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

And with me, Rory Stewart. And we're in person, Alistair.

We're in person.

And you're wearing, surprisingly, a Burnley tie.

I've got 31 Burnley ties and this is one of the 31.

How does it work? They're all different ties.

Because they have a club shop.

They want to sell lots of different things.

And the theme is Claret, but they do a lot of different strikes.

Claron Blue, and then down there is the badge.

Thank you for showing such an interest.

How many of our listeners do you think are interested in the fact that I'm wearing a Burnley tie?

Well, I think people, you're getting a lot of Burnley fans out of this podcast.

I think it's one of the big things. I hope Burnley's thanking you.

Well, shall I tell these Burnley obsessed listeners what we're going to talk about?

Yeah, please.

Yeah, we're going to talk about Rishi Sunak and his sudden attempt to be action man and some of the actions that he's doing be that somewhat reversing, I say, stance on climate change, banning bully dogs, tackling smoking, scrapping HS2 possibly, the northern bit.

And also we've got some, we mentioned it last week, got some very interesting polling.

Not on how people are going to vote, because I think that's a very silly question.

How are you going to vote if there's a general election tomorrow when there isn't?

But other stuff about how things are shaping up.

I think we should also at some point have a chat about your friend the King's visit to France, which seems to have gone pretty well.

And then I think we, you and I want to talk about Ukraine, having spent a bit of time at the UNGA last week,

I want to talk about Ukraine in the context of the Polish general election, where Ukraine is becoming a bit of a kicking ball for the right wing and the populace.

And then I think we need to talk about Nagorno-Karabakh on the continuing theme of talking about very, very, very important things in the world that seem to be bypassing most of our media.

Very good. Let's start with our polling.

So Ipsos, polling company, has very generously worked with the Restos politics for the first time to bring together a series of polls which we've commissioned.

And if listeners enjoy it, we'll keep doing some polling.

We'll put the full thing in the newsletter, which if you subscribe to therestopolitics.com, you can get that and all sorts of other stuff.

And the fun thing is we hope this actually might be able to feed in a little bit to the next round of questioning.

A couple of the questions that we asked that I thought were quite interesting on their responses. The first is we asked how many people thought they might change their mind on which party they vote for for the election.

And the second one is we got into the question of which parties we thought were more likely to raise taxes and spend.

Let me start on the second one.

I stuck that one in thinking this is a real one of sticking it to labor.

And you scored a massive own goal.

Yeah, massive own goal because I thought what was going to happen is that they would come back and say,

obviously labor are much more likely to raise taxes and that this was the great Akhidi's heel of Kirstammer and that Rishi Sunak would be able to exploit this.

And the results were?

50% think labor will put up taxes and 51% think the Tories will put up taxes.

Yeah, totally indistinguishable.

And basically they think both parties are likely to raise taxes.

The polls suggest labor is more likely to spend it on public services.

I don't know what the public think the Tories are going to spend the money on when they raise taxes.

They're friends, they're friends, corruption, bungling their donors.

I thought that was interesting because it says to me that what the Conservatives always felt was a given,

we are the party of low taxation has been eroded by the fact that we're paying a lot of tax.

And also I think it probably will be Rachel Reeves as the shadow chancellor will probably see it as a little bit of a vindication for her very kind of tough line on this.

It also does say though that people, they essentially are saying they don't believe the parties when they're saying they won't put up taxes.

But I thought there was a very interesting question we asked about belief and about trust and question, who do you believe?

How often, if at all, do you think each of the following tell the truth?

Now Keir Starmer does come top, people think he tells the truth all of the time, 25%, about half the time, 24%, not very often, never, 38%.

Sunak is on 20, 23, 47, think he never, ever tells the truth.

But by a mile, by a mile, the winner of who never tells the truth are these two, politicians that led the campaign for the UK to leave the European Union and government ministers.

I think that's probably a reflection.

I often look at these interviews that the ministers are doing their rounds when they're out every morning

and I just think, why does nobody get a grip of this?

Because every day they're going out there, they're gaslighting, they're saying black is white and I think the public are onto that.

The point you made though about people changing your mind, there's something here that I think

should worry both of the main parties and that is the number of people who, when they're asked about how likely are you to vote for a particular party. And the figures for the Liberal Democrats and the Greens are a lot higher than their projected share of the vote.

That may be your point that there isn't an election tomorrow.

I think some pollsters say they often consistently poll higher than they actually get a result.

I also think this is quite interesting.

So the current polls at the moment, there was one yesterday, the delta poll, Labour I think was 16. I loved it.

The Daily Telegraph said, Tories slash Labour lead.

When you got to the eighth paragraph, Labour was 16 points ahead.

But what's interesting in this one is over two in five say they are likely to consider voting Labour.

Are you very or fairly like to consider voting for Labour 44?

So I think Labour can probably say their people are almost certain to vote Labour.

39% say not very likely, would not consider at all.

Figures for the Tories, 32% very or fairly likely, 51% not at all.

But the Liberal Democrats, 28% likely or very likely, Green Party 25, Reform Party 17.

I should apologize in advance for the SNP.

This was a UK wide thing, but we didn't feel that on this one.

