

## **Transcript – Warpod S2E5**

### **How are UK political parties thinking about security policy?**

CHARLIE

Welcome to Warpod, the podcast brought to you by Saferworld, asking experts from around the world about the impact of security policy on contemporary conflict. I'm Charlie Linney, Project Coordinator in the Arms Unit at Saferworld.

LEWIS

And I'm Lewis Brooks, UK Policy and Advocacy Advisor at Saferworld.

CHARLIE

For this episode, we're recording from Westminster, where we're joined by two guests to discuss security policy debates ahead of the next UK election.

Firstly, we're joined by Olivia O'Sullivan, Director of the UK in the World Programme at Chatham House. She's also a contributor to the Chatham House podcast, Independent Thinking. We're also joined by Christine Cheng, senior lecturer in War Studies at King's College London. It's also relevant for this podcast to mention that Christine is the chair of the International Security Working Group for the Liberal Democrat Party.

LEWIS

So, as we record this episode, UK elections are expected sometime between mid to late 2024. Public polling would suggest we are heading for a change of government from the current Conservative government over to the opposition Labor Party. We should say, when talking about anything to do with political parties, that Saferworld as a registered charity, is not politically affiliated in any way and is very politically neutral and impartial.

The first episodes of this series picked out quite a few changing trends in global security, and many of these have been the subject of political debates in the UK. This particular episode is going to see how that's playing out between the political parties as we get closer to the general election. Please bear in mind, we recorded this episode a few days before Rishi Sunak announced plans to increase defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP, so we didn't discuss those particular plans in this episode.

So, Olivia, I'm going to come to you first. We're talking about political parties, I guess, thinking about how they approach security policy making. Do they all have the same view of the security challenges facing the UK, and do they have similar responses or proposals for addressing those challenges?

OLIVIA

I think this is such an interesting question. I'm going to focus on the two main political parties in this answer, so the Conservatives and the Labour Party, if you look at the way that have recently been responding to some of the big conflicts and security crises in which the UK has some sort of interest.

On some of those issues, they've sounded quite similar. So on the war in Ukraine, that's a topic of remarkable political and actually relative public consensus in the UK compared with other countries. Lord David Cameron, who's the Foreign Secretary, doesn't sound that different from the shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy of the Labor Party when they talk about this. Both parties see the UK as having a very staunch role in supporting Ukraine.

Both parties have been banging the drum to try to get the US to continue to support Ukraine. Ukraine has been a way for both of them to find a consistent foreign policy role for the UK, especially in its relations with Europe. Both parties have also sounded quite similar on the Israel-Gaza crisis. It's been tricky for both of them to hold a line that keeps their parties together on that issue and the role of internal party politics on how political parties frame their response to conflict is an interesting theme maybe we can get into later.

On big, strategic issues like the response to China, they actually use very similar language. The conservatives, who are the current party in government, have this three word phrase, “protect, align, engage,” and Labour uses, “cooperate, challenge, compete,” which, you know, eagle eyed listeners, that's the pretty similar. Like they're trying to kind of have it both ways on China.

On things like defence, diplomacy and international development, both parties make positive noises about spending more money when circumstances allow, which is a conveniently vague phrase that sort of allows them to not really set a target for that.

Having said that, I think while they see some of these immediate security crises similarly, I think there is a bit of a difference in what they think we should do about it. So the really obvious difference between Labour and the Conservatives is that Labour have repeatedly said they would seek more security and defence links with our allies in Europe and find a way to build a more structured relationship with particularly the European Union on security, defence and foreign policy. On migration, which there's certainly a debate about whether that's a security issue or not, but some people see it that way, Labour take a bit of a different line.

I think the overall interesting question is if they win power and the Labour Party are ahead in the polls, will they take a fundamentally different view of the world? If they do win, they might well do a big kind of review of the UK's foreign policy – in the UK's policy calendar they'd be about at the time when the government is likely to do that. One of the big things in the last big foreign policy reviews was this identification of concern about the rise of China, concern about the Indo-Pacific as this region of concern for the UK and its security. And I think there are a lot of questions about whether Labour would keep that focus in power or what they'd look more at the Middle East, the Sahel, North Africa, other places, other parts of the world where there are conflict flashpoints.

