

This is a global player original podcast.

How did you throw it all away?

I think that when I look at what...

Would you have listened to your colleagues a bit more when they conveyed their unease over things like the Chris Pinscher affair, the Owen Patterson row, at what any of these turning points?

That was Boris Johnson, our former Prime Minister, and he's pretend snoring.

And he's pretend snoring through a question he's been asked about allegations of sexual assault by one Chris Pinscher, his former Deputy Chief Whip.

It is an extraordinary interview, an extraordinary exchange, and you're not going to hear that exchange anywhere else but on the news agents.

On today's episode, we're going to be talking to the journalist who interviewed Boris Johnson for that show and getting her reflections on a Prime Minister who not only doesn't seem to want to reflect, but in any way atone for that period of chaos.

Welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's Emily.

And it's Lewis.

And we're joined today in the studio by Julia McFarlane, who is a freelance journalist who works a lot in the US as well as here.

And recently, she was lucky enough to be co-hosting a podcast, One Decision, with Boris Johnson as their invited guest.

And give us a feel, a flavour, Julia, of what the sort of podcast is about.

So our podcast, I co-host it with Sir Richard Deilove, who is the former Chief of MI6.

And we interview world leaders, former world leaders, academics, politicians.

And the main theme of our podcast is geopolitics, national security.

We do a lot of Russia, a lot of China.

And we got a pretty last minute interview with Boris Johnson earlier this week.

And I was, I mean, so I was dreading it, but I was concerned about how difficult it was going to be.

I spoke to a lot of journalists before sitting down with him just to get some advice.

And everyone said he is possibly the most difficult man you can interview because he's a former journalist.

He knows all the questions you're going to ask him, and he's going to do his damndest not to give you what you want.

And everything from being evasive with answers or trying to take control of the narrative and steer it in a different direction, I was given all sorts of advice and tips to try and see if we could get a bit more insight from him.

And I think what could have been really good about it is when you have a podcast interview, it's much longer than a broadcast interview.

And I was hoping that we could maybe have, maybe see some of self-reflection from Boris.

It's been almost a year.

It is a year to the day that Saja Jabin and Rishi Sunak resigned.

And I remember it very well because it was my birthday.

And that was my birthday dinner, was me and my boyfriend Dooms growing on Twitter. But we were hoping that, or perhaps we were interested to see if in the year that has elapsed since that very fast-moving story, that perhaps there would have been some reflection from Boris Johnson if maybe those events have aged a little differently in his mind.

And what we found was that nothing has changed.

He was belligerent, he was defensive, and he was not willing to engage with the questions on whether he had viewed his decisions, those decisions he made last year, any differently.

Let's play a little bit of that now.

How can you argue that people like Vladimir Putin need that there should be democratic processes when you denigrated your colleagues?

You called into question their integrity.

How can you save Vladimir Putin in the same breath and talk about extolling the virtues of democracy?

Are you really saying that I'm like Vladimir Putin?

No, I'm not.

But does it undermine your arguments?

I think I've had a pretty rough old time recently.

But I do think, I take slight exception.

Can I ask you a different question?

But let me ask you, does it undermine your arguments for why we should protect the democracy?

What's your best decision?

I think my point is a very robust one, which is that for all the faults that I may find in the system, for all the faults that others may find in the system, it's a system that I think protects the people, protects the country against arbitrary draconian rule and in the end stops the kind of disastrous abuse of power that you've seen in Russia.

You're 1700 polemic against the privileges committee.

If you say that we have a system that works, that we should protect.

Well, I think one of the freedoms we have in this country is freedom of speech and I don't think anyone would want to detract from that.

And I think the difference between this country and Russia is that we have a country where people can speak their minds, where politicians can speak their minds.

And that is very important.

And I think that actually is one of the reasons why our democracy is so healthy and why I'm so broadly optimistic.

And if you ask me what is the best decision I've taken, I think it's a very good question.

I think at this stage you're supposed to say something suitably soppy about it.

No, not at all.

Hard-nosed political decision.

I think it's obviously an excellent decision to come on this show.

I think we've been running just 33 minutes.

We appreciate your time, but can I ask you if there were any decisions that you should have made that maybe could have affected the outcome of how you left the job that you wanted your whole life, the boy who wanted to be world king, and how did you throw it all away?

I think that when I look at what you've done.

