Twitter Thread by Andrew Levi



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With @DavidGHFrost, for @BorisJohnson, tweeting 1 am threats at Ireland's government … what's up?

"Ever bought a fake picture?" Smiley asks Esterhase, in Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy. "The more you pay for it the less inclined you are to doubt it".

A (very long)■/1.

[The following is based on articles written earlier this year, updated - see "notes" tweet at the end]

When future archaeologists pick over the carbonised remains of the Johnson era, they will find many blackened cans kicked down to the ends of multiple Brexit byways. /2.

By a prime minister & cabinet trapped within the irresolvable contradictions of their core policy. Much of what the dig turns up will relate to Ireland/ Northern Ireland. Not incidental to Brexit, but central. /3.

The historians will marvel at how that led to Boris Johnson, David Frost & their Brexit becoming toast. If they're not too busy picking over the charred debris of England & the UK which, the way things are developing, are likely to be long gone as political concepts. /4.

But, back in 2021, you might be thinking: if only they had listened, we wouldn't be in this mess. The Irish trilemma was explained time & again, before the EU referendum & after. /5.

And now, if they would make genuine efforts to implement the Northern Ireland Protocol, sausages & all, instead of using it as a weapon against the EU & Ireland… Well, things wouldn't be perfect. But they would be so much better. If only. /6.

It isn't true. 'They' - Johnson & Frost - did 'listen'. They knew any 'oven-ready Brexit' taking the UK out of the EU customs union & single market had to put a border either across Ireland or down the Irish Sea. Certainly at the outset. /7.

They knew, & know, the first is such a blatant betrayal of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement even a Trump-led USA would have imposed unbearable costs on Britain if any government tried it on. And Mr Johnson and Lord Frost would be out of a

job before you could say “Suez”. /8.

An ‘Eden Strategy’. Bad idea.

Equally, they knew, & know, the second dismembers the UK of GB & NI, without majority NI consent. Which, despite highly contorted legal & political claims to the contrary, by well-meaning folk, they fully realise is also a betrayal of the GFA. /9.

And they know the Northern Ireland Protocol is a sticking plaster, not a solution. But one which might allow them sufficient wriggle-room to survive another day. Kick the cans & see if something changes to their benefit along the way. /10.

The ‘Micawber Gambit’. The best they have got.

Since it’s solely directed at maintaining their personal hold on power & advantage, requires constant escalation, & carries enormous risks for the country, it can safely be added to the ‘bad’ category. /11.

And they always knew, & still know, that the only sustainable way forward is for the whole UK to be in the EU customs union and single market, or substantially identical arrangements. Because of Ireland. /12.

Not forgetting the systemic, increasingly obviously catastrophic, damage to the UK caused by being out. But the Vote Leave cultists in the Conservative Parliamentary Party would defenestrate them at the whiff of such a move.

‘Suicide Mission’. Courageous. Not on the cards. /13.

In short, they’re backed into a corner. They did it to themselves (& the country). To get the keys to Downing Street. Cut through all the chatter & bluster, & they really are just waiting for something to turn up. /14.

How about the ejection of Ireland from the customs union & single market, & the imposition of a border with the EU in the Celtic Sea? Attractive. /15.

By rendering the Northern Ireland Protocol inoperable - if they can - their calculation is that the EU will be forced to implement a frontier somewhere. Not across Ireland, obviously. No one, except an extreme Unionist fringe, wants that. So, between Ireland and the EU. /16.

But to pull that trick, they need to make it look like someone else’s fault. That might appear an active strategy. However, it assumes such an unrealistic level of incompetence, incapacity & naivete on the part of the USA, EU & Ireland that, in reality, it’s for the birds. /17.

Quite apart from the EU’s resolve not to allow that, the current American administration would intervene to prevent Ireland from being sacrificed. Again, the UK has no say over the pivotal developments. It is little more than a spectator in its own future. /18.

Which is why the darkest, yet open, secret of the Johnson government is its desire for the Biden presidency to be overthrown. Or, as a good start, be incapacitated by a Trumpian revival in the mid-term elections. /19.

