

Marginal Gains

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**Grim days
for May**

An interview with Jack Lopresti, MP

By Josh Newby

On Wednesday 24 October, I visited Westminster after being given the opportunity to interview the Conservative MP for Filton & Bradley Stoke, Jack Lopresti. Mr Lopresti and I sat down for 20 minutes to discuss Brexit, and given that he is a parliamentary private secretary to the Ministry of Defence, we also discussed foreign policy.

In terms of the Northern Irish question, how close are the government to finding a solution, do they have some semblance of a plan?

At the moment I think there's so much speculation – because it's a massive historical issue, and people's passions run high on both sides of the argument. But there's so much noise, I think people just need to cool down, and let the negotiations continue. There's a lot of work going on behind the scenes as you can imagine, both here and in Brussels. I was chatting to a Minister last night and we were discussing possibilities; the thought was we were 90% of the way there, but we were both reasonably confident that there would be a deal of some sort that would go through the House. I mean I was on the Northern Ireland Committee



for eight years, so I've got a lot of affection and experience with Northern Ireland. Julian Lewis asked the Prime Minister last week – who wants this border, the Irish don't want a firm border, the Northern Irish don't. So, I thought it was really interesting and quite realistic.

Do you think that if we see an economic bounce after Brexit, and if the change is very positive overall, do you see other countries beginning to leave?

I would argue one of the reasons the EU is giving us such a hard time is because they are terrified that when we leave, that we will make a success of it. I think other countries will scratch their heads and begin to think – well hang on, the Brits are doing very nice for themselves, they're not paying into a central bank, they're not having half of their laws or regulations decided for them or a currency that's just a drag on our economy; why don't we make a bid for freedom. It could almost be like a domino effect, you could end up with a much smaller and narrower EU.

The Prime Minister's heading to the 1922 Committee today, how possible is a leadership bid at this point in time?

I think you'll find that when she goes to the '22 this evening they'll be banging the desks and thumping – and people may even give her a standing ovation when she goes in. I think most of us realise that she's got a very, very difficult job at the moment without a majority – with the help of our friends the DUP, getting through a very complex and contentious piece of legislation like the European Withdrawal Bill. Most of us appreciate her courage and resilience.



Dictatorship works

By Zaki Hashmi

Just in terms of foreign policy, with the disappearance of – or should we say the recent murder of Jamal Khashoggi – do you think it might be time to review the relationship between the UK and Saudi Arabia?

I think there's going to be a bit of a reset, and I think difficult questions are being asked for an awful situation. Just horrific. You know, as a nation and as a people they are one of our strongest allies in that part of the world – they're our friends, and there's no reason that won't continue, but serious questions are being asked.

I know the UK, France and Germany have had quite a resolute response to this, but the US has seemed more tepid towards the issue.

I mean you have to put it in perspective. We do business around the world with unpleasant regimes, and we engage them – and we trade. I think you're better off having that dialogue, influencing policy, having trade and creating strategic alliances, as it's in their interest to maintain good relations – and it's up to us to demonstrate that we expect a reasonable standard of behaviour.

Keeping to the Middle-East – just one last thing do with the Iran Deal. Obviously President Trump withdrew, and now Iran are looking to the EU. Do you think that the UK should pursue taking helm of the deal, or lean towards the US perspective?

I'm sympathetic with the Trumpian view, because Iran are the world's biggest sponsor of state terrorism, they cause endless problems around the world – they have a insidious and malign influence. I know it's in a different government now, but the aim of Iran's previous governments was to wipe Israel off of the map. There are elements in the liberation of Iraq and Afghanistan where our men were killed with Iranian technology, so I remain extremely sceptical. I think the idea that we can allow them to be close to making nuclear weapons – serious questions have been asked by people as to whether they are keeping their end of the bargain. They have to realise that the deal is not unconditional and that they have obligations to fulfil as well.

In the Western world, the word dictatorship has gathered very negative connotations over the years and not for unjustified reasons as many of the world's mass murders and war mongers have governed in a dictatorial fashion. Despite this, the very philosopher who first pioneered democracy, Socrates, famously said that a benevolent dictatorship is better than any form of democracy. His reasoning for this statement is that if a group of people were on a boat you would naturally want the best sailor to captain the ship but if democracy was used then the most popular person would become captain rather than the most able sailor and the ship would sink.

