

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / Macron and Xi Jinping, the rise of the right, and Tony Blair vs. UFOs

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And me, Anastasia Campbell.

Anastasia, I want to hit you with something. Macron-China interview. So you've been following the French press. You're actually in France, aren't you?

I am.

We can hear the tweeting of the birds of the French spring. I think I heard what sounded like a black bird outside your window, isn't he? Now, Cosmoiselle, what do you make of Macron's recent interview following on from his China's visit? Is he really keen on establishing a third world power bloc, or is he trying to hedge his bets in the light of a potential Trump assertions? Is there some strategy behind this, or is it driven by ego over to you? Well, so President Macron, accompanied by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, had a big trip to China. President Xi certainly rolled out the red carpet, certainly for Macron, less so for Ursula von der Leyen. And it seemed to go in terms of the China perspective. I think they felt that it went well from their perspective. And Macron, I think, thinks it went well from his perspective. A couple of points I would make right at the top. I think our friends from the Stop Wiga genocide movement will be alarmed, the extent to which that did not feature. And the second thing is the controversy insofar as there is one that seems to have emerged from the trip, has flowed from these interviews that he gave on the plane coming home, where he did talk about, this was in the context of particularly of Taiwan. I think the sense that America and China are talking themselves into a conflict. And you and I have reflected on this before. There does seem to be this, you know, so we've just had the Taiwanese president has visited America, and as a consequence, China have done these pretty spectacular military exercises over three days, including, I don't even saw the sort of simulated missile attack on the mainland, which is, you know, and he's basically saying that the European Union is the only force in the world that could be big enough, powerful enough to operate as a third pole in a multi-polar world.

Okay. And let me come in here for a second and just sort of sharpen up the criticism.

So in the interview, he said that there's a great risk if Europe gets caught up in crises that are not ours, which prevented from building its strategic autonomy. The question Europeans need to answer, is it in our interest to accelerate a crisis on Taiwan? No. The worst thing would be to think that we Europeans must be followers on this topic and take our cue from the US gender. Now, this has made the Taiwanese very, very angry, and many parliamentarians across Europe very, very angry, because it slightly sounds as though he's posing as being neutral on the subject of China, Taiwan, instead of what we would expect, which is absolutely in the light of what happened with Ukraine, defending Taiwan's total right to self-determination. The Taiwanese do not want to be part of China. They've made that clear and vote after vote after vote. And you would expect the West to absolutely defend their right to be independent and not given to Chinese aggression. Yeah. I listened to a French radio debate, as we're driving down. And where this is, it felt very much like some of the debates related to Iraq, where you had a sense of that they were even talking about, there's the Anglo-Saxon world.

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And of course, AUKUS, the military tie up between the United States, the UK and Australia, that has perhaps added to that sense. So, and then the point about strategic autonomy, this is a big, big thing for Macron that he wants Europe to become, when he's talking about strategic autonomy, he's talking about security, he's talking about defense, he's talking about an economy that is able to compete with these two kind of giants. And that seems to ruffle feathers within different parts of the European Union as well. I think there are parts, there are other countries in the European Union that think maybe he's going too, too fast. And I suppose Cosmoiselle's question, is there some strategy behind this or is it driven by ego? Well, there's a bit of both because it is a strategy. He wants the strategic objective is to build this strategic autonomy. But at the same time, Macron sees himself as and indeed is a key figure in the development of European foreign policy and economic policy. So, I do wonder whether he slightly overstated what he thinks on the plane. It often happens when you've had a very successful, what you feel is a very successful trip, you get back on the plane, you think, well, that's gone really, really well, I landed all my points, I made, I said everything I wanted to say about Ukraine, I made them feel that they have to step up more than they've done. He had a plain load of business guys who were obviously off doing deals with the Chinese left, right and center. And then he sits down with a few journalists and he maybe just sort of, you know, kicks his shoes off a bit too much. But you know, as you rightly say, the Taiwanese not happy, the Americans not happy. But at the same point, I think he has landed the strategic point that he wanted to. Right. Okay. Over to you for a question.

