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The UK: Time for a diagnosis and a prognosis



Thermometers and Temperatures

It's time for a health checkup for the UK. Seven years of political turbulence here have been marked by our leaving the European Union ("Brexit") in 2016 by a small majority in a referendum, followed by the global COVID pandemic, accompanied by a lengthy stretch of challenging lockdown.

Not to mention an unprecedented series of brief tenures of five different prime ministers within six years, each one apart from the rather underwhelming incumbent, Rishi Sunak, ousted by their own (Conservative) party for various reasons.

These included political and economic incompetence in two cases and the saga worthy of Norse mythology of Boris Johnson - breaking a law he enacted himself - and as a result of accusations of serial lying, still subject to a series of political investigations and "public enquiries" (we love enquiries).

All this has been spiced up by almost daily resignations and firing of close aides and advisers of said ex-prime ministers for breaching lockdown laws.

Add astonishing numbers of dismissals for sexual impropriety within the hallowed gothic halls of Westminster.

Stir into the mix a spike in inflation rates making life barely affordable for many, and a slew of strikes by transport workers, junior and senior doctors, teachers (generally, reportedly by polls nobody really trusts, supported by the public).

This is not sedate, stiff upper lip Britain! We might have misread the recipe. Someone's left the cake out in the rain!

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I believe the motives were more complex - or arguably, more simple - than a reflex action of the wail that "we want our country back", and "they're eroding our national identity", which dominated the lamentable national "debate" pre-referendum.

I can envisage a Martian or an inferior AI bot assessing that we are secretly yearning for an imperial past in splendid isolation, but I think that despite elements of this, the facts differ.

The real issue was and remains illegal immigration - reluctance to debate directly for fear of accusations of racism, which has become confused with EU membership and less than a political football than a political boomerang, returning to blind you. Like a problem without a solution, you have to treat it as a fact.

Added to anxiety about your children's disrupted education during lockdown, and the strong possibility that they will have problems ever buying a home (a British obsession) - the doctors who are not on strike will take out a thermometer and check your temperature. It wouldn't be unfair to say your temperature - and blood pressure - are pretty high.

The doctor or the superior AI bot might tell you that a holiday in the sun would be of benefit. But unfortunately the air traffic controllers are on strike too.

British understatement - it's all a bit fraught.

invasion of Ukraine will have unavoidable ramifications for everyone.

Prognosis and Barometers

This is a challenge even for the more reliable AI bot.

People do not tend to vote on foreign affairs issues: our priorities are security and economic issues. We vote for whom we believe will make us safer and wealthier.

We still have a seat on the UN Security Council. We still have a significant say in NATO. We still have a sense of humour.

If you are a Conservative politician you would have to indulge in a hefty dose of magical thinking to be confident that your job will last beyond next year's General Election.

But I'm considering voting for the Liberal Democrats, learned AI bot.

But that too, is a job for the thermometer. This Thursday's four by-election results forced by the resignations and sackings will confirm, deny or be completely irrelevant to my assessment.

"There is no shame in checking into a mental hospital", replies the bot.

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We need a barometer for a longer-term assessment - or prediction - of the UK's prospects.

The past is important - we learn from it and attempt to avoid mistakes. But the future alone has the power to terrify.

Will the UK implode from withdrawal from the Single Market and rejoin the EU? Possibly, but only if the EU vaguely remains in its current form, and very politically unlikely in the short term.

And whether you pay attention to foreign issues or not, the outcome of the Russian