And it touches, of course, on our old story around proportional representation, which is that if you had a PR system where people thought voting for these parties, the Greens and the Lib Dems, was more likely to result in seats in Parliament, you could end up in a situation which is much closer to the kind of situations we're talking about in France and Spain,

where you end up not with two parties, but four parties, almost indistinguishable.

I mean, I guess in this case, Labour on slightly more, but the others on more than a quarter of the vote.

I did an event yesterday for Comic Relief, for the staff at Comic Relief,

who, like most charities, are feeling a bit sort of under the cosh from the whole woke nonsense.

But in the Q&A, there was a very nice woman there called Emma, who said she would vote Labour if there was a commitment to changing the electoral system, but she's a Green Party supporter and she feels she has to vote for the Greens.

So I was left arguing, and I accept it's not a very strong argument.

I really think that if you are in a Labour Tory marginal and you vote Green, you have to just be honest with yourself, you're effectively voting to keep the Tories in.

And I said to her, and I say this to Liberal Democrats as well,

I think they'd be far better off playing into this idea that there should be

a sort of so-called progressive alliance, get the Tories out,

but make clear, as part of their strategy, we are lending your vote, our vote to Labour, but only on condition that there is some movement on electoral reform.

I mean, I wonder whether there will be any movement on that.

It's amazing that New Zealand did the change, because there is this sense that turkeys don't vote for Christmas.

And trying to understand what it was in New Zealand politics,

which meant that people who benefited from the first-past-the-post system were willing to introduce proportional representation.

Well, what means if you Chris Hipkins, the Prime Minister on leading this week, he was clear that actually Labour had been, to some extent, a victim of the first-past-the-post system, which helped. And then I think for other people like Helen Clark, it was the sort of steady sense of people in the population saying, like they're saying here now, this just isn't working.

And I think it has to change.

And you and I both spoke about how the light gets in festival at Hampstead.

It was a very Hampstead event, wasn't it?

Very enjoyable, very Hampstead.

I got lots of rounds of applause, by the way, for slagging off Brexit, slagging off the turkeys.

The minute I said that the best thing we could do in this country to improve equality was scrap private education.

It was a very muted applause, I have to say.

Oh, sorry, I forgot we had Hampstead.

And there, I'm sure you got the same.

It was just everybody basically saying, this has to change.

And I do think, actually, Angela Rayner is onto something in this stuff that she started to talk about, about public service and restoring values of public service.

So I've also been very struck.

I was talking to a friend of mine who's a polling expert called JJ, who was the head of polling for Theresa May.

And he's been doing a lot of focus groups recently, which is seeing a lot of support for Angela Rayner.

More support, it seems, for Angela Rayner than for Rishi Sunak or Keir Starmer.

And that is because she seems to come across the focus groups as really standing for something.

And I think this is important for Keir Starmer because the same polls we're looking at are showing that only 36% of voters are decided and 38% are still open to changing their mind.

That's mind-blowing, absolutely mind-blowing.

I mean, if you look at the US figures, nobody's changing their mind on Biden and Trump.

Everybody's made up their mind.

So here we are a year out from the election.

38% of the voters open to changing their mind.

And what I think is coming across is that Keir Starmer needs to take positions, even if they're unpopular.

I think it wouldn't be a bad thing to choose two or three things.

Even if they didn't poll well as things,

the general symbol of him standing for something is going to be hugely important.

No, I was talking to somebody recently who's voted Tory all of their lives, ex-diplomat, very private school, foreign office type.

And he was saying, I can't vote for the Tories.

I'm desperate to vote for Labour, but they need to give me a tune to march to.

I thought it was a very good way to put it.

I want to have a tune to march to.

And Fiona yesterday, we were having dinner and we were talking about politics generally.

And I was saying, I think the Tories are finished, but Fiona was saying,

yeah, but if you go to those people there and you say,

I'm going to vote Labour because, what are they saying beyond because the Tories are terrible?

And I think they are moving into that.

But if you look at, let's go on to Rishi Sunak,

because we can talk about the merits and demerits of the stuff that he said,

but you can't say that he's not saying and doing things.

And let's just quickly remind people what he said.

So you gave us a bit at the top of the menu, but the big astonishing, slightly horrifying thing is, while I was in York for UN Climate Week,

Rishi Sunak came out and reversed his position on very fundamental things to do with climate.

So, for example, in the United Kingdom, we were in 2030 going to be in a position

where no petrol or diesel cars could be sold pretty soon, seven years out.

Very important signal, signal to the motor manufacturers,

signal to any normal member of the public buying.

If that deadline was held and people thought the government was serious about it,

it would have driven an incredible transition in our vehicle fleet.

What he's done there is just pushed the data out for five years.

Now, he's got this very sort of, he doesn't have a populist manner.

So the way that he explains it is very moderate.

So we're still going to make the 2050 target.

I'm just being more pragmatic.

But of course, as soon as the government shows an inch,

it destroys all the credibility on these things.

My mum, who was about to make a transition into buying an electric vehicle,

of course, these are expensive things.

You've got to change the charging and everything.

Now, thanks, wait a second.

It's not really happening in seven years time at all.

It's happening in 12 years time, which seems much further out.

Then he's also changed policy on insulation, on boilers,

on requiring landlords to upgrade their houses.

All of this stuff is, I feel, a whistle to the right,

to some of the people who are on the climate change denial right.