Would you have listened to your colleagues a bit more when they conveyed their unease over things like the Chris Pinscher affair, the Owen Patterson row, at what any of these turning points?

Okay, look, Julia, I think most of the interview had been about Ukraine and about geopolitics because that's the subject of your interview, but there hadn't been an agreement that you wouldn't ask the sorts of questions about his downfall and British politics.

No, we made no such agreement with that.

We said that it was going to be a conversation largely focused on Ukraine, which it was. We spent about half an hour talking about Ukraine, Russia, national security, and in fact, because he had arrived half an hour late, that was technically a half hour up, but we had said that we would ask a few other questions on some other subjects, and when our time was running out, I did then ask him, because we were coming up to that one year anniversary of the day that he announced that he was going to stand down as Prime Minister two days after those cabinet resignations, how he was feeling about the anniversary and how all those series of events had perhaps with some hindsight, had he done the right thing?

He thought, would he have done things differently if he could see really how events would inevitably overwhelm him and cause him to be left with no other option but to resign?

There's so much that's quite extraordinary about that exchange, but perhaps the bit that stands out the most is the moment when you're asking him about the exact chain of events which led to his downfall and whether he'd reflected on it, and obviously one of the most notable components of that was the Chris Pinter affair, in which just to remind people, the Conservative Party whip at the time was accused of sexually assaulting a young male Conservative Party worker, and Boris Johnson's response to even any reflection on that and his role in denying what he knew about that at the time was to fake mock, snore.

Let's just hear that one more time.

Would you have listened to your colleagues a bit more when they conveyed their unease over things like the Chris Pinter affair, the Owen Patterson row, at what any of these turning points?

Okay, look, what were you thinking when he did that?

So my initial question to him was actually, you know, one year on from all of this, are there any decisions that you would have made differently?

And he said, well, you know, COVID was very, very difficult and the decision to lock down was a tough one.

And he was actually talking about how that was a right decision that he'd made.

That wasn't the question I'd asked.

So that's when I said, for example, should you have behaved differently when your colleagues told you they were uneasy about how the whole Chris Pinter affair was going down.

And as I was asking that, he sort of lent back a little, he sort of rolled his eyes and looked over at Richard, who was the other man in the interview.

And then he started to snore when I brought up that story, which is about sexual assault allegations.

And how did you interpret that?

So in the heat of the moment, I could see that he was trying to undermine my question

and what I tried to do was not rise to it.

I sort of acted like it wasn't happening.

I mean, one of the things that I had been advised by fellow journalists was, you know, he will do things to try and put you off.

He will try to, you know, make it very difficult.

And so I tried to keep calm and no, no, no, please answer my question.

And it was only really until watching it back that I thought that moment was extraordinary because it shows that one year on from this, something that the straw that broke the camel's back after all of the different scandals, which his administration had been implicated in and had been plagued with.

His attitude to all of that is boring, boring, boring, boring, boring.

There was no mea culpa.

There was no, for someone who we're all anticipating wants to return to politics.

I think if he had said, you know, one reflection, perhaps that wasn't best handled, we could have done better, could have made it easier, perhaps for voters to accept, you know, we're all human people make mistakes.

But to sort of make a joke about it, to try and dismiss it shows that that is not the place where Boris Johnson is in right now.

You also made the comparison earlier in the interview with his advocacy of democracy in Ukraine and the fact that he didn't seem that willing to accept the findings in the British democratic system of the privileges committee, which he called a kangaroo court and pushed back with a 1700 word essay of sort of self pity.

Yeah.

Well, that was something he was found to have apparently broken ministerial code by discussing the results of the committee's investigation before they'd published it for themselves and calling into question the integrity of his colleagues.

And it was when he talked about, he used the word holding to account in the context of Vladimir Putin that I thought that's totally incongruent to how you reacted when your colleagues tried to do the same to you with regards to the privileges committee investigation and whether he had misled the House of Commons.

Did you really think that you were comparing him to Vladimir Putin?

Because that's his defense, isn't it?

It's like, oh my God, please keep this in perspective.

One thing was about something I said in Parliament and another thing is about literally a dictator who's committing war crimes.

I can't say what was in Boris Johnson's mind at that moment, but I think it's pretty clear what I meant and I did say what I'm asking is if it undermines your argument for protecting democracy given everything that has happened here in the UK, it perhaps was a deflection.