Lee Hain, I live in a constituency where well organized tactical voting will be needed to unseat the Tory incumbent. What can be done to ensure that a truly independent tactical voting movement or poll will emerge closer to general election, one that's widely trusted and therefore effective? Where do you stand on tactical voting?

I'm very, very pro tactical voting. And people did try in the last two elections to set up quite complicated websites, which did the mathematical calculations on the polls and tried to give you advice on how you should vote, if you believe in certain things, could be on Brexit remain, could be whether you wanted the Conservatives to stay on or not. What tends to happen is as you get closer to the elections, the political parties get more and more ambitious for their majorities and more and more reluctant to accept tactical voting. And of course, there's huge opposition from the local parties and the local candidates who've spent two years preparing to fight the seat and don't like being told by their headquarters that they're going to have to step aside in favour of another political party. So I think it's going to be critical though for Labour because we'll see how they do in Scotland. But many of the seats, particularly in the South of England, the Lib Dems are in a much stronger position than Labour. Yeah.

And if Labour tries to run against the Lib Dems there, they'll lose those seats.

I mean, I think there is a Keir Starmer's operating, I think he travels everywhere in his pocket with a list of the seats that Labour has to win. And that's where Labour will focus. But as you say, the local party will pick a candidate. It's then a question of what message the party nationally sends out. And I think the Lib Dems, likewise, they know where they need, where they can win, where they need to win. There's some very

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interesting polling that keeps popping up on social media. I don't know how they do these constituency polls because the numbers must be pretty small. But an awful lot of them recently, they've popped up Tory held seats, which if the Labour and Lib Dem vote and the green vote as well were combined, the Tories would be gone. And I think the more that those sorts of polls start to appear and local media start to report them and cover them, then I think tactical voting will take on a life of its own. Because I think that there's always a central driving question at an election. And if the election was to be held tomorrow, I think the central driving question would be, can the country really have another term of the Tories? Now, Labour has to build on that to have their own positive agenda. But that I think is where the next election is being defined. And Labour, I think are going to start to frame this question around, do you feel the country is better than it was? Are you better off? Is your family better off? Are you more or less hopeful about the future? And that's then where they hope they can get over the line? We had a question slightly related to how Labour can campaign. So somebody has asked about whether sometimes things where people agree don't become proper subjects. So Celia Richardson, there's so much evidence that clean water and nature protection are issues with truly bipartisan support. Is that why they're comparatively overlooked among the main parties' priorities? Because they aren't sufficiently divisive. Now, what's your thought on that?

Well, there's another question related to this about water. Paula Pearson, why do all politicians think it's okay to allow water companies to pollute our rivers? If Labour get a majority, do you think this will make them brave enough to stand up to them and force them to clean up their act? Well, I certainly hope so. And there was a very good sign of it. Darren Jones, the Labour MP who's chair of the Business Select Committee, I saw him doing a very good job of really sticking it to one of the water company bosses about why they weren't investing properly, obsessed with payouts of dividends to shareholders. And I think Celia Richardson is right that the politics of water should become a very, very big part of the next election. It's an odd one, isn't it? I mean, I found when I was running for Mayor of London that the polling was often why people didn't campaign on it. I was trying to campaign a lot on the Thames and on trees and planting. And consistently in the polls, it was the number one issue only for about 3% of voters. So I think it's not just that it's not divisive enough. I think it's that voters have to make it more of a priority in their lives to really get it up to the top of the agenda.

I do think this sewage into the waters has really got through to the public, though. I think people think it's pretty disgusting and they can't really understand why the government can't do something about it. Now, Rory, there's a question here from a gentleman by the name of Peter McCrae, who I think is giving us a challenge for our trip to Belfast. Do you think there should be a Northern Ireland version of this podcast and have the hosts be a nationalist and a unionist? That's a very, very good idea. That's an excellent idea. Excellent idea. Well, maybe we could try to recruit people. It could become known as Trinip. The rest is Northern Ireland politics. Trinip. The rest is Northern Ireland politics is very good. I like it. Very, very good. We should set ourselves the task of finding the right people. Let's have a quick break.

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At the grand old age of 59, I hit rock bottom. So I went to Brooklyn, sat in a little tiny apartment in front of a panel of very serious coaches and said, show me how I can do better. The tone that you had was very similar to some of the students that I do work with. And that's what I teach them not to do. No offense.

