

## [Transcript] The News Agents / The Brits trapped in Sudan's warzone

This is a global player original podcast.

The fighting in Khartoum in Sudan is now so bad we're hearing reports of people sleeping under their beds, sleeping in shifts so that one family member can look out and trying to work out whether there is greater danger in leaving your home or in staying put. And increasingly there are questions about what the British government has done or hasn't done to get British nationals out of Sudan.

This is Alicia Kearns, the Conservative MP and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee talking to the news agents of her assessment of the situation.

Nobody underestimates the complexity of an evacuation but the reality is that the British people have a contract with the British government.

That contract relies on one core concept which is that the British government, the British state will protect them in a time of need and will come to their rescue and that ultimately is the foremost job of the foreign office.

So I am very much hoping that by the time the podcast airs we hear that there is an evacuation taking place of British nationals because for fail to do so would be to abandon them and yes there was an explicit threat to our diplomatic staff and that is why we saw all our allies evacuate their staff as quickly as possible.

But as a previous foreign office member of staff it is ingrained within you that you are the last one out and therefore I am sure those staff will all be expecting and hoping the British government will evacuate.

Now the reality is the US government has decided they will not evacuate.

If that is our position we have a moral duty to tell the British people in Sudan that we will not be evacuating them so that they can make the decisions that are best for them. So a clear message from Alicia Kerns there.

The moral duty is first to get them out of Sudan and if you can't do that you have to be honest and tell them that you can't.

We know that France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Ireland have all managed to evacuate their citizens.

Alicia Kerns is talking about a much bigger number when it comes to Britain between three and four thousand she thinks so clearly the logistical difficulties are much greater.

But today on the newsagents we're going to ask what they should do.

Is this starting to look like the botched exit from Afghanistan and what duty of care does the British government owe its citizens abroad?

Welcome to the newsagents.

The newsagents.

It's Lewis.

It's Emily.

John is states side, we're expecting him to pop up on some question time version of American TV very shortly.

I was deeply disappointed he didn't turn up on Meet the Press yesterday.

I know, pathetic.

Real failure John.

Pathetic.

But in his absence we are going to talk about Sudan and later as well we are going to be

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talking about the 48 hours we've had since the Dominic Robb resignation and how that story has quickly snowballed just from being about a man and his behaviour to his staff to apparently a comprehensive change in the civil service and its relationship with ministers because he's come out to say that really it wasn't about him and how he was treating said staff but about the fact that he was basically taken out by a pro-remain cabal who didn't much like his policies.

Why is there so much politics at the weekend?

I know.

It's so annoying.

Somebody up there is trying to get us to do seven days a week, not five.

Hello Dino.

Anyway, Sudan.

So before we explain a bit of the background to all this it is just worth thinking about the human impact not just for British nationals but also for so many Sudanese who are just caught up in this terrible fighting.

Just listen to this.

Roseanne speaking to Sky News about the situation she's in.

This was over the weekend.

My name is Roseanne Ahmed.

I'm a British national of Sudanese origin and I am in Sudan.

I have been hiding under my bed for the past six hours.

The area where I stay at the moment has been shelled to shreds.

I have heard nothing but explosions and gunfire and shelling and screams for the past six hours.

That was Roseanne speaking over the weekend but it is now getting increasingly difficult for people to even communicate their fears.

Internet coverage is massively down even in that short space of 24 hours and what we're understanding now is when we reach out, when we're trying to send messages, when we want to hear back from people they cannot even tell us the difficulties they're in because they simply can't communicate and this also means that they can't get messages more importantly to the foreign office or to the embassies or to whoever is left that might be able to help them with an evacuation plan.

They're being told to stay in their homes and if their homes have no coverage that's complete cut off.

And there are more and more reports that food is running out, that clean water is running out and unlike other situations that we've seen, humanitarian situations we've seen recently obviously Afghanistan, Ukraine, there is very little foreign news reporting as well because it is just too dangerous for those exact reasons.

It is just so unpredictable at the moment, even news operations are thinking twice about sending there.

It is worth just taking a little step back though and just reminding ourselves how we got to this point before we think about how the British government has responded.