And what he's doing, I guess, and this is the political question for you,

is he's trying to make a dividing line

and he's inviting Keir Starmer to stand up, as we hope he will,

for that 2030 date.

Has Starmer come out and said he'll stand for the 2030 date?

I've not seen Keir.

I saw Ed Miliband doing a pretty robust response.

But it's interesting, you said he was not being a populist.

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 174. Scrapping HS2, 'Ukraine fatigue', and 'Vive le Roi!'

I actually think that was the speech that turned him into a full-on 3P politician, populism, polarization, post-truth.

Because as you say, he's got this very nice reasonable manner.

And then he does that big sort of rhetorical flourish.

Seven bins.

I'm scrapping it.

Tax on meat.

I'm scrapping it.

Utter nonsense.

Nobody serious is proposing it.

It's completely mad.

So that's how it's an outpost, true populism.

I'd love to just touch on the seven bins.

So I was the minister for recycling.

And the basic problem in Britain is that we have over 20 different recycling systems in the country.

Our recycling figures were absolutely horrible when I took over environment.

There was about half that of Germany.

And the problem isn't seven bins.

The problem is whether we could get to three bins, right?

The way to get to three bins, and I am a great believer in decentralization, but in this particular case, we need a national system.

And then people can have the same trucks, the same recycling, the same bins.

But my goodness, local councils won't move.

My goodness, government won't move.

And a lot of this is about this problem, about bins,

particularly people in cities obsessed with ending up with too many bins.

But you're completely right.

Nobody's proposing seven bins, but it would be great if we could get to three.

I'm not anti-bins, but I'm anti-prime minister standing up and saying he's somehow saving us from this menace

that nobody had seriously proposed.

Compulsory car sharing.

I'm blocking it.

I mean, when has anybody ever been told you're going to have to share your car with some complete stranger

standing on the pavement?

So that was full on 3P politics.

And what should Kiyosama do?

Should he do what I want him to do, which is to come out and say,

this is nonsense, climate matters, flavour comes in, we're sticking to the 2030 date?

Or is the huge political risk in lining up against Rishisunakas?

There's clearly political risk, which is why they're doing it,

because the other piece of gas lighting that was going on,

and by the way, in breach of the ministerial code, I'll come onto that,

and the lectern, what did he say, long-term decisions for the brighter future of some nonsense? It is a breach of the ministerial code to use a party slogan inside a government building, and that is the Tory party conference slogan.

So back to the normalisation of the abnormal, nothing happening on that.

I hope that Kiyosama does what in a way he didn't do on the back of the Uxbridge's bri-election.

With Ules, it's being weaponised, just as he's now weaponising the non-existent tax on meat and the non-existent seven bins.

But I think that gives Labour an opportunity to stand up for it.

It could have been a huge opportunity.

So presumably, Kiyosama could have dominated a loss of the news channels,

because you and I have been being asked to comment on this all week.

He could have been in every studio last week standing up for the environment and getting those 20% green votes on-site.

If he had become, for the whole week, the big public champion of,

I believe, in the climate energy transition,

that could have been an extraordinary week for him, couldn't it?

Yeah, and maybe he might do that as we...

Don't forget, I guess they're all sitting around thinking about party conference at the moment.

It is interesting just how hyperactive Sunak is being.

I think the inaction man thing really stung him.

So he's doing international baccalaureate.

He's trying to change A-levels into more of a broader educational system.

Insanity, what do you think about that?

Well, my main adviser on education is somebody by the name of Fiona Miller.

Your partner?

And she's been advocating for some kind of baccalaureate system for years and years and years and years.

So actually, on that you think probably is a good policy.

I think it could be properly implemented.

And again, the point that you make in your book about if they propose it, it must be a bad idea.

I think Labour maybe should have not been so dismissive of that,

because we are, you know, they write to say,

teachers have been through enough hell and through enough chaos

and all the reforms haven't worked.

But I do think we've got to move towards some sort of system.

And what if they don't?

What if Labour had come out with an idea like that?

Would that have been bold and interesting or too dangerous?

Yeah, I think it would.

I think it would.

Fiona's been bagging on about it for some time.

I mean, there was, we should put in the newsletter,

the clip of Rishi Sunak out and about yesterday

in one of his visits where he said,

he was me asked about HS2 and he said,
I'm not going to comment on the speculation.
He was the one who had started the speculation.
So with HS2, so HS2 famously started,
I think the cost was supposed to be about 50 billion
and the cost began to escalate and it's now at about 300 billion.
And it's a very, very interesting project
because from the point of view of my constituents in Penrith,
it was actually going to make the journey less convenient.
Instead of being able to get a direct line from London to Penrith,
we were going to have to change along the way
and it wasn't actually going to be much faster.
And the calculations around it were all about the fact
that by saving time, we were going to be more productive.
That was the way the Treasury did the money.
And the idea was having 20 minutes less on the train
would give you 20 minutes more contribution to the economy, et cetera.
The real reason I think that people want to do it
is that the old line, which is actually quite quick,
25 miles an hour in bits, is decrepit and they want a new line.
But my goodness, it's been painful.
I mean, that was 10 years of real political hell
because of course a lot of these lines run through Tory's safe seats.
Cheryl Gillan.
Exactly.
Tory MP standing up against it.
Anyway, the most expensive bit of the line
turned out to be the bit that actually gets you
from Old Oak Common,
which is about eight miles outside the centre of London
to Houston stations.
Through the chaos of which many of us have lived for many years.
Yes.
And now it's not happening.
The latest idea is that we build this train line
and you have to get off the train
eight miles outside the centre of London
instead of getting off at Houston.
You probably get a rail replacement bus from there.
Exactly.
I mean, it's not.
It's just, it's terrifyingly bad.
I saw you were engaged in a little bit of an exchange
on Twitter yesterday with Andrew Adonis,