So they sound very similar in some of the current crises, but they differ a bit in the way they would seek to approach it, the types of alliances they would want to build. And I think there are questions about if, once Labour get into power, they might slightly reorient the UK to be looking at some other regions and parts of the world, I don't think they're going to abandon the focus on China in the

Indo-Pacific, but they've certainly made noises about building up the UK's diplomatic engagement with conflicts and security crises, sort of closer to the European neighbourhood.

CHARLIE

Yeah that's a really interesting and really useful kind of overview to start this discussion. Christine, I wonder what's your take on this? How do you see the parties reacting and characterising both the security challenges that are facing the UK and the world right now? And then also the responses, do you feel that they differ in their responses as much as Olivia mentioned, or do you see more similarities?

CHRISTINE

I'm quite with Olivia in all of this conversation. I think, she's characterised a lot of the differences really, really well. I think there are some finer points here that are interesting to highlight. And I'll also bring a bit more of what the Lib Dems have to say into this as well, because I think there are interesting differences because of how the parties are sitting and their possibilities for power. And that constrains the way in which you are permitted to address the issue. Right? Because if you think you are genuinely about to take office, then you are going to say different things than if you don't think you have any hope of it. And it just creates a lot more space there. Right? So even though I think Labour is, for example, more careful and calculated in how it deals with China, I think that parts of the party are probably much more hawkish, but probably can't come out and say so because there are going

to be consequences. Right? So I think there, there is some line there.

And I think here, for the Lib Dems, because we are much less likely to actually have to take power. There's a lot more space to be more hawkish.

And so there is some of this thinking about how far you can go in what you say as a result of where you think you're going to end up. I feel quite certain that Labour's being very careful about what it says, thinking about what might happen when it actually has to take power. So it is calibrating its response, thinking about having to actually deal with the other people who they maybe otherwise would prefer to say not nice things about and be much harsher, than it would be if it, you know, had no chance of taking power. So it's, it's behaving differently in anticipation of power.

I think the defence spend is another interesting bit where there are differences and it's not totally clear where this is going to come out. Even at this point, I think everybody's hedging their bets. And part of the hedging has to do with, well, what else the rest of the EU is going to do, right? Thinking about the Baltic states, thinking about Germany and France, how their defence spending is going to creep up. And I think to some extent we will have to – I think – parties will feel the need to match. But part of that is also dependent on what the political conditions will be at the time.

But everybody sees, I think, the need for defence and broadly international affairs spending to go up. The question is what form will it take, how do we allocate and how do we decide, okay, what does 0.7 look like? What does it meaningfully mean in terms of

overseas spend for peace and conflict issues, as Saferworld cares about?

LEWIS

Let me just interject here and explain that what Christine is talking about is the percentage of UK Gross National Income that is spent on overseas aid, also known as Official Development Assistance (ODA), and whether that is 0.7 per cent, or whether that is a lower amount.

CHRISTINE

So how you kind of decide to divide the pie as what counts as what, is actually really important because that's a significant, significant amount of money – we're talking about billions of pounds here. Right.

So I think there are differences here, in how the parties think about this stuff. And importantly, on Brexit and EU issues, I think there's a big divide here. I think the Lib Dems are by far the most pro-European party and can openly come out and say that, still in a more calculated way, but just as a party and, you know, “bollocks to Brexit” being a classic Lib Dem slogan from the last round of European elections, I think that says something about how the parties feel, but also the constraints, that are felt in terms of trying to win back those red wall seats from Kier Starmer.

LEWIS

I guess it's interesting as well, when we think probably as similar dynamics at play with some of the other smaller parties. So thinking about the Greens in particular, at the moment, the Scottish National Party also have more seats in Westminster than

the Liberal Democrats do, but again seeing kind of perhaps more permission to be as pro-Europe as the Lib Dems in some of their policies and, and, possibly thinking differently on some questions of defence spending and things like that as well.

I guess both of you have picked out very state centric policy challenges in terms of the rise of China, in terms of some of the aid spending and things like that. Are you seeing the parties differ in how they broach human and planetary security issues? So climate change being one, I guess kind of thinking about global pandemics and things like that, or is that sort of something for the aid budget and that sphere of policymaking?

