

Robert Fox | Hope for a Troubled World

– Right, good evening from London, if you are with me, and I'm ready to start. I'm trying to give a note of optimism, "Finding the Good in This Troubled World," as you can see from the title, but I think, really, we're going through an Indian summer of old politics, and I think there's a lot that's extremely interesting and will take time to reveal to come. And I'm going to try and lift the curtain on that. I'll just sort of set up by explaining where we are, because I don't think it's confined necessarily to one continent, but in particular in Europe, we are seeing really significant, subtle, and what may lead to momentous political changes.

The change of the prime ministership in the U.K. is not just a question of moving the chairs on the decks of the Titanics of the Tory party because the Tory party, I think, is having problems in connecting with the rest of the country. I think equally illustrative, but in any, and in some respects, seemingly more niche, but a much larger political figure is Italy, and they're getting rid of Mario Draghi for very narrow political reasons, which I think even the Italian public is beginning to say in public opinion "they're going to regret," but it's a failure, another failure, of a political system. And we can see what is happening in France and Germany. And we have already seen really quite a significant change, a change away to something different, more consensual, more collegiate, more international, in terms of agreement in Australia with Albanese coming in. There are big changes coming as we can see with climate. We know about climate. It's been playing in the background. There are the troubles in the U.K. There are troubles with the legislation in America. But what I really think we're getting now, the accumulation of events, which is beginning to lead to an accumulated climate shock, the shock therapy, which will get people really to do something. There are loud enough voices now saying, "It is simply not good enough to have COP26 last year "and to have come to all these conclusions about "zero emissions and trying to keep "the mean temperature above industrial levels "to a certain level." That is quite clearly up for grabs and people, and that needs to be connected with it. And going in and out of this is the energy and food crisis. And this is why, as we have said with the crisis of grains from Ukraine, but also from Russia, from serials there, that this is not isolated to one continent or one continental bloc, as we now see. It is very, very badly affecting the North-South dialogue with the more deprived nations of the South. And we do have the driver of the Ukrainian War, which it seems in a point of stasis, is that Russia is not really gaining what stated objectives we can understand from Moscow, and although it is battered and suffering very badly, the Ukraine of Vladimir Zelenskyy, and that's what we must talk about, the Ukraine of that regime is not yet in a mood to surrender or to disappear. And I think that how this plays in the next six weeks is going to be of really unexpected

consequences.

So, let's start at the top, and let's talk about the mini-earthquake in British politics. Just a small size seismic shift. Boris Johnson, his party, or rather his government, got fed up with him, and now we have buyers' regret that some people say that they want this rather extraordinary figure to stay on. And meanwhile, the party, a very narrow electorate and of quite a large country, 160,000 people out of a country of a population of nearly 66 million or more is deciding who their next leader should be. We'll unpack that. This is not a choice for Parliament. It's not a choice for any of the rest of us. It's a choice for the membership of the particular party, which the ex-prime minister and the new prime minister will lead. It is the conservative unionist party whose members vote, and it is a small and very ageing population. It leads to the question, is this really the right way of going about things? And furthermore, is the system broken? I think Boris Johnson is a fascinating case study because he is an extreme example of the rather eccentric, exceptional personality in politics, and history is littered with them, but his behaviours are quite extraordinary. A marvellous performer, public performer, jokey. This is really what his persona is, what he is in public, and in private. It's how he performed as a university politician, as a columnist, as the mayor of London. Very successful when he delivered the Olympics in London in 2012, but he is that most extraordinary of paradoxes. Boris Johnson is the supreme gregarious loner. He has very, very few real friends. He has supporters who are generally supporters of convenience, and he has very tangled relations with wives, mistresses, children, and so on. But he, even with potential successes to him debating across the airwaves and filling the newspapers as whether they're fit to be the prime minister of Great Britain, Boris is still a dominant figure. Boris, we have to understand, which is central to where the U.K. is at the moment made his progress in national politics with Brexit, with the whole idea of getting Britain out of the EU. Neither he, who was for it, nor those who were against, excuse me, fully understood what the consequences and the implications of this were. But it was really a slogan for him. So you have to ask yourself the question, did Brexit exist for Boris? Sorry, or did Boris exist for Brexit? Sorry, I'm going to have to take a thing. It's full of pollen, London today. Too much information. And Brexit drives this terrible mess of policies about citizenship, who is entitled to be a citizen, and migration and refugees and asylum-seeking, which has really driven U.K. to becoming increasingly extreme in its rejection of international customs and norms. Like saying, "We will get out of the "conventional human rights," which is a founding principal of the UN, or "We will ignore the European Court of Human Rights," which says, that plans to reject asylum-seekers and ship them off to Rwanda, would you believe it, are against the spirit and the letter of agreed international law. And Brexit brings problems. It's got enormous problems over trade and political deals with Ireland, North and South, which could be even more trouble. But the thing that is undeniable is

that it has cost a lot more than anyone realised in the first place. The bill for splitting from Europe and Europe's institutions is going up towards 50 billion pounds, which is enormous, and it has cut the wealth of the country by expected output over the next 10 years by 10%. So what has he left us with. Boris was leader of the conservative and unionist party, prime minister of the United Kingdom and the Kingdom, at the end of his three years compared with where it was at the beginning, looks much less united. So we have not only got a political crisis, but I suspect that he has left us with an enormous institutional crisis. Really, parliamentary politics and government out of parliamentary politics doesn't really work. The conservative party, which he is now going to hand over the leadership of, although I have just read 10 minutes before I came on here, that "he gets more like Trump by the day," he is hoping for a write-in vote by a majority of those 160,000 members of the conservative party saying, "Oh, we want you to stay after all." It has been a successful, moderate, central, and not particularly grudgingly, on the whole, reforming party. I'm talking about the Conservative Party, which has been around for more than 200 years, and a lot of that in power. The clever trick has always been, is not to be seen to be reforming, but common sense and the needs of the times tell us that we've got to reform. This was particularly in the case of two great prime ministers who've left their names all over history in the 19th century: Robert Peel, who had such trouble over free trade in the Corn laws, but actually gave Britain and the world the first modern police service, the Peelers; and Benjamin Disraeli, again, a maverick performer, wonderful speaker, clever and charmed Queen Victoria, seemed to be the prime minister for Imperial Britain, and yet, underneath that, despite all the trouble, there was a lot of social reform about regulating hours in factories. We were still in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution but actually delivered a great deal, and then after the first World War, and remember, the first World War was not run by a British government headed by a conservative nor labour, which was just emerging at the time, but it was the liberals of Herbert Asquith and then David Lloyd George, another maverick, very, very strange figure, not unlike Boris Johnson, again, particularly in his private life. And then you had steadying the boat through the 20s and 30s with Stanley Baldwin, who's had a brilliant cousin as his propagandist known as Rudyard Kipling, who won the Nobel Prize, indeed, for literature. And then, through the terrible years of the Depression of the 20s and 30s, then you come up to Neville Chamberlain and the Chamberlains had dominated running the Conservative Party. And then, we get a complete maverick, who had been in politics for 40 years by that time, Winston Churchill. And Winston Churchill is much admired by Boris Johnson. Indeed, he's written a short biography of Churchill, and he identifies with him, a bit of a toff, a way with languages, a tremendous public performer, but in many, many ways, so many ways, they couldn't be more different, Boris Johnson and Winston Churchill. For a start, to be quite plain, Winston Spencer Churchill was a genuine aristocrat of a genuine aristocratic background. His uncle, Frederick, he was a young nephew of him. Lord

John Russell had been prime minister and a reforming prime minister. His great ancestor was John Churchill, DU.K.e of Marlborough, probably the most successful British general in the history of British arms because, and Winston had a bit of this in him. He was a brilliant soldier, but also a brilliant diplomat. And Churchill much enjoyed his years in opposition, writing a first rate biography of Marlborough.

