

[Transcript] The News Agents / Can there ever be peace in the Middle East?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

You think it's scary now in the Middle East?

It could get a whole lot worse.

That is the Iranian Foreign Minister.

Last night, warning that Iran, one of the regional superpowers, could launch a pre-emptive strike against Israel to stop it going into Gaza.

All this, as President Biden is preparing to visit Israel tomorrow.

And despite all of that, and despite the massive movement of people that is going on within Gaza, and despite, again and again, us hearing that humanitarian aid will be allowed into Gaza and that the border crossing with Egypt might open to at least allow some people out, there remains no sign of any of those things happening.

And each day that goes by, Gaza and its two million people run out of water, run out of medical supplies, run out of food.

The whole of the international Western effort is now focused on trying to get that border open.

Welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's John.

It's Lewis.

And if you are trying to get in or out of Gaza, broadly there are two routes.

One is via Israel and the other to the south is via Egypt.

But that crossing point remains stubbornly closed despite the efforts of diplomats from around the world, Arabs, Americans, the West, are trying to find some way that it can be opened so that humanitarian supplies can get in.

But you have Israel saying it won't stop the aerial bombardments and it's very worried that humanitarian supplies not only supply the Gazan people, but they resupply Hamas.

And you have got Hamas saying it's not going to cease its firing of rockets.

And into that impasse, as Lewis said in the introduction, there are two million Gazans who need water, who need fuel, who need medical supplies, who need to live.

This is, it seems to me, a sort of perfect crisis which has thrown up because you've basically got each side having zero trust in the other.

And so you end up in a situation where the status quo maintains, i.e. the border won't open.

Why won't the border open?

When you've got the UN, have quite literally got truck after truck.

They've said so.

They've got trucks ready to go full of water, full of food, full of medical supplies, ready to go in.

And the two sides, i.e. Egypt and Israel, are unwilling to make it happen, basically, for these reasons.

Israel, for its part, is worried that if it allows supplies in, in whose hands does it end up?

Hamas.

And they think, what's the point of basically putting a siege on this territory if it means

that we're just going to allow supplies to get through to our enemies?

Now you cannot have an argument about whether that's legal, in fact, I think it's clear we looked at the episode on Friday.

International experts would say, blockades of that kind probably aren't legal.

But leaving that to one side, that's what they're worried about.

And in the Egyptians, meanwhile, are worried that if they open the border to refugees, that they will then have a huge Palestinian influx that will never leave.

The Israel will never take them back, because Israel will just say, well, these are people who've left, and they are potential Hamas fighters in there, so we're not going to allow them back into Gaza.

So into that, you've got these two sides who aren't willing to talk, or at least aren't willing to reach some sort of compromise so far, and it means that two million gardens are trapped.

Yeah.

And you have got Biden coming to the country.

You've got the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, and let's face it, they have considerable leverage.

The Americans have considerable leverage, theoretically, over both Israel and Egypt.

But there is this stubborn arm wrestle going on, and you can see why there is the arm wrestle.

You can see why Egypt is suspicious.

You can see why Israel has zero trust of Hamas and wanting to do anything when it's pledged in the wake of the massacre that took place in southern Israel to destroy Hamas.

You can see why they don't want to do a deal and why the deal is impossible.

But you just think these poor bastards that are caught in the middle of this, who haven't got food, who haven't got fuel, who haven't got water, that this is an intolerable situation.

And I can't believe there isn't going to be some resolution of this before Biden arrives, because for Biden to arrive with none of this having been resolved is pretty suboptimal, unless of course Biden arrives and then he kind of goes to a meeting and then it's suddenly agreed and he claims a victory for the US.

But actually, I think that that might work in a kind of Louisiana context or a Wisconsin context.

I'm not sure you get Israel and Egypt agreeing that just because the US president's landed.

Thing is, unless some sort of humanitarian route is opened, the gardens will starve and they will die first.