You may have listened to our episode from last week talking about the Wagner Group, that rather unusual military organisation, paramilitary organisation in a way, and its

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involvement in Sudan and we had Tim Marshall, a journalist on, talking about that. We thought in a way he'd explained it so well last week that just in case you'd missed it, and why would you've done, just in case you'd missed it, this is just a segment of his explainer on why Sudan has fallen into the grips of a civil war.

This is the background to what's happening in Sudan, even further back, let's start again in 2016.

Bashir, then the president of Sudan, brought in the Wagner Group to shore up the regime. He was then deposed by the current president and vice president.

The current president runs the army.

The vice president runs the rapid support forces, this paramilitary force that grew out of the Janjawid militias in Darfur.

So you've got two armed groups with two powerful politicians, each of which wants to be in charge.

And then the army, realising it's got this paramilitary group, wants to integrate it into the army and bring it under its own command.

I mean, I don't want to go too quickly to Nazi Germany, but you know your history and you know there was the brown shirts and on the night of the long knives, this paramilitary force in Germany were all taken out and that left the Nazi party as the only power in town.

That's a vague comparison because you've got an armed faction, RSF, run by the vice president. You've got the army run by the president.

Those are the two groups that are fighting.

So this goes back to Darfur, this goes back two decades to a civil war and to essentially Sudan's attempts, the people's attempt to overthrow military rule and just how it went so wrong.

Now we have the added complication of Putin's sort of military arm in the form of the Wagner group.

That was what Tim was talking about.

So this is a pretty, it feels intractable civil war right now or certainly uprising right now and the question is when the British government talks about trying to bring about a ceasefire, bring about an end to the conflict as a way of getting people out, it's all very encouraging but it sounds almost impossible and that's why the people listening to that on the ground in Sudan are not thinking, well, hey, today there's going to be a ceasefire, it'll be fine, we'll get out and cross the 12 hours to the border to get out of Egypt or to the port of Sudan, they're thinking the fighting is not about to stop any time soon.

And as these emergency operations conducted by different countries and organisations including the EU, the US and so on have been going ahead, as we say, more questions are being asked about what the British government is doing.

Let's listen to Andrew Mitchell who is the development minister, part of the Foreign Office now.

He was speaking about it on Sky News earlier today.

Britain should take the travel advice that we have issued, we've updated it this morning.

They should take that travel advice and we will do everything we can to help them.

So that is hiding under the bed until a ceasefire?

Well, as I say, we will do everything we possibly can to help them in every way we can and in

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the meanwhile, where possible, they should stay indoors and wait.  
But you can't do anything until a ceasefire from what you're saying?  
We will do everything we can, including before a ceasefire, if we can successfully do it.  
But let me make this point, yesterday the Turks organised a convoy.  
They had three muster points where they were encouraging their people to come to.  
Two of those muster points were shot up during the time they were assembling.  
This is incredibly dangerous and we have to be very careful.  
What advice do we give?  
They're civilians, aren't they?  
Indeed, the Germans are coming in after the French and after us and they are moving some of their people.  
But I should emphasise that the number of Germans who are there is very, very much smaller than the number of Brits.  
Look, we get it's complicated.  
It's a really difficult moving situation and it is a war zone.  
Nevertheless, if you are a British citizen there and you hear about the incredibly slick, incredibly successful airlift of all the diplomatic staff, you are wondering now why you have been left behind.  
Yes, they say that the diplomatic staff were particularly targeted by the Civil War.  
Yes, they may have been in more danger.  
But in days gone by, it was the diplomats that stayed behind to make sure everyone else got out first.  
And I think this has been a reversal now in terms of what people feel is the priority.  
That's definitely what we saw in Afghanistan.  
Of course, they've become quite famous now, the UK mission staying right until the very end.  
But we want to ask Alistair Burt, a former Foreign Office Minister, what he makes of what he's hearing now.  
Can it really be right to tell people just to stay at home, even if it means carrying under your bed?  
Can it really be right to airlift all the diplomatic staff out first and leave others behind to make the voyage if they decide to do so at their own risk?  
Is Alicia Cairns right when she says this threatens to be a repeat of the mistakes made over Afghanistan?  
Alistair Burt, thanks for joining us.  
Hello, Emily.  
How are you?  
Yeah, really well.  
Lovely that you can join us.  
Alistair, it sounded listening to Andrew Mitchell this morning like they're basically not going to evacuate UK citizens in Sudan.  
Is that the feeling you get now?  
No.  
The impression I get from Andrew Mitchell is quite rightly he's concerned about the

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safety of our citizens in Sudan.