But the great thing about Churchill, which is so different, and we're forgetting, and there is no comparison with Johnson. Flawed though it was, as we now know it, he has huge admirers in the United States like Eliot Cohen and so on, David Petraeus. He had a brilliant strategic brain. He could see what parts were moving. He actually knew history. He knew Britain was in decline as he dragged it through to survive the second World War. He knew what the power of Stalin was, and he knew, above all, he needed FDR, and he handled that very difficult relationship, absolutely brilliant. He was a loner like Boris, but he was also very empathic. He had lifelong loyalties, truly lifelong loyalties, people that he met as a very young man, as a young soldier, and he always stuck with them and was very, very fond of them and stuck by them. And the genius in the second World War was that Churchill was his defence minister, and he ran the war, and he had as his number two, his opposite number, the leader of the opposition, Clement Attlee, who everybody said, "Churchill ran the war," actually ran the country, and actually became a great prime minister for social reform and so on, the National Health Service. But here's a fascinating thing. Somebody was very insulting about Attlee in front of Churchill. And Churchill loved Attlee. He admired him. He was absolutely opposite. He teased him; he made terrible jokes about him. But Attlee had fought through the war and through very difficult campaigns, and Churchill nearly always referred to him as Major Attlee, and it was not disrespect. And somebody said, "Oh," that "Attlee is very bad "for the country" when he was running the coalition. And Churchill turned to this conservative MP and said, "Major Attlee is a great patriot, "and you will never speak to me like that again." That is the mark of the man. The great spring for Boris is, as I said, the performer, and he campaigned. He could not run a sweet shop. I've been on the same newspaper as him, and I know how his mind, clever mind, wanders all over the place. But he has very quick instincts, and interestingly, he saw almost quicker than any of the other European leaders how once Ukraine was in trouble, once the worst case scenario had been arrived at, which many intelligence operatives right across the piece, and it's the close cooperation in Ukraine between the U.K., the US, Germany interestingly, and France that, on balance, they had been told particularly by the continental colleagues, "Oh, he'll never attack "the Americans." And the Brits very quickly, by Christmas last year, had worked out that this was real, real trouble. Once it happened, Boris knew he had to go to see Zelenskyy. They had to get in to see Zelenskyy, whatever, to make it absolutely clear to Putin that the core of Europe and the US and Biden was with this, particularly Antony Blinken and Jake Sullivan, that

they were going to back it. Now, that is sheer instinct of Boris, and he did it very well. It was partly for show, and it was the showman that has delivered him success and brought disaster to him. He won, and once he got leadership of the party, he won a stunning victory, which nobody expected, an 80-seat majority in the House of Commons in the general election of 2019. But then, he's one of the figures, an absolutely contemporary figure, in that he dissipates his talents. You really need to grip Boris, 'cause I can remember when we were working together, if he trusted you, you could give him a look, and he'd say, "You don't agree with me, do you?" And I'd say, "No," for the following reasons. Why do you know all this details? Not a detailed man. And I just don't think he had enough consiglieri. He had enough people around him to say, "Now, Boris, what do you really know?" They didn't really play to his weaknesses. His weaknesses are that he doesn't do his homework. He doesn't read his briefing papers. He is not like Barack Obama or Jimmy Carter, who were particularly good at this kind of stuff. He didn't have the flair of knowing how much he had to brief himself as Tony Blair, for example, another great performer politician who could command a great following. And there was a curiosity about him, but he was a great public performer. He was a very bad debater. Churchill was a great parliamentary performer, and Churchill was a truly great orator, you know, that, as I said, in the War, his great, his only, ally, his great asset, was the English language, and he treated it like a lion. And he set the language to fight his cause. Boris is not very good at that. He's very good at the jokes. He's the perpetual dinner party speaker. But he's not very good, actually, at turning ideas around. He's very good at making jokes, at putting people down. And so, we come to the fall and the legacy, and it's, which I think is really terribly important and reverberates way beyond it. He had a muddled private life, chaotic private life, indeed. And that's part of his loneliness, you know, but he's not got life partners, I'm sorry to say. I knew his second wife quite well at one point. And she was very good for him. Unfortunately, he only realised it too late. And it was very interesting how he handled COVID. In a way, it was Trump-like. It was sort of blustery. "I'm not going to be brought down this thing." And then he caught it, and it nearly killed him, and he shut the nation down. But what is so silly, and it's the schoolboy in Boris, which believes there's always something out there, there's another world, we could all have fun. Yes, everybody's shutting down, but everybody's working so hard. In my office here in Downing Street, it was wall-to-wall parties. I thought it was just one or two. No, it wasn't. It was about 20 or 30 different parties every Friday night. How could you do that? Have 30 or 40 people in a room with cake and cheese and a lot of wine and expect your country, and he didn't equate this with it, to follow you? People who are not allowed to visit their dying relatives in care homes that had COVID, that they had to shut themselves up. They had to isolate themselves for weeks. And this was one of the things that really did for him because he denied, first of all, that this was really going on and was found out. And the problem was that he was too loose with the

kinds of people that he hired. There were one or two misdemeanours, really rather unpleasant with staff, and he denied that he knew about it. And you had very serious public officials say, "No. "Yes, he really did know about it." And in a way, that to this day, Boris Johnson simply does not understand that his senior ministers got fed up with going out and saying, "No, he didn't know about this." And realising, and it dawned on them quite slowly, that they had been lied to, and they were telling lies, and that this is a thing that still hangs over his head, that he could lose his seat in Parliament and have to fight for it again if he wants to because it's quite a serious charge that he seems to have lied in a statement from the Prime Minister's despatch box about what was going on with COVID restrictions and his private arrangements in his own house to Parliament. And, he doesn't really see why that should undo him. We've come across it elsewhere, and it's very prominent with Trump, I have to say, is that they do see themselves as licenced transgressors. They like bending the rules, whatever, they think that their role in life is a disruptor. But there's something slightly more about this is that he becomes a transgressor. This is why what he left, what he started out, he had a huge majority. He was in power for five years, longer than an American president. In 2019, he'd got such a solid majority, he was going to make the poor in the North better off with new welfare programmes. He was going to have brand new trade agreements. He was going to take Britain away from Europe. He hated Europe. He'd been educated in Europe. His father had been a European bureaucrat, had all this red tape and restrictions and trade, its nonsense. We're going to be the new magic global Britain. And in a sort of strange pantomime way, he believed in it. But none of this has been done. He has left a legacy of a country which is under desperate pressure, part of which can be laid at his door. Part of those pressures, of course, have got nothing to do with him. Wherever we are, whatever we say, whoever we declare that we're not in favour of or whose rules we say we won't obey, like the Convention on Human Rights or the laws of the EU, the laws of economics, the laws of climate, the laws of trade, the laws of supply and demand and the complexity of the politics, of the energy markets are going to hit you, and they are going to hit you in a very big way. Equally, although it was intelligent the way that they borrowed, the exchequer, that is the treasury, but bought Britain temporarily out of the worst of the restrictions of COVID, it has left huge pressure with debt. The debt is there. How you handle it is now a major issue and goes well beyond the current leadership dispute. And I think it's going to bedevil British politics for at least another 10 years to come. It's always going to be there and how you handle it. Now, how Boris handled it was, "Well, you know, "we borrowed so much up to now, "why don't we borrow a bit more so we can "get our way out of this," whether it is subsidising military loans and training for Ukraine or for giving extra social allowances to the people on the poverty line. He thought he could do it without raising taxes. Britain is highly taxed, but not as highly taxed as a lot of European neighbours, and we're stuck with taxes.