UK operatives are impotent, however, because Johnson and his team know that even the rumour of a suspicion of interference would bring down upon them wrath such as they have never experienced, nor ever wish to. They are cowering bystanders. /20.

It seems terribly unfair that the EU refuses simply to concede an unpoliced regulatory & customs frontier between it & the UK. The unicorns could roam free. And the World King could stay on his throne. /21.

Of course, the resultant gaping wound in its common customs & regulatory zone would tear apart the EU. It won't happen.

'Polexit' would be minor by comparison.

There's an alternative to this mess. Statecraft. With an election three years off, put the country & duty first. /22.

Outmanoeuvre & face down the extremists. Assemble a parliamentary grand coalition majority, & re-establish UK membership of the customs union & single market. By all means in stages. But decisively. And constitutionally sound government. /23.

For a PM who believes in nothing except the world constructed inside his own emotional-psychological universe, which includes what he imagines the history books should say about him, there are far worse options. /24.

Otherwise it's back to squirming in the space between lies & pretence, on the one hand, & the delayed impact of career-ending (& worse) reality, on the other.

The questions then are: when do the USA & EU move decisively? /25.

And, will they pursue a policy of UK reintegration into the alliance or one of containment?

Mr Johnson & Lord Frost can only spend each day watching. Hoping to survive to the next morning. If they haven't been up all night tweeting, that is. /26.

So, what are the chances of statesmanship & the true political skill & courage required?

For that we need to understand who we & the world are dealing with.

Despite, by now, millions of words published on the subject, few do. It's a very unpleasant story. /27.

Lord Frost is viewed as a disposable office help, patronisingly mocked behind his back by those exploiting his skills (which, if limited, are real). He's loved by much of the great unwashed of the Conservative Party membership. But they, too, though feared, are disdained. /28.

By whom? Well, let's start with their leader & work from there.

"I read 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy' at school", Mr Johnson told 'The Atlantic', in an interview released on 8 June. /29.

“It presented to me this miserable picture of these Foreign Office bureaucrats… For me, they were the problem”. The problem being Britain’s loss of mojo. Due to declinists who let it happen. /30.

The PM’s notion of Britain’s rightful place - superpower, or perhaps opportunistic, piratical cakeist - was, as John Le Carré recognised, wholly anachronistic when Johnson’s generation came into the world. All the more so by the time of the infamous Bullingdon Club photo. /31.

Many of Johnson’s contemporaries grew up to develop broadly realistic perspectives. Others stayed frozen in time. The main characters in ‘Tinker, Tailor’ were born in and around the First World War. Kim Philby, the original for Bill Haydon, in 1912. /32.

As Haydon and Smiley started their ascent through British Intelligence they realised they had been sold a lie. Empire was already over, bar the shouting. /33.

Successful management of Britain’s transition - now there’s a concept the current PM could try to learn about - from former hyperpower to normal-ish, small-ish, highly industrialised country at the western extremity of Eurasia was vital. Denial was for dolts. /34.

Both saw the truth. Haydon’s reaction was treason. Smiley’s, a sometimes weary patriotism. Fast forward to the elite 1950s and 60s babies. Eton & Oxbridge, or school & university milieus which aped them. /35.

Social-professional environments in which, to aid advancement, an ambitious Gove or Johnson simulated what they imagined to be an aristocratic mien. Not always wittingly on the part of mentors, the lessons today’s Johnsonians took away were woefully divorced from reality. /36.

And, consequently, unpatriotic. If, by patriotism, we understand the promotion of the security, prosperity & well-being of the country.

You will rule, they heard. Or chose to. Britain is great. America, a by turns contemptible, thrilling & terrifying upstart. /37.

Foreigners, bad or inferior. Britain, betrayed by feeble, effete, failures & communists. Otherwise, it would still be ruling the world. Proof? Britain ‘stood alone’ & ‘won the war’. /38.