Democratic governments are elected based on the amount of votes they get not on the merits of how they would govern; this means that popular yet inefficient and harmful governments get elected, and this can lead to recessions and overall worsening of the country. Furthermore, voters elect politicians based on their promises which they make during their election campaign, which are often only made as they seem appealing to the average voter not as they would benefit the country. In addition, once in office, these very same politicians enact policies and pass legislation in order to appeal to their voter base with the hope of being retaining power next election cycle, such

as Trump persisting with his Muslim ban despite the international condemnation and the diminishing of Americas standing as a leader of world equality.

'Socrates, famously said that a benevolent dictatorship is better than any form of democracy'

To solve this pressing issue, a tried and tested solution of benevolent dictatorship could be the answer. Despite the namesake, a benevolent dictatorship is almost unrecognisable with the Stalinist fear-lead rule most associate with the word. For example, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, through long term economic and social planning, which is not possible in democracies due to term limits for heads of state, transformed Singapore from the 'third world to the first world in a single generation'.

It is clear to see the benefits of authoritarian rule when the interests of the country and wider population are given priority. Factors that are unique to benevolent dictatorships such as freedom for the government to pass legislation, stability in the country and most importantly focus on improving the country rather than get re-elected allow for them to prosper and flourish where democracies have failed.



The killing of Jamal Khashoggi

By Jack Arrowsmith

It's been well over a month since journalist and Saudi government critic, Jamal Khashoggi, was brutally murdered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Following initial reports, the kingdom vehemently denied accusations of assassination, describing claims that he was murdered as 'baseless'. They instead claimed that Khashoggi had safely departed the consulate, before later disappearing. After 17 days of dissembling, the first acknowledgement of Khashoggi's death from the kingdom came on October 19th, claiming that he was accidentally killed in a fist fight. On October 21st, the Saudi Foreign Minister finally told Fox News that he was killed at

'the details of the killing itself highlight the sheer brutality of a medieval autocracy, which the West has no moral interest in associating itself with'

the consulate, but that it was a 'rogue operation', that Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), knew nothing about. On October 25th, the official Saudi press agency then reported that it appeared his death was premeditated. The full circumstances of the killing were finally revealed by President Erdogan of Turkey on the 10th

of November. He confirmed the existence of audio recordings related to Khashoggi's death, which have been shared with major European countries, and the United States. They are believed to include the killing itself, and conversations pre-dating the operation, appearing to confirm the Saudi prosecutor's statement that the killing was premeditated.

The details of the killing itself highlight the sheer brutality of a medieval autocracy, which the West has no moral interest in associating itself with. Although exact details are unknown, reports suggest that Mr Khashoggi was tortured, strangled and murdered, before being 'cut up', with his face 'disfigured', and acid applied to some of the remains (in an effort to remove the evidence), which were then disposed of. Not only does this highlight a complete disregard for the rule of law and a free press - integral components to Western civilisation - but it also demonstrates a barbarous regime that has no regard for the value and sanctity of human life.

The response from leaders in the UK and USA to this assassination has in turn been pitiful. Mr Trump originally declared 'I don't like hearing about it, and hopefully that will sort itself out'; whilst acknowledging that the Saudi narrative is 'all over the place', he is ambivalent to the suggestion the Crown Prince is involved, and shows little concern over

the implications for the future leadership of Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the UK government is too preoccupied with Brexit to allow Britain to take a moral stance with a long term ally; Jeremy Hunt has rejected calls to end weapons sales by highlighting that they bring jobs to the UK - not a compelling argument when the integrity of our foreign policy is at stake. By contrast, Germany and Norway have stopped the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia, whilst Canada is considering freezing their arms deal, all more proportionate responses to this situation.