It's something Boris Johnson has been known to do in interviews to deflect, to meander, to try and be evasive and avoid answering questions.

I mean, he's a really, really difficult person to interview and I suspect I'm not going to get another chance to speak to him again after this.

Well, you've already alluded to it in a sense.

Obviously, if anyone wants to actually see the clip, they should be able to, but in the

clip, the video version of the clip, he is sort of constantly looking over to your co-presenter Richard, who we've had on this show, Richard Dearlove.

He obviously didn't like the line of questioning that you're addressing.

How do you think he felt about what you were saying and how did he deal with it and you afterwards?

What do you think his reaction to you specifically was?

So I mean, he was getting pretty, pretty hostile.

I mean, later on in the interview, when I was asking questions about his domestic record, at one point he said, Julia, you're just like a character from Monty Python, you know, we got Brexit done.

We steer the country through COVID, fastest vaccine rollout in Europe is what have the Romans ever done for us?

And I said to him, this isn't, I'm not judging you.

Your colleagues have judged you.

They have come to the judgment that you were unfit for office.

And I'm asking you how that judgment sits with you one year on and what your reflections on it are.

It feels like it was perhaps personal, but it's not personal.

And in fact, there were plenty of opportunities for him to have more of a reflective conversation that could have ended up reflecting well on him if he had shown a bit more openness, a bit more willing to sort of show that he had come to terms with what had happened, perhaps learned some lessons.

And I think like a lot of the issues that plague the Johnson administration, so much of this is to use a Wimbledon phrase, unforced errors.

What did he say at the end?

He was talking about some more of his achievements and looking to the future national priorities, building infrastructure, leveling up.

And he said, and that is where I shall leave you.

Thank you very much.

Good day.

So was he happy at the end of it?

Was he happy for the interview to run as it was?

We haven't heard anything from him.

He went pretty quickly out of the studio.

We were supposed to just take some take some photos afterwards.

We didn't get the chance.

He was out of there pretty quickly.

Do you feel that he was unhappy?

I get the impression that he won't be coming back to us anytime soon, unfortunately.

So Julia, will this run in full on one decision?

The conversation on Ukraine and Russia will be the main topic of our podcast this week and all the other bits that we've discussed will be on social media and will be available for listeners in the UK to listen to.

Indeed, on the news agents, wherever you find us.

Julia, thank you so much.

Thank you for having me.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back.

Now you have probably followed over the last 48 hours or seen some pretty troubling images coming out of Israel and today or overnight Israel has withdrawn its forces from the Palestinian city of Jenin after carrying out one of the biggest military operations in the occupied West Bank, which is a Palestinian territory and it's the biggest military operation that they've done there for some years and 12 Palestinians, at least five of them fighters, Israeli government

have said, were killed in that Jenin operation.

Yeah, and it's always really hard to get to the bottom of exactly who has been targeted and who has died in these kinds of situations.

The Israeli government line clearly is that they are targeting terrorists who have been hiding or being sheltered in the refugee camps of Jenin and that they are taking out people who are using refugees as human shields.

And Jenin is a place where the refugee camps, I guess, symbolize a kind of force of liberation and revolution for many of the thousands of Palestinians who live there, who are currently seeing absolutely no peaceful way or no democratic or diplomatic means to a solution that gives them their freedoms and rights.

It's a very familiar story, but I think what is perhaps less known in the coverage that we get here is what's going on behind the scenes in the Israeli government and just how the personal problems, the legal difficulties of one Benjamin Netanyahu may be affecting or influencing the military policy of Israel right now.

We're going to hear about that in a little while.

But first, Sukunda Qamani, who has been in the camps at Jenin, who's reporting for Channel 4, an old former colleague of ours at Newsnight, who I think can give us a sense of just how febrile the situation has been.

We should say that just last night, the retaliation of the attacks on Jenin was both Gaza rockets fired at Israel, all of which were stopped by the Iron Dome, and Hamas member who went out on the streets in northern Tel Aviv, crashed a car into another car, then went out on a stabbing spree and injured at least five Israelis, leaving one pregnant woman badly injured who we think has lost her child.

So you can sense already the scale of the tensions mounting.

Sek, just give us the lie of the land.

Well, a lot of anger.

I mean, we saw the Israeli forces withdraw late last night after nearly two days of fierce fighting, one Israeli soldier killed as those troops were withdrawing.

