



*By Otar Davitaia*

### UK General Election 2024 and what does it mean for British Foreign Policy?

Since 2010, the Conservative Party has grown in power from Lord Cameron’s coalition with Liberal Democrats to Boris Johnson’s 2019 super-majority. Although the party took a hit in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum and the resignation of David Cameron, his successor Theresa May managed to form a minority government. However, May failed to wield the power over her party and successfully convince the opposition to approve her Brexit deal. Five years have passed since the Conservative party was given a strong mandate (the highest majority since Thatcher’s first cabinet) to sort out Brexit and address the issues which led to Brexit. Although prime ministers changed, the mandate of the party stayed. Yet the day of the general elections (4<sup>th</sup> of July) looms darker and darker over the conservative party. Mismanagement of Covid; ‘partygate’; the sorry state of NHS; and The Brexit deal that created more problems than solutions<sup>1</sup> are beckoning electoral doom for Tories in the next general election. Neither Liz Truss nor Rishi Sunak managed to reverse the harm done by the policies of Boris Johnson, and the combined failure to remedy these issues will affect the outcome of the general election. As a result, YouGov polling has shown potential drastic change in the representation in the next parliament.

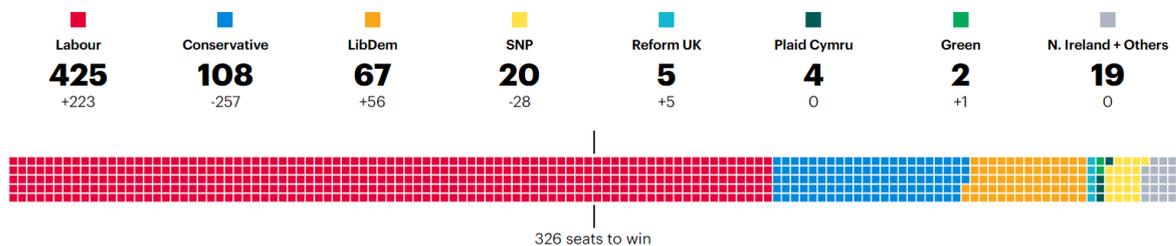


Fig.1. YouGov projection as of 19<sup>th</sup> of June<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See YouGov ‘The most important issues facing the country’ <https://yougov.co.uk/elections/uk/2024> [accessed on 01.07.2024]

<sup>2</sup> UK General Election 2024, YouGov, <https://yougov.co.uk/elections/uk/2024> [accessed on 01.07.2024]

Should this projection hold true, the Conservatives will have the worst performance in the party's history and beat the anti-record of Lord Balfour of 1906 (131 seats)<sup>3</sup>. This polling clearly shows how questionable policies implemented by the last three cabinets decimated support and led to voters jumping ship. Where Right-wing voters went to Reform UK and more moderate were split between LibDems and 'New Labour-esque' Labour. It should be noted that the Scottish National Party also took a hit following the demise of Nicola Sturgeon and the short tenure of Hamza Yousaf as Scotland's First Minister. As of now, it seems that Sir Keir Starmer will be the next British Prime Minister and will have a super-majority in parliament.

Although, one can go on and on discussing the Labour Manifesto and examining different sections of it, this article will concentrate on the implications that the Labour government will bring to the foreign policy of the UK and its involvement in the Black Sea region, as later has become a battleground between Russian Federation and civilised world.

Prime Minister Sunak in his campaign has stated that '... the choice at the general election should be based on defense and foreign policy, and that Labour should not be trusted by the voters on these matters, now vital with a Russian war of conquest raging.'<sup>4</sup> However, whether the parties differ that much on foreign policy can be questioned. The Labour Manifesto vows to continue support of Israel and Ukraine. Yet, it should be noted that the manifesto underlines the importance of a special relationship between the USA and the UK. The visit of shadow Secretary for Foreign Affairs David Lammy MP to the USA in the beginning of the last month serves as a testament to this. David Lammy met with Democrats as well as Republicans, he stated with the press later that:

'[Lammy] has just made headlines for suggesting, during a question and answer session at a right-of-centre think tank in Washington, that the divisive former and potentially next president, Donald Trump was "misunderstood".'

Should Labour come to power simultaneously with Trump, they would find a "common cause" in their approach to the world. Miranda, however, is not alone in her distress at Lammy's journey from his view of Trump as a "neo-Nazi sympathising sociopath" to a partner in the fight for international order.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that no matter which administration will be in place after the next presidential elections across the pond, Starmer's team plans to honour their vow to rebuild alliances and potentially get more involved in foreign affairs in Eastern Europe in support of the USA.

It also should be noted that Labour plans to become closer with the EU, as their manifesto hints at a desire to take on a relationship with the EU similar to that of Norway. Does this mean the UK will be more involved with European politics, I highly doubt it. Starmer has clear goals to stabilize the economy, NHS and housing market. It seems that for this term at least the domestic issue will be more prevailing than

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<sup>3</sup> Craig, F. W. S. *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918*. London: Macmillan, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Dominic Lawson, 'David Lammy, the least subtle of shapeshifters', *The Sunday Times*, Sunday May 19 2024

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Philp 'David Lammy: Building bridges with Republicans could be vital', *The Sunday Times*, Friday May 10 2024, 10.30pm, *The Times*

international and the overall current geopolitical strategy of the UK will remain or British involvement will increase depending on the position in Washington DC if the future president chooses a harsher approach to Russian aggression the UK will follow suit, so the ball is in American half for now. The main foreign policy goals for Labour cabinet will be establishing trade agreements in order to aid domestic situation within the UK.

Although one fact should be highlighted, as Starmer is not planning to increase taxes and spending based on the manifesto will increase, some cuts have to be made and foreign aid seems to be the place where money will be cut from, this will of course affect aid sent to Black sea region, with the exception of Ukraine, if the USA will continue sending aid (military or otherwise) so will the UK. Starmer seems to want to adopt the position of a 'follower' rather than a leader when it comes to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. This is understandable as solving domestic issues is more relevant for his campaign and future prime ministership, as this the reason for British people to elect him.

As the general election day is coming closer and Sir Keir is preparing to move into Downing Street 10, one question still remains whether he will be a "messiah" or a "very naughty boy" as one of his predecessors Mr. Boris Johnson.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mathew Normann, 'He's a very naughty boy, but on the Tory fringes Boris Johnson remains the messiah', The Independent, Tuesday 02 October 2018