But what he can't do and can't tell you at the moment, I don't think because of the situation on the ground, what it's going to be.

You know, my experience of this is that once you get into something like this, it's very confusing.

There's an awful lot of different things to take into account.

The last thing you want to be doing as a minister or as a government is telling people what you think might happen if then it can't happen.

And that's why the British Foreign Office tends to be very cautious in what it says.

But I didn't get that sense.

What I do get the sense of is that conditions appear to be very, very difficult now.

Moving people around is hazardous and has already been hazardous for citizens of other countries and could be again.

So the travel advice remains as far as I'm aware.

Stay put.

I guess the question that many in Sudan will want to know is why can't it happen?

France, Italy, Germany have managed to evacuate their citizens.

Why isn't that our absolute top priority?

And why aren't we able to guarantee that we'll get them out?

It is a top priority, but I haven't seen the numbers of French, German and other citizens in Sudan.

But I suspect they will be quite a lot fewer than those of British citizens in Sudan.

And that may well be one of the reasons.

I would imagine also, you know, I remember that trying to find out where people were is an exercise in itself because people aren't obliged to register with the British Embassy when they travel anywhere.

These could be people with families all over the place, and moving people is genuinely very hazardous and very dangerous.

I suspect numbers are many fewer for other places, but also you can't believe everything you hear all the time.

There's an awful lot of miscommunication and misinformation.

Small numbers of people have been able to be got out, so I read.

I suspect there are specific reasons why that's been done, why it's safe to do that.

But in general, moving people around in a civil war puts them at risk.

Alastair, you've been in the Foreign Office or were in the Foreign Office for a long time and know how operations like this work or sometimes how they don't work.

Just take us inside what the Foreign Office will be doing and thinking right now.

And how do you practically even go about trying to remove people in a situation where you basically have a massive, massive country and it is just consumed by civil war?

First of all, the operation for this.

There is a central room in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Crown Prices Centre, well connected with communications and everything else.

It will have been devoted to this.

It's one of those where nothing else happens in that room except the emergency.

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They will have drafted in people from all over the office in order to work, to man phones and communications.

One of the most important things is communication.

So you need people at the centre who are finding out what's going on so they can transfer information to other people on the ground and this information is constantly flowing.

Then in terms of what might be done for people, that's a wider operation across Whitehall in contact with those who may have information on the ground, those in other departments whose expertise might be used.

You're trying, first of all, to find out what it is that's going on.

You're trying to do all you can to keep people safe, which is the priority, the duty of care to UK citizens and to diplomats and transfer that information.

But people will be working extremely hard spending all long hours.

This is a 24-hour-a-day operation until it's complete and people will be trying to find out the very best ways they can to help people, knowing the situation is changing on the ground all the time.

The last thing I'd say is you're also in contact with representatives of other countries because you're trying to work together.

What do you know, what do you think is happening, etc., etc., and that will be happening locally as well as through capitals.

I suppose at the moment one of the things that you would have to try and do, if you were to try and facilitate getting anyone out, is have some sort of contact with the government in Sudan.

But at the moment, who do you even talk to?

Because by the very definition, that is very contested who is in charge right now.

It is contested, but there is a government in Sudan.

It does have an army, and of course that is one of the parties in the civil conflict that's going on.

What the UK government will also be doing, I imagine, is talking to their close allies in the region, those allies that have their own contacts with the Sudanese government.

So they'll be looking to Saudi Arabia, to UAE, those who will have their own intelligence contacts.

What the UK government will be doing at the most senior level in terms of the foreign secretary and Andrew Mitchell in his role, is working with other governments and the UN on the potential calming down of the military situation, or a ceasefire, or a window.

In most civil conflicts, those from abroad are not a target.

These two warring groups are not looking to aim at foreigners in particular.