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Donna May Roberson. Why is there so much coverage on the accusations about Sturgeon's husband on the BBC, but nothing about the billions in fraud written off by Sunak and the PPE profiteering by Moan and ministers involved? That's a very fair question.

Yeah. Although it is a sort of, it's a style of question that we get sort of every week, isn't it? It's called what aboutary. Hold on a minute.

Every time you point out a crime of any sort, doesn't matter. I remember this was true when you will remember this, when people were talking about Saddam Hussein. People would say, why are you talking about Saddam Hussein and not talking about Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe?

The fact is we should be able to call out crimes on all sides equally and not suppress ourselves just because we think some other crime isn't getting enough attention.

The money involved in, as you said, in your excellent explanation of the Peter Merle situation on the main podcast, that you're talking about, I think it was £600,000. We're talking in relation to PPE about billions that have gone from the public purse without real accountability.

The question's very straightforward. Is it crime or is it waste? If it's crime, 100%, but the accusation against Peter Merle, the reason he's being interviewed under caution, is the suggestion is that a criminal act has taken place. And presumably you're not suggesting some criminal act has taken place over the PPE contracts.

I'm very concerned that there might well have been crime involved in the levels of money involved that has just been peed up against a wall are so large that I do think that a police investigation would be in order.

Very good.

Okay.

Now, here's one for you, Roy. Very much for you. Tom Halloran. Rory mentioned in a previous episode that he'd done a silent retreat and it had changed his life. Could he elaborate what happened on the silent retreat and how did it change his life?

Yeah. So I've done two silent retreats and that means sitting, meditating for pretty much every hour of the day. You wake up 4.30 in the morning or about 4 in the morning, start meditating at 4.30 in the morning and you start meditating at 9.30 at night and you don't speak for 10 days. You don't eat after midday and you basically sit in the dark with your ice crossed concentrating on sensations initially on your upper lip and then working from the top of your head down to your toes and up again. And I found it the most extraordinary experience. It changed, it gave me a patience in relation to my children I didn't have before.

It gave me the space to try to think about everything from, I mean, I'm not sounding quite pretentious, but everything from the universe to quantum physics. It brought me closer to thinking about my own death than I'd ever been before. And really, I would be doing these things much more if I didn't have a young family and I didn't have obligations towards my work and give directly.

And not to mention, Roy, it's very difficult to do a podcast if you're not allowed to speak.

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Yeah. I was trying to work out how to get to that. How are you going to let me off for a week of the podcast to go into my silent retreat?

I'd have to get Johnny Mercer to stand in, I think.

That's true. That's always what you want to do. I think you just got to record a few episodes with them. This is clearly what you're just longing for.

Just one thing. You've talked a little bit before about, you know, you do do God in a way that I don't, but did it sort of move you forward on that front as well?

Yes. I think it definitely gave me much more space for things which I think are related to spirituality and mysticism and a much closer way of trying to understand how I would think about meaning in life. But in some ways, the things I took away from it, I guess, if you were to write them down would sound a bit more Buddhist, probably than Christian. Here's a question for you along the same lines. Sara Buschova, my partner suffers from bouts of depression and finds mornings tough, usually lifts midday. What tips do you have for the care of brackets me?

Well, Sara, first thing I would suggest is that you get a hold of a copy of my book about depression and read Fiona's chapter. Because Fiona's written, wrote a chapter in that book about how she deals with it. And if I can sort of summarize it, I'd say that her main thing, it took her a long time to get to this, is you mustn't blame yourself. And I think a lot of people do blame themselves when they're living with somebody who gets depression because they think that they ought to be able to fix it. And the easiest way when you know you can't fix it is to say, well, must be something about me. So that's the first thing. The second thing is, she would also say, I think is get something for yourself that is very much yours. So Fiona's would be swimming. She's she's swum virtually every day that I've ever known her when I've been really, really bad or, you know, not being very nice to be around. That's the thing that she's always been able to hold on to. And then I think the the other thing I'd say, which we've managed to get to, but it's taken us a long, long, long time to get there is I always have a sense of how I define it is this, when I'm depressed, I want to know that Fiona's around me, but I don't want her in my face. And so I would say Sarah, be there, be the person that will be supportive, but don't just sort of be there the whole time thinking you can fix it wanting to fix it trying to fix it and understand that your partner is the same person. It's just that they're going through a bad phase and you can help them get through that bad phase.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I'm going to I'm feel a bit embarrassed moving on to a slightly more trivial note go Tony Blair and UFOs. What do you think the telegraphs report on Ryan Graves UFOs story? So this was a US Navy pilot who said he saw you UFOs almost on a daily basis with a squadron. And Alice the Campbell, did Tony Blair really have a book called Left at Eastgate about the Rendlesham UFO case on the 10 Downing Street bookshelves?