'Crown Prince MBS, once hailed as a moderniser, is now demonstrating himself to be a brutal autocrat, which should concern all those worried about the promotion of democratic values'

Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry rightly pondered what the Government's response would have been had this event stemmed from either Russia or Iran, with 'one of their dissident journalists (murdered) within the sovereign territory of another country'. This inconsistency neatly characterises the fundamental flaw in Britain's foreign policy. It is based upon applying different standards to different countries, depending on their strategic value to us. Despite our disdain for Russia and Iran, and their actions in foreign territories, including the promotion of terrorism, they both have functioning democracies, unlike Saudi Arabia, and whilst it is debatable how free and fair their elections are, they both rank higher on the Press Freedom Index, meaning it is consequently hard to justify turning a blind eye, solely on the grounds that it suits our foreign policy interests.

I'm not advocating an idealistic Wilsonian approach, where we refuse to associate with countries whose values we don't align with - a pragmatic foreign policy is all about compromise - but I would argue that we will find ourselves in challenging circumstances if we don't equally criticise and punish these



countries for actions that undermine our core values and threaten the safety of all people.

Proponents of the UK's support of Saudi Arabia will argue that: 'whilst we may not agree with much of the structure of their society, or how their government behaves, they provide us with a strategic advantage in the Middle East. We can use this to enact positive change in Saudi Arabia and the neighbouring region and this outweighs the moral ambiguities of the regime itself'. This would indeed be a logical argument, if there was evidence that our relationship is significantly beneficial, but there is limited evidence of more progressive policies taking root in Saudi Arabia. In 2017, President Trump agreed a new arms deal with Saudi Arabia, totalling \$350 billion over 10 years. The most recent use of these weapons is in the Yemen Civil War, through support for the Hadi government against Houthi rebels; the war itself has, according to Save the Children, killed at least 50,000 children since 2017, with Saudi-led coalition airstrikes estimated to have contributed to two thirds of reported civilian deaths.

The killing of Khashoggi is a clear indicator that the West needs to rethink its approach to Saudi Arabia. Crown Prince MBS, once hailed as a moderniser, is now demonstrating himself to be a brutal autocrat, which should concern all those worried about the promotion of democratic values. If the West does not demonstrate to countries - whether it is Russia or Saudi Arabia - that you can't murder dissidents, by coming down harshly and consistently on these countries, then the Middle East is doomed for further totalitarianism, and the West will lose its moral authority and hence its ability to drive forward Liberal Democracy, around the globe.

Hungary: where poverty is a crime and being homeless will get you arrested

By Maya Sharma

It seems Hungary has gone full circle after reintroducing laws prohibiting homelessness. Under the new ban, written into the country's constitution, people caught living on the street multiple times over a period of 90 days can face fines, mandatory public work and even imprisonment. After multiple warnings police officers are authorized to confiscate and destroy people's personal belongings.

The first ban was introduced in April 2012 in response to an economic crisis that left poverty and homelessness on the rise. But it was only later that year, following months of protests and claims that it punished a social class rather than a specific behaviour, that the Hungarian Constitutional Court declared the ban unconstitutional. Then, in March 2013, the constitution was amended, allowing for the ban and its enforcement. This amendment also added provisions that prevented the court from striking it down in the future. Years of back and forth power struggles ended with the election of a right-wing prime minister, Viktor Orban, in June 2018 who's government passed legislation declaring that 'using a public space as a habitual dwelling shall be prohibited'. This law began being enforced at the start of October.

The government argues that this ban will help save the lives of homeless people as the brutal winter approaches and 'serve the interests of society as a whole'. They theorize that the new legislation will encourage the homeless to flock to shelters where they will be provided with clothing and the help required to build a new life. But with Hungary's estimated

homeless population being around 30,000 and government shelters apparently being inadequate in both services and quantity, it begs the question, who does this ban really benefit?

On the other hand, human rights activists argue that the ban effectively criminalizes poverty by targeting those most vulnerable. It has been suggested that if the governments motivations really were in the interest of those living on the streets, they would instead be investing in long-term solutions, which have been proven to be less expensive and more effective, such as treatment programs and permanent housing. It seems that the government, instead of permanently dealing with the problem facing their streets, would rather sweep it under the rug by sweeping those most vulnerable into prisons.