OLIVIA

I think that's a really great question, because I think in general, in the past few years, there's been a bit of a turn in the way we talk about foreign policy choices and dilemmas for the UK towards this focus on hostile state actors or competitor states, or in fact, the prospect of state-on-state war.

For about 20 years, the UK's foreign policy was actually oriented around the “war on terror”, which is far more focused on things like building our armed forces and our military around counterinsurgency, around fighting non-state actors, specifically terrorist groups. A lot of our diplomacy, our regional focus was all oriented around that effort. Not all, that's not fair, but that was the significant overarching framework in which we were thinking.

And I think it's only been quite recently that – I mentioned it, but in 2021, the UK government published its big review of its Defence, Foreign Policy, Security and Development called the Integrated



Review – and that was, I think it was sort of under remarked upon at the time. There was a big shift away from that focus towards a focus on hostile states or competitor states or authoritarian states in the threat they represent. And that has obviously been borne out by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

It's caused a lot of questions, and rethinking, particularly in Europe and among European states, about what kind of military force do we need, what kind of defence readiness should we be prepared for? What kind of conflicts should we be worrying about?

So, I think that that has meant that the identification of Russia as a threat and its invasion of Ukraine, concerns about the rise of China, concerns about the return of great power conflict has led to much more of a focus on states and inter-state conflict. But we can see potentially the reemergence of concerns about non-state groups, non-state conflict in various ways. There's a lot of instability across the, the Sahel, Sudan, the Horn of Africa. All of these places are sort of quite close to the European neighbourhood, quite close in a way to the UK, that instability is likely to have knock on effects for us in terms of migration and other concerns.

So I think there has been a real emphasis on states recently, but we may be seeing and whoever wins next election, it certainly does look like it might be Labour, might have to slightly reorient to think about non-state conflict, threats from non-state groups, and we might see that come a bit more to the fore.

LEWIS

Christine, was there anything from your point of view in terms of those kind of wider challenges? Or again, it sounds from what Olivia is saying is actually the parties are pretty united in focusing on state threats and, and actually these kind of other big, planetary challenges or human security challenges are sort of less a focus at the election.

### CHRISTINE

I think there is definitely space for dealing with some of the planetary challenges. And climate change, I think is the big one that is staring us all in the face. So the wonderful thing about the UK is I think all of the parties, and I mean *all* of the parties, maybe with the exception of Reform, are pretty much united on the importance of climate change and doing something meaningful about climate change.

I mean, to the extent that I'm a bit upset about Rishi Sunak rolling back on his commitments in this respect, having said that, still, I think the parties are largely aligned and quite serious about it. And I think this is true of all of the factions of all of the major parties. And I think that's actually really amazing and remarkable and something we should actually all be proud of.

Right. So there are not climate change deniers, really in the UK that have any kind of meaningful political space. So I think that's something that we should, we should actually hold on to, because sometimes I get quite sad about what's going on with the state of international affairs. But this is one thing that I think we should be thinking about.

In terms of things like the pandemic, the thing that we learned out of the pandemic is more along the lines of what Olivia was just saying about the focus on states. Right? So we realise that our supply chains are quite weak. And in fact, if anything else, we should maybe, perhaps become more protectionist. And that has taken a number of different forms and words.

‘Decoupling’ was the first version of this. Now it's ‘de-risking’. So ‘decoupling’ meaning that we separate out and think about what where is stuff produced and stuff should actually be produced in-house that really matters to our national security, right. So thinking about masks, thinking about things like, you know, it was ventilators at the time and, you know, obviously vaccines and so forth.

So the capacity to deal with all of those things. But then we took that idea, and I think it's right for us to do so and are applying it to a whole set of other, issues and thinking about things like microchips, right, and having a lot of vulnerability in Taiwan, where the world's microchips are basically being produced.

And then the, you know, the reshoring, the offshoring, reshoring issues around that. But now thinking a little bit about it more broadly as ‘de-risking’, okay, so who are our friends here and ‘friend shoring’. Right. So putting making sure that our supply chains are in places where we actually have reasonably good access. But I still think that, you know, this is this is, it's more of a state conversation. It might be a bit more of a who is on our side, who are our friends, who can we really trust in the moments where we really need to trust? And how far do those boundaries go?