Well, if he did, I was spectacularly unaware of it. If he did, he never mentioned it to me. And if he had any sort of worries about UFOs beyond those that any normal person might have, I wasn't aware of them.

Well, I had a friend who got very, very excited. You'll be aware, I'm sure that there's a village called Bonnie Bridge in what's called the Falkirk Triangle between Amber and Glasgow

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that has about 300 UFO sightings a year. And my friend Luke got really excited and went to Bonnie Bridge to go and see the UFO. He was slightly less excited when he discovered that 298 of those sightings were made by a single person.

Well, I've also noticed that the question you read out, it came from somebody who goes by the name of Paranormal Blip.

Ah, I see. Okay. So then I don't think they're going to be very happy with the jokes, actually. They're going to explain that it wasn't one person who saw all the UFOs and that Luke's joke was off colour.

Yeah. Here's one from Will.

Yeah.

Have you got any words on all these Tory leaflets with a clear disassociation to anything Tory and even the colour blue? Have you noticed this, Roy? Lots and lots of Tory candidates are putting out leaflets that don't say that they're Tories and they're coloured green.

Absolutely. Michael Fabricant, even, who was a massive Boris Johnson supporter and on the Brexit right, even he's putting out leaflets with no Tory association. Well, I think there's a very straightforward answer for that. The Conservative Party is consistently 20 points or more behind in the polls. I'm afraid a real sense of despair is spreading through Conservative Party headquarters. The Conservative Research Department, which back in the day was meant to be an intellectual think tank coming up with great policy ideas, is consuming itself desperately, trying to mount rather lame attacks in the Daily Mail. And as a result, I think there is a real sense that nobody in the Conservative Party at the moment quite believes that they're going to be able to win the next election. So MPs are hoping that they're going to be able to campaign on the basis of their local constituency record. But hold on. Do they really think that if they put their name and a picture, Michael Fabricant has a leaflet and he doesn't call himself a Tory? They really think that's going to make people think, oh, he's not a Tory, so I'll vote for him. I mean, what are they thinking?

Oh, I know. It's very tempting, though. I think it's something that I was often tempted to when I was an MP. There were moments, I'm afraid, when I thought David Cameron was not a great asset on the doorstep, and I wasn't sure I wanted to be handing out leaflets with a big picture of David Cameron. And I guess they'll be feeding that even more strongly at the moment.

Or even with Rishi Sunak.

Well, I'm a fan of Rishi Sunak. I am a fan of Rishi Sunak, but I do think that people think that it's very unlikely the Conservatives win the next election and people are getting pretty desperate. They didn't think the brand is in a very good state. Tom Gorman, you're both voracious readers, often having a number of impressive and intellectual books on the go. But do either of you have any guilty reading pleasures? Well, I have a lot of guilty reading pleasures. So while I give you a second to think, I've been rereading, you'd expect this, wouldn't you, the Hornblower series about the naval lieutenant and captain during the Napoleonic Wars, which is sort of almost young adult books, but absolutely brilliant books about leadership. Hornblower is a kind of shy, introverted, insecure man who is the most extraordinary, kind of courageous naval commander. So that's one guilty pleasure.

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Another which is actually quite a formidable book, which I'd like to recommend is by Christa Baleig, which is called *The Lion House*, which focuses on the early 16th century and the Ottoman court of Suleiman the Magnificent. It's a historical novel with incredible characters, including the Venetian ambassador and fantastic accounts of the sort of palace and court life and food written by Christa Baleig, who was an economist correspondent, is married to an Iranian speaks beautiful Turkish.