In viewing the homeless solely through the scope of criminality, the Hungarian government has failed to acknowledge the flimsy social safety net that has allowed this problem to manifest to such a colossal scale.



A European army: do we need it and will it work?

By Henry Davies

The idea of a European army is not new. It has been mooted by various European leaders since the creation of the European Economic Community in 1957. However, there hasn't been any serious lobbying for it until now. The debate was reignited by President Macron and has been publicly backed by various European leaders, including Angela Merkel, raising the prospect of the project getting the go ahead.

The idea for a European army has gained such strong popularity partly because of the deterioration of relations between the US and Europe over a large number of issues, such as the Iran Nuclear Deal and the very light approach taken by many European countries in regards to defence spending. Many Germans now think that President Trump's America is a bigger threat to peace than Russia's President Putin. Many Europeans also don't want their defence to be so heavily reliant on the US so have turned to radical ideas to try and alleviate this 'issue'

But is a European army even possible?

Many commentators think the project is militarily ludicrous, especially in the short term. It will take a huge investment over many years to replace US capability. Armies need communications, intelligence and logistics, plus air and maritime support, and command and control centres. On all of these,



'Many Germans now think that President Trump's America is a bigger threat to peace than Russia's President Putin'

continental Europe is very heavily dependent on US capabilities.

Furthermore, on the practical side even more European defence co-operation could result not in greater capabilities but rather in the dilution of existing ones.

Already European military structures are alarmingly top-heavy. The extra costs and bureaucratic duplication which would come with a European army would further intensify this problem.

Armies also need political masters to send them into battle, which raises the issue of where this power would lie. It is hard to see many European countries, especially Germany, which micromanages all military developments, agreeing to put their national armies under the command of European bureaucrats and politicians. Europe is today divided over the need for further sanctions against Russia for the recent action in the Black Sea. How would these political divisions be reconciled with the need for an European Army to take action?

Britain's position is unique as we are no longer able to veto any effort to create a European army, but our exclusion from such an initiative would be detrimental to the ability of the European army's capability, as the UK is the biggest spender in defence in Europe and maintains one of the most powerful militaries. Many commentators' view is that the EU cannot defend itself from Russian and other threats without the UK. Let us hope that this is never put to the test.



Crisis in the Central African Republic

By Max Penney

In 2013, a group of Muslim militias called the 'Seleka' seized control of the Central African Republic (CAR). In retaliation, a group of majority Christian fighters named the anti-Balaka took up arms to fight back and in response, the United Nations set up the Minusca mission where nearly 13,000 peacekeepers were deployed in the country at a cost of nearly £700 million a year. However, in the last five years over a million people have been displaced whilst thousands have lost their lives which has led to experts questioning the success of the UN's mission.

After it was announced the country was at serious risk of entering a full-scale war, the UN council failed to agree terms to extend any peacekeeping missions. Jan Egeland, the Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, has already stated peacekeeping missions are overstretched as well as reporting any other wider efforts to halt conflict have also failed. A key factor to the lack of success in preventing conflict is the lack of donations, because despite the evident severity of the issue, the UN has generated little publicity to help the cause.

The CAR has received less than half of the \$500 million that was needed to help bring about change, and these funding shortages have meant help can only be given to areas in 'absolute crisis' and as soon as the emergency is deemed to be over, the aid is quickly taken away in order to preserve funds for inevitable upcoming issues. On the 17th November, the CAR extradited an ex MP and militia leader Alfred Yekatom following multiple allegations for crimes



against humanity. The International Criminal Court has alleged Yekatom was responsible for murder, torture, attacking innocent civilians and using child fighters. Yekatom led the anti-Balaka from 2013, to counter the Seleka rebels. However, despite being under UN sanctions and facing allegations dating back to 2013, Yekatom was still elected as an MP in 2016. After firing a gun in Parliament following a row with an MP, Yekatom was finally extradited to The Hague.

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Just two days prior to this, the mandate for the Minusca mission was renewed but aid agencies warn that the mission needs significantly more additional resources to improve the already failing mission. Over 2 days beginning on 31st October, 27,000 people were forced to flee their homes after burnings and lootings in the surrounding area, despite their being a UN base effectively next to the area of conflict.