who was part of the brainchild of this whole thing.
Yeah, he loved it.
So Andrew Adonis, just to remind people,
he was Labour, he was Lib Dem and he was a Conservative minister.
But he was the Labour transport secretary.
And then a junior Tory transport secretary from the House of Lords.
Well, no, he didn't need to sit on the infrastructure commission
or something.
I don't think he was a minister.
No, if he was a Tory minister, I wouldn't be speaking to him.
And I still speak to him.
So when we first started 2009, as you say,
it was projected costs.
Then the Tories came in and Justin Green was transport secretary,
announced they're going ahead with it, budget of 55.7 million,
as you say.
Yeah.
We're now talking eight years since then.
We're talking 14 years since the whole thing started.
And the current budget estimate,
I mean, something like 300, 400 billion.
So it's not going to fulfil.
And then meanwhile...
And wait, but just very quickly.
And from my point of view,
actually the real priority is nothing to do with this route to London.
The real priority is Leeds, Manchester.
That's the big investment that could be made.
And that's what we taught in this very studio.
We talked to Andy Burnham about that.
So you've now, here's the crazy politics of this.
As part of his new action man,
Sunak flies the kite that we're going to scrap it at Birmingham,
and we're only going to come to North London,
thereby cutting out the North,
a part of the country which he is about to visit for his party conference.
Mimo, you were saying about Andrew Dennis's tweet on China.
So he said that while we fail to build from the HS2,
China has laid down 20,000 miles of rail track.
And that is really interesting.
And we should talk about this more because we keep saying
we're going to do something on the Chinese economy.
But if you look at some like Shenzhen,
which is this big sort of mega city near Hong Kong,

they've built something like seven underground lines in the last decade.
And they cannot afford them.

It's like the railway boom in Britain,
which led to beach enclosing all the lines.

The Chinese have built all these lines.

We've congratulated them for them,
but now it turns out they can't even afford to maintain them,
let alone service the debt.

Because what happened during 2008 is the Chinese government said
the way we're going to get the Chinese and global economy going
is just build everything that's on your books.

Just build, build, build.

And they all built.

And it's a real reminder of the difficult balance
you've got in transport infrastructure.

At one moment we're praising China,
and Andrew Dennis is still in the world of praising China.

I don't think he's caught up on the fact
that they've massively overbuilt.

What a problem that is.

Well, I don't think we can be accused of overbuilding.

No, we certainly cannot be accused of overbuilding.

I've mentioned Fiona a couple of times.

Can I tell you her theory about you, Rory?

Yeah, go on then.

She's decided that the reason you've come back to London
is that you're eventually going to end up as the chief advisor
to the king.

Oh, to work for the king?

Yeah.

Well, that would be a very great honor.

Let me just...

I don't think it's true, but it's a great honor.

You don't think it's true?

No, no, I have not been offered that job.

I've not been offered that job,

and I'm not sure I could keep doing the podcast if I did.

Well, surely you could at least get him on for one.

Yeah, no, anyway, let me just quickly, though,
because you've raised the king.

A very interesting trip that the king just made to France.

And pretty astonishing, the figures that are coming up.

Figaro did a poll.

We're talking about polls on the French,

and they've used the monarchy.
And of course, France, very proud republic,
you know, really went for it and getting rid of their kings.
Absolutely.
Heads on sticks.
One thing we know about them.
But 67% of the French public, sorry,
71% of the French public in the Figaro poll
have a positive view of the British royal family.
80% of them see the British royal family
as being in tune with British voters
close to the British people.
And the monarchy is most popular in France,
with people aged under 35.
And one of the reasons Emmanuel Macron really went for it,
he does these beautiful short clips of tribute.
You would have seen as one to the queen.
And on his social media.
Yeah, and then he just did one for King Charles.
I've always visited France through the years.
And he says, you know, welcome your Majesty.
And the reason he's doing it is it's popular with his base.
I mean, being close to the British royal family
really plays from.
But I don't get this at all.
Have you got any speculation or ideas
about why France should have quite a sort of
nostalgic positive view of the British royal family?
Well, I think one of the reasons why the British,
apart from the obvious historical reasons,
have such a relationship with the monarchy at the moment.
Because if you think about when the queen was still alive,
there were lots of people saying,
oh, when she's gone, it's all over.
Charles won't be able to step up, blah, blah, blah.
Young people don't care.
And there's still a little bit of that around,
but not very much.
But I think actually it's because of the contrast
with the politicians that they've been seeing so much of.
So I think they look at Charles and they think,
well, you know, compare that to Liz Truss,
compare that to Boris Johnson.
And maybe a little bit in France, don't forget,

that one of the relentless criticisms of Macron is that they think he behaves like a king. So there's sort of, I think there's part of them saying, you know, that law, I've got a real king. You're just another politician. And presumably with all the tensions with Brexit, it allows France to show affection for Britain and the British people without showing affection for particular politicians. It's a way of showing continuity, respect. Some of them are drawing, you know, remembering support during the war, whether or not it's important then. So it's a way of France showing a kind of cultural respect for Britain at the time when Brexit's problematic. Yeah.

