. He did much better in the midterms than people predicted. He's managed to negotiate with the Senate and Congress much better than almost any of his predecessors. Really, what's he going to be like in 18 months' time? I mean, what's your sense on how one deals with just being honest about that? Well, what's the alternative? What's the alternative? He's made it absolutely clear that he's standing. Hillary Clinton, when we spoke to her on leading, she said, Joe's going to run and Joe's going to win. Now, I know the second bit, you kind of have to say that. But I don't see where the alternative comes from. Look, they're both old men. They're both the same old men who ran several years ago. But I don't see the process short of Joe Biden saying, I'm not going to run. I don't see what the process is. And I don't see who the, who the successor is. So the people that you were talking to, what are they saying is the alternative? Well, I think that they're sort of slightly horrified. I mean, I think both Republicans and Democrats think that they do not have ideal candidates here. And they're basically facing the question you've posed. They're embarrassed by this question. They're thinking, this is completely mad. Most or many, many people in the Democratic caucus, including Congresspeople and senators, are a bit worried about a Biden candidacy and wish there was somebody else running. And of course,

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an enormous number of Republicans are horrified by the idea of Trump running.

But as you say, they can't quite work out how on earth you're going to get an alternative. Now, something that might change it, of course, is if something happened to Biden's health between now and the election, and so that a lot is gambling on him being fit in 18 months time, and of course, being able to convince people that he's going to be fit for the next five and a half years.

Yeah, exactly. And also, we shouldn't overlook the fact that Trump is not young and he's, you know, overweight. And I mean, I agree with you, it's a very, very difficult choice for American people, but partly because of the polarization right across the political spectrum. You've got these people who can say no wrong about Trump. And I thought Francis Fukuyama was interesting on

that when he basically said that, you know, the cowardice of these Republicans who are pretending that they support Trump. And I think we talked a little bit about the Santos. I saw a poll this morning that was done in Florida, where Trump is absolutely trouncing Santos, and both of them are beating Biden. So that is kind of, you know, that is alarming. I agree it's alarming, but I don't see how you get because the only way you can get to a place where people might start to say, you know, Joe Biden isn't going to be a credible candidate. It couldn't be, couldn't stay for another four years. That only starts to happen if people who are not Joe Biden's ruled it out.

So therefore, all these other people have to start undermining him, which becomes, which simply exacerbates the problem that the Republicans are trying to create for it.

And the Republican problem is extraordinary. So all the polling and public opinion people I've been, you know, but polling and sorry, our focus group people that I've been talking to here in the States are discovering that although there are Republican candidates who in certain key swing places like Iowa seem to potentially have more traction than Trump, as soon as they attack Trump in an ad or speech, Trump's popularity goes up. So they've got to somehow work out how to defeat Trump without attacking him. Because every time they attack him, people flock to him. Let me just put the optimistic case for a second for Biden. I think the optimistic case made by the pollsters is that everybody has already made up their mind on Trump and Biden. There's nobody left in the United States who doesn't have a view on Trump or Biden. So there are not very many independent swing voters left. And therefore, there's a sort of basic structural sense that if people voted for Biden against Trump last time, they're likely to vote for Biden against Trump.

Next time, despite the fact that one of the focus groups that has just been done asked people who voted for Biden in 2020 and were disappointed. So that's the normal. It's a classic swing voter group, so you say. So you interview them and they say Biden is not a strong leader. He's not able to be president till 2028. He hasn't delivered on their expectations. And then they finish by saying, but we're all going to vote for Joe Biden. That is, that doesn't fill me with some hope.

Also, I don't think it's the Kamala Harris is unpopular. I think it's just that she's been a little bit invisible. Do people actively dislike her? I think the sense of the polling is she's very unpopular and the Republicans are calculating that if they can scare people with her potentially becoming president, that that really helps them. One key question I think is going to be turnout and particularly turnout amongst African American voters, because they really feel that although Biden has done a lot of things he hasn't delivered on what they expected. So African American voters particularly haven't seen voting rights reform, police reform, criminal justice reform. But Biden is being helped by the fact the Republicans are running an insane culture war

