



By: *Harvey Morris*

Bond villain or visionary genius? How the British view Musk



Elon Musk this week invited his 211 million followers on X to vote on whether America should undertake to liberate the people of Britain from their tyrannical government.

It was the latest rhetorical salvo in a campaign waged by the man dubbed the disruptor-in-chief against the governing Labour Party almost from the day it took office.

The Musk vendetta took off when the billionaire predicted that civil war was inevitable as summer riots rocked parts of the UK, spurred in part by misinformation spread on X.

Since then, his rhetoric has grown increasingly intemperate, as when he **asserted** that, under Labour, “Britain is going full Stalin”.

More recently, he has managed to grab the news agenda with his accusation that Prime Minister Keir Starmer was “complicit in the rape of Britain” by failing the victims of child sexual exploitation gangs.

For good measure, he branded safeguarding minister Jess Phillips a “rape genocide apologist” and proposed she should be sent to jail.

A step too far

That was a step too far for Starmer, who, in his first public intervention of the new year, **declared** that: “When the poison of the far right leads to serious threats to Jess Phillips and others, then in my book a line has been crossed.”

Without naming Musk, he said those spreading lies and information were not interested in victims. They were interested in themselves.

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The debate on whether successive UK governments have adequately responded to the scandal of historical sexual abuse against vulnerable young girls exposed to violence and trafficking, notably by gangs of Asian origin, has been widely covered elsewhere.

The findings of numerous inquiries into how the police and safeguarding bodies failed the victims over decades, including the 2022 **report** of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, are readily available online.

Obsession with Britain

Let us focus instead on Elon Musk and the charge that his meddling in European politics poses a threat to the continent’s democracy.

The motivation behind his evident obsession with Britain is not hard to define. The election of a centre-left government in a US-allied state clearly offends his relatively recently evolved right-wing sensibilities.

He is also alive to the potential consequences of the UK’s Online Safety Act under which social media companies will face fines for failing to police violent content.

His social media rants - including his call for King Charles to **dissolve** the UK parliament - might normally be expected to raise a sigh or even a chuckle from the irony-loving British.

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It is no laughing matter, however, that the world’s richest man will have an official role in the incoming Trump administration as co-head of the new Department of Government Efficiency. Labour MPs are not alone in crossing their fingers that the two heavyweights will eventually fall out.

For what it is worth, the British in general do

not appear to have much time for either man to judge by occasional surveys. A YouGov poll in November **found** that around two-thirds of the public, including X users, had an unfavourable view of Musk.

Many of the latter blame him for the coarsening of debate on the once useful platform they perversely insist on still calling Twitter.

Meddling in European politics

Whether Musk should be regarded as a visionary genius or a latter-day Bond villain - those midnight tweets can be quite creepy - there is no doubt that he has the presence and the cash to influence the political debate well beyond the US.

France's President Emmanuel Macron and Jonas Gahr Støre, the Norwegian prime minister, are among the leaders who have **criticised** his meddling in European politics.

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In Germany, where Musk has endorsed the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in upcoming federal elections, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has responded to online insults from the X owner by advising Germans: "Don't feed the troll."

In the UK, meanwhile, Starmer accuses Conservative and other right-wing opponents of jumping on the bandwagon to exploit the latest Musk-driven furore.

Musk's scope is limited

Starmer's rivals should perhaps be careful what they wish for. Musk has **turned out** to be a fickle friend in the case of Reform's Nigel

Farage, who recently doffed his cap to the tech bro in the hope of receiving a fat donation, only to be told by Musk that he was not up to the job.

Farage's offence was to have rejected Musk's diktat that he should allow the jailed rabble-rouser Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, a.k.a Tommy Robinson, to join Reform.



Nigel Farage recently doffed his cap to the tech bro in the hope of receiving a fat donation, only to be told by Musk that he was not up to the job

Yaxley-Lennon, it should be remembered, was the one who cheered on the August rioters from his Spanish sunbed before being jailed for an unrelated contempt of court.

Tim Montgomerie, a former Conservative Party activist who defected to Reform last month, commented wryly that "Reform has probably dodged a bullet".

Musk has certainly emerged as an irritant, if not a menace to British politics. His scope is limited, however. His Ayn Rand-style ultra-individualistic brand of libertarianism, in which the loud-mouthed superman calls the shots, is not really adaptable to boring old Britain.

And, sadly, the very real plight of those who have suffered the assaults of child grooming gangs is certain to outlast his gadfly attention span.

By the way, that poll. Out of almost two million who voted on X, 58 per cent told Musk that America should indeed liberate the people of Britain from their tyrannical government.

You've been warned.