And I think, well, although Macron did have a very good meeting with Sir Keir Starmer, as you're probably aware, reports from both sides coming back to say that it was very, very positive. He's made an effort with Rishi Sunak as well. And Rishi Sunak's made an effort with him. Yeah.

But I think what was, what was, what I find when I go to France, there is, this is sort of global, isn't it? There are, they are, I've never understood it, but they are slightly obsessed with our royal family. I mean, virtually everybody in the world has a view about Harry and Meghan. I mean, I don't study what it has to do with their lives. I actually dreamt about Harry the other day. What?

You know, I dreamt about Harry. I was in a church. Which is not a thing you often do. No, normally funerals, but I was in a church and Harry was in the pew in front of me with Meghan and people were going up to make speeches at the pulpit. Was it a funeral? Was it a funeral? I don't know what it was. I don't know. It must have been a funeral

if they were making speeches from the pulpit.
Lots of people going up to make speeches.
I've just been in a church in Devons.
It might have been that,
because I've been doing a book,
a book about the church.
But anyway, people were just wandering by,
muttering abuse at Harry and Meghan.
Oh.
Yeah.
And what do they represent for you?
Do you think you are Harry and Meghan?
No, I don't know what I think.
It's a dream and I'll have to talk to my psychiatrist about it.
But anyway, the next thing that happened was I was,
I was then told I had to make a speech.
And I said, well, I haven't prepared anything.
So they gave me a pen and some paper.
And my pen started to leak.
Oh.
And this black ink flooded out of my pen.
And it went all over Harry's shirt.
Oh.
He was very nice.
He was very polite.
So I think that I can honestly say it's the first time
I've ever dreamt about Prince Harry.
Thank you for sharing the lessons
we'll have for its theories on the screen.
I'm guessing you dream about King Charles the whole time.
I had a series of very weird dreams recently.
I'll try to remember them after the break.
The reason I remember, I used to mention my psychiatrist.
There was a period of my time where I used to write down my dreams.
And there's a thing called hypnagogia.
You can train yourself to remember more of your dreams as you're dreaming.
I was told one of the tricks there was that
if you drink a lot of water before you go to sleep,
you have to wake up to pee.
And that's the moment at which you can write down your dream.
Okay.
Anyway, just to finish before we go to the break.
So King Charles gave a speech.
A lot of it in French.

Much of it in French.

That's right, dear.

But it was extraordinary.

Of course, he's got an accent,
but he understood what he was saying.

He did it well.

And the French Senate was full of applause.

Standing ovation.

And I think he managed to be very strong on standing with Ukraine.

Very strong as you'd expect on the environment.

Do you think the Queen would have talked about Ukraine?

No, I'm not sure she would have talked about Ukraine
or the environment in quite the same way.

And I think that's interesting because I think what he's doing
is he's speaking for His Majesty's government.

He knows that both the government and the opposition are strong on Ukraine.

So he's not worried about that.

But he feels that if the government,
and in this case, the opposition are combined on their views on Ukraine,
he can do it.

On the environment, of course,
he is slightly out ahead of where the government feels that it is.

I did notice that he did two speeches,
one at Versailles and one in the Senate.

And I noticed that the one in Versailles,
when he said,

More Premier ministre,
there was a little bit of a curl of the lip.

Anyway, so he's done 34 visits to France.

And Macron, in that lovely social media clip,
which we can share a link to,

he says,

You visited as a prince.

You return as a king.

Your Majesty, welcome.

It's a great thing.

No, Macron does that stuff very, very, very, very well.

Great.

Right.

I'm insisting on doing this, though,
because as you know,
we're getting sent dozens of books
because it seems that every time we mention a book,
it does very well for sales.

Because we've been so fawning about your friend the king,
I am going to say that Graham Smith,
the guy who got arrested at the coronation,
has written a book about republicanism.
And I sent it to you.
Well, we'll put that in the links too.
There you go.
Well, time for a break.
Welcome back to The Rest is Politics with me, Rory Stewart.
And me, Alistair Campbell.
And just a little plug for leading.
We did Chris Hipkins,
who's the New Zealand Prime Minister,
who's going into an election.
Definitely worth listening to.
He's the man who famously, during COVID,
said people should get out and spread their legs.
We've also got...
Is that the big takeout of his life and times?
It's not the big takeout, as I've said,
but it was fun.
He says lots of other interesting things,
but he did indeed say it.
It was one of the great political lines we'll take.
And we're also doing Theresa May,
who's going to be out next week,
which will be in a good listen
next Prime Minister on the show.
But in the world at large,
I guess there are a couple of things
that we haven't talked about.
One of them is Ukraine,
and in particular, the way that Poland,
which is really, really important
to the story around Ukraine,
is beginning to shift its position on Ukraine
and what that suggests.
And the second thing is the fight in Nagorno-Karabakh,
which is a fight between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
Really big news,
but not reported much in the British press.
But should we start a little bit on Poland,
because that's something that you raised?
What have you been finding out about Poland?