And I think you can see where I'm going now, but just I have to add as a note that last month the borrowing, the borrowing requirement of the public debt, required a payment of nearly 20 billion pounds, which is a very big lump from the national budget, the national Exchequer. I think that you could see that the political debate is, it is of necessity but rather narrowly, and it will happen in the United States. I suspect it's going to happen in more parts of Europe than they realise, where the argument is going to be about taxation and lending and what the state will do. The most articulate version of this, although it is in a very bad state and probably the person who understood this best, and he's left the scene temporarily now, is Mario Draghi in Italy, one of the most experienced global bankers that there is, but really does understand what is going on and what you can do and what you can't do. There are two other parts of the legacy of Boris Johnson. One is being independent of Europe, which it was his dream with Brexit, which has been now taken to an absurd degree because, in order to inherit his mantle and to be the next Conservative Party Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Great Britain, and Northern Ireland, you now have to be hostile to Europe. It's not, "We're out. "We don't accept your regulations on most things, "but we can cooperate." What has happened now, which is I find so peculiar, is an outright Europhobia. It's very narrow. It's very impoverished intellectually. To put it at its highest, it's extremely philistine because it's sort of projecting an idea that Britain or British history and British political, social, cultural development has nothing to do with Europe at all. It's complete nonsense, and it's the most, it's xenophobia, chauvinism, it's hatred of foreigners, which is actually causing a lot of damage 'cause it's disappointing expectations. It's not a solution for anything, and coupled to the Europhobia is this toxic argument about migration. Yes, there have been pressures of migration. There have been problems. One of the biggest arguments, the Populist arguments against Brexit, was the free movement of labour and citizenry allowed by membership of the EU, from which, may I say, from my point of view, looking at it economically, Britain was wholly benefited. It was wholly beneficial because the contribution of the European presence in labour, in culture, and investment was, by any calculation, on the positive side of the balance sheet. But now, they've got themselves into an extraordinary convulsion about this that's been a lot of pressure with refugees, mostly Afghan, Asian, Syrians, Iraqi, I'm just thinking from the Gulf and Pakistan coming across the Channel to make an illegal entry, and it's can be up to 15,000 a week; it's still not a huge figure. It's still not quite of the scale or far from it of the crossings from Africa to get into the EU via Italy or Spain, but particularly Italy and Greece from the East Mediterranean. But they've got themselves into a real shouting match. A lot must be done about whether they want to put more money, they want to put patrols, about denying asylum-seekers, rights and hearings. 'Cause you fail at the first hearing, you don't appeal, you get shipped off, in theory, to Rwanda because

the British government under Johnson has paid Rwanda 120 million pounds. Rwanda has said maximum, maximum on that money can only take 400. Rwanda has, in the past, entered into such a scheme with Israel. Wanting to reject would be immigrants, sending them to Rwanda. It failed completely. Those that did arrive ran away, and the scheme had to be closed. But this story, particularly Rwanda, is now what is known as, with migration as a whole, with Brexit. It with lower taxes, with reduce the size of the state, what is known as a dog whistle issue to the Tory-faithful. Dog whistle, high pitch, the dogs can hear it, we can't. The dogs of the Tory-faithful, the Conservative-faithful, hear the pitch. That's it. And they will make sure we get it back into power. I have to go on with this a little bit because I've been looking at all the latest opinion polls. The opinion polls are nudging well over 50% that they think, on the whole, given the results so far, that Brexit was a very bad idea. It's quite healthy. It's not that it's 51-49. It's 51-38, and those that approve of Brexit are going down. And yet the Brexiteers, the Conservatives, insist that was a one-off vote, which settles us for all time. I know we can't go in and rejoin again, but this is unprecedented in British constitutional practise because the whole point of Parliamentary law is that you can revise it. A particular Parliament or government can pass a law, and it is the law of the land, but it does not bind future generations, future governments and future Parliaments. But there again, this rather strange Populist government seems to think that shouldn't be so now. So the the trouble is, as I was saying, the dog whistle issue, which just to repeat again, on asylum, and Europe is putting them into extreme positions, and it has now, which is very untypical for the old Conservative Party, become a mainstream issue for the party. It will have to be there in their next manifesto. The next general election, sadly, is not due until the end of 2024. I'm pretty sure we'll have an election with the new prime minister within a year, sometime in the autumn of next year. But it's there, and it's a rather ugly presence. There's another strange dog whistle area, category, and it's going to run in and out of my talk, of course, because of where we are and think what's happening in California, Australia, and in Europe is the very, very ambivalent divided approach of the Conservative government and party towards climate change. It has been rather consistently plagued down by the Conservative government. We've had a whacking-great heat wave, very big temperatures, record temperatures for the U.K., 40 degrees Celsius.

What has been unpleasant about it is the unmoving air. We have had these phenomena, which you've all experienced in your different continents of this heat dome, of the trapping of atmosphere, the absence of precipitation, and we haven't had rain for two or three weeks now, and we're not going to have rain here in London for another two weeks. Now, the Conservative Party and government's approach, first of all, it embraced having to do something about carbon fuel emissions, zero emission by 2050 in the COP, the UN climate change protocols from Paris in 2015-2016, all the way through. But there's

another part which says that this is all exaggerated, and if those of you who can follow these things, so I said, "That sounds "terribly condescending, but I don't mean to be," with you are different countries, but try and get the lead article in the current "Spectator" magazine because "The Spectator" magazine, it's very interesting. It really is the notice board of the Conservative not necessarily Party but the Conservative government. It has an extraordinary assertion that Britain is very well prepared for the consequences of climate shift, these terrible changes in temperature, including freak floods, but also the heat. We are all beautifully prepared. It's an absolute fantasy. It's absolute nonsense, you know. This climate change largely is a convenient myth to help greater public expenditure and ownership by the Socialist opposition. Where else have we been hearing that kind of thing? The Conservative Party has slightly shifted in that they have moved from a position, this is a cultural thing, very, very, really fascinating, they've moved from a position of outright denial, and up till a few years ago, they were ferocious. They would attack the BBC, who would put on some reasonable climate scientist or a famous ecological naturalist like Sir David Attenborough, and they would insist that a climate denial was put against him or her. That has now been dropped. The BBC told me that "they now can put on "any thoroughgoing climate scientist to say, "this is what the research says to us. "This is what our forward projections set," whether it's with weights, ice shelf is enormous significant in Antarctica, what's happening with Greenland sea ice, and so on. That is a change for conservative opinion, and it's not much shared in Europe. And now why should Europe take any notice of them because they have no clout, the Conservative Party in Europe. They're fighting a rearguard action. And, unfortunately, the climate debate still seems to have some theocratic overload. The thing that the Conservative Party, Conservative government do, and it's not unique to them, but it is a very important tendency, which is a theme of this talk, is that it has to live by denial. It doesn't believe in the kind of generally agreed consensus. Having an unwritten constitution, Britain absolutely depends on consensus, on trust, that he may be the opposition, but he or she is a very good person, and they're doing a lot of this in good faith. The accusation, and this is part of the toxicity of Boris's tradition 'cause Boris is like this, he loves insulting people. He's a playpen tyrant. He's the loud mouth in the schoolroom, and it is this denial, it is this unwillingness to see goodwill in anybody or anything outside your tribe, which is quite worrying. Very reasonable, former Conservative MP is a columnist in "The Times" of London called Matthew Parris. I was shocked to read a column with him saying, "How do we mitigate, how do we get social resilience "for old people, et cetera, who are vulnerable "against the worst excesses of climate change," heat and so on. He just said, "No, enough of the nanny state." Well, frankly, COVID has shown that the voluntary and the private services, the NGOs, are not up to doing that. In a complex and ageing society, you've got to have, as I've suggested before, a mix of the private and public agencies. They do not encourage the goodwill