Their risk is that they are in the wrong place at the wrong time, and that they get caught up in crossfire.

Or if they are trying to be moved around, say a convoy.

We might know what a convoy's purpose is to get people out.

Somebody else may not, and somebody may give misinformation about a convoy, and then it puts it at risk.

So you'll be working with others to try and make sure you get as close to a ceasefire as possible, to enable something to happen on the ground, and you've got to inform people

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about what's happening.

Everybody will be jumpy, and as soon as people start moving around, you want them to be safe. So you're right, there must be a channel of communication with another government, and I have absolutely no doubt that the Foreign Office, with its other allies, will be working on this as we speak.

Alice, do you recognise that something may have gone wrong quite early in the communications? Because we were hearing from people on Thursday who said that when they tried to hand over their names and give the embassy a sense of where they were and why they needed recognition, they were being told that for GDPR reasons they couldn't actually get any response.

And then we heard of people who were sending quite urgent emails and getting back automated responses.

In the last 24 hours, the internet, we understand, is now working at 2% capacity.

So those people who might once have been able to communicate are no longer.

We can't even get through to them on the internet, on email.

And that was Thursday, and we're now nearly a week on.

I wonder if you recognise that something has gone pretty badly wrong with the communications?

I don't know, Emily, obviously, because I'm neither on the spot nor I'm in the Foreign Office, but I heard the reports as you did, and I would imagine that they would have been heard in the Foreign Office as well.

I would have thought every effort would have been made from then to pick up on any of the communications.

I recall instances where in Tunisia or Libya, people would be on the media, they would be talking to the BBC.

We spend every effort to try and find them immediately in order to try and reassure them.

That will be going on.

But also, I've not been able to bottom out this business of GDPR, and I don't think there's any problem at all about people contacting the Foreign Office about relatives, whether they're phoning in from the UK to the UK numbers or whether they're phoning in in Sudan to the local number.

I don't think there's any issue about transferring information about where people are, and people should continue to be doing that.

But communications is always a problem, you're absolutely right.

As soon as somebody is in a dire situation and they're very frightened and they're very vulnerable and they will speak to whoever they can in order to convey information, as soon as they're doing that, then that creates an impression that things aren't happening, even though there may be a massive amount of work going on to contact everybody in the meantime.

I don't think the Foreign Office can do anything about internet speed or anything, but I do know telephone numbers and others are out there because I've been on the website this morning.

Elizabeth, thank you so much.

Really appreciate it.

Thanks for joining us.

Thanks, Elizabeth.

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Thanks, Emily.

Thanks, Lewis.

Oh, if there's anyone listening to this who thinks, and that's like a Chamberlain way, you know, a faraway country with which we know nothing or little, I mean, there is a way in which you can imagine this starting to really affect domestic British politics in the not too distant future, if there isn't a ceasefire, if this doesn't calm down at some point in the imminent future.

Around 10,000 refugees have already entered South Sudan in the last few days to flee the fighting.

A region, by the way, South Sudan that has been stricken by a famine over the last six months or so, partly driven by the Ukraine war, and, you know, the exit routes from the country are, you've already alluded to it, Emily, torturous.

It's already really difficult for humanitarian groups to operate there and NGOs to operate there from within the country.

So you can just imagine that if this doesn't calm down and becomes yet another center of global instability on a semi-permanent basis, what's going to happen?

You're going to start to find more people from that part of the world, and there are already worse some because Sudan, well, it's now South Sudan has been a, you know, if you could think that to Darfur, this has been a sort of region of instability for many decades, but if it gets even worse, then you're going to find more of those people in Calais trying to make their way over into Britain.

And it was interesting hearing the difference from each member there, each MP from the Conservative party, and the differences in response.

So Alistair Burt telling us very carefully that we shouldn't hurry this.

We might not understand the story.

We might be in the middle of something that was happening and kind of was all going on, and we shouldn't sort of try and rush things by jumping to conclusions.

Alicia Kern's there much more direct about the fact that if the British government knows it cannot get people out, they have a duty of care to say you're on your own.

Say so.

And if you can get a lift with the French, if you can get a lift with your employer, if you can get on a convoy that has an armed guard, because we know there are about 30 checkpoints between Khartoum and the crossing at Egypt, then go for it.