Well, Ukraine is just becoming a little porn in the election, and I suspect that the Ukrainians will be quite worried about it. So you've had the Polish government, this law on justice, very right-wing, but under pressure from a very, very right-wing force, the Particle Confederation. And the rhetoric against Ukraine has been cranking up. So they've talked about not necessarily giving weapons. They're in the middle of a grain war. And then Duda at the United Nations, I'll give the quote, Ukraine is behaving like a drowning person, clinging to anything available. A drowning person is extremely dangerous, capable of pulling you down to the depths and simply drowning the rescuer. And what these, the far right, this confederation lot, who like a lot of far right parties in Europe are sort of basically propoten, they're essentially going around the place saying the trouble with the Ukrainians is they never say thank you. It's a classic sort of, you know, we're helping them, but what do they do for us? And it's dangerous. Really important, isn't it? Because Poland was probably the fiercest, clearest ally of Ukraine from the very beginning. They were the people, you raised Nord Stream to the gas line last week. Poland was out there very early, 2004 saying that signing up to Russian gas was like the ribbon-trop packed with Hitler. They were right out of the gates when the invasion happened, got a lot of credit for how strongly they stuck with Ukraine. They took 1.7 million Ukrainian refugees. They're the major logistics hub for supplying the Ukrainians with military. They gave them most of their migs. They were one of the first to deploy aircraft. And actually it's been interesting because since 2015, Poland along with Hungary

have been the strongest example of right-wing populism in Europe. It's in a very difficult situation in the European Union because the polls have been cutting down on the judiciary in a brutal way. I mean, this is the theme of right-wing populism. We talked about it with Israel, but in Poland it's very, very clear. You know, they've got involved in the nomination of the judges. They've set up new supervisory bodies. Basically the politicians are running the courts in Poland. The European Union has a standoff. There's nearly 30 billion euros at stake in COVID relief fund in the standoff between Poland and the EU. But because Poland was so strong on supporting Ukraine against Russia, this populist government began to get some credit in the West and a lot of popularity with the US and even with the EU. And now this is beginning to falter and this far-right party you're talking about. I mean, it's a really disturbing party. We've talked about far-right parties in Sweden and Finland, but this party, you know, wants to provide a list of... Homosexuals. Yeah, really, really weird stuff. I think it's a reminder of something that we maybe haven't talked about enough, which is that these populist parties don't, as it were, remove the kind of toxic right-wing views from a society by absorbing them. They actually enable even more right-wing views to emerge on their right. Well, it's a kind of extreme reiteration of the way that UKIP and its various manifestations pulled the Conservative Party further and further to the right. But the grain situation, most of our listeners will know about the importance of Ukrainian grain to the rest of the world. In their exports, they've had to go through Poland. And a lot of Polish farmers, who are pretty powerful in the Polish debate, have objected to this because it's also going into the Polish market. And so they're bringing in pretty old-fashioned protectionism to protect the Polish farmers, to get their support through the election. And, okay, so that's a little trade war going on. But then to bring into that, then on the platform of the United Nations,

the President basically saying,
this is like a drowning man dragging us down.
So I think that explains why Zelenski,
partly why Zelenski has been so busy on the international front in recent weeks.
And of course, a smaller country,
we've talked before about this guy Fisko in Slovakia,
same story being told.
So Zelenski was obviously in the States when I was there last week,
and he was at the UN General Assembly,
which Biden very much wanted to make about Ukraine.
But he didn't succeed.
What actually happened at the UN General Assembly last week
is the focus was very much more on development and on climate,
not enough on climate, but more on development and climate.
He then went down to Washington,
and he's facing a real challenge with dealing with the Republicans,
because the dominant Republican runners are very doubtful
about the continuing support for Ukraine.
As a Republican field, they basically divide into three camps.
There's Nikki Haley and Mike Pence,
who are very much behind the sort of Biden strategy
and think that you've got to defeat Russia,
and that's the only way to protect Taiwan against China,
and it's important for American primacy.
You've got a second group like Vivek,
who think that Russia is a distraction from China,
and that the US should be putting more energy into China
and less into Russia-Ukraine.
And then the third group, which is, of course,
Trump represents in Trump's, the frontrunner by such a country mile,
Trump in May was out there saying he would resolve
the entire Russia-Ukraine more than 24 hours of taking office.
And although he never quite says it,
the implication is that he'd do it by giving bits of territory to Putin.
There's now another big over \$30 billion package
trying to go through Congress at a time
when the US government is frozen again.
They're not paying civil servants, air traffic controllers
are working for free, et cetera,
which is supposed to be for the Ukraine.
And all of this, I think, reflects a bigger issue,
which is there was so much hope for this counteroffensive,
and Zelensky was communicating at the beginning of the year.
This was the year they were going to roll through.