behind that. Since we're looking for a new prime minister, it's interesting to consider the way the campaign is run by six hopeful MPs, but they're not asking the fundamental question because they're cut down the middle. You feel that they are wanting to be shown. If you look at their heart, I am a more orthodox, new conservative than my opponent. They're not asking what for me is the obvious question in these very difficult times, is Britain workable? Because there is a great feeling out there that it isn't. The question now left behind by Boris is, has he bent Britain out of shape and beyond repair? Two candidates. Rishi Sunak, who is a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, in other words, Treasurer; of Asian heritage; very smooth; scholarship to one of the top private schools, Winchester; a banker, and he thinks like a banker, but he really does understand the numbers. He focuses on tax and inflation now heading from 10% towards 12% by November, which is really very, very difficult for the U.K., given U.K.'s indebtedness. So, where do we go? Do you go up or down? His opponent, whom we'll come to, Liz Truss, believes that you can still go on borrowing, which will just fuel inflation. Sunak, who is not liked by his party, I suspect they're extremely racist, by and large 160,000, they're middle-aged, they're mostly male, and they are almost entirely white that he is not expected to win. But his opponent, Liz Truss, who is now currently the Foreign Secretary, the Foreign Minister is expected to win. A very interesting, rather strange lady of very mixed origins in that she claims to have been impoverished. Her father was actually a professor of mathematics at university. She went to a good local school; she went to Oxford. She was a Liberal, she was pro-Brexit and voted for Europe in the referendum, and now is doing a hasty makeover job, is modelling herself on Margaret Thatcher, as an ultra-nationalist, hard on migration, anti-European, cut taxes, and hoping to mitigate cost of living crisis that way. Is a supporter of Ukraine. She's a very, very strange person in that she doesn't seem to realise that Margaret Thatcher was one of the great architects of the European Union single market, that she would not have gone about it this way. She was extremely pragmatic. She had a will of iron, but actually did listen to opponents. And her whole approach to Europe was far more nuanced. We have to focus on Liz Truss because she is very likely going to be the Prime Minister of the U.K., or on September the fifth. I think she's got an appalling problem. We'll be giving her the mistrust by her own party in Parliament. She has to command Parliament, and through Parliament, she has to command the nation, and she will be the creature of a very, very small membership, 140,000 people, 100, 120,000 people, and two or three, quite extreme by now, newspapers, "The Daily Telegraph" and "The Daily Mail." She will be very isolated. She has, that I can recognise, no international allies. I don't think she's got chums on the continent of Europe. And oddly, I cannot see any resonance, respect, or understanding, or even relationship in the Republican camp in the U.S., which would be a natural, a constituency. This is going to be extremely difficult for the isolated U.K. because it means, then, she is going to find it very hard with these rather strange populous policies to cultivate the

confidence of organisations like the IMF, OECD, World Bank, and NATO. She will have a problem, capital letters, of credibility at home and abroad. And finishing this one, which will be fascinating, so unlike the United States, she will have the problem of the, sorry, I seem to have done something strange. Are you still with me? Can you hear me?

– Yep, still good, Robert.

– [Robert Fox] Hello, yeah, my screen has done something weird. She will have the problem of the ghost of Christmas past in the shape of Boris Johnson, in that Boris Johnson is doing the full Trump. He is not going away. He doesn't believe he should be chucked out. He loves the public stage and is going around peddling tremendous number of betrayal myths. He was betrayed by snakes in his own party, snakes in his own government, which is your full Boris, but what is most dangerous is he is saying he was betrayed by the public service, the civil service. And that is dangerous. Beyond Boris. She will have to deal with ailing economy, social pressures, wall-to-wall strikes, travel, trade, Northern Ireland, and confidence in the system. And on top of that, there is the distraction of migration. Britain is going to have to, with the principle Europeans, have to put more into keeping the defence of Ukraine going. She has got Scotland where there is a new demand for an independence referendum, and whatever they say now, I think they're going to find it very, very difficult not to grant that. And the climate will get worse. I think she will find it difficult to keep the party and government united, let alone the country. And I think that, therefore, as I was explaining, I think that she will be forced to go for a general election. She will not react well to the constant sniping of the opposition. Now, that is the end of Britain, which I've indulged myself in, but it's so good because it is a breaking system. And let's see what the resonances are and what is going on in the United States with the ailing Biden Administration, the midterms, echoes of the crisis in Europe, credibility in and effectiveness of representation and niche interests. Look what's happening from West Virginia prevailing. This is quite apart, I think, from the individual problems, which fascinate me from where I come from as a journalist and as a historian. With Biden himself, I'm fascinated, should I add by delusion, in high office where people cannot confront the obvious, and in Biden's case is how badly he has provided for his succession, which I think will prove fatal for him. And this is an outsider, and forgive me for just sticking in, he looks to me extremely isolated. He looks to me fatigued. He's just had COVID, which worries me, and two, just under two weeks ago, I had COVID, which went away in three or four days. But what it does lead to, and my friend, Dr. Vanya Gant at the University College Hospital, who is a leader in this, says that "you have to be aware of the long-term effects of all kinds, "not just the particular variant of COVID "in terms of fatigue." I wonder whether we are going to see that in Biden. From a distance, as I said, it says to me, I would consider it, but you know, when people in office get completely

pumped up by the adrenaline of power, this man looks in no way fit to run for 2024, which leaves you with a problem, which is a question of succession.

Now, forgive me for repeating myself and being a crass boor. A great friend of mine, very maverick, but very successful U.K. military commander, very witty, very all round, quite on military in some ways, by the way, he was the commander of the UN that led to the end of the siege of Sarajevo, all credit to him, Rupert Smith. Said whenever you were taking over a command in the army, like a battalion or a company, one of the first questions, two questions you had to ask yourself was, "Who is going to succeed me? "How can I shape my succession? "Because if you will shape your succession, you can work out what the legacy is going to be "that you want to give him or her that's taking over." And I think that's a very, very good rule of thumb. But look what's going on round Biden. I mean, there's the failure, which I don't understand, excuse me, and perhaps you can enlighten me. There's the failure, certainly for me, of credibility of Kamala Harris. But where, there should be these supporters, not just the officers of his cabinet like Blinken and Jake Sullivan. Who are going to stand in there? I mean these sort of great figures, I mean, you may disagree with me, but with George Bush. Sr., that at least he did have Jim Bakker, and Jim Bakker, to me, quite often sounded like a president-in-waiting. And he sounded actually more, on foreign affairs, more authoritative and farsighted than the president himself. But it's that kind of figure that I'm looking for. I mean, even John Kerry, whenever you think about him, when he's talking about climate change, he's taken the brief seriously, actually sounds more authoritative. So gosh, I mean I do think we have a problem of succession there, and I think it is a prime task for the democrats, who I feel sure, the way the dice are rolling now, is sure to do badly in the midterm election, but that they must find a candidate that can unite the party because this is where I do draw a line between Washington and London. There is a crisis, a palpable crisis of governance. Gosh, I mean, that's a fancy way of saying, "Look, it doesn't work." These systems that have served us so well for centuries since 1776 and so, and so on, the way they're conceived on bipartisan rivalry, which gets narrower and narrower, it's just not working for the common good. Not an expression that one generally hears a lot these days. Biden has got to produce a candidate that will provide unity. Abraham Lincoln, bind up the nation's wounds. But reflecting on this, I was reading a very good article by a great commentator on American Bred but very fine, very good on the crash of 2008 called Adam Tooze, T-O-O-Z-E, Zed-E. And he's written a very interesting thing in the "New Statesman" in the U.K., and if you can't get it, these articles should be available online, and it's about Biden failure. And Biden has failed for discrete particular reasons. But what Adam points out is that, actually, very few, almost none of the last four presidents have managed to succeed fully in signature legislative programmes. Look how Obama had to pull back on Medicare, on the social Medicare programme. Look how Trump, Trump succeeded in