Honorary. Honorary. I think, I think one of the question that meant was whether they were you going to talk about Jilly Cooper or Jeffrey Archer, right? And you suddenly got a guy who works for the economy, speaks fluent Iranian.

Here's a really embarrassing confession. I love Colleen McCulloch's historical novels called *Masters of Rome*. They're kind of sex and violence romp novels about the Roman Empire. So I'd recommend that to anyone because I think there's a great way of learning about Rome while having fun. What are your guilty pleasures?

I'll tell you the one that popped into my head was there's a German novelist called Charlotte a Link, who I started to read when I was doing my German courses during lockdown and I became slightly hooked on these books. And I thought they were quite highbrow. And then we went, we went, I went on a little trip to Germany and I was sort of sitting there reading it.

And I could tell from this, I started was talking to this woman at the next table and I quickly discovered that as far as she was concerned, this was very much a guilty pleasure. So I think Charlotte a Link is my guilty pleasure. Except you're reading it in German. I mean, yet again, you're intellectually one-upping me. I guess so. I was just provoked by your Iranian speaking economist correspondent. I'm not having this. I've just finished a novel which I strongly, strongly recommend and especially to you, Rory, because of your love of Africa by a woman called Chika Unigwe and it's called *The Middle Daughter* and it's absolutely brilliant. She's Nigerian. She writes in English and Dutch. I think she's married to a Belgian or a Dutch guy and she lives in America. She's got four kids. And I also discovered, I was really, when I got to the end of the book and then the acknowledgments, she gave an acknowledgement to the sult, sult as it's described, the German island that Fiona and I went to a few months ago. And they run this fellowship for African budding African writers and she's not budding. She's an established novelist. And she wrote the draft of this book on the wonderful beaches of salt. But it's absolutely brilliant. It's about family. It's about a woman who has horrible, horrible, horrible marriage gets out of it. I won't give it away, but it's a really, really, really powerful read.

Well, on the subject of African writers, or writers with connections here to Africa.

Are you going to one-up me again? Are you going to one-up me again?

No, no, not one-up me. Sarah Manica, a very recent book called *Between Star Shine and Clay*, *Conversations from the African Diaspora*. And it's a wonderful series of stories and interviews she does with everybody from Tony Morrison through to Henry Louis Gates, Michelle Obama, talking about the history of people's lives. And I think brought together by Footnote Press, which is a really great publishing house of people looking for books on Africa.

You definitely read more than I do. But I won't ever talk about one-upmanship.

I'm on planes more than you. I think that's the key. Too much time in aeroplanes.

No, I used to, in the days when I was never off aeroplanes, I didn't, I tended not to

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read. I tended to write on planes rather than read on planes. But no, I go in fits and starts. Sometimes I can read sort of voraciously in another periods. I'm very slow. Talking of one-upmanship though, Rory, there's a great question here from Caroline Johnson. How does Alastair feel about his tweets being archived by the Bodleian Library along with Stephen Fry and Mary Beard? And is Rory Stewart envious not to have been selected?

Very, very, very, very jealous. I mean, completely furious.

Especially is it your university, not mine?

Exactly. I think it's, I think it's, no, I think you are a master of the form. I think you and Stephen Fry were good choices. But I do hope that if I work really hard by posting more obscure references to archaeological finds in Romania, I may be able to get there myself. Did they explain to you why they're archived?

No, I've got a feeling with mine though, that it's all part of their never-ending strategy to get me to give them the originals of my diaries.

Ah, how's that going?

I'm sort of, you know, I'm interested. I'm interested and I've had many...

Have you got a Cambridge Oxford competition going? Are you trying to get your college in Cambridge to bid?

There's a bit of that. I don't want money. I don't want money. I just sort of, you know, I think I'll let my kids decide.

You like winding them up?

I think I'll let my kids decide in the end.

Emanuel Cohen, Rory, what were your first jobs? What was your first job?

My first job was a young army officer aged 18. I joined the army before I went to university.

Did you do any part-time jobs?

I did a small work placement with a transport and general workers union.

What?

Very bizarrely.

What?

In Derby.

