

**Large Format Transcript –
Warpod S2E5 BONUS: The impact of US and European
elections on UK 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.

LEWIS

In our previous episode, we looked at how UK political parties were thinking about security policy in the run-up to the general election.

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

Charlie, one of the big problems with doing Warpod is that we get stuck into some really interesting conversations with some really interesting guests, and end up with way too much content to fit into one episode.

CHARLIE:

Yeah absolutely. In our previous episode we had a really dynamic conversation with Christine and Olivia where we spoke about national issues related to the way UK political parties are thinking about security policy. We spoke about the tension for political parties in communicating some of these issues to voters.

In this episode, we're pivoting a little bit to look at international dynamics, particularly electoral dynamics, in the US, the European Union, and in European countries themselves, and the interplay that these might have with UK security policy over the coming years. We talk about how political parties might respond differently to these developments, for example if Trump comes into power in the US.

So we'll jump back into the recording with Lewis asking Christine a question.

LEWIS:

So, Christine, I mean, you were talking about how the UK behaves with allies and how that plays out in domestic policy or in policy recommendations and commitments of parties, particularly around election time.

I guess the US is deemed to be one of the UK's closest allies, and we've got a quite divisive election coming up in the US as well at the end of this year. So in terms of, how different political parties approach the US, do you think we're going to see different reactions from political parties in the UK to the outcome of that election?

Or, again, is this going to be another place where there's going to be quite a lot of consistency between, say, Labour and the Conservatives?

CHRISTINE

So I think largely, yes, there is going to be more consistency. I think it's easy if it's Biden. If Biden is re-elected, everybody and I would say this even about the different factions from within the different parties, that there is going to be a very positive response, as we would expect.

What happens, though, if Trump is re-elected? So, if he is re-elected and it's a clear win and it's clear for everybody to see, then, you know, I expect Labour will be in power and I think it will be difficult because, you know, parts of the Labour Party have said some not very nice things in the past. So, it will be a fine line to tread.

I expect that there are a lot of people from within Labour who will not be happy about this, but there is also the very practical consequence of the US are our closest allies. And frankly, having a less than great relationship that has happened over the course of years because of Brexit, we can't rely and just pivot to the EU, I think, in the way that we would have previously.

So, I think he's he will have to thread this, you know, walk this very fine line that is going to be deeply uncomfortable for him, probably both personally, but professionally you just have to do what you have to do. Right. And then the question is, how do you make the party, you know, do the same thing? And frankly, the country, right.

So I think the country is going to have a hard time with it as well. So managing all of those dynamics, I just see real difficulties and real obstacles. And then what if an even more difficult situation arises, which is Biden wins, but it's very, very close, *very close*. And we know that this going to be the case.

Then, how does Trump respond? If he responds in a way that disputes the election? And I think he's basically telegraphed that he's going to. He's not tried to hide the fact that he's going to dispute it. He already feels like he has the right to win this. Then what happens?

Because the response there could end up becoming violent. He could nod, wink wink, nudge nudge, in the direction of groups that have the potential to do harm. Right? Bring real violence into this situation. And then plausible deniability. 'I didn't really say that. I didn't really do that.' If he does do that, what do we say? What do we do?

What do you do when your closest ally does something like that? And they might end up actually in power too, right? So, if there is a that kind of movement and then he really does come to power in a situation where we would not normally see that as legitimate. And if it happened in any other country, we would come out and say something.

What do we say? What do we do? I don't have an answer for that. So, I don't and I'm not sure that any of the parties would, right? Because it would be so completely unprecedented, but also definitely a non-zero chance of happening, that I really think all of the political parties should be gaming this out now. Right? Like we have to think about the response.

And also the response should be cross-party, and we have to be very careful about it because we are still reliant on the US for our security, like we are part of the US security umbrella. And this is not a time where it was 20, 15, 20 years ago, when things were much more secure, where we didn't have to worry about an invasion from Russia.

So all of the calculations are just so much more delicate and fragile. And I'm genuinely worried about this period.

OLIVIA

I mean, I would completely agree with Christine both that I think both parties are going to do their very best to have some kind of relationship with a US administration, whoever wins power, and also that that throws up some very difficult, immediate questions. Maybe just to pick up on a different theme or to add an additional challenge into the mix is whether Biden or Trump wins, the continued presence of Trump as a force in US politics, but also other trends in US politics raise real, long term questions about what kind of role America is seeking or will seek to play in the world. I think actually on both sides of the aisle in the US, you hear more questioning about the US's international role, in a way that I think means the UK will both have to think about how to respond in the moment to some very difficult questions about its

closest ally, and also probably has to do some long term strategic thinking about our alliances in the world.

Because if we have a very unpredictable US or a US that is much keener to focus on China, the Indo-Pacific play less of a role in European security long term, then that opens up big questions for the UK about the security umbrella that we have been part of, our relationship with our European allies, but also the US has traditionally played a role on big global problems like climate.