where they're banning Black History Month, they're banning Black History books, they're playing footsie with essentially white nationalist fascists. And so the Black community is in a situation where they what they've got, of course, is their vote and they're being forced to choose between a president who they feel hasn't delivered what he promised to them, but at the same time are completely horrified by the tone of the Republican Party. Yeah. Now, I think the three things that could change this. If there is an economic slump, if there's a recession in the United States before the election, and if Biden's health slumps, if he has a shockingly bad debate performance, for example, these things could change it. But at the moment, structurally, it feels as though Biden's slightly got the edge. Well, I hope you're right. The polls don't say that right now, but then polls all swing around all over the place, I guess. I mean, I think again, to go back to Francis Fukuyama, it does say something pretty remarkable that this is looks like it's going to be the lineup for the next election. And also throw in the green guy that we talked about before, Cornell and also Kennedy, the Robert Kennedy's son, who's now he's polling 20% in the Democrats amongst the Democrat supporters.

And this appears to be a genuine lunatic. Or am I being unfair to him?

Well, crackpot was the word that Fukuyama used, but certainly seems to, you know, any passing conspiracy theory seems to jump on the bandwagon. But of course, there's a part of American policies that seems to like that. And again, so I think all of that says to me that Joe Biden's only strategy can be just to keep on keeping on. Of course, keep on keeping on is what he's always done pretty well throughout his career. And just before we go to the break, I think final thing is really keep an eye on the artificial intelligence threat in this next election because the potential now for a deep fake released almost too late for anyone to do it, pretending to be a health scan of Joe Biden. And I think they did strangely in 2016, I think the US was not on top of the way in which social media was disrupting, they were more on top of it in 2020. Strangely, even during the Trump administration, the FBI and others actually got better at working out how to deal with electoral interference. But AI poses a whole new threat. And also, we mentioned, you know, precautions, troll farm and putins interference. I mean, we can imagine they will step that up. I actually spotted a couple of things just today. I saw this video of Joe Biden trying to stand up on a beach and it turned out it was completely fake. And then another one where there's this whole AI, this whole TV debate has been generated, which is also fake. So those are going to be all sorts of stuff. And I think there it, you know, educating the public ahead of an election about that is going to be very, very, very hard when you have so many people who just want to believe what they already believe. I think there'll be more swing voters than you think. I think there'll be within the middle quite a lot of people to play for. And that is where Biden has to be strong and he has to hope that Trump turns those people off. But for you and I and others like minded, I think it's, you know, given that we find it hard to see what anybody sees in Donald Trump as an attractive proposition for president, I don't think we should underestimate that he has worked out. I mean, Fukuyama was clear about this, wasn't he? I think he virtually called him a genius. You know, he said he's an amazingly talented, devilishly clever, blah, blah, blah. He's going for those swing voters as well as for his base. Yes, yes, yes, yes. And I think the final thing is just as a sort of to cover all probabilities. It's worth remembering that that can be candidates with

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invisible momentum. So Obama was 30 points behind Hillary Clinton going into that, going into the election that he won. And you can suddenly find these figures emerging. So maybe in the future, in another episode, we can talk about some of the other people that in the Republican field like Tim Scott that we maybe haven't talked about enough, who might potentially come through. But at the moment, it looks like Trump. We happy for a break? Yep, let's take a break.

This week's episode of the Restless Politics is sponsored by The New European. The New European is what I like to call a real newspaper, full of brilliant writing photography. And every week, my spirits lift a little as I read it. It takes no prisoners when it comes to dealing with the people who got Britain into the mess that it's in today. This week's issue has got a fantastic blast at the right wing media from Patience Wheatcroft and Liz Gerard, both of whom you know a thing or two about that. And it's the kind of no-holes-bar article you won't find in other newspapers. Strong stuff. And thank God The New European is brave enough to publish it. Well, as you know, I'm a huge fan of theirs and indeed of yours as their roving editor. I love the stuff they do each week. This week, there's an amazing set of photographs of the trial of Marshal Petain in France. So people remember the great hero of the First World War, who then was collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War, along with a great historical article with the photographs by Julian Jackson. There's also some fantastic pictures by Paul McCartney this week of when the Beatles went to Paris. Now, The New European is one of the fastest-growing newspapers in Europe. So here's your chance to do something positive about the sorry state of our media and politics in the UK. Become a New European subscriber. For just a pound a week, you get full access to their fantastic website, including the entire seven-year archive of content. And if, like me, you like it in the actual newspaper, you can have that for just an extra one pound a week. These are the very best rates you will find. And as a special introductory offer for the rest of his politics listeners, they will give you either a t-shirt who doesn't have a t-shirt or one of their ever-popular bollocks to Brexit passport covers worth 25 pounds, absolutely free when you sign up today, your choice as to which you get. Don't delay. Visit www.TheNewEuropean.co.uk forward slash trip. That's www.TheNewEuropean.co.uk forward slash t-r-i-p.