And it's trying to figure out who your friends are and shoring up those, you know, in between country friends. Right. A lot of the Global South friends, a lot of the nonaligned countries that really want to sit in the middle, the Indias, the Brazils, the South Africas, the Saudi Arabias, people who sit right smack dab in the middle, we are all wanting them, right?

Both sides of this authoritarian democratic divide, everybody's going after them. And then the question is, where do we want to sit in this? How far do we want to go to make a deal? How much of our integrity and our principles and our human rights and all of this stuff are we willing to compromise on how much is it going to be much more about these realist interests in defending our security?

CHARLIE

So moving on then, from that, can political parties find enough space to produce the commitments that meet the scale of these global challenges? We've talked so far in this conversation about Russia and China and developments in Ukraine, and in other parts of the world. Even if we think about pandemics, climate change, these are huge issues. So can political parties find the space to make meaningful commitments and progress on these issues?

OLIVIA

Well, I think it's going to be extremely challenging for whichever party forms the next UK government, because of course there will be so many calls on them to address nominally domestic

problems, particularly the UK's slow productivity growth, faltering public services.

There are going to be a lot of calls on their time and not a lot of fiscal space to do it. Not a lot, not a lot of money to do it and an awful lot of problems. But I think it would be a mistake to imagine that people don't care about foreign policy and that they don't in that sense - whichever party forms the next government does not, in that sense - have the political space or the political remit to address it.

I think people just often articulate foreign policy issues in different ways from we might expect. If you look at polls, to pick up on Christine's point, people in this country do worry about climate change. And there's quite a striking public consensus about climate change. People don't necessarily agree about what exactly we should do about it, but it's consistently an issue that people put at the top of their list of concerns.

People also do worry about global conflict. Polls show that people see the UK as unprepared for something like a large-scale conflict scenario with Russia. Not saying that's going to happen, but when pollsters put that to people, people feel concerned that we're not as secure, as protected as we could be. And I think the experience of the past few years has really shaped the way a lot of people are thinking, particularly the pandemic, as something that started as a problem far away that very rapidly showed up on people's doorstep and really changed the way they were living their lives.

But also the return of full on state-on-state war in Europe is a massive shift in the way people see the world. And you can see this articulated in some of the political parties' thinking and

strategies. So Labour in particular have adopted security as a watchword. But they're particularly thinking about the way voters feel and experience security.

So all the way from kitchen table type security: can you pay your bills? Do you feel like you can make ends meet? Up to a global sense of security, a sense of the UK is a secure country, and it's not going to be buffeted by these geopolitical shocks or is able to defend itself. So forgive me, that was quite an abstract answer, but I do think that one way to answer that question would be to say, well, it would be very difficult because ordinary people don't really care about these global issues, especially when we have so many everyday domestic problems. But I think there is a bigger way political parties can think about this, which is that I think people do care about these things. They do worry about things like energy security, they worry about conflict, they worry about climate, but we might need to be creative about the way we articulate these problems and their solutions so that their relevance is really brought home to people.

And I think we might need to for things like climate, you can see a bit of a shift in people's understanding of, especially since the war in Ukraine, what energy security might mean for the UK.

There's a there's a different way to articulate the need, for example, to bolster our sources of renewable energy. It's not just about doing good in the world, it's also about safety and security and not relying on brittle supply chains or hostile states for supplies that we need. So it may be that we just need to rethink the way we are talking about security.

And I think, interestingly, you do see some political parties seeking to do that.

## CHARLIE

I think that's a really interesting point there that you've pulled out in terms of that link between domestic policy and foreign policy. I think we're seeing that now almost more than ever, at least in recent history. And I think there's an interesting point there about how different parts of the UK population experience security and what security means to them.

You mentioned energy security being a big one that I think everyone's very focused on at the moment. But there's also kind of gender dynamics between men and women in the country and how they experience security. Then there's parts of the population like the elderly, those in cities versus those living in more rural communities. To what extent do you think that is reflected in the way political parties are thinking?

## OLIVIA

I think the idea that there are increasing interlinkages between domestic and foreign policy is gaining a bit of traction in some kind of political and policymaker circles, and I think it's a really interesting idea. And it has a lot of implications for the way we do government, which I think might be a very interesting question for whoever wins the next UK election.