I mean, there are reports, lots of reports coming out of families who, you know, they run out of water or they're having to drink what's left of kind of toilet water or bathroom water, sea water as well, because they've run out or on the process of running out.

I was talking to someone who is quite familiar with the work of one of the hospitals there and they were sharing me a message from one of the doctors that had been shared with them and they said this, we're fine.

I do hope they won't bomb us or threaten us again.

Today we receive tens of dead bodies, and injured people and children, women and old people are victims of the two attacks which happened yesterday morning and there are hospital after hospital which are running out of power and fuel.

And unless the West can find a way of exploiting and using some of its influence either via the Qataris or by the Turks or whoever it is, or as you say, John, via the enormous influence that the US has, Biden is going to fly in there and fly out without anything coming of it.

So it's interesting.

You talk about what could be happening to gardens and the damage and the loss of life potentially, unless it's before the ground invasion has even started.

I've been talking to General David Patreus who was head of US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, former head of the CIA.

He's just written a book called A Military History of the Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine.

And I said, is it fair to look at this with all the mistakes that were made then?

Is this Israel's 9-11?

I think it's worse than the 9-11 moment, but I think it's instructive to recall, again, the understandable outrage, desire for revenge, the urgency of taking out the al-Qaeda sanctuary in which the 9-11 attacks were planned in Afghanistan and then taking down the Taliban because they refused to bring the al-Qaeda leaders to justice and so forth.

But we conducted some actions that, when you look back later, are instructive.

For example, in particular, what do you do after you've taken down a regime?

The post-conflict planning, obviously, for Iraq proved to be wholly inadequate.

And then there were some decisions made that made that even more challenging, firing the Iraqi military without telling them how they'd provide for their families and firing the government bureaucrats, basically, without an agreed reconciliation process.

So there are some very instructive moments here.

But I think this is far worse.

We lost nearly 3,000 innocent civilians and the horrific attacks on 9-11.

The Israelis lost the equivalent of well over, well over that, and they're still doing the accounting.

As you know, right now, they're at 1,300 innocent Israeli civilians and, of course, done in a way that's truly unspeakable and barbaric.

And you can hear the whole interview with David Petraeus and the person he wrote the book with, the British historian, Andrew Roberts, on newsagents USA.

What Petraeus is raising there is the thing that just keeps running around my mind and which really scares me in terms of where we're heading with this.

There was an extraordinary quote from an IDF spokesperson, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Hex at the weekend, and was asked what an Israeli military victory might look like.

And he said, and this is completely on the record, that is a big question.

I don't think I have the capability right now to answer that.

So it feels to me as if we're just in a situation where all the dominoes, the cascades of dominoes are falling one by one, that a set of events has been put into motion by Hamas last Saturday, Saturday before, which they knew would happen.

The Israelis feel they have to respond, of course they have to respond, and they see no other option but to go into Gaza because the correct perception is that containment clearly hasn't worked.

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So what else is there?

Well, it's occupation again, which was the status quo ante before 2005-06.

But there is no real sense of how that's going to work.

There is no real sense other than it's going to be a bloodbath of what actually taking the thing looks like.

I mean, I read an analysis at the weekend from a military expert who actually said they can't think of any equivalent operation to this in modern military history, that there is nowhere quite like Gaza.

There is nowhere with that kind of labyrinthine network of 500 miles of tunnels or whatever it is underneath Gaza that has been booby-trapped and rigged and which are going to be full of human shields and potentially hostages.

And then on top of that, you've got Israel.

There is one way they said, you know, you could imagine them doing it.

If this were Russia, they would just flatten the thing.

They would do what they did to Aleppo or what they did to Bakhmut or any of the endless other Ukrainians.

Or Chechnya.

Or Chechnya.

They'd just flatten the whole thing and then they'd just go in and they'd pick up the pieces.

Israelis can't do that and won't do that.