Welcome back to the rest of his politics with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell. And Rory, do you think there are any circumstances that could lead to Rishi Sunak winning the next election? Where are you on that one at the moment?

Looks very, very difficult, largely because of the economy. I mean, the British economy is in a terrible state, sadly. And inflation is much higher than people projected higher in its competitors. It's going to be very difficult for him to work out how to get inflation down without crippling growth. So there'll be a lot of pressure to put interest rates even higher in order to get on top of inflation, which will be miserable for people with mortgages, obviously, but will also almost certainly drive us close to a recession. And I don't see how you can win an election coming out of that. I'm not sure all of that is Rishi Sunak's fault. Some of that is bigger economic conditions. Some of that is Brexit, but I'm not quite sure tactically how he's going to be able to get what he needs, which is inflation down and growth going before the election. What's your sense there? Well, I think if you go through his five priorities, half inflation, that's not going well, grow the economy, that's not going well, reduce debt, that's not going well, cut the waiting list. We're heading into the longest ever junior doctor strike. And remember, I think people

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sometimes think junior doctor means trainee, that is most of our doctors. So NHS waiting lists are not going to come down anytime soon and stop the boats. That's not going very well either. So in all of his five priorities, which as we've said before, he laid out at the time with Tory Central Office happily briefing, this is a great strategy because these are all going to be met quite easily. They're all off course. And then I think the other thing where he could and still should in my view signal a real shift against his predecessors, but he hasn't done that. So we both agreed, I think, that he should have come out strong against Johnson on the Privileges Committee report. I think given that he was right in his predictions about what would have happened if this trust became Prime Minister and went off with her kamikwazi strategy, he should be making more of that. But I think he's, you've talked before about it's not just that there are two factions, three factions, four factions, five factions, the Tory party is now this sort of collection of different factions wanting different things. So for example, Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor, who's actually been pretty low profile since he became chancellor, did an interview with the FT at the weekend, said that he couldn't really foresee tax cuts before the election. That, you know, really hacks off quite a substantial number. You've got those that want to fight the Trump style culture wars, the Leanderson's of this world. And what it seems to me he's not doing is giving any clear sense of strategic purpose and mission. And he's also lost that sheen that he had at the start. I think at the start, people were giving him an awful lot of kind of, you know, leeway and quite a lot of credit for being the quotes to grown up in the room. But I think he's lost that as well. So I think unless he goes for that big strategic purpose and mission, I don't really see how he goes about this. And the other thing I think is, again, you've got to be very, very careful stuff. You just, you know, see being briefed out anonymously and so forth. But there was, you know, this briefing going out that they feel that they've now got to get a lot harder on Keir Starmer. There was just at the weekend, they're going to do what Johnson didn't try to link him to the Jimmy Savile case. And I just thought this is desperate, desperate stuff. Yeah. I mean, I guess if we're right that structurally, I mean, I think his five pledges were thoughtful, sensible. I'm not sure they were ever easy. I think if people were briefing out, they were easy. That was mad. But I think in terms of sensing what voters wanted, if he could have got on top inflation, delivered growth, reduced debt, stopped the boats, cut the NHS waiting list, that's a pretty good list of five things that most of the polling suggested voters wanted. And that probably gave him a narrow path to victory. But it was always a narrow path because he came in with labor at about 50 points and him at about 25 points. So he was well, well behind from the start. It was a huge amount in decline. However, I guess my question to you, Alistair, is surely if you were in Downing Street and I came to you and said, basically, you're screwed, the economy's turned against you, you're not going to be able to turn around. It was a very big mountain to climb anyway. You can't do it. You're still going to feel, well, we've got to do it. And you're going to desperately cast around for some kind of strategy to win, even if the odds seem 95% against you. Oh, absolutely. You can't, you can't sort of throw the towel in. But what strikes me as odd is that it strikes me that he's not even having those conversations. It's almost like they're just going day to day, hand to mouth at the moment. And that's then what leads to all the kind of nonsense around him. So for example, I mean, I think this Robert Jenrick thing, I don't know if you followed the story of the Mickey Mouse murals at the Asylum Reception Center for Children. I mean, for a minister of the Crown, particularly one