It is believed the fundamental problems within the social system of the CAR are a

key reason as to why little progress has been made in ending the war. Unemployed, desperate young men are willing to go to any lengths to earn any money to help them and their families survive which has led to rebel groups having thousands of recruits. It is just as cheap in the CAR to buy a hand grenade as it is to buy a load of bread!

In the centre of the country, major towns such as Batanfago and Bambari have experienced increased violence resulting in thousands of people fleeing their homes to live in 'the bush'. Normally, staff at Batanfago hospital see over 1,000 patients a week for malaria based illnesses, however last week this fell to just 60 following the violence as a large majority of the population has fled to the bush where this is no medical help, and as a result medical workers are worried for increased numbers of cases of diarrhoea, malnutrition and respiratory infections.

With elections looming in 2020, the UN are under extreme pressure to not only negotiate more efficient peace agreements but also to generate a significantly bigger humanitarian response before further violence breaks out.



God Save the Queen

By Olivia Tennant

Increasingly, within the modern political climate, the role and value of the Monarchy has come into question, with anti-Monarchists proposing the abolition of the figurehead of our country and the Royal Family.

Until the 3rd September 1651, the Monarchy and the hierarchical society it produced formed the foundation of England. Parliament acted as an advisory body called by the Monarch, with the prerogative powers being held by the sovereign. However, due to the unfortunate victory of the Parliamentarians in the Civil War, and the later Glorious Revolution, Parliament gained significance within the governance of the country. Sceptics and anarchists criticise the need for the Monarchy. However, they seem to neglect the requirement for the monarchy, as well as the income they provide.

The income provided by the Royal Family is arguably critical to the government, George III agreed in 1760 that as he was no longer governing in person he should not benefit from the income the Crown Lands provided and therefore the income from the land went to Parliament. The Sovereign Grant Act of

2011 simplified the previous agreement, and means the Crown Estate's annual revenue which in 2016-17 was £328.8 million, is divided with the Monarch being granted 15% and Parliament 85%.

Moreover, the Household is fully accountable, as the accounts are audited through the National Audit Office before it is given to Parliament. Also, even though the Royal Family are not legally required to pay income tax, since 1993 both the Queen and the Prince of Wales have voluntarily paid income tax on private sources of income. Interestingly, the monarchy pays more taxation than some politicians, TV personalities and other 'celebrities', such as John Mills, who donated £1.65m to the Labour Party in shares in order to avoid the taxation on the cash.

The Monarchy also provides an



increased income to the UK through tourism, with the Brand Finance group claiming in 2015 the value from tourism

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of the Royal Family and royal heritage was £535 million. With Brand Finance also claiming the Royal Family's net contribution to the UK economy standing in range of £1.155 billion in 2015.

Another myth surrounding the role of the Royal Family can be exemplified through the latest Royal Wedding between Prince Henry and Ms Megan Markle. Many reports at the time recounted the extensive costs of the wedding, claiming it was a waste of 'taxpayer's money'. The wedding itself was expected to cost around £32 million, with the majority being spent on security needs, estimated to be around £30 million. In advance of the wedding there was a public outcry around where the funding for the wedding came from. However, the Royal



Ivanka Clinton!

By Imogen Davidson



The latest event in the ever ironic Trump administration is that his own daughter, Ivanka Trump, has used her own email accounts to do official government business. A detail that would have probably gone under the radar if Trump's entire campaign hadn't been dominated by his request to have 'crooked Hillary' locked up for the exact same action.

Ivanka has claimed, since this was released, that her use of private emails was nothing like Hillary's, and 'There just is no equivalency between the two things'. The only way in which this is true is that Fox News didn't create 61 articles on her 'scandal' like they did with Hillary, they created 1 article about the mid-terms in which Ivanka's emails are only brought up in one line.

So what should the president do now given that his own daughter has committed the same act that he deemed so inexcusable that it was central in his entire presidential campaign? Trump, a man who claims to have America's safety and interests at heart, should surely be concerned with righting this wrong within his White House. Should he have her arrested like he wanted with Hillary for the protection of the people?