one thing. He succeeded in cutting taxes, but for all his shrillness of making America greater again, the logic wasn't there. He actually did do one or two things really successfully in foreign policy. He did get the Europeans to pay more for the collective defence budget in NATO. And he did make some sensible initial moves with China because nobody had been, at least of all Europe, had been confronting China nearly enough. And one of the worst was the U.K. at that time. But again, there has been no continuity. There has been no continuity legacy. And, you know, there we have the collective failure of Biden now, the zero emission target, carbon capture, renewables, the peculiar position of Joe mentioned in West Virginia, a Congress partly Biden's fault, partly not but is completely, completely stuck. The climate and tax package is scuppered, so it won't come again, I think, for another six years because we'll have possibly a zombie presidency after the midterm elections, and then probably, I think almost certainly, particularly if Biden goes on in the way that he is and not making up his mind or not stating, and he should state sometime next year that he will not stand. People will say they could see the power draining away from him, but he would then come up with a minimalist programme because the zombie presidency is now a real worry. The one thing that I think he has been consistent on, and it's going to be very difficult to deny his legacy is on Ukraine. And I think from what he has said, and it's quite difficult to discern, and if that's not a snare, that oddly, and it's a paradox, Trump comes out really quite well from this because, despite all the bluster, all the stuff with Manafort and so on, and his strange dealings in Russia and his declared admiration of Putin, I get the feeling, and there is some evidence that Trump always knew that Ukraine would be trouble because there is a story going about that when Kushner was travelling in the Middle East, and Mike Pompeo was on the road, by the way, he's beginning, isn't he? The slimmed down Mike Pompeo to look as a possible candidate for 2024. That Putin was more or less saying, "Do you want to trade off? "You want to stick it out in Syria? "Syria or Ukraine, which are you going to go for? And the freedom of Ukraine, the Trump administration privately was always very strong about, and I think that that's really interesting that I think that the Lease-Lend programme, the 44 very generous billion dollar, but it is Lease-Lend to Kyiv, was sensible plus the top-ups, but the top-ups will have to continue for what I'm going to explain in the concluding part of this talk, and I think that America, across the floor on Capitol Hill, understands this almost better than Europe does. I think that Biden also should be taken, if you are looking at it from a democrat point of view, is that, oh boy, you know, approaching my 77th birthday in just over a month, they have got a colossal age problem to have the shakers, movers, and the grandees, Nancy Pelosi 82, Bernie Sanders 80, on the left wing, Elizabeth Warren.

Where are the new generation? Where are the successors? They're obviously not gathering them in or taking them into trust; you may say that I'm wrong about this, and I'm not an expert on American politics,

but again, succession politics, it bedevils us all because what we have got, and it's right in the middle of French, to an extent German but to a lesser degree, less than anything I'd put, French, British. Italian politics is extreme narcissism of leaders, individually and collectively, who've largely failed. I quickly want to go through the republican side and Trump, because I think that this is where I can close off the circle of my argument on this. Of course, the republicans gained from Biden's ampers. Now, the interesting thing is going to be the Trump factor in the midterms, and I'm not going to do an immediate reveal like a conjurer on this. The question about Trump is, is he going to announce for 2024 before the midterms or after? And you may rightly ask me what is he going to announce? Does his narcissism help or hinder? It's a mixed verdict. You look how DeSantis has done very well by not talking about Trump, but by talking about issues, about other things that are really going to affect the slate, not only for midterm elections, but, particularly, for the next presidential run. Trump has an enormous fighting fund; he has acres of good and bad publicity. But the details of the January the sixth, whether it's a kangaroo court and it is very slanted, one must say, it is almost beside the point. I think it is the details. It is the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers. It's this kind of company, this idea with Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell of power at all costs. The central problem of Trump is Trump, and similarly, the central problem of Boris Johnson is Boris. When they become the issue themselves, Boris the martyr, Trump the cheated, Trump the victim of the great steal, it impedes all other business. And this they have in common very, very strongly so, and I think that it's a declining asset. I think that it could affect the midterms. I think it could decide that Trump, if he even he wants to stand will get, not get, the nomination in 2023. And the problem with the Tories for the incoming Prime Minister, likely to be Liz Truss, they must not allow Boris to obscure all other business which needs to be done. The general conclusion is this. The U.K. and the U.S. are in a very similar dilemma. It's a political culture based on partisan representation for the most part, although there've been in and outs, Irish parties, labour party, liberal parties, and so on, it's been bipartisan the way the system of government representation has been worked leading into a government, and has been based on consensus, on judicial and constitutional values. But, of course, there are great differences. One is a monarchy, one has an unwritten constitution, but the norms, the practises, the practise of jury trial are absolutely the same, and the assumptions, therefore, are the same. This is not working because there is no consensus, there is no trust. It's not that they are the opposition, the loyal opposition, and must have their say. They are the enemy, and they are factious, and they're malicious and they're badly motivated. They must be excluded. We must find ways of diminishing them, gerrymandering, constituency or electoral boundaries or not giving them time to debate, or offices, things as childish as that in the House of Commons. And this is where we are in a very interesting anniversary year. 1922. This was where we had the end of the liberal monarchy in Italy because anybody else was

the enemy, and from a minority position, Mussolini's fascism still purported to be a parliamentary phenomenon, but it managed to exclude opposition in a rather sinister way. They had a thing called the legge truffa or the trick law. So the winner in Parliament got an extra third of seats, the total seats in the House, particularly in the lower house. And then it got even worse because always with Mussolini there were the squadre and the squadristi, the violence, and went around murdering opponents like the great socialist leader, Giacomo Matteotti, in 1924. Very, very important. But this is where a toxic culture can lead you because people will misread it, and you cannot have a culture of violence instead of one of consensus. There is a sense now, I think in both countries, but I'm certainly speaking of mine because I have laughed and joked about what happens in the Conservative Party. How a candidate member is nominated in a safe seat. It's an enormous representation. It's nearly 670 in the House of Commons, and nearly 1,000, over 800, in the House of Lords, who still have clout, who are appointed. The majority by the majority government of the day through the House of Commons, it is very, very unrepresented. It represents a minority of a minority. The fact is at a rather crucial and divisive moment in our history, a prime minister is being chosen by a constituency of about 160,000 of which he will garner the votes of about 90 to 100,000 is absolutely absurd. And it's the thing that we've chewed at again. In complex societies, I think that first pass the post. Electoral systems where the winner scoops all, and you have an electoral college or constituency, say 100 or up to 150, 200, sometimes as low as 60,000, and the outright winner by one vote takes everything is absurd. What do I propose? Yes, I do propose that we have to go to multi constituency, multi representation constituencies, as we have indeed in Northern Ireland, part of the British Constitution, where you have for one constituency, you have three or four members and you do it on a proportional basis. I think that doesn't necessarily solve our problem because it isn't only COVID, but it's the distress of the cost of living rises of, of particularly the cost of domestic fuel and food is, shows an inherent weakness in community reassurance, governance and representation. And I think something has to be done to mend the rather sclerotic system of local government. And one of the things that I noticed that came across pretty well was how Ireland really, when it was the Hibernian tiger, really took off with investment from the EU and really put in a lot of social reforms. Still quite controversial, but how they managed to get it through the iron grip of really very, very authoritarian party management by principally two parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, and their alliance with Rome, with the church, which was politically very, very present and now very, very much diminished and declined. How do you get round that if you want to have gay rights, things like that? Well, there was, again, an immigrant prime minister, gay, Leo Varadkar, an extremely interesting figure, and he did it by persuading the electorate to push their constituents through it, by having community forums, by having people's assemblies where they say, "By the way, "we're in Kill County, "and we'll have three or four

meetings there, "and we'll pass on to our member, you know, "our general conclusion," and in many cases, for social reform, you know, emancipating still needed in many ways, you know, access to certain parts of professions and so on for women that the pressure was tremendous. It's an object lesson because, I must say, being very interested and very fond of Ireland, but I'm very, very sad about what happened to Ireland after independence. They've got every right to be independent, but golly, what they had under those terrible militarised presidencies of people, like Eamon de Valera, was the next best thing to fascism light, and it's a big legacy for them to live down, and Leo Varadkar did a really good job. Of course, he's passed out of politics and now passed on. I am moving on, I'm on time, and we've talked about America.