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who's married to somebody whose parents were both refugees of the Holocaust, to think that that is a good use of his time to say that I understand that there are these Mickey Mouse Disney murals at the reception center for asylum seeking children. And we need to wipe them out because that gives too much of a welcoming sign. And the idea that's going to have some impact upon people in Syria and Afghanistan, they're all going to say, Oh my God, I'm not going to try and get to Britain because apparently you don't have any nice welcoming pictures of Mickey Mouse on the

wall. And I think this is what happens when you if you don't have a clear overall strategy, that I presume is part of the stop the boats messaging. But is it really something that Rishi Suna would want to put his name to? I very much doubt it. It's difficult and it's difficult thinking about it from his point of view. So he was, I guess, 20 points ahead of his party in polling at one point. So he was more popular than the Conservative Party. And the 15 year plan for the NHS, which we discussed last week seems to be a pretty thoughtful, serious plan. I mean, we pointed out some of the

problems around the edges of it. But basically, it seems to be the right thing to do. They've really come up with a thoughtful way of setting targets for addressing staffing and the same the other. But I just don't see what the path through is. I mean, what would be your best hope if through some bizarre, weird world you found yourself in Downing Street facing being 20 points behind in the polls, the economy tanking and an election, you know, about a year away?

I think he has to show far greater leadership than he's showing on all of these issues and on a general sense of this is why I think he missed such a pivotal moment in signaling a break from the kind of chaos and the madness of recent years. And I think he missed that. I sometimes think these these moments when leadership is called for are so so significant. And one of them to me was the Privileges Committee report. And I'm not saying that people are sitting around there saying, God, isn't it awful that Tsunak just vanished again? But I think that was a massive missed opportunity to show that he was a different sort of leader. And then once you've established that you can then do other things, which the moment he probably feels he can't do because he's he feels surrounded and hemmed in by all these factions.

Right. So in other words, you're suggesting that he should have taken the more high risk, high return strategy, which is to say, we're going to create a new conservative party. I'm going to challenge the Boris Johnson factions. I'm going to take the risk that I alienate some of the party members in the country who are pro-Poris Johnson. And I'm going to use that fight to rebrand,

give myself legitimacy, take the risk it may tear the party to pieces. But if I'm successful, I've got a path through to an election. And at the same time, whilst doing that, try to say to then be able to say, and compared with the opposition, I have a clear sense of who I am, what I'm trying to do, and here's how I'm trying to do it. Instead of which he just looks like he's a bit of a prisoner, wheeled out every day. So today's out with Biden yesterday was out talking about I've already forgotten what he was talking about, what he was out yesterday.

And he sort of pops up the whole time. I do think it's very interesting on the economy.

If you remember right at the start when he took over from trust, the messaging was that he and Hunt were going to be this sort of grown up double act, and they would get things back ship shape, and at least on a stable footing. And Jeremy Hunt, this seems to me has disappeared,

because I think what's happening is the Tories are picking up that Sunak is not cutting through in the in a positive way in the way that they thought that he might. So they're trying to develop him in a way. But the other thing I think he's got to do is stop appearing so peevish, stop looking. I mean, I don't know if you saw his performance at the liaison committee, but it really wasn't good because he looked like a prime minister who didn't want to accept that he wasn't handling things terribly well and didn't really understand why he had to be questioned by these, you know, impertinent MPs. So I think he's just got to kind of throw the shackles off a bit. And I would also be given the same sort of advice, by the way, to Kerstama. I think that, you know, they both them just to sort of need to let rip a bit more now at the moment. It's a sort of faint echo, isn't it, in a very different way of the US election, which is that the voters are faced, certainly, I think the focus groups suggest with two choices that don't seem terribly inspiring. Now, at least in the British case, we don't have Donald Trump running as one of the candidates. But there is a sense that voters are slightly, and maybe this is always the case. Maybe this has been true forever. But I guess the question is, are they going to think that both are terrible and it doesn't make much difference which way they vote? Or are they going to think both are terrible, but they'd rather vote for Kerstama? And I guess that's the key, isn't it? A lot of this is going to be a turnout question. I think what the country is crying out for at the moment is the sense that change can come and it can be transformational. Now, it's very, very difficult when people are so cynical about politics, they're able to say, I'm going to come along and, you know, change the world. But I feel that's what people want. So I think that, whereas I think the Tories are basically saying, look, yeah, okay, you don't like us very much, but the other arm up to much, either stick with the level, you know, which is a very kind of depressing sort of campaign message. But I think that's where they're going to go. I think they are going to attack. I think it's going to be, theirs is going to be very much an attack campaign. Whereas I think what Labour should be doing is actually sort of, you know, really say absolutely ripping into the Tories over their record and over their divisions and over the economy and everything else. But at the same time, giving the sense, the possibilities of real, real change. That's the way to get a big majority of that. And that is what they're going to need if they are going to make real change.