And I think it tells you so much that you get such divergent views from three people who are all foreign office-based ministers, ex-ministers, and they can't really decide what the best form of words is on that.

Yeah, and cleverly has already indicated that our ability to do much is severely limited.

So in that context, as you say, why not be more clear?

I do think on that refugee point though, it will be very interesting to see if, as I say, this goes on, you can imagine if it goes on for another week or a couple of weeks, there may well be pressure from within the House of Commons for the government to make an indication about what's Britain going to do about potential refugees.

Because by the way, when we had a similar, well it's not similar, but when we had another



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deeply unstable country, IE Ukraine, we unveiled and created a refugee package, wasn't as generous as the EU's, but nonetheless, we unveiled one very, very quickly.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and say there will not be the offer of safe passage for Sudanese to Britain any time soon.

Absolutely.

I do not see that happening.

No, indeed not.

And then there are questions about, given that, well, given that Sorella Bravman is indicating that anyone who tries to make the trip illegally with the new illegal migration bill will be sent to Rwanda or wherever, this is a perfect case in point of how blunt a tool that could be.

Because no one could possibly say right now that anyone fleeing from Sudan was an economic migrant.

You cannot possibly say that the entire population, civilian population, is at risk.

And right now, all of the emphasis is on emergency evacuation of dual nationals for different countries.

That's understandable.

But that conversation could change quite quickly and could start to affect our own domestic politics.

Well, the other main story across the weekend, if you cast your mind back to three whole days, was the resignation of our Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab, who went out with a letter that sounded, one of my colleagues said, like a slammed door.

And as he went, he basically laid the blame for his own political demise at the hands of civil servants, who he said were activists, were politicised.

And it's created quite a conversation now around what politicisation of the civil service looks like or could look like.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back.

Well, on Friday, of course, we had the not insignificant event of the Deputy Prime Minister resigning after being found to have bullied his civil servants.

And of course, there was a scenario, maybe when Dominic Raab said, OK, that's fine.

I accept that and went quietly and re-emerged in a couple of weeks.

But that did not happen.

I think it's fair to say nothing was quiet about the Raab resignation.

As we covered on Friday, he had an article in the Telegraph ready to go.

And then later in the day, very late in the day, it emerged that he had done an interview exclusively with Chris Mason, the BBC political editor.

And there was one bit in particular, which really got everybody talking over the weekend.

Isn't the blunt truth, when you read all of this report, that a fair-minded person reading it would conclude that, I mean, to be crude, that you're a nightmare to work for?

Well, actually, almost all of the complaints against me were dismissed.

And what this doesn't give you, it's a handful of very senior officials, none of the junior complaints were upheld.

And I got on and dealt with hundreds of civil servants, thousands of other people in prison

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service and the court service.

And what you've got is the risk here, a very small minority of very activist civil servants with the passive-aggressive culture of the civil service who don't like some of the reforms, whether it's Brexit, whether it's parole reform, whether it's human rights reform, effectively trying to block government.

That's not on.

That's not democratic.

Well, I think one thing we can definitely say is that there's nothing passive-aggressive about Dominic Raab.

Yeah, I mean, the question about, are you a nightmare to work for?

Probably is sort of a wider question than many of us would actually like to confront.

But I think what's become clear in the very exit that Dominic Raab made was how loathe he is to accept responsibility for his behavior.

And just what a problem this is in terms of casting the conversation somewhere completely different.

It's like walking to a room, stubbing your toe on the door and then saying, we've got to rebuild this entire edifice because it's clearly not working.

It's not my toe and it's not the door.

It's the whole thing that needs reworking.

Yeah.

And what he's done is take aim at an institution that he somehow feels is, what, working against him?

What I thought was amazing about this in a way is that we have become so inured, so used to this kind of vein of conservative thought and thinking, which is that all the institutions of the British state are out to get us.

It is a frenzied way of thinking and a way of talking.

It would have once been like 10 years ago, even five years ago, I don't know, it would have been really, it would have really shocked us to hear a deputy prime minister essentially allege that what the Americans would call like the deep state, deep institutional forces within the British civil service were conspiring to bring him down.