Trump took the US out of the Paris Agreement last time he was in power. He might do a similar thing again. So then where will we, you know, look to which or which actors might play the same kind of, leadership or organisational role on some of these big global problems. So there's both immediate questions and long term questions, I think.

I mean, if it is Trump, I think whoever is in power in the UK will probably seek to continue to have some kind of functional, transactional relationship with him. But exactly as Christine says, it's going to be very, very challenging. There are also going to be some long-term questions about America and our relationship with them, I think the next government will have to think about.

CHARLIE:

And then what about Europe as well? I think we mentioned earlier on in the podcast that, a Labour government in the UK might seek closer relationships with, with Europe as a whole and specifically with the EU. But as people might be aware, there's big major elections going on in lots of countries around the world this year, but quite a few of them in Europe.

So we're looking at France, Germany as well. Some of the really big players in the EU are having elections where there is a potential creep in of, you know, more right wing politics. So it's not just the US, which we've already covered, but also closer to home. So it's not a simple solution of saying, oh, well, if we can't look to the US, maybe we'll switch to, increasing our relationships with the EU.

So how do you see the EU playing out in terms of the way political parties might take this forward post-election?

CHRISTINE:

So I've just come from Berlin, where I had the chance to hang out with a bunch of Europeans. So this was for the Berlin Moot, which was a peace conference, thinking about peace processes and peace settlements.

And I think relatively, you know, just shortly before that, I was attending an ALDE conference with a lot of the different European parties.

CHARLIE:

Just for listeners who don't know, ALDE is the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

CHRISTINE:

So both of those in those conversations, I definitely felt the distance of being in the UK. And I'm sad to say that. I think that Ukraine is going to pull us together. I think that our joint need for

dealing with security at a continental level has been made clear as a result of that.

But I think when it comes to the peace and security kind of defence issues that I think both the Lib Dems and Labour have said that they want, that we want, the difficult part of this conversation is that they might not want us in the same way that we want them. And I think if they do want us, it is really because they see a real security threat.

But I, I think and I want to correct this perception here because I don't think that people, voters in the UK are fully aware of it because why would you be hanging out with European parties? You know, there's no reason to be, but they do not feel like we are trustworthy. You know, they do not want us the way that we think. Oh, if even if we wanted to go back and this is being hammered home quietly to me and to others, that we might not be welcome. And these are these are people who want us on their side. Like, I mean, these are they see the Lib Dems as very pro-European. So this is the friendliest of the bunch, right?

But because that experience of Brexit was so hard and difficult and fraught and frankly, you know, there was a lot of back and forth, it shouldn't have happened. Agreements that were settled and then were not, right. The comments about international law, that was deeply unhelpful. All of the stuff around Northern Ireland, there's so many things where we don't look like the country that we once were in terms of keeping our word.

So, I think when it comes to Europe, I'm quite concerned about that, that even if we wanted to, that it's going to be a lot harder than we think it is in the UK. Right? We think they're just going to say, yes, of course, come on, come on back in whatever form it is,

right? If you want to do more trade, if you want to do more security, that we would be welcome back.

I think that conversation is going to be much more guarded, much more careful, much more transactional, and a lot less trusting than it would have been from, you know, immediately say after Brexit, right. If we'd done it then and frankly, you know, if we had, if Theresa May had been successful in pushing through the form of the deal that that she wanted, then maybe we would be in a different space.

But this is not where we are now.

OLIVIA

I think I would share all of those concerns about not taking our relationship with the EU for granted. I think it will be certainly challenging to reform, kind of relationships and links that the UK might be seeking, depending on who wins the election and what exact program they set out on relationships with the EU. I do think there's I mean, Christine, you said this, but just, just picking up on it a little bit more.

There are going to be some very difficult questions for the EU in the next five, ten, 20 years, particularly on security and particularly on, kind of managing geopolitical risks. And I do think that is one area where the UK has assets to offer. We do have we have kind of outsized defence assets to offer. We have played a role in European security.

As the EU seeks to answer some of those questions for themselves, I think we should we certainly shouldn't take anything for granted. But there is space for the UK in that

conversation over the long term. So I think if, if it were me forming the next government, I would be thinking, what questions does the EU have and what security concerns does it have, and where is the space for the UK in that kind of longer term conversation?

So I think all of that is well taken. And I also, I guess I'm seeking to end on a slightly more hopeful note that they're not doesn't necessarily say good things about, the world out there, but both the EU and the UK have some similar security concerns, geopolitical concerns and questions. And that might, that might open up a bit more space to cooperate over the long term.

LEWIS:

In a conversation that's had a few bleak moments, perhaps a hopeful note is a good one to end on.

CHARLIE:

If you haven't listened to the full discussion with Olivia and Christine, we really recommend that you do so. Search for Warpod and look for the episode with the title "How are UK political parties thinking about security policy?". Thanks for listening!

Warpod from Saferworld. This series was produced by Andy O'Connor and supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

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