And of course, the first Abrams tanks,
these big American tanks, have now turned up on the ground yesterday.
They've got their air support,
they've got a lot of the missiles that they requested,
but actually what they're doing is they're fighting over this place,
Bakhmut, that we talked about, which the Wagner Group took.
That was Pregatian's great victory.
Ukrainians are trying to take it back.
A lot of the US military is very doubtful about this.
General Austin defends Secretary saying,
why waste your time about Bakhmut?
It really doesn't matter.
Head cells to try to cut off the Russian lines to Crimea.
And these are all complicated ways of saying,
it's just not moving.
And the public sense that it isn't moving.
I know you were talking to people who slightly disagree with this
and are a bit more optimistic about Ukraine, Russia, is that right?
Yeah, I was.
But were they optimistic because they want to be optimistic?
I don't know whether there's sort of a bit of optimism bias going on.
But I think that where we are now,
is that you've mentioned America there,
but the politics of the democracies are now,
I think, really playing into Putin's hands.
And of course, the reason Poland's become so important
is because before when Erdogan helped get that new sort of trade deal going,
a lot of it was going to seaports.
And of course, Putin's been battering them.
And that's why they've had to resort to land.
And then that goes through Poland.
And that hence they're in the difficulty that they're in.
And this election is very, very soon.
It's on October the 15th.
We're talking, you know, a matter of weeks.
Now, who knows?
None of us know where it's going to end.
But the fact that the governing party is playing this game at this moment,
suggests to me that they've decided that is the way to help them win it.
So I think, I mean, if you're Zelensky, I think it is, it is tricky.
You know, he sacked his defence minister.
He's under huge pressure to demonstrate progress,
to demonstrate that all these munitions
that are coming in are really going to make the difference.

He's saying that Russia's exhausted.
He's going to try to fight through the winter.
He thinks Russia can't keep going.
But other people are saying, look, these minefields,
the Russians have laid are very deep.
They're very entrenched in.
The ground's going to get very soft and soggy,
which is going to make it very difficult to do an offensive.
People I was talking to did say that Russia had a real problem
with armaments manufacture at the moment.
And that's why he had to go and see Kim Jong-un
and try and get a bit of help from there.
I don't know.
OK, so if that's not complicated enough, Poland, Ukraine,
let's talk about Nagorno-Karabakh.
And of course, Putin's at the heart of this as well,
because you have Breakup of the Soviet Union,
Armenia and Azerbaijan,
they've been effectively at war ever since
in part over Nagorno-Karabakh.
And in the first war,
not long after the Breakup of the Soviet Union,
to everybody's surprise, the Armenians won.
Since when Azerbaijan has been hell-bent on revenge.
Russia's been in there as a peacekeeping force,
basically on the side of the Armenians, historically.
And now, as sort of stepped aside,
as has the Armenian government effectively,
as Azerbaijan has just rolled in.
So if I can do an explainer for people.
So Armenia and Azerbaijan,
Armenia, predominantly Christian, speak in Armenian language.
Azerbaijan, predominantly Muslim, speaking in Turkic language.
Armenians to the west, Azerbaijan to the east.
Azerbaijan along the Iranian border
and along the Caspian Sea.
Big difference, Azerbaijan.
Huge revenues from oil and gas.
Big historical tensions.
And part of this goes back to the Armenian genocide.
The Armenians were a very large,
very ancient Christian population.
I mean, they sometimes claimed to be the first Christian country
in the world.

They converted very, very early to Christianity.
They're a state that have been there since the time of the Roman Empire.
And they had populations that spilled into what is now Turkey and Iran.
And I remember on my walks through the Turkish-Iranian border
coming across these abandoned Armenian churches.
And essentially, around the First World War
and the end of the First World War,
the Armenian population were driven out and killed by Turks out of these areas.
So they are hypersensitive to this question of ethnic cleansing, genocide.
And in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is an area, a tiny area,
just over half the size of Cumbria, about 150,000 people.
Well, they reckon at the moment they're about 80,000.
Even before they were taken out, there were a lot of people moving out.
Tiny, tiny thing.
And it's surrounded on all sides by Azerbaijan.
So it's a little sort of enclave in the middle of Azerbaijan,
captured after the fall of Soviet Union in 1994 by the Armenians,
a little Christian enclave.
And that displaced about 800,000 Azerbaijanis who were living around the area.
A couple of years ago, the Azerbaijanis by now much wealthier with oil and gas
used Turkish and Israeli drones in an attack in 2020 to take a loss of that area.
Russian peacekeepers came in traditionally again on the Armenian side
and that's partly about the history of the Russians standing up for Christian populations
going all the way back to the Crimean War.
Turks much more on the Azerbaijani side and again some more of a Muslim thing.
And now as you say, we now have a big advance where it looks as though Azerbaijan
has retaken Nagorno-Karabakh and now it's incorporated back within Azerbaijan
and people are very, very worried again about the ethnic clans of the Armenians.
Yeah, because the president, LAF has made all sorts of positive noises about
you will be welcomed citizens, et cetera, but the history is brutal.
There was all sorts of stuff circulating on social media about saying things like,
you know, now we can go and rape in the women like they used to do to us
and all this sort of stuff.
And there's something else that was very interesting.
I spoke to somebody in the Armenian government who was making the point
that since this happened, Macron has spoken to both sides.
Blinken has condemned what's happened and called for a ceasefire,
which seems to be sort of working-ish.
Schultz has spoke out about it at the UN in his main speech.
The German chancellor.
The UK, it's been left to a minister by the name of Doherty, who I must admit I'd never heard of.
And then I think it's somebody called Lord Ahmad.
I'm not aware that the prime minister or the foreign secretary.
I could be wrong, but I'm not where they've said a word.