So you're then left with a kind of war of attrition, a guerrilla war, which could stretch on for weeks and for months and all the time, Hamas might not even be there.

They could have fled to Egypt and then just return later.

Obviously, in the middle of it, millions of gardens.

And then, of course, Israelis on the other side who are absolutely terrified for their security.

It feels as if we're in a situation where everyone knows that this potentially could lead to nowhere or could lead to an even worse place.

But no one can think of an alternative to where we're going and what we're doing.

I mean, look, you're absolutely right.

Urban warfare is the most hazardous, dangerous, costly.

You clear one building, but you've got to keep people in that building so that it isn't reoccupied.

You don't know where the booby traps are exactly, as you say.

Israel has been there before where they dealt with, I think, 30 miles of tunnels and that took them long enough.

If they're going to try and deal with 500 miles of tunnels, that's another thing altogether.

You quoted the IDF officer there, the Israeli Defense Forces officer.

I think one of the really interesting parts about the interview that I did with Petraeus, which again, you can hear on newsagents USA, the whole thing, is him saying that you want to understand how feisty the Israeli high command officers are when it comes to dealing with the politicians, saying to them, OK, what's the plan, and what if we do this?

Then what?

I was left with the distinct impression that these Israeli generals are not a bunch of grunts

who just go and do what their political masters tell them, that these are people who have a sense of vision, a sense of responsibility, and they're not just there to blow things up and kill people, that they will want to know that there is a plan in place. Now, what hasn't happened yet from the Israeli side, and maybe it's being done in the channels of communication that may be open with Turkey or Qatar or whoever, is if there is a plan, it hasn't been articulated.

So what does Israel see that a post Hamas Gaza looks like?

Who is running the place?

Is it Fatah that comes back in?

Is it the PA, the Palestinian Authority that runs the West Bank?

And I think that there needs to be more of that, because we all know that the disaster of the invasion of Iraq was not the invasion of Iraq.

That was a pretty smooth military operation.

It is what came next, as Petraeus was saying, that there was no post-conflict idea of what peace looked like.

And the truth is, they don't know, right?

They just, they don't know, because they didn't anticipate this was going to happen. The Israeli government had been caught unaware, and they're now going from crisis to crisis, and just trying, no doubt, to assemble what the hell the military incursion is going to look like, and try and protect as many of their troops from death as possible.

And then, of course, they don't know that, and of course, again, what scares me even more, or worries me even more, is that no one knows where this goes, even in the medium term.

I mean, look, the truth is, we all know, right?

We all know that Netanyahu has screwed up in so many ways here, in a sense that, yeah, he took his eye off the ball in terms of the immediate security situation.

He was distracted, as we were saying yesterday, with his judicial reforms, and the kind of political reforms, and the backsliding that was going on in democracy in Israel, frankly.

He screwed up in another way as well, which is that after the many, many years of his many premierships, the longest-serving Prime Minister in Israeli history, what has he done?

His policy has been basically to, little by little, make the prospect of any Palestinian state less and less likely.

That's literally been his policy.

He's authorized settlers.

He's made sure that he has been in a position where he's brought in harder and harder line elements to his government, which would have made that even more difficult.

He's moved the center of gravity of Israeli politics further and further to the right, and further and further away from any prospect of any reconciliation between the two sides.

Now there has been also a radicalization and a push to the extremes on the Palestinian side as well, in the form of Hamas, particularly in Gaza.

We've got to think, and if this, in the long term, is never going to happen again, the truth is, is that the peace is not going to ultimately be born from the barrel of a gun. It's going to be born by a sustained attempt to create a settlement to make sure that Israelis can live in peace and Palestinians can as well.

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I broadly agree with that.

I think that, I mean, you know, is this the sort of stuff that keeps you awake at night?

Literally?

Yeah, it is.

I keep waking up and thinking about what happens next and what, how the peace is full.

And it's undoubtedly horrible, scary.