And that is basically what he was saying.

And that, of course, leaves aside his personal behavior, of course.

It also leaves aside the fact, you know, this idea that like they are a bunch of the kind of Romain, Wokerati, blah, blah, blah, all that stuff that we hear time and time again.

Like, just remind me who delivered Brexit.

The people who delivered Brexit, we talk about Boris Johnson delivering Brexit, whatever, the people who delivered Brexit, they delivered it politically, sure, the people who actually delivered it and made sure that it wasn't a total car crash on day one.

You might say that it's a sort of slow motion car crash, but it didn't just topple over on day one with a civil service.

The civil service worked literally millions upon millions upon millions of collective hours to ensure that Brexit, which was the number one government priority, was delivered. So for example, you know, who made sure that the new training arrangements were in place

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at the Port of Dover with the civil service?

Who made sure that all of the new export regimes, the import regimes were in place?

It's a civil service.

Who replaced basically 45 years worth of political and commercial integration, which they had to do within an incredibly short time period?

It was a civil service.

Who were the ones planning for all of the contingencies and trying to put in contingency in place in case there was a no deal week after week after week?

It was the civil service.

Who made sure that the planes kept flying and there was an aviation agreement?

It was a civil service.

You know, it goes on and it goes on and it goes on.

The truth is, it may well be true that large parts of the civil service and civil servants might not like Brexit, just like, of course, everyone's got political views, it'd be odd within the civil service in a way if you didn't.

But to differentiate the civil servants from the civil service institutionally, it is abundantly clear that the British civil service aims to deliver the priorities of the elected government, as it always has done.

Yeah.

I mean, I, fully enough, I hear a slight sort of canoe-like thing going on with the waves here, which is that many people now are finding it hard to argue with the economic failure that Brexit has been.

When I say that, I guess I'm talking about any of the polls that you've seen recently, any of the stuff that we've covered, any of the queues at Dover, any of the difficulties with trade arrangements or what's going on still in Northern Ireland and the difficulties there.

It's quite hard to argue that Brexit has been an economic success, right?

Even if the civil servants have, as you say, managed to get us over the line from sort of, you know, Tuesday to Wednesday, let's say.

And I wonder whether the frustration of people like Rob, who have put his name and his reputation on the line as Brexiteers, as solid Brexiteers, has been that there aren't very many sunlit uplands.

So you thrash around.

You haven't got Europe anymore.

You can't blame Macron.

You can't blame the EU, whatever blob that was.

So you've come close to home.

And the nearest people you can find to blame for getting in the way of your vision, right?

Not your reality, but your vision are the people that you're working with on a day-to-day basis.

And I think this idea that people in very junior roles are going up to the deputy prime minister and saying, no, we're not going to enact what you've told us.

Putting their career at risk, by the way.

It's so far-fetched.

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Yeah, it's absurd.

Right?

Yeah.

It is absurd that, A, the civil servants on a junior level would be accountable to their own seniors.

And their own seniors wouldn't be doing that to the deputy prime minister.

And B, as you say, that they'd somehow be carrying their baggage of like, ooh, I don't like queuing it over.

What's up with each other?

Yeah, exactly.

So let me make sure that I accuse the deputy prime minister of bullying.

It doesn't really add up.

And it speaks to, I think, somebody in a position of authority who has not quite come to terms with the fact that the thing he basically made his reputation on hasn't worked.

Also, by the way, if that's the case, why wouldn't civil servants be doing this for the literally scores upon scores of other Brexit backing ministers?

It's never been a problem for anybody else.

It's just a problem for Dominic Raab.

And I suppose Mr. Raab has to kind of consider why that might be.

But it doesn't seem, if those interviews, the interview he did is anything to go by that self-reflection is one of his strong suits.

I think your point normally about looking for someone else to blame is absolutely the correct one in that there's a wider thing going on here as well.

And you see this in the, you know, right wing papers and the conservative supporting papers as well.

At some point after 13 years, once you've done left the EU, it becomes very, very difficult to continue to find institutions for which you can blame.

And ultimately, this is all, as you say, coming back home because you've run out of everything else.

The media, the judges, and so on.