And is that related to the fact that I'm again grateful to my good friends at their Spiegel, Achmiliad and podcast, where I heard that they were saying that on even as this military attack was happening,

executives from BP were at some sort of celebration event, not about the invasion about the attack, but about something else with the government.

And you mentioned oil.

And of course, that is what has given the Azerbaijan is the upper hand.

It's fascinating.

And my old friends, ESI, this think tank, European think tank, did some extraordinary reporting on the influence that the Azerbaijani government has had over lawmakers in Europe and in Britain.

They were very, very astute at inviting people on paid holidays and getting their positions on the council in Europe.

There's a lot of reporting in their reports around an ex Lib Dem MP called Mike Hancock and his links.

His links into Azerbaijan.

But it's also a sense of the way in Ukraine, Russia is changing things because Azerbaijan now really matters for Britain and for Europe

because it's the place which we're getting our oil and gas when we're not getting it from Putin's Russia.

So Azerbaijan could not be in a stronger position.

And again, it's been a humiliation for the US.

It's also been a humiliation for Russia, actually, because Russia had peacekeepers.

And in fact, some of those Russian peacekeepers have been killed in this Azerbaijan attack.

So Russia likes to believe that it is the dominant force in the former Soviet Union.

It presented itself as keeping the peace here.

It had peacekeepers supporting the Armenian population, this corridor running through.

Which the Azerbaijan is effectively shut down.

Effectively cut.

So it's been a humiliation for Putin.

It's been a humiliation for the US that was trying to call on restraint and a victory really for Azerbaijan and Turkey.

It does feel like we're back in the 19th century because the Turks are fighting, as it were, a sort of almost proxy war against Russia in Azerbaijan.

They were fighting a real proxy war against Russia in Syria, where the Turks were against Bashar al-Assad, the Russians were on the side.

And in Libya, which we talked about last week, where the Russians were on the side of Hiftar and the Turks were on the side of the government Tripoli.

But at the same time, of course, the Turks are buying Russian military equipment.

So final thing I noticed is the role of celebrities in this.

So we've got a situation in which the Armenians are being endorsed by Kim Kardashian.

See on the basis of celebrities which side you think you should support.

So the Armenians are being supported by Kim Kardashian, Michael Jordan and Mel Gibson.

And the Azerbaijanis are being supported by Ronaldinho and Chuck Norris.

Who would you go with?

I'm not making my judgment on this based upon which celebrities are telling their many Instagram followers.

I'll tell you the thing about America as well.

Shortly before, again, this is something I've not seen anywhere in our media, there were military exercises involving America and the Armenian.

They have a very weak military, but there were military exercises just before this.

I don't know whether that was about Americans sending a signal, but if it was, it seems to backfire. And I think the reason perhaps the Russians didn't get as involved as they might have done in keeping the peace

is perhaps Putin was saying, listen, if you're going to play around with Americans, then don't expect us to keep the thing together.

It feels as though this is dangerous from Nikol Pashinyan who's the Armenian leader because he took a risk of growing pro-Western and distancing himself from Putin.

And it boy has it not paid off.

The US and the European Union have not written to his rescue in the way that he would have hoped.

And that's a problem because that was a big diplomatic play by the US and Europe to try to leverage away former Soviet states from Russia.

And this is bad, I think.

What do you think it is about the British government has been so quiet about?

I know Cleverley was busy on the King's visit.

I imagine it probably is that they're very conscious that we're very dependent on Azerbaijan for oil and gas

if we're not taking oil and gas from Putin, and therefore they're reluctant to come in.

Thank you, though. That boy, we covered a lot of ground there.

We've done a lot of detail on Poland, a lot of detail.

We'll have to do your dreams another day.

Do my dreams another day.

You should start doing what I do.

What I recommend is, this is what I did when I was doing this.

I don't do it anymore, but I do remember my dreams much more than I used to.

Before you go to sleep, you basically say to yourself, I am going to remember my dreams.

And you have a notebook and a pen next to your bed.

And then while you're dreaming, it comes over time.

This is the hypnagogic process.

Over time, you develop this capacity as that while you're dreaming,

there is a part of your conscious mind saying, I'm going to remember this bit.

Okay, here's my final dream, just to disturb all listeners at the end of their thing.

So I dreamt that I was standing in the airport security line.

And standing in front of me, I believe, was Timothy Gartenash, who's this kind of professor.

So I dreamt of you, Mr. Harry, you dreamt of Timothy Gartenash.

I won't tell you about my dreams, but Halle Berry.

And Timothy Gartenash sort of left the security line.

And I couldn't quite work out why he left the security line.

And I was kind of joking to the guy who was standing,
where the professor was leaving the security line.
And I realized that at the end of the security line was not an x-ray machine,
but a guillotine.
And I was going to have my head chopped off.
And I realized I had about a minute until I was going to have my head chopped off.
And my strongest thought was, this is all very well making jokes
and sort of putting a brave face on it.
But I've got a minute to contemplate my life before I get my head chopped off.
Why am I wasting time making jokes
rather than preparing myself for dignity for my death?
Or getting out of the situation, surely.
Or getting out of the line, but that never occurred to me.
No, I'm a proper conservative. I just do what I'm told.
I just plod forward towards the guillotine.
Well, on the note of Rory Stewart having his head chopped off,
we'll see you soon.
Thank you very much.