I mean, maybe at the start of the Yom Kippur War in 73 when it looked like, you know, Israel could be swept into the sea as an existential moment for Israel.

That was a more critical sort of period of 48, 72 hours, where you thought, oh my God, this really could happen.

I don't think anyone is thinking.

Do you remember that?

Do you remember that at the time?

Yes.

And did they really feel like that in 73 that like it could be gone?

Oh God, Israel was attacked on two fronts, taken by surprise over the Yom Kippur period, the high holy days of the Jewish calendar.

And there was a period where it seemed like it was possible that the state of Israel could cease to exist.

Now Israel countered, it got military and subsequently made military gains and took more territory.

But at the time, there was a moment where you thought, wow, this could really happen.

I was 14 at the time.

So yeah, it's in my memory.

And the feeling at that time then must have been of, yeah, more pogroms and...

Yeah, of, you know, the homeland that had been built since 1948 was about to be eradicated.

Not that long at that time.

No, no, not even 20.

Yeah.

25 years.

25 years, yeah.

Exactly.

Very different.

I wonder now, but it takes a leap to believe that this has been such a shock to the people of Israel, that if you do start to look at what comes next, you have to accept that there are things that are going to have to change, but it is going to require, you know, if it is the two-state solution that was envisaged by the Oslo Accords in the 1990s when Bill Clinton was president.

It's going to require the dismantlement of Jewish settlements that have been built in the West Bank, cheek by jill, where Arabs live, where Arabs think that is our territory. And that is going to be politically difficult to achieve.

Now, you know, remember that, as you said, Gaza used to be occupied by the Israelis, and there were Israelis who, there were Israeli settlements, and they were swept out. And Israelis were forced to resettle, and it was painful, it was difficult for the Israeli

government to do.

But I think it needs something like that, and maybe this will be the jolt, the wake-up call that the policy of gradually undermining what is left of the two-state solution.

If that is the only show in town, then you need to take some tough action, and there are going to be tough decisions for the Palestinians, and there are going to be tough decisions for the Israelis, and it's going to take a huge amount of reassurance for the Israelis to believe that you can have that given the vulnerability to attack from Gaza that we have seen, which was one of the things that the Israelis always thought was unsustainable in the two-state solution.

I think if anything positive, and maybe it's just looking too far ahead, because we just don't know what the next few weeks could look like, and it could extend into a wider conflict.

But if anything can come from the ashes of all of this, is that perhaps the West will have to realise again that it's also been asleep at the wheel, that it's allowed the process to ossify that there hasn't really been any serious engagement from any US administration since certainly Clinton Bush, and that this is too destabilising a region and too destabilising a conflict, that it has the potential to destabilise everything, that it actually requires renewed effort.

But who knows?

As you said, John, that requires a change of leadership in Israel, it probably requires a change of mindset in Israel, and on the Palestinian side as well.

I want to make a small geeky point, which may sound utterly irrelevant to this discussion that we're having on the gravity of a kind of global geopolitical situation.

But by God, the voting system in Israel with pure proportional representation has been a frigging nightmare in terms of stable government.

I don't want to get you on to voting systems, because we'll need another four episodes just on the formal piano.

Let's talk about the kinesits.

Yeah, exactly.

But it has meant that the Israeli people have delivered this situation where Netanyahu is forming these governments with far-right people who think that there is a solution there.

So Netanyahu is the product, democratic system of Israel as well.

But we should never forget, right, that we do know that conflicts in Israel, these sorts of surprise conflicts, it can lead to political change.

Why?

Because we saw that in the 60s, the 60s, and 73, with the decline of Israeli labour, of the Israeli left more broadly, that's set in motion a series of events which led to the rise of the right in Israel, which has basically dominated Israeli politics since the late 70s and 80s and onwards.

Who knows?

We might be at a similar inflection point.

We can feel so hopeless at the moment, but politics can move and maybe it will move now.