Sorry, you did a... Unbundle that one for me. I want to know more about this.

Is this in the book?

No, not in the book. This is organized by your least favorite institution, Eastern College, somehow persuaded the transport and general workers union to let me and some others come up to Derby to do an internship in a car factory. But really, I was 16 years old, absolutely no use to anyone, and I wandered around vaguely interviewing union reps.

Oh.

What was your first job?

My very, very, very first job. Well, as a kid, I used to work weekends as a petrol station attendant. I spent most summers working on my uncle's farm.

What did he farm?

He was a dairy farmer, but I used to go out for the summer when they were doing all the hay stuff.

Did you milk cows as well?

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I did milk cows, yeah. I did milk cows, yeah.

And with an automatic milk crew?

Yeah, the automatic milk and machinery, yeah. And then one of the most extraordinary jobs I ever did, I worked in a light bulb factory where my job was to be on a conveyor belt and the bulbs came along, and I had to pick the bulb out and put it into a socket. And if it went to a certain color, I put it into the box on the right and a different color, I put it in the box on the left.

And I stood next to this, I stood next to a guy who had been doing that job like for a few years, and he was one of the happiest people I ever met. He loved his life, he loved the people I worked with.

Is it like a Charlie Chaplin novel? Did you find that your wrist was turning in a strange direction?

It was quite a physical thing because you had to push the light bulb down and then wait a few seconds until it went to a certain color and then stick it into a box.

Was it a bayonet socket or a screw?

It was a thing with three little things on the end of it. I don't know what it was, Rory.

Yeah, push in and turn.

Once I was through university and I didn't know what I wanted to do, before I found out I decided to go and do this mirror training scheme. I was a roulette dealer for quite a while.

Where was that in Monte Carlo?

No, that was in the Golden Nugget in Shaftesbury Avenue. And it's the only time I've ever been sacked twice in my life, and I was sacked from that. And I was also, I was constructively dismissed at the mirror.

Why were you sacked as a roulette dealer? What made you a bad roulette dealer?

I've never, ever found out. Years and years and years later I met somebody who works in the casino industry who told me that he knew I'd been sacked and he knew why, but he didn't tell me.

I think there's two reasons, I think. One is I might have been, they film your hands all the time. And I think that they might have thought I'd been a bit helpful to some of the punters.

I used to say to them sometimes, I'd say to them, I could see when they were making really stupid bets. And I'd say, why are you doing that? And so I'd sort of, I'd sort of, I think they thought maybe I was trying to help the punters, being a good sort of, you know, socialist that I am already.

But the second thing is this, and let me say for the record, this was a long time before I met Fiona, but I did have a bit of a thing with one of the other roulette dealers. And I just wonder whether one of the managers was also interested in this young lady. I think it might have been that.

Very good. Okay. Well, it's dubious stuff. Here's a self-serving question from me from Rowan Castle.

Very much enjoyed the documentary you did about Afghanistan, Rory. Do you have any plans

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to present more history or travel documentaries?

So a little plug. I did one documentary, which I'm quite proud of, on Lawrence of Arabia and the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, which is available on YouTube. I did another one called Afghanistan the Great Game, which is sometimes on Netflix and I think it's also on YouTube. And then I did a third two-part BBC documentary on what's called border country and it's trying to take seriously the idea that there's a lost country spreading across northern England and southern Scotland, an ancient vanished kingdom, which has been lost by the modern borders.

So this is what Brian Cox was talking about and you took the mickey out of him.

It wasn't suggesting combining it with southern Scotland. I did think one of the nice things, one of the most striking scenes in succession, of course, is when Brian Cox's character goes back to Dundee to be celebrated. And he does that so beautifully and I didn't realize that the actor himself also came from Dundee so that there's a fascinating kind of echoes going on and his reluctance to sort of reconcile himself to his past.

Yeah. Just on Afghanistan, Abbey Rumi Aryan, can you share your thoughts on what happened in Afghanistan? It's a topic long overdue for discussion. I'd hate to miss your take on it. This week, the Taliban informed the UN that their local female staff should not report to work and stay at home. So Afghanistan does feel like it's being forgotten. She's right about that. And also that it's going even further backwards.

