05152024 Clearlake Boris Johnson

**Clearlake**

**Boris Johnson – Former Prime Minister, United Kingdom**

**Introducer: José E. Feliciano, Co-Founder of Clearlake**

**Moderator: Behdad Eghbali, Co-Founder of Clearlake**

**Wednesday, May 15, 2024**

(Applause.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Boris, a lot of my fundraising meetings, I tell our partners there’s nothing proprietary. You’ve got to go in auctions. You have no angles, edges. There’s nothing you could do. Nothing’s really for sale that’s unique except Chelsea Football Club. So, we bought it from you. How did it go down?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I’m proud to have played a small part in selling Chelsea to you. And congratulations on your deal, 2.5 billion quid. (Laughter.) That’s pounds. I’m sure you got value, by the way. I mean, I think it’s a very, very –

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Did you get the highest price?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I mean, I think £2.5 million, I think Abramovich, when he bought it, paid considerably less than that. (Laughter.) But he’s made – it’s a great, great national institution.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** And how did you take it from Roman?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, we did something which we don’t normally do in the UK. We expropriated his assets. (Laughter.) And I want you to know, that’s very, very unusual. But I think in his particular case, it was worth it and it was right. And by the way, I don’t know what you think, Behdad, but there’s this £2.5 billion that you brilliantly invested in Chelsea, and it will turn out to, I’m sure, to be a brilliant investment. I’ve absolutely no doubt about that, but there it is, that money, £2.5 billion.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Sitting in a bank account.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Busting, sitting, doing nothing. And what should it do? We all know what it should do.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You did as any good politician. You said it’s going to help the victims of the war in Ukraine.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I think it should.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** But it hasn’t yet.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** It hasn’t yet, and I think it should be given to Ukraine, along with the $330 billion of assets that Russia holds overseas. And who agrees with me? Give it to Ukraine.   
  
(Applause.)

I mean, Clearlake has made a fantastic investment. Abramovich has. He didn’t want to, but he’s sold Chelsea for £2.5 billion. Give it to Ukraine.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** On a serious note –

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I’m serious, by the way. Yeah, I’m serious. (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You were first in line to go to Kyiv to support Ukraine. Two and a half years, three years later, we’re still mired in a World War I-style trench warfare, billions of spends, millions of lives lost. Why hasn’t the West been more coordinated to defend Ukraine?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I think that, look, first of all, the Ukrainians are heroic and do not underestimate anybody. What Ukraine has already achieved, they’ve kicked the Russians out of 50% of the territory that Russia occupied. The Russian economy is now more or less on a war footing. I mean, it’s gone back to being a command economy. Everything is being run by the state. Everything is going towards Putin’s war effort. Of course, they’re making money off their oil sales, but it’s gone backwards a long, long way, Russia.

And the Russians are not having an easy time of it, and I believe that they will lose. I think effectively, they have already lost, because Putin has completely disproved his own thesis about Ukraine. He said Ukraine wasn’t really a country, and they’ve showed the most spectacular national feeling, patriotism of any country in the world today. And they’re still fighting for their country today.

And people in America know that when wars of independence begin, this is a war of independence, they tend to end only one way, and the Ukrainians will eventually win. We’ve just got to keep supporting.

The answer to your question, Behdad, why has it taken so long is because we have, I’m afraid, at every stage, delayed too much in giving them what they need. And I’m glad that the $61 billion supplemental has gone through. That’s great, but it should have been a while ago. And my own country needs to do more. And expropriate those $330 billion, give them the right to attack troops massing behind the Russian border, and I think the other thing they should do is attack Crimea, or they should make it much more difficult for Putin in Crimea.

Do not rule out the possibility that Ukraine is going to win. I think Ukraine will win.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** We’ll come back to the U.S. elections later, but in a world where Trump wins, is Ukraine’s window over by November, by Jan 20th, or not? What happens?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** No. I mean, if you mean by that, is Donald Trump going to be a kind of Ukrainian skeptic, I don’t think so. I think he has in the Republic – is he going to pull the plug on Ukraine? I don’t think so. Look, I might be wrong, but I don’t think so. And I don’t think so for a very simple reason. I don’t think it’s possible for somebody who wants to make America great again to kick off their presidency by allowing Vladimir Putin to humiliate the West, which is led by America. I really cannot see how that works.

Victory for Putin in Ukraine is a complete humiliation for Western democracy and for the ideals of Western democracy. And I don’t think any American president can inaugurate their presidency with that. And if you look at Trump’s record in Ukraine, I think you can argue that it’s actually superior, certainly to the Obama White House. I mean, who was the president who gave the Ukrainians the javelin shoulder-launched missiles with which they repelled the Russians from Kyiv? It was Trump.