We'll be back in a moment, and we'll be in Scotland, where the SMP conference is taking place.

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It might seem insignificant compared to all this other stuff that we've been talking about, but it matters.

This is The News Agents.

That was the sound yesterday of Nicola Sturgeon, the former leader of the SMP, being introduced and applauded at the SMP annual conference in Aberdeen, party conference season is not quite over.

And this is, in a way, really symptomatic of sort of the SMP's problem, and particularly the problem of Humza Youssef, the First Minister and Sturgeon's successor, which is this is the most difficult conference that the SMP have had for many, many years.

They've basically had summer after summer after summer, and yet suddenly they're in the middle of a Scottish winter.

Because Youssef suddenly finds himself off the back of the rather glen bi-election, Labour revived in Scotland, never looked like it was going to happen.

They've had a defection to the Conservative Party, and of course, all of it encompassed by the long shadow of Sturgeon herself, both in the sense of being such a successful leader, hard act to follow, but also because there are quite literally a police investigation ongoing into SMP party finances, which has included the arrest, though not the charge, of Sturgeon herself.

Well, and made more difficult by the fact that Humza Youssef was very much the mini-me of Nicola Sturgeon.

He was the continuity candidate.

If you want to carry on with Nicola's policies, vote Humza before she was arrested, and that hasn't worked out terribly well.

And so it has been a torrid time for Humza Youssef.

I heard an interview on the radio, I think yesterday, where someone said, what is his greatest achievement since becoming leader?

And I thought that was a really fatuous question, because actually he's only been there a few months.

So why are we talking about the greatest achievement of his leadership so far?

It's been tough.

It's been unrelentingly tough.

And people have just said, is he really up to the job?

He's a bit drab.

He doesn't seem to have any original thought.

He hasn't got a clear strategy.

The only thing I would say, and it weirdly segues back to our earlier conversation about the Middle East, of course, which is that his in-laws, terrifyingly, are caught in Gaza at the moment and can't get out.

And who knows how much water and food that they've got at the moment.

But his wife's parents had gone to see an elderly relative in Gaza, and they can't get out.

And yet Hamza Yousif's conduct over that and has gone to synagogues where people are mourning the death of loved ones following the Hamas raid, he has been exemplary.

He has shown compassion.

He has shown empathy.

He has shown leadership at a time when, frankly, he must be sleepless given a concern about his own family.

And he's with his wife's family.

Yeah.

And it's a good argument as well for the power of representation in politics, right?

I mean, probably historically speaking, Layla Moran is someone else like this.

She's also a British Palestinian, Lib Dem MP.

There wouldn't have been these sort of voices or many of these sort of voices at the top of British society who give that view and give that sort of very visceral, direct connection with what things that are going on in Gaza, which sort of go beyond the politics.

But it is, he's having to deal with all of that.

And John, you're right.

He's sort of spoke about it in an exemplary way.

He's had to do that alongside doing something which actually is always one of the hardest moments for a party leader in the British political calendar, which is a conference speech, even harder for him when, or at least trying to do today, which is to introduce himself properly to Scotland, to try and be a change from Nicola Sturgeon, despite the fact that he was selected as the continuity person, to try and represent renewal in a country which has been dominated now by the SNP since 2007 and certainly in a parliamentary sense since 2015, and as well try and achieve something which had defeated even Sturgeon at the height of her powers, which was plot a credible way to a second independence referendum in the path of absolutely stalwart Westminster resistance.

Brexit can't be made to work for Scotland.

It has been an unmitigated disaster and with independence we can escape the failed UK Brexit-based

economy and take our place for the very first time as a member state in our own right of the European Union.

And the problem he's got is that the SNP in some ways is a single-issue party.