We've talked about Boris. I do want to talk about Europe. Of course, I would talk about Italy 'cause I know Italy really quite well, and I know Mario Draghi a bit, which doesn't, shouldn't really prejudice my view. The collapse of the Draghi government is very serious for Europe, for European coherence and unity, and, particularly, with the political address to Ukraine that it is really ominous the way the government fell. Mario Draghi is an extremely successful banker, but he'd been in public service for much of his life. He'd been in the private sector, Goldman Sachs, but he'd, I think he'd been in the World Bank, but he certainly was president of the European Central Bank. He had been in the treasury as a senior administrator,, very successfully in difficult times in Italy. And he had been in the Bank of Italy, so public service is part of him. He just doesn't like running for office. And he came in in an emergency when Italy was in terrible trouble with debt and needed a coherent plan for a recovery fund from COVID, particularly to deal with 250 billion Euros, dollars, which mostly coming from the EU for recovery, which is what he set out to manage. But on the way he's established himself as one of the most articulate voices for Europe about Ukraine. He's surprisingly strong about what Putin is, where he's coming from, and what he thinks he is doing. He is wary of Italy's position, trapped by its huge dependency, second only to that of Germany on Russian gas. But his mission, stated from February last year, was the recovery from Italy, from COVID, and debt. And he was going to do wholesale social reforms, including improving the access to the marketplace and the workplace for women. It's still disgracefully, prejudiced by circumstance in Italy, reforming the judiciary to get them to operate quickly and more efficiently the dispensation of justice in which he was supported by the president, Sergio Mattarella, who played a very powerful role in that, and particularly, this absolute for a country which is the fastest ageing in Europe, it's quite shocking, but the thing that is absolutely so terrifying in Italy is the level of youth unemployment, the true unemployment of girls and boys under 20 to 25, and he really done quite a bit about it. But there were a lot of problems. Italy's debt is still huge, 150% GDP. Still worried by the way, Greece is going up to 185%, so expect trouble there again. But he had a five-

party coalition, which was supporting his programme. He brought in brilliant technocrats, the head of Vodafone and so on, and they were doing wonderful things. And he had the broad support of the Italian people because he said, "I'm here. "I'd like the government to run its full course, "which isn't until about February next year, "then you can vote on it." But why in the last few weeks did a party in his coalition of Populists, group called the Five Star, which was an anti-party party, but then got into government, behave really rather stupidly over all kinds of things, including the public incinerator through Rome and support for Ukraine. And said, "We are not going to support you, "not even for another three or four months more "just to get this phase through." And so other members of the coalition, particularly on the right, the group, very anti-immigration party, stridently served the party of the league, La Lega, formerly the League of the North under Matteo Salvini, decided, "Gosh, if they're going now, we'd better go. "We'd better pull out because, otherwise, "we'll miss our chance for "power." Public opinion is outraged at this sheer narcissistic opportunism by old political leaders. The problem is that there is a movement on the right where there is a not-so-old political leader who is really quite something for Europe. The movement to the right is really led by a lady called Giorgia Meloni. Giorgia Meloni is an raucous orator. She heads and founded a party in the 2014 called the Brothers of Italy. In the 2018 general election, it got just about 4% of the vote. In the opinion polls, it gets well over 20% of the vote, and it's the lead party, so we now have the prospect of an election on the 25th of September led by a three-party nationalist, anti-migrant, anti-EU, but not for pulling Italy out yet, and half of them are very critical about Ukraine. And the main thing is stopping the votes coming into Sicily, Pantelleria and Lampedusa in the south, which they have tried to do, and they cannot do it in the way that these leaders want, going alone. It does need a joint European effort, but this is something which has started a sympathetic vibration again because Meloni reads across to Marine Le Pen in France to the alternative for Deutschland in Germany to Vox, extremely strong Populists in Spain, to two Populist leaders who could just possibly command a majority in the Dutch Parliament, Thierry Baudet and Geert Wilders. They've been round a bit, and the very nationalist Democrats in Denmark, so that we are seeing this nationalist, personalised, anti-European politics to say nothing of Viktor Orban, who believes in nothing but the ethnic purity of the Hungarian-Magyar race. He's been causing trouble amongst the Hungarian minorities across Europe. So, Europe itself is divided and incoherent just at the time when it needs maximum coherence. Now, of course, in the background and the foreground, and it cannot be ignored, although some would try to ignore it, is the War in Ukraine now entering its six month.

And I'm going to give you an assessment, most of which you'll probably be familiar with, and you can come across in the public prints and your media, but there will be a kicker towards the end, a very important one, which means that this thing could be leading us into

changes of seismic influence in global politics, which is not generally recognised publicly. There are very good reasons why it isn't recognised publicly, but when it happens, it is going to potentially be quite difficult. Just to sum up, two things which were not a given when Russia invaded on the 24th of February. Russia has not achieved a major war objective. Yes, it is rolling through the Donbas. Yes, it has trashed Mariupol. Yes, it is causing trouble still with Kharkiv. Yes, it can pump rockets and cruise missiles with increasing inaccuracy into cities in the west of Ukraine and set wheat fields alight. But Ukraine is not defeated. Bear that in mind. Ukraine is not defeated. It has had defeats, it's had reverses, it is bleeding, but Ukraine is not defeated, and that is a major difficulty for Moscow and Putin and Putin and Moscow. Putin is still in charge. The gambler, is he going to double or quits, or is he going to close the play, fold, cash his chips and get what he's got? Could he negotiate a peace on favourable terms? Take the Donbas with its mines and some of its very rich farmlands and much of the Black Sea Coast, the complex, which seems to be the new trophy target, and Zaporizhzhya, which is the biggest nuclear power generation complex in the whole of Europe. Could Europe, the newly Populist Italy, Hungary, ugh, nobody takes too many notice, the divided councils in Germany, Turkey, Putin's new best friend as international broker and interlocutor, could they push for it? Could they push for a temporary deal to get enough gas and oil to get them beyond the October deadlines, October and December deadline for oil and gas? Could it happen? America, preoccupied with the domestic troubles, energy supply, the effects of climate change, the travails, the ups and downs, of the midterm elections, and Trump, and questions through Congress about further support, which has been assured up to now, but one of the big questions by the way, watch this, is in the Lease-Lend package, there is a provision there for air training, for training pilots. Could the U.S., by allied means, surplus stock, in say, the Netherlands or Scandinavia, be prepared to supply F-16s to Ukraine by looking the other way? Not clear. I think this is all unlikely that there will be a deal. The problem is that Ukraine won't do a deal for a start. It may not be decisive, but Ukraine is strengthening and surviving. And if you want to do the see-saw with its enormous numbers under arms, its enormous military strength, if you looked it on paper, and I did look at it on paper where things stood on the 24th of February, Russia, Ukraine, and its forces. you'd have said, "Ukrainian and its forces." An army of 120,000. An Air Force of just under 50,000. Russia, 140,000. 1,400 strike planes. You'd have said, "No chance. "The left hand, Ukraine." What we seen through skill, prowess, cunning, brilliant propaganda, is the scale has been going steadily like that. That there is not quite equivalent, no way, but in cunning, in ability, in adaptability, in dreadful circumstances because, after all, they're occupied, that Ukraine is still in the fight, which is quite worrying because what you have done, dot, dot, dot, dot, increasingly you're exposing the weakness of what was always Putin's strongest card, whether it's in Syria, whether it's in sub-Sahara