Believe it or not, Trump, for all his integrity, will not impose any consequences for his daughter's actions and she remains free to stay in her authoritative government position and conduct federal business in any way she wants.

Sadly this is not a surprise.

Family themselves funded the wedding, mainly through their Grant. In order to try and remove the skepticism around the royal finances the monarchy has published their financial situation.

Moreover, whilst the majority of prerogative powers have now passed to parliament, the Queen still has the ability to act on certain powers. For example, the monarch can still appoint and dismiss the prime minister. Although by convention this is made into an almost theatrical procedure, the power is still exercised by the Queen. This power is also extended to her ability to appoint and dismiss ministers. However, more through convention the party with the largest amount of votes becomes the government, the party decides on the leader, and the leader decides on the ministers.

The Queen also gives assent to laws that have been affirmed by both Houses. The Queen can prevent bills becoming law, but the last Monarch to do so was in Queen Anne in 1708. The Queen can also summon or suspend Parliament. Although this again has become more ceremonial, with the state opening of Parliament, it is still a power the monarch holds.

The Queen also holds judicial power, mainly the royal pardon, which allows the Queen to pardon those who have been wrongly convicted. Moreover, the Queen still stands as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and all military personnel swear allegiance to her personally, not the government.

The Queen is also the Head of the Church of England, and the Head of the Commonwealth. One of the only prerogative powers the Queen fully retains is the right to create peers and give honors, a power only the Queen can exercise.

However, whilst the majority of the Prerogative Powers have been handed over to the government, the Queen stands as the figure head of the country, she is known globally, and the majority of the population still respect her for her service to the country.

Therefore, it can still be seen that the monarchy is critical to the UK, and the skepticism around the monarch's lack of use in a modern society is greatly unfounded.



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Boris Johnson: icon or idiot?

By Dominic Orton

Boris Johnson is an incredibly well known politician for many reasons; his time as Mayor of London, as a long serving MP or due to his unfiltered way of communicating his ideas. He has been involved in politics since 2001 when he was elected in the safe seat of Henley as the Conservative MP and ever since has not been far from controversy.

Boris has always spoken his mind and that was true only a year into his time of being an MP; he was strongly criticised over comments made about Commonwealth members, calling people of colour 'picaninnies' and used the term 'watermelon smiles' in a Telegraph column he wrote in 2002. These types of comments were a clear forewarning of what to expect from Boris's future career.

Many class Johnson's reign as Mayor of London a success due to what he achieved from 2008 onwards. The cycle hire scheme caused huge changes in London due to the accessibility of the bikes. Furthermore, Boris Johnson ended up with the responsibility for overseeing the 2012 Olympic Games, its execution and its legacy, including 100,000 new homes. Being an advocate for London and the Games allowed Boris to successfully boost inward investment, tourism and the reputation of the capital. These achievements may have led to Boris being chosen as foreign secretary for Theresa May.

However, during his time as foreign secretary he did not find success easily. One key role of foreign secretary is to provide support and help for British nationals across the globe; something he failed to do for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. After Johnson announced in the House of Commons that she had been 'teaching journalism', the 38-year-old, who is serving a sentence for treason in Iran, was sent straight into the court and told that her sentence would be doubled.



In some instances, his jokes worked and some politicians overseas warmed to the entertaining foreign minister and therefore there were times when Mr Johnson was an effective minister for foreign affairs. But in reality Johnson achieved little beyond carrying out the expected functions of foreign secretary: 'he met the right people, said the right things, caused no offence and placed the UK firmly in the mix as an international player' said James Landale, the BBC's diplomatic correspondent.

Johnson routinely failed to meet expectations on maintaining relationships and finding answers to key international problems such as Britain's answer to military tension in areas such as Syria and North Korea. A lack of substance and answers emerging from his work led to the frustration of many party members and also of international counterparts, as

they could not leave meetings with just a list of his jokes.

Boris Johnson finally stepped down after many other controversies including calling women wearing the burka 'bank robbers' or 'letterboxes'. However it was fundamentally due to his disagreements over Brexit. He said May's plan 'sticks in the throat' and that supporting the plans would be like 'polishing a turd', bringing an end to his colourful reign as foreign secretary.