It exists to get independence and yeah, it's governing and yeah, it's doing that, but if that's the only ambition of the SNP to say, well, we'd do a better job than Labour or we'd do a better job than the Tories, then they're just another political party, then they're not the vehicle for independence, but at the moment there seems to be no pathway towards independence that is ever going to satisfy kind of the activists who think, I want this and I want this now, because it does look like the agenda for a second referendum is miles away.

So they have moved the SNP conference yesterday, moved to a slightly different variation on the Sturgeon Plan.

So the Sturgeon Plan was to say, given that the prospect of another referendum as declared by the Holyrood Parliament had been struck down by the Supreme Court, the Sturgeon Plan was to say, if the SNP received a majority of the seats at the next Westminster election that that would itself be a de facto referendum.

Now you can imagine all the problems with that, I mean, so you could get a majority of the seats but not a majority of the votes, it's a general election, it's not a referendum,

all those problems.

So they have now subtly changed that under the use of leadership to say that if they get a majority of the seats, then that will be a mandate for the SNP government in Holyrood to start negotiating with Westminster about another referendum.

Now obviously the problem with that is it doesn't, again, overcome the central problem, which is what if Westminster says no, which they will, if it's Starmer, or whether it's Sunak.

But also in a sense, that is no, it's not much of a development on SNP policy of yore.

I mean, the SNP policy over the last 10 years, or certainly since Brexit anyway, has been to say, we want to start negotiating with the UK government to get another referendum and we want to do it now.

So in a sense it's just a reassertion of that.

And the problem is, I mean, look, the SNP have got two central problems now, which is that basically after the 2021 Holyrood elections, when there was a pro-independence majority return, not just an SNP one, but an SNP green majority in the Scottish parliamentary elections, it is true to say that Holyrood's will was being denied by Westminster.

Clear majority, they were standing on an independence referendum.

Again Westminster said no.

The way that would have unlocked another referendum would have been if there was quite frankly sufficient agitation within the public, the Scottish public and the Scottish electorate to make it happen.

If we had seen people on the streets, if there had been repeated demonstrations, there have been these sorts of things, but there has been no sense of being an absolutely burning issue that would make Westminster take notice.

And with the resurgence of Scottish Labour, that prospect seems even dimmer and more distant.

And so if you talk to SNP people now, they will say, look, our plan has to be a medium term one.

We're definitely going to take a hit, we'll almost certainly take a hit at the next general election.

Our task has got to be to ensure that we remain the Scottish government at the next Holyrood elections in 2020-06.

And where do you think we will be if you have a minority Labour win at the next general election and the SNP are the party that could get them over the line?

They've done a deal with the Liberal Democrats.

Yes, that's, you know, however many seats the Lib Dems win at the next election, but they're still short of an overall majority.

So I mean, presumably Keir Starmer cannot promise a second referendum.

Now, I think the Starmer's, people know that that would just be lethal.

And that any prospect of being seen to give in to the SNP would just be so politically toxic within England that it wouldn't be worth the gain.

And I think the Starmer play in that sense would be to say, what are you going to do?

You're going to vote down the first non-conservative government for 13 years.

They think they've got the leverage in that situation because the SNP wouldn't vote them out, at least not immediately.

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And then maybe at some point they would say they would have to go to the country again within a year or so anyway, so it would be a short term thing.

I think though there is a question for Labour about how they deal with, let's imagine a situation in which Labour gains, say, 25 seats at the next election in Scotland, which would be a massive, I mean, by a factor of 25.

It would be a huge resurgence within Scotland for them and they would be thrilled about it.

Obviously, the difference is the SNP would either still be first overall or a very close second.

The SNP would still be a powerful force within Scotland.

There is a sense that they are down, but they're not completely out.

And there is now a new factor within Scottish politics, new Fisherman Scottish politics that wasn't there the last time there were all of these Scottish Labour MPs, which is the constitutional question is now the central question within Scottish politics.