Africa, whether it's seeking brokerage with India, or even muscling, trying to muscle a bit with China, and it was his armed forces. The weakness in the order of battle, and how it is arranged, that is, the stacking of forces, is being exposed almost by the day and the week. There's another thing that has been exposed by this is how isolated Putin is. It's very rare that he goes outside the country. So he, on the 19th, he visits Tehran. He does want things from the Iranians. He wants help in getting his oil out and in manufacturing, processing the oil to get through to clients in the Middle East, not necessarily in the Middle East, but I mean, by that I mean Pakistan, possibly the Pacific and to China. But, of course, Iran is doing quite well, thank you. But Iran also wanted Russian expertise in getting the oil fields in Iran modernised. A very, very difficult bedfellow. And, of course, he had a small plastic shopping basket, Putin, to buy a few, and it could only have been a few dozen 'cause they just don't have that many more available. A few dozen Iranian drones of their best of which are copies of an American drone that they shot down in 2011 straying over from Afghanistan, so the Americans will know all about it. Get the picture? There's a bit of desperation about this, and the interesting thing is that, in his coalition, the Central Security Treaty Organisation, his pals there, like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus, are not actually, despite what L.U.K.ashenko said, they're not all that wild about sending their boys there. There is more to be said about the recruitment drive at the moment because it has gone critical. It's very interesting how they've sent Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister, to do the round of a traditional area of encouraging support and markets and so on in Africa, sent them to Africa, and Lavrov says, which we knew all along, and it isn't about Donbas or the Black Sea ports or Odesa. "The aim "of the special military operation," in other words, the war, "is regime change in Kyiv," to destroy the regime in Kyiv. Please hang onto that because that is the critical point, and it's, if he's not careful, the point on which, within six months, Putin is going to break his military credibility, and if that goes, he very possibly could go, and the cohesion of Russia could go, but I would need need to walk you through a few stages of the argument before we get to that. The attrition on both sides has been terrible, and my amazing friend, Shashank Joshi, do follow him wherever you can, does these compilations, and he's just done one which has come up just four hours ago on "The Economist" website. It's available there. Do find it. He tries to calculate what the losses are and uses all kinds of information from the intelligence agencies such that they will give him, and they're very, very reticent in Ukraine.

But above all, it's U.K., U.S., Germans have been, I think, quite helpful. He's sticking to the number given to by the Defence Minister, Defence Secretary, U.K., Ben Wallace, of around 20,000 Russians killed. The Ukrainians have said it's up to 35,000. Now, that's much too strong. But what Shashank takes you through, which is very, very important in this, and it becomes more extreme with the more

sophisticated warfare and things like custom munitions and so on, is the rate of wounded to killed, which can be absolutely up to nine to one, but on a conservative calculus, you can do with Russian forces in Ukraine. And I think you realise where we're coming to at this. It is at least three, between three or four to one. So are you saying by the end of June, first week in July this year, so you've had in just over three-and-a-half months, you have lost 20,000 killed and you have lost 60,000 out of service due to injury or indisposition. If you are pointing to a figure of 80,000, that is well over half the Russian military force that went into Ukraine in the weeks subsequent to the 24th of February, which was maximum 125,000. It's an astonishing figure. We don't know what the attrition rate's at the moment. They've been particularly bad for the Ukrainians, by the way, with being badly exposed in the open plains in Luhansk, but this has been very damaging because the assessment that, again, Shashank makes in this article and in the excellent "Jamestown" series of papers, very well studied from local resources in Ukraine and Russia, there is a force, a Russian force, of about a quarter of a million now committed to Ukraine in and around Ukraine. That is an awful lot, and that's a lot that you've got to replace, recruit, train, feed for the months to come, and particularly, when you go into winter. It's going to be very difficult for Russia to maintain its commitments and its security commitments, quarter of a million around because it's still not organised how really successfully it can do the occupation of the territory. It's already captured in Donbas on the Black Sea Coast and in European war today, you cannot do a scorched-earth, which they've been trying to do. The capacity for guerilla action, which is enormous. the sabotage actions, I believe, are frequent and on both sides. There's very little stability. And Russia also has commitments to the caucuses, to the dodgy borders of Belarus and the Baltics, Syria supporting the Balkans and its allies in Africa, and the Central Strategic Treaty Organisation, who have been asked to supply forces like Kyrgyzstan, and they've absolutely refused to send them. Belarus, which is now just a satellite, is now just a part or province of Russia. Still hasn't managed to recruit for war in Ukraine. And on the other hand is a battalion, quite a well-known one apparently, of Belarus volunteers fighting for the Ukrainian government in Ukraine. In the Jamestown papers, and I won't go into too much detail, but it is absolutely fascinating about the call-out. The summer call-out, which has yielded about 134,500, is 7,000 better than a year ago, but the terms of the engagement are not known. The contracts, even, or the understanding with the conscript and the contracts for the contract soldiers are not stating yet, "War "in Ukraine." So what they're doing is they're standing down personnel from specialised units like the Rocket Army units, which is 50,000 strong, and the navy, particularly the Northern Fleet, as some may have observed before, and they're moving them. They're trying to form them into infantry battalion, and then they're being sent to Ukraine, and how this is going to work, we don't know. There is enormous quantity, as they say, on the Russian side. They're using up stocks of old Soviet artillery, which they batter everything

in sight with some success, but they are running out of precision-guided weapons, PGMs, precision-guided missiles, the ones with which they've been hitting Lviv and places like that. There is a degradation and deterioration in guidance systems because where do they get the chips and the circuit boards and the various bits and pieces? Because they were quite easy to obtain and quite cheap, you get them from the West, including the U.K., and you're not getting that anymore. And the problem with artillery is this: it requires a lot of big, bulky ammunition, and this can be seen from the sky, and from the sky, you can spot them, and you can target them by drones or even just by low-flying satellites. And you can bring in the new artillery systems. Oh, there are 16 sets of the so-called HIMARS, the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, which they said it would take ages to train the Ukrainians. They have proved incredibly at it to doing them and with various contributions from the Brits and the Norwegians and the Dutch, they've got about 30 really good battery systems, which is driving the Russians mad. They keep on saying they're knocking them up, but they're not. So you can see how the thing is going. There is quality against quantity, and what they're trying to do is to round up ethnics, not Russians, from non-Russian parts of the federation and from the peripheral areas. And it's in the way that they operated Chechen levies under Ramzan Kadyrov, a great pal of Putin's, that they're, and he's been posted in Donetsk and they're using these mercenary levies, and here's a funny thing. Nobody likes them, and it's a friction. It's a friction for the Russian forces and the Ukrainian forces because western Russian forces, of which there are few, but they would see themselves as more or less the same as Ukrainians. So there's a big thing going on there, but Russia is creeping forward across the Donbas. But it doesn't look to me, unless I'm completely wrong and there's some terrible collapse, that they're going to make an objective of claiming the whole of the Donbas by the last week in August, which is really an objective. I think it's bloody. I think that Ukraine perhaps is not being adroit enough at rejecting a fight and drawing lines and getting to positions where they can manage because the losses really have been colossal. I think that they've probably lost between 20 and 30,000 killed in action and probably as many civilians, but they're determined to go on. And one of the mysteries, which is going to lead to my dark secret at the end, is why the Russian Air Force is doing so badly, and why, relatively speaking, the much, much, much smaller Ukrainian Air Force is doing relatively well. Forever, I'm seeing clips on YouTube of yet another Russian Sukhoi 34 or thought it 35 being downed over a Ukrainian wheat field. How are they managing to do it? Their air defences are excellent. They are not necessarily only supplied by the U.S. There's been bits and pieces of stuff supplied by the Brits, by the French and the Germans and, but it's countries like Slovakia that have been putting in kit and are really helping out. They've just announced another big tranche going across to the frontline. There is real NATO-east European solidarity, far more than with the western European NATO nations about this. Finland candidate member, Sweden, the Baltics,