Yeah, it's a terrible, terrible situation. So firstly, of course, the economy has collapsed since the Taliban's taken over. The Taliban have a pretty good grip on the country still. So security has improved largely because the Taliban are not setting off bombs. But ISIS, the Islamic State, has a significant presence in part of the country and just killed the Taliban governor of Mazar-e-Sharif, for example. And the repression on women continues to be very, very troubling. And there's a standoff, it seems, between more progressive, if you can call them that, Taliban ministers in Kabul who seem to be more open to the idea of female education and the religious leader in Kandahar who keeps issuing edicts which are much more repressive. But the fundamental question remains for the international community, which is, do we continue to try to engage? And I think we must continue to engage because there is no point imposing sanctions and punishing the Afghan people in the belief that it's going to change the behavior of the Taliban often. And I'm afraid this is probably true in Syria and it's true in many countries of the world. We impose sanctions on countries because we feel ashamed or guilty about the situation there and often we feel responsible for it. But actually all we're doing is imposing untold misery on millions of people who lack access to basic foodstuffs. I mean, many, many people in Afghanistan are not far off starvation. So I think we unfortunately have no alternative other than to try to continue to engage and get development assistance through, not through the Taliban, but directly through nonprofits to people on the ground.

What you didn't do, by the way, was answer the question as to whether you're going to make any more documentaries.

At the moment, no. There's actually incredibly funny, if people haven't seen on Twitter, the guy that does the room next door has done the most hilarious documentary which should be a spoof on Twitter, which should put you and me off making documentaries for good,

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which is a three minute clip of him walking around pretending to do a documentary on the United Kingdom.

Here I am, walking around this beautiful isle, eating lots of food. Oh, this is delicious. Here I am, a middle-aged white man, wasting your time walking up and down the United Kingdom. And it doesn't matter that nobody watches it because I'm a middle-aged white man and I'll be commissioned to make another documentary again in the future.

This is the great Michael Spicer.

This is the great Michael Spicer, yeah. Highly recommended for anyone.

Yeah. And is he suggesting that people like you and I are far too readily commissioned to do documentaries?

Is that the point?

I think that is the implication, despite the fact that you've made some very high quality documentaries and I'm very proud of mine. I think there's a fear that maybe a bit much of this.

So, final questions maybe for you and quite a serious one for you. Rise of the Right coming from the Dogfather. With Greece's far right party looking to take part in the next general election, Finland's far right party gaining a large share of the vote, Donald Trump's return on the far right figures in the could, is populism and the threat of the far right on the rise or is it slowing, Alistair?

Related to that, Sam Bolton. Populism is a recurring theme in the rest of his politics yet it lacks a clear definition. All well criticised English political discourse for rendering fascism meaningless except as something undesirable. Could Alistair and Rory please define populism to avoid the same charge?

I think populism is the separation of a population into the pure people and an elite and the populist politician is the one who seeks to represent, even though they probably come from the elite, they seek to represent the pure people against the elite. And then populist politics is a politics which rather than seeing its role as solving problems, it sees its role as the exploitation of those problems to feed that populist polarising divide. So that's my definition of populism.

It's beautiful. Beautiful. I absolutely love it. And one concomitant on that is that although they may sometimes claim to speak for the constitution, if it stands in the way of their power, they're very, very quick to thrust the constitution aside and start playing Murray Hill with the constraints of the constitution. It hates checks and balances it because their myth, this crazy myth that they speak for the people, which often isn't even the majority of the people, but is in Nigel Farage's word, the real people, it gives them this crazy sense that they can do anything they like, particularly anything they like to minorities. Anyway, what's your view on whether they're on the rise or not?

I think it's a very mixed picture. Trump is out of power. No, he's not gone. He's still on the scene, but he's out of power. Biden is not a populist. Macron beat Le Pen. Le Pen might win next time, but for the moment, not winning. Bolsonaro lost to Lula. Lula's got populist street term, but he's not. I wouldn't say he's an out-of-night populist.

I think what the Finns and other elections have shown is that there is a populist strand in virtually every public opinion in the world at the moment, which an effective politician

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can easily mine to get up to 20, 25%. Whether they can then get beyond that will depend upon the country, upon its politics, and upon its history and its culture.