It's a deeply unconcerned instinct.

It's not something that we would have associated historically with the conservative party.

But this frenzy, and it is, as I say, a frenzy way of thinking of constantly looking to institutions rather than looking inwardly at your own failings.

Not only does it not get us very far in terms of policy and politics, but it's damaging for our politics.

It's caustic for our politics.

It's acidic on our politics because what it basically does is you have, you know, literally as I say, the deputy prime minister in this case, suggesting to the public to conservatives within the electorates, the whole of the British state is basically amassed to try and thwart what you want.

I think it's...

And that is really damaging.

Yes.

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I mean, I think it's the language of a sort of, dare I say, a Tim Pot opposition party like Reform, whose latest campaign video basically said, oh, they haven't done Brexit properly.

We haven't got enough Brexit, or we're not Brexit enough, or whatever they went into their campaign video to say.

And that's fine because we realise they want to attract a voter who doesn't think the conservative party is right-wing enough or Brexit-y enough for them, and they think there is capital momentum to be made then.

But I think it's quite hard for literally the conservative party of government of 13 years to rally round and try and find ways that the entire civil service that they have overseen and talked through and worked with for more than a decade now is somehow out to get them.

And there are now suggestions that, and there were whispers in the papers of the weekend that there are concerns that a few other ministers may fall foul of these sort of accusations.

I mean, I suppose one thing to sort of say about that is that if you consider that since 2010, literally, and particularly because there's been such churn in governments in that time, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of different ministers, I mean, in a way, I mean, you would expect, given bullying does exist in workplaces, you might expect that any given a small percentage of those people may well have been found to have been bullies. People say, well, this hasn't happened before.

Well, partly that's because of the very secretive kind of relationship, an unusual relationship between ministers and civil servants.

Frankly, traditionally, you know, in the kind of hush-hush culture of Whitehall, it was always just the case that if there was a particular problem with a particularly problematic minister, it would be the civil servants who got moved.

They would go to their bosses and say, well, we can't move the minister because they're elected.

So the civil servants have to move.

And that, I think, is just changing subtly, which, quite frankly, isn't a bad thing.

Yeah.

I mean, funny enough, I'm reading a note from Chris Smith here who says, as a mid-level civil servant, I wish I could claim all his power that I supposedly have.

As for resilience, if I shat at my staff and called their work useless, I would rightly be seeking alternative employment.

And I do think it's right.

I mean, I know we're speaking specifically about the civil service, but there was also this question about whether people who've been bullied were lacking resilience or snowflakes.

And I think it is actually worth going back to the Tolly report itself, where he says,

I did not detect any material lack of resilience in those who'd made complaints.

Most of the individuals in question had many years of experience working closely with ministers.

So in other words, they weren't snowflakes, perished the term, and they had had decades of experience working with ministers in brackets who they had not accused of bullying.

So at that point, you do have to start thinking that the missing piece of this jigsaw here is any inward glance at Rob himself.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / The Brits trapped in Sudan's warzone

And there's one, quickly, there was one other thing from that report that I think got absolutely missed at the end of last week and throughout the weekend, which is this, is that actually Tolly in that report basically says that Rob misled him.

And what he says is, is that he spoke to two senior civil servants who they had, and they themselves at some point had spoken to Rob about his behavior.

Now Rob says that he disputes that either those meetings took place or he disputes the nature of them.

And Tolly says, I believe the senior civil servants.

So what he's basically saying is, is that Rob misled his inquiry.

And if so, that itself is a breach of the ministerial code.

That's not to say lots of other parts of it weren't nuanced because they were, they were very, in many ways, they were quite generous, Tolly was very generous to Rob in some ways.

But that in itself, as I say, I think was missed and itself is extremely serious for someone who is, was the deputy prime minister.

We'll be back in a second.

This is the news agents.

That's pretty much it from us.

But tomorrow we're going to be looking at rentals and rental prices and the incredible difficulty that many people are now having at not even getting on the housing ladder to own property, but even managing to find somewhere to live in a place that makes it possible for you to work there.

We've had some of your voice notes and mails.

We'd love to hear more if you are in a position of struggling to find a place to rent or to afford a place to rent.

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