There's been some really interesting commentary recently about should we rethink altogether, sort of the way that the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, its main foreign affairs department, rethink the way that it works. Over the

past few years, there's been a lot of kind of changes and shifts in the shape of the UK government and the different parts of it that have an international remit.

Some of that's been because of Brexit. You know, suddenly we needed our own trade strategy, so we needed government departments that looked at international trade, but also trade has, in exactly that period of time, become much more fraught because there's more kind of protectionism. We're in a more geopolitically competitive world. So trade has become very linked to our security.

So all these different bits of government that we may be traditionally would have seen as just being in their own departments, in their own categories, as joining up a bit more. So I think that is a really interesting question for both how ordinary people in this country conceive of their own security and conceive of foreign affairs increasingly, maybe not something happening really far away, but something that sort of has these implications on our own doorstep.

And I think that also might be reflected in the way the next government maybe chooses to think about how government does foreign affairs, linking our kind of economic policy, economic and trade policy with our foreign policy, with our development policy. The importance of climate and climate transition in all of this, I think, is going to be massive, because our relationships with countries that have different resources that we need, because we're going to be looking at different sources of energy.

It really just shifts the way we think about foreign policy away from this bit of government that's very separate, very separate from ordinary people's lives to something that's far more



intertwined with other areas of government policy and has lots of relevant implications for ordinary people.

## LEWIS

Christine, perhaps if I turn to you, and you might have to take off your academic hat for a second and, because you've played a role in helping to draft policy for the Liberal Democrats, is what Olivia is talking about there in terms of what kind of political space you have to set policies that meet the needs of, the kind of global challenges we've talked about.

To what extent does that space kind of feel there for you as a party, as you're thinking through what to propose? And do you also feel that you're kind of under that, you're having to navigate your way round this kind of, link between foreign and domestic policy and having to kind of demonstrate that to voters.

## CHRISTINE

Yes and yes. But that's a perfect segue because I was thinking about what Olivia was saying in terms of an example. And in fact, I had one perfectly in mind because we struggled with this, I should say I struggled with this personally is thinking about 0.7, right? So that's a huge amount of money that we would want to spend overseas.

How do you justify that to a normal voter when they can't pay their bills at home? And they're saying, why are we spending this

money overseas when we have so many problems at home? And I think that is a perfectly legitimate question to ask, and that is one that we need to tackle head on. And, you know, I struggled with this a lot because we have homeless people on the streets.

We have so many issues with the NHS. We have a million things that we need to address at home. I have a son in school here and I don't think his school is, is doing very well. We have, you know, the falling apart schools with the, you know, the concrete issues. There are so many things. How do you tell somebody that this money needs to go overseas?

How do you justify that? And I think the best way in which I have thought about this and come up with it in dealing with it internally through the party and with discussions and with normal people, is to say that if we don't, there are consequences, right? So the things that are happening over there, as with energy, are not completely divorced from the things that are happening at home.

And I don't think any political party has done a good job of actually communicating how the things that happen over there then will have roll on consequences at home. Right? So people talk about small boats. They see that as an issue that happens over there. Nobody says, 'oh yes, by the way, when we do this, that and the other overseas, or when we fail to do this, that and the other overseas, when we fail to deal with peacebuilding issues, when we fail with conflict resolution, then the consequences end up back on our shores', right?

That's how we end up spending billions of pounds on dealing with refugees. This is you know, we are not taking our fair share of the global burden. And this is me, Christine, saying that, that I don't think we are, not the party saying this, but it is our thinking and

our conceptualisation and our framing of these issues that I think is part of the problem.

People see this foreign policy issue as quite separate from, hey, look, there are ramifications for when we don't deal with it. And if politicians could actually, all of them across all the parties, could do more to actually bring these things together in the way that in terms of, you know our conflict resolution issues and so many other things, we would do such a better job with how we spend our money.

But the space, you know, politicians need to create the space and actually be a little bit more brave to have those conversations.