Very good. Okay. Well, I think next week you suggested we do a deep dive into Labour on whether they can be radical in the current economic situation. So I think that's something to look forward to, which brings us, I think, finally, to what's happening in Israel, Palestine and BB versus Biden and Janine. What do you make of what's happening?

Well, look, back to Joe Biden, in this interview yesterday, he was very, he was pretty critical, given how close historically the US-Israel relationship has been, he was pretty critical of the Netanyahu Cabinet talked about some of the people within it as being the most right-wing members of kind of any cabinet anywhere in the world. And what's been going on in Janine, I think, is pretty alarming. And look, we haven't talked about the Middle East much and the Middle East peace process. And I think the reason is it's one of those situations that it's very, very hard to see how anything is going to improve. And what happened in Janine? I mean, okay, there were 13 deaths, 12 Palestinians, four of whom were children, an Israeli soldier who was killed. It's thought by his own side in the horribly phrased friendly fire, lots of injuries. But I think more importantly, in a way, 4,000 displaced. And when you think that this is a refugee camp in

the first place, I think people sometimes are confused by this, but a lot of the people who are living in this part of the world, they're in refugee camps already. And Janine is effectively a refugee camp. So they're twice over refugees. They're now leaving, they're trying to find somewhere else to live. And part of the Israeli strategy, whether it's in the settlements or the legal buildings, it is actually about trying to narrow and narrow and narrow the space that the Palestinians have. And unless the rest of the world is standing up and speaking out on this, it's very, very hard to see where this gets resolved.

And Israeli public opinion is interesting on this. I mean, we covered the very strong demonstrations against the judicial changes. So, you know, hundreds of thousands of people out in the streets. But that was very much demonstrations, which were all about carrying the Israeli flag, people re-emphasizing that huge enthusiasm for Israel and keeping it very narrowly focused on the question of judicial reform. There isn't much political space in Israel at the moment for great sympathy for the Palestinian cause. And the Palestinian leadership seems incredibly fragmented and divided. So for the first time now, I'm seeing Jordanians coming forward and saying, actually, why don't we just reunify the whole thing into Israel and then let demography carry through, in other words, put the emphasis on challenging Israelis about the rights of Palestinians

within Israel. And making it more an argument, you can see increasingly Palestinian activists talking about apartheid, making the argument about people's rights, rather than making an argument about a two-state solution and land, because the promises of the 90s on land are very, very unconvincing at the moment. I mean, it is a very fragmented divided territory with walls and fences everywhere, checkpoints everywhere, very difficult to see a sort of viable state. Just on Janine, I mean, I visited very briefly Janine a number of years ago, and these refugee camps are very strange because they're not quite what I think people expect, and it's true even for the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. They're basically areas that started as tinted camps, but have become over time very crowded urban areas, often with very rickety concrete buildings. In the case of the camps in Lebanon, often high-rise buildings, but no urban planning, no green space, huge unemployment. And of course, in the case of Janine, a very, very long history of these raids and fights, there was a big standoff in 2002 where a number of people were killed. And that led to several thousand leaving as well. Exactly. I agree with you about the, we think of refugee camps and we think of great tinted communities, and that's what we're going to see on the news. But actually, you are talking about established communities, if you like, but there are 19 territories that are identified as refugee camps in the West Bank and another eight in the Gaza. And I think I'm right in saying that the United Nations has two million Palestinians registered as refugees. And of course, that goes back a long, for some of them, you're talking second, third generation. Absolutely. And there's this particular UN agency called UNRA, which is responsible for looking after them. And its budget is often very controversial. And there are many people in Israel who've been challenging its existence

and saying it's an anachronism that this is particularly UN agency. I mean, I think it's partly the tone of this attack was so sort of staggeringly brutal. But of course, what motivated it is that Janine is also the home to militant fighters who do have ammunitions and light arms. And this was prompted by a response to the Israelis presented very much as a security measure.