Later, rubbing shoulders with billionaires, they thought they’d discovered that super-capable ‘sovereign individuals’ (a phrase coined by William Rees-Mogg) would inherit a tech-&-data-fuelled future. The rest could go hang, along with their quaint ‘nations’ & ‘governments’. /39.

Later still, fancying themselves visionaries, they half-digested second-hand fragments of Silicon Valley conversations about ‘bootstrapping unicorns’, & ‘the singularity’. /40.

Lacking direct experience & intellectual capacity, they never understood the nature & finality of the changes which sealed Britain’s fate: profound structural shifts driven by the spread of energy availability & economically transformative technologies. /41.

This became denial: loss never happened or was reversible. Allied, dissonantly, to victimhood: feeling robbed by the incompetence & treachery of those who preceded them. In a fictive mental universe belief trumps truth. /42.

As does cynicism: when everything is belief, who spins wins. And narcissism: when all is fake, what is left but self-advancement? /43.

Angry, nostalgic, solipsistic, revolutionary fantasists. In the absence of a yearned-for, but unavailable, sweeping power to direct people, resources & events, distracting themselves by ever more reckless attempts to escape their frustration & listlessness. /44.

This collective of sleepers, programmed not by the Soviets but by England's ancient institutions & their imitators, is now activated. A Manchurian Cabinet. Its task to eradicate post-imperial Britain & install an alternative. /45.

A fever dream of a never-existing, freebooting, Elizabethan England allied, improbably, to an 1870s Britain at the height of its dominance. No room for a social market economy, national health service, rule of law or, indeed, commonly held notions of truth or decency. /46.

As for geopolitical reality, forget it. The failure to appreciate Britain's circumstances is total. The fundamental truths of the last three-quarters of a century are, & remain, that without the economic & security infrastructure guaranteed by the USA, Britain is helpless. /47.

And that there is no viable alternative in any foreseeable future. The US-led system requires control of the eastern & western ends of Eurasia. Which is why the Americans have invested so much in European integration & the Euro-Atlantic Alliance. /48.

That there's been a relative erosion of US stand-alone power, massive though it still is, only increases the need for a stronger EU, in partnership with the US & global allies. Unless it fully pulls its weight, Britain's either a weak irrelevance or a pariah to be contained. /49.

There will be no free rides (or 'cake', eaten & kept) for self-styled British buccaneers.

Worrying the US might give up on European & other allies is, perhaps, understandable. /50.

Pretending that would be anything other than a catastrophe, or Britain could escape the consequences by quitting its responsibilities & trying to metamorphose into a 'nimble dolphin', or some other misunderstood business school concept, is foolish & dangerous in the extreme. /51.

Even Bill Haydon would have baulked at the approach some are promoting: holding out for a future US administration which would happily throw the world under the bus. /52.

A twenty-first-century echo of Britain's experience from around 1900 onwards is challenging the American global system. In the process shaking, coarsening & polarising politics in many countries.

The betrayal of Britain, though, has a special, bitter odour. /53.

The first global hegemon, unable to adapt to normality. Once deciding the world's rules, now pretending it can ignore them. Recently a leader of Europe, now less able than Luxembourg to assert itself. /54.

Shrinking its home market from the size of a continent to smaller than its own country. Shouting sovereignty while demanding & forcing through a deal which fractures & likely breaks up the UK. /55.

Absent a political counter-punch of exceptional force, Britain will continue its dystopian descent.

England's elite system programmed the Manchurian Cabinet.

'Europe' triggered it.

So far, Britain hasn't fought back. /56.

What's the time?

Time to fight.

If you care about the UK's security. Its prosperity. The well-being of its people.

Bring Britain back.

"What's this about, George?" says Esterhase.

"It's about which master you've been serving, Toby", Smiley replies. /57. End

Notes: thank you to all at @RebootGb notably @CrosbieLiz & @SimonPease1 for inspiring the original articles on which the above is based. I'm unaffiliated to party or movement. But I recognise decent, reasonable people, fighting for a better Britain & better world when I see them.