Residents were able today really for the first time to come out of their homes and assess the damage.

And it's pretty severe.

I mean, one central street inside the refugee camp was largely destroyed.

I mean, this assault was massive, the largest one in around two decades in the occupied West Bank using drone strikes, military bulldozers, hundreds of troops, and funerals have been

taking place for some of the 12 Palestinians who were killed during this Israeli raid. Mourners from across, really, the West Bank had come to express their solidarity and their anger.

The Israelis say that all of those who were killed were militants, but there's video that shows that at least one of them was not armed.

It seems that at the moment that he was shot and there's a lot of both grief, but really the overriding feeling is of anger, not just in Janine, not just in the refugee camp, but really across the West Bank.

You know, one elderly man who I was talking to was saying that this could well be that the spark that leads to a third intifada, you know, another uprising of the kind that we've seen in the past.

You know, many others think that it's not going to be the case that, yeah, we're seeing these increasingly deadly, increasingly violent flare-ups, but there isn't the appetite amongst many people in the population for that full-on uprising, but really anger is very high.

You know, the Israeli army see this operation as a success because they say they seized more than a thousand weapons and arrested 30 suspects, but, you know, there were still guns on display, militants parading in the streets today around the refugee camp.

So, you know, much of that militant infrastructure is still intact.

And of course, the underlying grievances of both the militants and the wider Palestinian population are still very much at play.

And actions like this, Israeli raid, only really add more fuel to the fire in terms of that resentment.

Because there's no doubt, as I said, that lots of civilians, one way or the other, have been caught up in this incursion.

Absolutely. I mean, we went into the family home of one Palestinian family inside the refugee camp that that house had been taken over by soldiers.

All their belongings were strewn right across the floor.

The men of the family had been handcuffed and taken aside.

A 16-year-old boy had been taken away.

They don't know where he is.

They, of course, said that he's done nothing wrong.

Perhaps the Israeli authorities, if they were speaking, would say that he had links to the militants, but the family were adamant that he didn't.

And there were signs of, really, that the kind of etchiness is the only word I could use to describe it of some of the troops.

There was a wall tapestry that this family had in their home that had been torn down. It had a map of Palestinian territories on it.

And presumably the soldiers had star of David and the word Israel on top of it.

That's what gives lie, I think, to the Israeli narrative that these operations are just targeting militants and are not about kind of a wider suppression of the Palestinian population.

I mean, of course, the Israeli authorities would say, well, maybe that's just the actions of one rogue soldier.

But to people on the ground, it really feels as if the entire population is being targeted

and repeatedly targeted.

And I've repeatedly asked people living in places like Jenin Refugee Camp, well, look, the Israelis always say that they're not the ones to blame for the bloodshed.

You should be blaming the militant groups because they're launching operations against Israeli citizens using this camp, other places like this, heavily built up civilian areas as kind of bases from which to operate in.

They're the ones you should be directing your anger towards.

But that's not the case.

I mean, the anger is all directed towards the Israeli army, the Israeli state.

Anger too, also really interestingly, Louis, being increasingly directed at the Palestinian authority.

The organization that's in charge of places like Jenin, they've adopted a kind of more diplomatic approach in dealing with the Israelis.

And many people at a grassroots level are fed up with that.

They want to see them take a more confrontational approach, one that's more supportive of the militant.

So in fact, today, after the funerals of some of these young men who are being buried today, we saw some people throwing stones at a building of the Palestinian authority in Jenin.

And that's really a dynamic to take out for because the Palestinian authority over the last few years has been losing its credibility.

And that credibility is diminishing even further amidst this kind of hardening of positions on both sides, both amongst the Palestinian grassroots and on the Israelis, where many Israelis want to see exactly this kind of very tough, hard-line military approach taken to the Palestinians.

Because the Israeli army says that many of the attacks that are being carried out on either Israeli settlers or within Israel originate from Jenin, other hotspots around the north of the occupied West Bank.

And they want to see a military approach taken to try and solve that.

So far though, that military approach doesn't seem to really have yielded any significant long-term result.

Sik, thanks so much.

Take care of yourself.

Like, wasn't it?

And as Emily was saying at the start, it is really important with this to broaden it out in terms of what is going on in Israel at the moment, the kind of long story around inevitably Benjamin Netanyahu's premiership and his legal difficulties and his political difficulties and his political projects in Israel.