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 150. Sunak's path to victory, Trump's stance on Ukraine, and the future of Palestine

Just on the kind of international scene, I can remember, and maybe this is just that sometimes the world gives up. But I think that's always a dangerous mindset to develop. But when we were in power, I can remember not long after the Good Friday Agreement, Tony Blair made a visit to the Middle East. And there was there was the two state solutions, sort of, it felt like it meant something. And Clinton was constantly working to try to bring people together and, you know, had some pretty significant breakthroughs during his presidency. And it does feel now that that sort of opportunity feels more distant than ever. And, you know, I think the fact that Kenya, who is surely one of the great political survivors, and we talk often about the era of impunity, here's a guy who's facing all sorts of, you know, charges for all sorts of things. And yeah, he's there. He's incredibly strong. He's incredibly powerful. And he is with these very, very right wing people, extreme people in his cabinet, you know, the chances of him being brought into some kind of two state solution right now appears to me to be negligible. Absolutely negligible. And I think there's simply no political will. I think his, I mean, the argument that's been made to Israeli leaders for decades now is that in the long run, a policy of confrontation with the Palestinians is not in Israel's interest that there needs to be a peaceful settlement that people need to live together. Otherwise, Israel's future is essentially threatened. And, you know, there were even senior leaders of Mossad of Israeli intelligence agencies often have come out and made

relatively progressive liberal statements and relatively about the importance of a two state solution. But that world has changed so much. The Israeli left that backed these measures has collapsed. There's much less space than the Israeli political conversation for it.

A very, very different Israeli politics has emerged, much larger ultra-orthodox populations, these new forms of conservative settler populations, and liberal Israelis who have detached from this conversation. And at the same time, of course, the Arab world has changed.

So UAE, Saudi increasingly playing closer relationships with Israel, the Abrahamic order. I think that is, that is, that is the big shift, isn't it? That is where the, I mean, the focus of interest of other parts of the world has shifted so significantly because of their rising power. But Biden yesterday was quizzed about whether he would even invite Netanyahu to the White House and he sort of undernerved and that this is where he made these comments about these extremists in the cabinet being part of the problem and said he was regularly in touch with Netanyahu to try and get him to get him to damp them down, call them extremists, said the extremists

on the other side as well. But, you know, it didn't feel to me like he had anywhere close to the top of his agenda right now. Some of these extremists, I mean, we've talked about it before, but some of the extremists in Netanyahu's cabinet are absolutely extraordinary. I mean, he's had people in his cabinet who've been making speeches, making astonishing claims, which almost seem to imply that

they think that Jordan should be part of Israel. I mean, there's a very, very aggressive form of rhetoric going on here. And there hasn't been much attempt really by the Biden administration to challenge the expansion of settlements, which continue to make the whole idea of a two-state solution unviable because they're effectively driving Israeli settlements into exactly the areas which are supposed to be reconciled. We've probably been a bit down today, haven't we?

Oh, yes. Have you got, are you nimble enough to be able to bring us with a cheery ending note?

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 150. Sunak's path to victory, Trump's stance on Ukraine, and the future of Palestine

What can be a cheery ending note? I don't quite know where the cheery ending note is going to come

from. Maybe, honestly, you can give me some happy mental health advice. What do you do for a afraid and exhausted man who feels that he's not staying on top of anything, is completely jet lagged,

is about to move 11 hours off this time zone on my trip back to Amman.

Rory, Rory, Rory, there's a very, very easy way to deal with jet lag.

That is not to fly quite as much as you do. A listener sent in a question saying,

Rory Stewart seems a very intelligent chap. He was basically talking in the same breath last week about flying from somewhere to somewhere and the somewhere to which he flew, you could see this haze from the Canadian forest fires.

Join the dots, Rory, he said. No, I think being tired is one of the,

I absolutely hate being tired. I think I can't do anything without energy.

So no, my advice is to fly less, sleep more, and drink lots of water.

Thank you very much. Well, are you drinking enough water, Rory?

No, I haven't, not from the moment I've woken up, I'm going to go and drink a huge glass of water at the end of this pod. Thank you. I will take that on.

See you soon. Thank you.