

## View from Westminster – June 2022

Geopolitics continues to be its usual blend of depression and insanity. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has become the defining global issue of the age, has descended into deadlock with little sign of compromise from either Kiev or the Kremlin. Neighbouring countries have submitted applications for NATO membership, serving to reinforce the Putin justifications for invasion in the first place or providing a lesson in unintended consequences, depending on your view, while demonstrating to some on our shores that the age of supranationalism isn't quite over. Stateside, former American President Donald Trump stands accused of trying to overpower his secret service officer, something that sounds far-fetched for TV, even within the context of his low standards of behaviour...

As for us down in Albion, politics remains the bedfellow of tragedy and farce. The dominant domestic event of the month - the vote of no confidence in Prime Minister Boris Johnson's leadership of the Conservative Party - demonstrates that admirably. There is little doubt the threshold of letters was triggered inadvertently. Only disorganised fools would have gone for it with two difficult by-elections on the horizon, which the governing party would go on to handsomely lose. Nobody meanwhile is suggesting the masterminds behind Downing Street parties are capable of multidimensional chess and so deliberate threshold breaches can be safely ruled out.

And so, a contest was held between Boris Johnson and a disparate and desperate parliamentary party with no unity candidate, discernible plan or shadow whipping operation. It is testament to the antipathy felt towards Mr Johnson that they mustered 140 odd votes against him. It leaves us in political purgatory and the nation possessing a Prime Minister weakened and doing little beyond moonlighting as an Ambassador to Kiev. The unofficial leadership contest begins in earnest... Speaking of which, two potential candidates for the crown, Ben Wallace, and Liz Truss, united on the eve of Boris announcing a defence budget squeeze to say that they want an increase! What a remarkable coincidence. Expect more of the same.

One parliamentarian just ploughing on with the job is the Aberdeen Raver. Fresh from his educational jaunt through the history of civilisation that accompanied the Levelling Up White Paper, Gove has launched himself into the murky world of local government reform. Very much where angels fear to tread, his latest proclamations come in various degrees of palatable! Firstly, he is proposing 2-year financial settlements, which will at least provide a degree of clarity and empower councils to undertake some medium-term planning with certainty. Confirmation will however be required that an inflation recognising clause is incorporated into the proposals to avoid a baked in cut for the second year. An obvious point perhaps, but one worth seeking reassurances over.

In addition, Gove has pledged to establish the grand sounding Office for Local Government. This, so runs the propaganda sheet, will act as a useful resource for local authorities to share best practice and acquire data that should allow them to improve decision making. So far, so innocuous, and potentially a useful conduit for local authorities. The cynic in me however wants to see how the body is used and fears it could turn into a government shield, both in terms of criticism deflection and access. Nonetheless, any doubts one has should be parked at least for the time

being, as there is good potential in both these initiatives. And you can't say that about much from either side of the aisle these days!