they're in this for real. It's quite interesting how this operates. The four key allies, Britain, France, America and Germany, have intelligence and military cells that assess and look what's going on. This is the picture that we see today. These are the four possible scenarios. This is what they're asking for for help. This is what they may ask for help. Why aren't they are asking us for that? It's an extraordinary way of operating with an ally, isn't it? What is so interesting is how mafioso these societies are, how tribal, how loyal, how clan-conscious they are that it is a people's solidarity. The Ukrainians are telling even their principle and most powerful allies far from everything. They're not even telling them how they do it. And this is a mystery that I know that British-American intelligence, particularly, is very interesting to find out. Because they keep on getting these long laundry lists. They get welcomed when they go over to Kyiv, or when they go down into to Odesa, "This is what we'd like. "We'd like your harpoon anti-ship missiles," and so on, "and will you train this mine sweeper?" Et cetera, et cetera, all that happens. It's very cordial, but the jewel of which the whole clockwork works is not being explained at all. And I think it's partly something very old, and I think it's very new. I didn't use the mafioso analogy idly. I think the loyalty is so tight that they got a kind of omerta. Silence. Don't speak unless you have to. And I think that this is even beginning to unnerve the journalists going there.

If you do the humanitarian story, you are great, and that's why I have to say, and I'm not being sexist about it, but it's just a general observation, in understanding what is going on in the societies of these terribly battered population, women correspondents have been to the fore. Some of them are as tough as places like Carlotta Gall of the "New York Times," but people like my friend, Ola Garrett, Sarah Rainsford, have been the both of, I think, have the language, have been absolutely outstanding in getting into it. When the blokes go there with their security advisors, whether it's the BBC or "The Daily Telegraph," it is absolutely clear to me that the local commander will show them just what he wants to, and it's generally a he, will just what he wants to show them, and no more and no less. "Do you want to come to me, do you want to go where it's "really hairy, outside Sievierodonetsk? "You take your life into your own hand, "but I'm going to show you that." But he's damn sure there's an awful lot of things about his planning and thinking and contingency, which he isn't, completely understandably. He isn't revealing. That is why what is happening, and this is my big reveal, there is the most extraordinary dark war going on. It's a war of which we have had hints before, but of a completely different quality. From Iraq '91, we had precision-guided bombers, but they were only the minority. A lot of them went wrong. We've had precision weaponry, but guidance by, precise guidance by GPS, by inert systems, by continuous hacking of information and comms cells. By that, it's not only propaganda and information, but also battlefield deployments and instructions, the understanding through the public and private, the discrete military

networks and why the Russian network, which was brought in in 2019 has failed, and also the use of mobile phones is quite extraordinary. And the thing is that one side, and I conjecture this, and honestly I cannot go, I'll probably have to kill you if I told you anything more, was that they are knowing more about what's going on on the other side than we can possibly imagine. I got a hint of this when a friend who had been on a British military mission came back, and I said, "Oh, there's jolly good "BBC radio programme." Indeed, it was very good. It's a thing on radio folk called "The Briefing Room" saying where we are, very much the kind of thing that I've been doing with you just now in Donbas in the situation, in the state of play, in the war. And this guy said, "Just if only I could begin "to lift the curtain even more for you "because you will find there is a dimension of activity "that's going on, which has been almost unimaginable before, "and it is the network information fourth "and fifth dimension war." There have been hints of this in excellent writing by the information war, information research body, which you could read everyday, or I think it is, and on the "Jamestown." It's been Brzezinski Foundation. They have written between them an article. They were kind to refer to each other, which proves this. From Napoleonic times and before, you could talk, but particularly when artillery came in, and then you got indirect fire. You didn't fire straight out the enemy mortars, so on. And then you've got air balloons and so on. The ground battle has been divided largely, the conventional ground battle, into three zones as it were: the close battle, the intimate battle, which when it comes to the worst things, it could be, you know, hand-to-hand , then you have the death battle, what's coming up behind it, the reserves, and then you have the rear battle, which is the logistics, the ammunition, the food, the fuel, and the replacement battle, casualty replacement, forces at which the longer range rocket systems provided by the European alliance, but particularly America, have been very, very successful. No use using them to knock out artillery at the moment. They've got to knock out the second and third line in reserve. But in the multidimensional battle where cyber and space come into play, space for obvious for communication, and soon it will be for launching munitions, unfortunately, this is where we get hypersonic weapons coming in, you no longer have a close, a discrete close, rear, and death battle. This is what I'm led to understand, and this is what the allies are observing now in Donbas, in eastern Ukraine because a battle is developing there of a kind we haven't seen before. And it will change most of the assumptions on which we train our armies in the West, particularly U.K. and America for future high level combat. And my conjecture is, and this is the really concerning thing, is that Russia is behind the beat. If this is realised to full consequence, to go back that they cannot bring up sufficient reserves, these new rural recruits that they have got from the ethnic minorities, these extra 250,000 that they need in time with ammunition, with equipment and ready for the fight, and if they're destroyed beyond the rear battle, then Russia is in trouble. Zelenskyy, the figurehead, but he's absolutely clear as to what he is doing with Ukraine. Ukraine wins if

Ukraine is Ukraine in whatever form. They may blast Kyiv to bits. But if there is a government in Lviv, that's fine. There has been no regime change, to quote Sergey Lavrov. If Russia cannot annihilate the essence of a free or independent, however gangsterish it is, Ukraine by early next year it has lost, and for what? Putin and the Putin circle and his gang in the Duma and his gang in the security service frame as the essence of Russia, Russia in the world, Russia and Eurasia, Russia and its true destiny as a major, if not the major, European power, if that suddenly goes up in a plume of smoke, then Russia is in trouble. And it's no sense of triumph on our part because if the apparat and the aspiration of Putin Russia blows up, then we're all in trouble because the fallout will be of great consequence. It will cause anarchy. It will cause anarchy in world markets. It will cause anarchy, particularly in the security not only of the European, but the wider Eurasian area. I think it's very good. I think these things should concentrate our minds enormously. I used the word good because what I think that it should make us now focus on as the debate about the problems with our governance, just to draw all this together in Western countries, the problems of the global economy, the food and fuel pinch, starvation, migration due to climate change. The word that I said that I don't hear in these political debates, which has been the essence of debate even in the biggest sort of faction fighting from, probably, emerging from mediaeval times but even before, is the notion of the common good, the good for the community, the good for the people, the good for all our community. I have heard not one conservative candidate use that nostrum, but again, a friend in the "New Statesman," Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge, Helen Thompson, has written a marvellous piece in the beginning of this month about why we should recover. And it's from religious virtues, from secular aspects of religious inspiration in politics, which is self-sacrifice, and I think the common good is, and common purpose, is a really very important fact to inform our politics, international, national and community, at all levels. And we're beginning to see some very fine writing about it. A friend of mine who writes detective stories, been a senator, has been very well known judge, anti-mafia judge in southeast Italy, wrote a lovely little essay which I wish had been translated into English, and I'll try and get it; it's called, have to, what's it called, it's on kindness, la gentilezza e il coraggio. "Kindness and Courage." And Gianrico has a wonderful paragraph about altruism. And he said, "To make society work "at a whatever minuscule level, "there has to be an element of altruism." "What is altruism is to have the courage "to act for a common good, which you may think "is absolutely against your personal self-interest, "but in the way that the wheels of community "and the common good turn, of course, "it is, in the end, to your interest "as well as that of the common good." And, of course, the great essay on goodness in my time is "The Sovereignty of Good" by Iris Murdoch, which I have been reading again. But it's this element of consensus and common good and common purpose, which is the thing that I think, and it is a noble end prize western liberal democracy has to recover. I conclude my

talk. Okay, thank you, everybody.