And someone that we've talked to about that before and who's really interesting on all of this is Ayala Penefsky from the University of Cambridge.

There is no one better place to understand Netanyahu and his government and what he's doing and how these latest attacks and conflagrations fit into that story.

And she's in Tel Aviv.

Ayala, thanks so much for coming back on the news, agents.

Thank you.

Ayala, can we just start with what's going on in Genine?

How has this been reported in the Israeli media?

And would you say that most Israelis are, and maybe there's been some polling on this, supportive of what the government and the military are doing?

So that's a great question because what Israelis see from this operation in the West Bank is very different than what you guys are seeing and what our listeners are seeing.

The mainstream media here, the TV channels, are broadcasting this military operation in a very supportive way.

There is no real criticism or questioning of the reasons to going to this operation now or the outcomes of it or what will it gain really?

Because we've seen so many of these military operations along the years in the West Bank, of course, in Gaza, but there is no explanation as to why the outcome is supposed to be different now.

And there was, of course, a lot of media coverage of the terror attack in Tel Aviv yesterday for obvious reasons.

But what is happening in Genine is still very much explained to the Israeli public through the lens of this national security emergency, something we had to do.

And the heartbreaking images of thousands of Palestinians, including children and families, fleeing their homes, don't get as much media attention here, unfortunately, which makes it easier for many Israelis to just turn a blind eye and focus on other issues.

The Israeli government, of course, will say that they are targeting terrorists who are using those in the refugee camps as human shields.

And actually, if they're not defending their own country against terrorism, then what on earth are they doing?

And to be fair, there probably are terrorists in Genine or in other cities in the West Bank.

The question is, what is the plan?

Right?

Because these operations can keep going forever and Palestinians will keep dying and getting wounded and getting their homes ruined.

And whoever saw pictures from the Genine refugee camp today knows that the thousands of people who left their homes will come back to nothing.

And how will that improve even Israel's national security in the future is very unclear.

But it is true that this is also very much related to what happens in domestic politics in Israel at the moment.

So Israelis are much more concerned with the future of Israel within the borders of 67, within the internationally acknowledged borders, not in the West Bank.

And when you see a terror attack in Tel Aviv, for instance, everybody here is very much concerned, of course.

So you have this happening in Genine.

For Israelis, it looks like something, like a mask, like something you have to do for your security.

Everybody talks about the long term, where this is taking us, what's the plan?

And at the same time, so many things are happening out here.

There are so many other fronts that require attention and public pressures, etc.

People are basically grained at this point.

When you talk about what the plan is, Ayala, I suppose the point is that there is no plan or insofar as there is a plan, the plan, certainly the Palestinians see it, is to squeeze what remains of the West Bank, of the settlement of the West Bank and guards it to some extent as well, until such time as that it's not viable and arguably, right now, isn't viable.

Right.

So what's important to note, especially when we think about public opinion in Israel, what we've seen for many years now is that there is no support for an annexation of the West Bank, not at all.

So people are voting for people they think will keep them safe, but they oppose the annexation of the West Bank.

What happens is that at the moment you have in the government and in Netanyahu's coalition, forces that are very much further to the right than the general population in Israel.

And for them, the annexation of the West Bank is part of some kind of a divine plan of a vision for the future that is ideological and religious, and they're not going to give up on it with Netanyahu or without him.

And should we see what is happening through that lens?

Is that the lens through which, to some extent, at least we should see all this?

So I think there are two things that are important to remember at the moment.

One thing, yes, this military operation was definitely convenient for Netanyahu in terms of timing because the protest against the government went overboard yesterday.

They were trying to reach further and not only demonstrate on the street, but also block the only airport in Israel, et cetera.

It's very convenient for Netanyahu that people are talking about Janine and not about the protest against the government.

It is also true that Netanyahu's trial is going on.

And during this past week, Arnon Milchin, who is in fact a Hollywood producer who produced a film like Pretty Woman and Fight Club, was actually testifying against Netanyahu in Brighton of all places as part of Netanyahu's trial corruption.

So it's true that it was perfect timing for Netanyahu personally in terms of his political fate.

And it's also important as much as he's a very kind of compelling figure, but we need to remember that apart from him personally and his fate, there is a movement in Israel that has enormous power today.

It doesn't have a very massive support among the people, but it does have enormous political power at the moment.