LEWIS

Yeah, I think that, I mean, that resonates with me. I think, you know, having been out door knocking myself for political parties and I think that challenge that you were talking about there is one that probably all parties face, even if that that there is a collective failure in how they're doing it. I imagine that door knockers approach all political parties who they're door knocking for, and say, you know, if a voter asked me about this, how do I justify it in conservative terms, Labour, Lib Dem, you know, Scottish Nationalist or Green or Reform or anyone else? So yeah, it, it it's kind of, I think probably a universal challenge if you like, in terms of, right sizing international commitments with domestic political opinion. So yeah, not an easy one to navigate for sure.

CHRISTINE

Absolutely. And you have to do it in 30 seconds or less. And you also have to be able to deliver it as a soundbite in any kind of broadcast interview. Right. So that's a hard thing when the issues are complex.

#### CHARLIE

But then just to press on that, what do you think needs to change then in order for politicians to actually create the space where they're able to have these conversations? Is part of the problem that, you know, the structure of government and the way things work, you know, financially in the UK they are so separate?

Is it a structural issue like that, or is it is there a reluctance in the rhetoric because of this fear of scaring voters away from your policies? What do you see as the kind of the main driver of that issue?

#### CHRISTINE

Both. Yeah, absolutely. I think and I don't think that Olivia will disagree with me, that there are structural issues that incentivise particular sets of behaviour.

And I also agree with, you know, the fear that politicians have of saying the wrong thing. And right now, if I was Keir Starmer, I am treating this whole set of issues like a very delicate Ming vase that I have to shepherd through very carefully and just carry through very, very carefully without fear of breaking anything. So, you know, I feel for him as I do for all of the politicians that have to defend a lot of these very difficult issues because it is hard to thread the needle through.

But I would say part of this too, also has to do with, you know, the media space in which we all deal with these issues and try and speak about them. And, and I would say the best example that I've seen so far in trying to bridge this divide is probably The Rest is Politics podcast. You know, where you have somebody from the left and Alastair Campbell type and then a Rory Stewart type from the Tories trying to actually plough through the complexities.

Right. And giving you a very intimate set of, hey, how do you think about this when you're in government? How do you think about this from the civil service perspective? How do you think about this internationally? And it is a cross-party, hey, we disagree on a lot of things, and we're allowed to disagree, but it is civilly done.

It is kindly done. It is with empathy and really listening. And when they don't agree, they don't agree. And sometimes that's okay.

But the conversation space is the kind that I would like us to go back to as a country, which is what I found when I came here 20 years ago, and I don't think that space is there anymore.

## LEWIS

What's interesting as well is that, I mean, the point you raised about how we have a debate within the country, but also there's something about foreign relations which is also kind of looking outwards and having a conversation with the rest of the world. And I guess in this, how we have a debate within the UK, I mean, it's something that we, try and do at Saferworld is try and bring voices from outside the UK in.

But I wonder if there's also a challenge, particularly around election time, and as to how you have a sort of the right kind of internal within the UK conversation, but on foreign relations, also trying to kind of think about how others perceive the UK as well. Maybe that's harder at election time to square that balance. But I mean, it's hard enough for us to try and do on foreign policy generally, but perhaps it's something harder in elections.

I don't know if that resonates, I guess Chatham House, you are known for convening people, whether that's a point that resonates with you?

OLIVIA

We certainly do convene people, although we often do it in such a way where we promise them no one will say what they've said. So maybe that's part of the trick.

I think that challenge is really significant for political parties. You can see sometimes parties or politicians using foreign policy or foreign affairs in a way to portray something primarily to a domestic audience, or even primarily to a political audience. So I touched on it earlier, but the UK response to the war in Gaza has been, that is already a very difficult thing to respond to, but politicians in both the main parties have sought to do so in such a way that also keeps a domestic constituency together, because this issue is one of such resonance for different communities in the UK that it splits both main political parties in different ways. So you have real domestic divisions over an international issue.

And I think you see that too, with things like migration, where you can see, the government sort of seeking to talk about

concessions that it's won on migration or the ways in which it will sort of defend Britain's interest on migration. It's framing that for a domestic audience, when in fact, I think that the issues around migration ultimately are ones where we are going to need to agree an approach to sharing that burden globally with other countries.

So I guess what I'm trying to articulate is often issues where we need to have a certain type of conversation with foreign partners or even adversaries are framed in a very kind of partisan way to win political points at home. And it doesn't always help us. And it makes that kind of artificial division in a way between foreign and domestic policy worse.