So how do those Scottish Labour MPs, that new phalanx of Scottish Labour MPs, a couple of dozen of them, 20, 30, maybe more, how do they deal over the long term with the independence question when in order to have returned to office or to one of all of these seats, there is no doubt that a substantial proportion of yes voters will have gone over to Labour.

Do they try and cultivate them?

Do they try and be a little bit more nuanced on the constitutional question or do they remain steadfast unionists?

As soon as the kind of shine of a new Labour government rubs off, it's an ongoing political question that Scottish Labour are going to have to work through and Keir Starmer will have to work through it as well.

I had breakfast last week when we were up in Liverpool with very seasoned Scottish Labour politician who was cursing Sir John Curtis, the great sephologist, for daring to say, oh well, on the basis of this Labour could win 24, 25 seats at the next general election. And he said, oh God, that is just a nightmare because that raises an expectation that is probably not going to be met.

You shouldn't extrapolate from one by election about what's going to happen in a general election.

And Labour have started becoming intoxicated with the idea, oh this is easy, we're just going to pick up 25 seats in Scotland at the next election.

And hearing about the efforts that went in for the Scottish Labour Party to win the rather glen by election, it was huge.

Everything stopped everywhere else in Scotland just to win it.

I suppose the other point that's worth making is that if you've got this dissatisfaction with Humza Youssef, he's got a lot of applause today for his speech, but there's also Alex Salmond who's set up this rival party.

And if there is dissatisfaction with the SNP, which there wasn't when it was Nicola Sturgeon in charge, does that present an opportunity to further split the nationalist vote?

Well for the first time, since Scottish politics was regearred around the constitutional question in the wake of the 2014 referendum and the 2015 general election, for the first time it is looking as if the yes vote and the SNP vote are starting to be disaggregated, they're

starting to be separate.

They were basically almost one and the same for the last 10 years.

That is starting not to be the case.

The question is whether there's another sort of receptacle for that vote.

Still, it doesn't look like the prospect of doing particularly well and I think this is basically the big question, which we just don't know the answer to.

To what extent is the constitutional question going to remain the central one?

It's clear that perhaps at the next general election, yes voters and a good proportion of the yes voters will decide that what they care about more is getting rid of the Tories rather than sticking with the SNP on a kind of independence question.

Suddenly Labour looks viable and some of these people will go over to the Labour Party because they look like they're going to be the most viable non-conservative force in Scotland again.

That's fine.

Does that endure?

Are these voters returning to the Labour Party with their hearts or just with their heads or over time, once Labour are in, will the constitutional question reassert itself and how does Labour respond to that and does the SNP remain viable in that context?

What we can see over the last few years in Scottish politics is that basically there is a non-conservative force, which non-conservative voters, which are the clear majority in Scotland, turn to with quite great volatility at different elections.

That happened in 2015 to the SNP, scores of Labour seats go.

Maybe that will happen again.

They'll return en masse to the Labour Party in 2024.

But what is clear is this great volatility.

So what this volatility gives with Labour in the one hand could potentially be taken away with the other quite quickly.

This is The News Agents.

Are you going to be here tomorrow?

Why wouldn't I be, John?

Your honeymoon?

My honeymoon.

My honeymoon.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

That thing.

Do you want to come with me?

Three's a crowd, I think.

Three's a crowd?

Well, I mean, you know, Emily's already there.

I've told my wife that really, you know, this is the two of you that I want to spend all my time with.

Can you imagine?

What, holiday, the three of us?

Can you imagine?

You, your poor wife, and Emily and me with you.

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Oh, my God.

Emily with her rubber ring.

Yeah, I know.

Big sunglasses on, of course.

Well, I may or may not be Billy No-Mates tomorrow.

I'm waiting to see whether Goodell actually gets on the plane and goes to Japan.

We'll see you tomorrow.

Or I will.

Life's full of surprises.

Bye.

Bye-bye.

The News Agents with Emily Maitlis, John Sopo and Lewis Goodall.

This has been a global player, original podcast and a Persephoneka production.