And they are the one putting pressure on Netanyahu to be more aggressive, both against the protesters

in Israel and against the Palestinians in Janine.

Ayala, can you just explain the corruption trial in a little more detail?

Because this is something that has been following him around.

And I think his wife, Sarah, for years, right?

And this was always understood to be a little bit like Trump.

You have to get back into power so that they can't come after you and put you in prison.

Yes, definitely.

And the whole judicial overhaul, the attempted judicial overhaul in Israel at the moment, definitely is linked to the fact that Netanyahu is standing trial on three different corruption allegations.

So the specific trial that is now going on and for the past week was going on in Brighton and, in fact, Sarah and Netanyahu herself was there, it's pretty simple.

The two other corruption trials are more complicated and I think also relevant for the U.K., if I may, because they involve the media.

And it's about the relationship between politicians and media and where does it cross the line. And according to the allegations, Netanyahu was granting all kinds of favors and convenient regulations to media moguls and media owners in exchange for a positive news coverage or more positive news coverage.

So these are the other trials that keep going, but they tell you a lot.

And in this, I think it's very similar to Trump's operation in the U.S. and we can also think about other examples, trying to take over all the potential checks and balances on executive power.

So it's the media, now it's the courts, but any other kind of institutions that we're supposed to protect Israel is against the force of the government, where attacked by Netanyahu and his government over this past decade.

Ayala Panievsky, thanks so much.

Ayala, thank you.

Thank you guys.

Great to see you.

Bye-bye.

Emily, when we were thinking about what we were going to cover today, we kind of knew we wanted to talk about this story because it's really important and it's not a story, I think, over the summer that's going to go away, but we were talking about the difficulties in covering Israel-Palestine and interviewing people for it and who we can and should interview for it because as I think you've had many times, particularly on Newsnight, the kind of dynamics of those interviews become quite difficult quite quickly and you're quite wary of it.

Yeah.

I mean, yeah, I remember that really clearly.

There was a time during COVID, which was difficult enough anyway, when we had a big flare up, I think it was about the al-Aqsa mosque and whether the security minister at the time had sort of taken people to this very holy spot and there was quite often, I would say, a trigger round about sort of June-July time and we ended up having the ambassador in and with her sort of 20 security guards, you can imagine, and having to find a way to put her in one part of the studio and have the Palestinian high representative spokesperson in the other part of the studio and get around COVID rules where we couldn't actually have two people in the studio at the same time because of the whole two meter rule and it was incredibly stressful, just actually trying to get to a place where you're not then putting out lines, which, you know, if you think the Israelis are wrong, you only listen to what the Palestinians are saying.

If you think the Palestinians are wrong, you only listen to what the Israelis are saying because people already come to this story feeling that they know so much of the background and of the injustices and of the fear and the terror.

I mean, the interesting thing about this, as Ayala was saying, was that this government is in a totally new place to where Netanyahu has been before just because he has this coalition, this very, very odd bedfellow in the settlement party, which is now really integrated into his government and it is properly on the far right, you know, and he is using that coalition to prop him up, but it is not what most Israelis would have thought of as the natural high with government.

Isn't the challenge, in a way, as you just said, the problem with sometimes covering this story is that it splits into two camps in terms of the audience, right, which is you just talked about one, which is there is a proportion of the audience who are absolutely convinced they have a particular view on who is right and who is wrong.

I'm not saying who that is or whatever, but that is just true.

There's a highly polarized story to cover, but then there's also quite a very substantial, perhaps the majority of the audience who actually find it overwhelming, the kind of the scale of the history, there's almost impenetrable and they're afraid, they're actually afraid and maybe he's a journalist sometimes, this can include us, almost afraid to try and engage with it because it's hard to know where to start and the scale of the story and injustice is difficult to reckon with.

And I think, you know, there was a time when we were really looking at a possible two-state solution.

Bill Clinton was the nearest we got to that with Yitzhak Rabin, who was, you know, horrendously murdered by an extremist on his own side, you know, so the splits are just incredibly complicated on this one.

And I think there are sort of truths in this, which you can't escape.

One is that the Israeli military might is massive compared to what the Palestinians can do.

And so you have to be conscious that any action by Israel will immediately seem disproportionate because they're targeting kids with stones.

And the other side of that is that the Palestinians feel that they have no hope left in any political sense and so they'll do whatever it takes.