Some of this is underlying things that we've talked about, rise of social media, which of course has allowed politics to become ever more polarizing and divisive. Loss of faith and the whole liberal democratic market system after 2008. Also, I think what's been happening to people's sense of hope, I was talking to the head of Ipsos Mori, and they've done some very interesting polling on this, been a dramatic change. When you were in government, the majority of people thought their children would be better off than they were. The real shift that happens as populism rises from 2014 onwards is the moment where the majority of people begin to believe, as they do now in most European countries, that their children are going to be worse off than they are. How very, very dangerous that is for a democracy. But also, you talked in the main podcast about how Putin exploits that, and you have to trust in the strong man as the only one who can help you deliver the things that we haven't delivered.

Listen, maybe this is a final question, because you mentioned Finland there, and I think this is a question from a real Finn, Miko Knutilla. Finland just joined NATO. It was, of course, a historical moment here, but what does it mean for the alliance as a whole? And also, why do you think Turkey and Hungary are holding up Sweden's approval? Turkey is against Sweden because of the anti-Turkish regime Turks who are living in Sweden, I think.

Yeah. And in particular, a demonstration, I think, which the Swedish government didn't intervene in enough outside the Turkish embassy and other things that everyone has taken offense to. I think it's a huge development. I mean, the neutrality of Sweden and Finland towards Russia, a deep, deep historical fact, and was always quite a challenge to NATO's ability to defend the Baltic states against Russia. So it's a huge change, and it's a real own goal by Putin. And I think it makes a dramatic difference, even if Finland has a comparatively small population. Those are absolutely critical parts of the Russian border. And I think a huge misstep by Putin over to you.

I mean, that's not a call to prayer. That's a demonstration, isn't it?

It's not someone trying to kill me. It's the man selling gas. For some reason, he's got a chant that sounds a bit like an ice cream salesman, but he's actually selling gas bottles. Well, I'm going to take a very mean one then. It's my final one. Lara Clark, one ferrari about his charity. How is the cash they give away administered? How do they give it out, and who do they give it to? Well, this is central. If you're giving cash to people. Sorry, Roy, just one second. Roy, just one second. There's two questions in a row now that have been directed at you, and you've asked them yourself. Surely, I should be asking you these questions. Roy, tell us how your charity works.

Well, thank you so much, Alastair. And Lara Clark. So I think it is central for cash, because as I've said before on the podcast, there's been a total revolution in the world in two ways over the last 15 years in international development. One is the development in Africa of mobile money, which means people bank on their phones, which means we can transfer money directly from an individual in Britain or Europe or the United States directly to someone's phone without going through governments or middle people. And the other has been this

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revolution in research and evidence, particularly randomized control tests like a medical trial where you give cash to 10,000 people randomly selected, don't give cash to 10,000 people and then measure over three, six, nine, 12 years the impact. And although this has demonstrated that cash is incredibly powerful at achieving all sorts of development objectives from nutrition to school enrollment, more effectively than almost any other development intervention, we still have to make sure that it's done honestly, securely and cleanly. So the answer is we deliver to people's phones, but we also have big fraud offices, internal audit teams following up on the ground. We also use AI and technology to follow people's spending patterns to pick up on any elements of fraud. Because fraud is a big problem, not just for cash, it's true for food distribution, it's true for school construction.

PPE.

PPE, PPE, coming on PPE. And something we take very, very seriously. So I think one of the things that I'm struggling with in trying to work slowly to get people really focused again on tackling global poverty is developing a sense of optimism and hope that it is possible to do. And part of that is restoring people's faith in international development.

Good. Well, listen, thanks for that. And we'll, we'll doubtless talk about some of these issues next week when we're face to face again in Belfast.

Looking forward to it. Thank you, Alistair. Bye-bye.

See you then. Bye-bye.

At the grand old age of 59, I hit rock bottom. So I went to Brooklyn, sat in a little tiny apartment in front of a panel of very serious coaches and said, show me how I can do better.

The tone that you had was very similar to some of the students that I do work with.

And that's what I teach them not to do. No offense.

Staying soon on revisionist history. Listen wherever you get your podcasts.