It's almost that we're playing out foreign policy as a kind of drama for a domestic audience, which really doesn't help. And to pick up on kind of Christine's points, I think it would be such a healthy and beneficial thing for this country and for political debate in democracies everywhere if politicians and leaders were better and had more space to articulate complexity. Particularly when it comes to foreign affairs, because by definition it's an area where we're not in control, there are other actors and they're going to do things, and they have their own interests, and we're going to have to navigate those.

So, I don't know, I answers your question, but it's a reflection on how tricky I think combining the two, the two can be.

#### CHRISTINE

I thought that was beautifully done. Okay. And I totally, I totally agree with you. I think you know what you said about a lot of these issues setting them up they feel like they are international issues,

but because they are – on Gaza in particular, right, and with these particular attacks – it plays out in a particular way. And I, I do think that if there hadn't been the antisemitism problem from within Labour, I'm not sure that Keir Starmer and Labour would have come out as tightly behind Rishi Sunak as they would have, because the rest of the party in Labour does not feel that way.

And you feel it, you feel the tension. There is the rebellion from within, inside their party, and they are trying to contain that, but they are also trying to show that, “hey, if we do come into power, we will do the hard thing we are able to do the hard thing.” Part of that is just the ability to demonstrate resolve, and that I've got my party in control right. So there are a number of things that are going on in that move, but I'm not sure that the two parties have got it right on this one.

I absolutely see why they have taken the stance that they have, strategically, and also to communicate to all of our allies that we are good allies and that we will stand behind them no matter what in a lot of cases.

Right. So think of the West and what happened with Afghanistan trying to demonstrate that we are not going to do that again. But at the same time, you've got this huge divide domestically where, you know, UK population does not feel the same way as the two major parties do on this.

Right? So and here the Lib Dems are different. And I think for good reason. And in particular our Lib Dem spokeswoman, Layla Moran is part Palestinian herself and from Palestinian heritage. So there are lots of good reasons. And again, another good way, another fantastic example of how to speak across the division of



the parties right, trying not to politicise the issue and really speaking to the human aspect of this.

But it is hard if you are in the two major parties and trying to have a conversation about this and bring across the nuances and deal with all of the problems within your own party around the divisions here. So I think, you know, the splitting of some of these issues and thinking about how does the rest of the world think about our security policies?

How does the rest of the world think about the UK as a good potential ally? And are we an ally that will stick to our word? I think this, this, this issue of how we are seen by the rest of the world is absolutely critical, and I don't think we think enough about it.

#### CHARLIE

I think for me, there were a few really important points. I think one of them that both Olivia and Christine summed up quite nicely at the start to the episode, was this idea that there seems to be relative consensus between major political parties in the UK on the security challenges, issues and areas facing the UK that seems to be, you know, not too contested.

Where there are differences, in the solutions and the perceptions of how to address those security challenges. Now, to me, the differences actually weren't as stark as I thought they might be, but they but they were still there. We see quite small differences in the way that the different major parties are thinking about

tackling these issues now and how they might consider tackling them in a post-election situation.

I think another point that really came out throughout the discussion for me was this discussion around national domestic issues and this blurred line with foreign policy and foreign security issues, and how you, as a political party, go about communicating those foreign security challenges to your domestic population. I think finding the space to be able to do that in a succinct and coherent way is really, really important.

But as Christine highlighted, that's extremely tough to do. What were your key takeaways?

LEWIS:

Yeah, I think actually kind of, part of your last point there was, was really interesting. And I think Christine talking, almost making an impassioned plea to politicians to stand up and be leaders in setting the tone of the debate, and having difficult conversations that bring in the complexity of foreign policy and to have it in a way that's less divisive and is more about putting differences down and thinking through solutions as opposed to this kind of, more toxic state of debate that she had encountered. I think that was really important. And I think the second thing related to that was about, you know, at a time when British politics is about the British government and what it's going to do in all kinds of policy areas, how do you bring people affected by British foreign policy from overseas into that discussion as well? Seems to me really important for making sure we come out with the right foreign policies, with the right kind of democratic buy-in from the British electorate. So that to me I think is absolutely vital as we count down the days to the, to the next election here.

## CHARLIE

But that's all we've got time for today. Thanks for listening.

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