And when you're doing whatever it takes, then yeah, you get the actions of complete madmen who will ram a car into civilians in Tel Aviv, who will injure pregnant women, who will, you know, shoot soldiers, who will shoot anyone, quite frankly, because they don't know where else they're going to get any kind of voice from.

But do you find it difficult to interview people?

Of course.

From either side?

Of course.

With regards to it.

Yeah.

Because you were saying we kind of didn't want to do that today, right?

For that reason.

Well, it's very hard.

I find it hard.

To get anywhere.

Anyway, politically, because I think it's such a deep-rooted, difficult story, and it's a bit like...

It's hard to do in eight minutes.

It's hard to do in eight minutes.

It's hard, you know.

It's like when you try and cover gun crimes in America, I just want to put my head in my hands because I can see there is no end to what's going to happen.

It's also hard, you know, as a Jewish person, I'm Jewish, but I'm not Israeli.

So I have to remember that I don't actually speak on behalf of Israel, or of Jews, or of anyone.

And that's what people who have prejudice against Jews often try and make Jewish people do, right?

Right.

So I'm still a journalist when it comes to this story.

Yeah.

I'm trying to cover Israel and politics in the same way that I'd cover US politics, or British politics, or, you know, France, because I'm still looking at it through a political journalistic lens.

But quite often, there is that sense, you know, because you're Jewish, you know, even once I did an interview that was fairly sort of hardcore, and I got a call from the rabbi's wife saying, oh, do you want to come round for, you know, Friday Night Supper?

Is everything okay?

And I thought, oh, isn't that interesting?

She's sort of, she's heard that somehow as an attack on faith rather than just like, this is what I do.

I'm a political journalist.

I'll hold any government to account if that's what is called for.

But I think sometimes even if you're not blurring the lines, the lines get slightly blurred for you and people's perceptions.

There are always stories.

And I've got them.

Because journalists are people where we've got backgrounds and we've got like, and so it's totally inevitable.

It's not unique to this issue, but it's also something that people are often curious about how we navigate.

You have your journalist head on, right?

And I really try and have my journalist head on.

And otherwise, you might as well go home.

But sometimes it's an interesting thing to explore that you come to something, you know.

Well, particularly with this, because as we said, there are few issues that elicit.

I mean, it's great.

You always get it wrong.

You always get it wrong.

Because there's so little else that I can think of where the lines are so clearly drawn.

I remember getting an interview completely badly wrong.

I just got the whole tenor right and it was on my son's second birthday.

And I remember coming off air thinking, oh my God, the lesson of all this was never work on your son's birthday.

Like don't work on your children's birthday because it had all just imploded.

And I was like, what was it for?

I spent the evening in tears thinking I should have gone home and been at the birthday party instead.

Why was I working?

That was my lesson.

Never work on your son's birthday, says Emily Maylis.

Off the therapy couch.

Off the therapy couch.

We are going to be back very shortly and we're going to talk about our guest yesterday, or Emily's exclusive yesterday with regards to Mary Black, and she had a performance of her own today in the House of Commons, which we're going to talk about in a minute.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back.

So you will have heard, I'm sure yesterday, our interview, Emily's interview with Mary Black, the SNP Deputy Westminster Leader, saying that she's not going to stand again at the next election and expressing her deep frustrations with how Westminster works.

Funny enough, today at Prime Minister's Questions, it wasn't Prime Minister's Questions, it was Deputy Prime Minister's Questions because not for the first time recently and not for the last, which we might talk about briefly, Rishi Sunak was not there.

He was at the NHS 75th birthday celebrations in Westminster Abbey and so he sent once again his Deputy Oliver Doucin there and that meant that Mary Black, as the SNP Deputy, was there to ask him a question.

And I think it's fair to say, I think she had the parliamentary zinger of the year so far.

She'd just begin by saying genuinely, how sorry I was to hear that the Honourable Lady will be standing down at the next election.

She and I joined this House at the same time and I know she has contributed much to her party and to this place.

And may I also say, I'm sure she will wish to join me in celebrating His Majesty, King Charles, receiving the Scottish regalia, I think pretty much as we speak.

There's always time for a Damascan conversion, Mr Speaker.

But when it comes to the NHS, I will take absolutely no lectures from either party on it.

It has been there for me, I was born in an NHS hospital, my children were born in an NHS hospital, it's been there for me and my family and this Government has put record funding into it.

The Deputy Prime Minister, I thank him for his kind words and we did join this place

at the same time and I'm pretty sure we'll be leaving at the same time.

Yeah, she looked like she was enjoying herself today, I think they sort of, if the Inamari Black hadn't been unleashed before, there's probably a question mark over that anyway, then it definitely came out.

Well, I was after spending so much time with you yesterday, she was just in positive spirits.

I'm lucky enough, we're lucky enough to have every single day.

Yeah, they're queuing round the block to go on.

It's a great line and brought the house down and down and we didn't know what to say.

There's sort of a slightly more serious thing about Prime Minister's questions this week and next week as well is the very fact that they were all there.

So SUNAC keeps missing Prime Minister's questions.

He's now got the...

To be fair, he was at prayers.

I mean, he was actually at an NHS prayer thing at Westminster Abbey today and so was Keir Starmer, obviously.

And there are always good...

Look, the convention has always been, look, it's perfectly fair enough.

The Prime Minister's got a busy diary.

He can't always guarantee, he or she can't always guarantee that they can be there on a Wednesday afternoon, they're expected to do.

So next week, he's not going to be there again.

He's going to be at NATO summit again as he pointed out at the liaison committee yesterday.

He can't really do much about that, gone are the days when Britain would determine and dictate when the NATO summit was going to be.

We can't even get our own NATO Secretary General these days.

That's fine.

But the sort of convention is that wherever you can, you've got to try and minimize that.

I think today, for example, I suspect he might have been able to move the NHS.

If he'd asked to put it back, given it was at Westminster Abbey by half an hour or so, probably would have been possible.

And he's now got the worst attendance...

Do you think he just hates it, do you?

I think that it actually takes up a huge amount of...

I mean, I think this thing that people often don't appreciate is that it's not just turning up.

It takes up quite a lot of time for the PM.

They end up preparing usually at least two or three times before the Wednesday.

And there is an argument that actually, if you have somebody who is a bit more of a chief executive, he's not a performer like Boris Johnson, he's a chief executive.

Do we want our Prime Minister to spend all the time rehearsing lines to get gags from sort of braying people behind him?

Or do we actually want him to be sorting out the world at a NATO summit?

I think that's fair enough.

The sort of cost of it is...

I mean, there's two sort of costs.

I mean, one is a slightly more rarefied one.

You could argue this never really happens anyway.

But of course, the Prime Minister does have a responsibility to Parliament in terms of being held to account in Parliament.

And although 95% of the time it is just knockabout, let's not forget, just now and again on those rare, glimmering moments, it does matter.

I mean, why is Boris Johnson no longer an MP?

It's because not really just because he lied to the public, but because he lied to the Commons.

And those were at Prime Minister's questions where he was forced to make account of himself.

So there is that.

And the second thing is just a slightly more prosaic thing for his own side.

If you accept that 95% of the time there isn't that much being held to account, the main function of it, apart from those nerds of us who like to watch it, is to actually provide a little bit of morality or troops.

It's to send them back off to their constituencies at the end of the weekend, feeling a little bit better than they might have done at the start.

The argument I can do without, but I think the accountability is right.

And we should remember that it's not just the five questions from the leader of the opposition.

It's the whole house.

It is the whole house.

And it's all the other questions that you might tune in and out of, but fundamentally they're asking about policy.

But I do think just on the parliamentary mechanics of it, one of Sunak's problems at the moment is his MPs are, and again, yeah, you're right, it doesn't matter a lot to the rest of us.

But the Chief Whitmorecare, and there is that argument for him as well, of this Sunak not necessarily liking necessarily to answer questions that very often.

He finds it a little bit irksome at the liaison committee yesterday again.

And I can understand that it must be really irritating, but you're constantly sort of firing off, or you're constantly being fired at.

And there is this just slight sense that he finds it a bit irritating, and it doesn't matter in terms of the public necessarily what they think.

But sometimes, you know, elite opinion form was within the press and elsewhere, the opposition starts to say, what's he afraid of?

Why isn't he willing to answer questions?

And you just don't want those sorts of narratives to come embedded.

All right, elite opinion form.

Well, I was, I was, I was looking at you.

Oh, no, you're not going to get away with that one.

No, no, no.

I think we're going to vanish.

Yeah, no more questions for us.

No more questions.

No more answers either.

Until tomorrow.

Until tomorrow.

Bye.

Bye-bye.