I’m worried, I’m anxious, but I think there are grounds for optimism.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Let’s stay on Trump. Like any good politician –

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Do we have to? Why? (Laughter.) I mean, what’s –

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** When he was president, you said the world’s safer and calmer.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Okay, okay, yep, yep, yep, yep. (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Biden wins. You say it’s a wonderful thing, a fantastic thing, breath of fresh air. I think you may have just endorsed Trump.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I said he was a breath of fresh air?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Yeah, at the G7 meeting, supposedly. I Googled it. Oh, sorry, ChatGPT. (Laughter.) Who’s going to win? Why?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I mean…

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** What happens?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Honestly, I think it’s too early to say who’s going to win.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Does it matter?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, of course it matters. America is the preeminent power in the world. I mean, one of the things that I really think sometimes people in the United States don’t see clearly enough is the continuing, in fact, intensifying reality of American preponderance. I mean, look at the relative growth rates of the U.S. and Europe. Look at America’s continuing military might. It matters hugely, how America is won.

Now, I’m not going to blight the chances of any candidate in this election by endorsing them. (Laughter.) That would be fatal, if I were to offer my support to either man. But what a credit, the American system is, by the way, to anti-ageing campaigns. (Laughter.) I mean, I think you’re really sticking up for the oldsters. (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You could run again in 25 years.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Say again?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You could run again. You could be PM in 25 years.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I know. (Crosstalk/inaudible) stretches out to the crack of doom, this whole thing. (Laughter.) It’s fantastic.

Look, so the honest answer is I don’t know who’s going to win. American leadership matters very much, but here’s what I think. I think that either potential president, and I think there’s probably only two, right, unless there are lots of supporters for Mr. Kennedy here. (Laughter.)

There’s some nervous laughter there. Is there a strong support for Mr. Kennedy?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Should we do a live poll?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Let’s just see if there are any backers.

Interesting. (Laughter.) Okay, he needs to build. He can probably build on that somewhere, but I think both of them will probably do the right thing on Ukraine.

I will say one thing. I think it’s probably a bad idea in principle to try to stop people getting on the ballot by legal methods. I think you should, speaking as a democrat, I mean, with a small “D,” I think you should allow the people to decide, not judges. There you go. That’s the most controversial thing I’m going to say. And I think it’s a big, big mistake. All this legal stuff is a big mistake.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** See, I think you and I agree. We’re pro-vaccine, unlike RFK, but we would have still gone to the parties. RFK would have, too.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, yeah. Well, I’m definitely pro vaccination. I heard him give a speech about the vaccines. It slightly puzzled me. My impression was that they were very successful, but he seemed dubious. (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Let’s go back to your time as Prime Minister.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Were you vaccinated?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** I was, a few times, four times.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Four times!

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** I tried both. (Laughter.) Pfizer.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** That’s greed. (Laughter.) That’s extraordinary.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Every six months.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** How many times? That’s not vaccination, that’s tattooing. (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** I never got the invite to the parties. (Laughter.) Right?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Ah, I see what you’re saying. (Laughter/applause.)

Can I say, if you’re talking – okay, you mean the very small handful of utterly miserable occasions in number 10 when – are you talking about number ten?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** We all had them. We all had them. You just got caught. (Laughter.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** No, no, no. No, I’ll tell you what happened. If you mean a party in the sense of a social engagement, I wish it had been so. I wish there had been music and dancing. And there was nothing of the kind. These were these were brief intervals, tragically, in which a very hard working bunch of officials broke off from their labors to say farewell to departing comrades.

And if you want an example of how things can get distorted, I give you the so-called Partygate scandal. I mean, I saw a guy, a British journalist on TV the other day, red-faced with anger as he described how he had seen footage of me drunkenly dancing one of these. The whole thing is complete bullshit. This footage was, of course, a Channel 4 reconstruction. Channel 4 is a leftwing, taxpayer funded channel in the UK, which basically spends its time attacking me, or did. (Laughter.)

Look, I can tell you, without fear of contradiction that it was bollocks from beginning to end. It was a load of bollocks. But what it expressed was what I think all Democratic leaders found at the end of COVID, including former President Trump. People were just exhausted by the whole thing, and they were very fed up. COVID, after the fear, and there was a lot of anxiety, what happens in a pandemic is an anger. And it’s basic human psychology. After fear comes anger, and that happened in every democracy.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You started out as a reporter in the English press. Tell us about the English press.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** As I’m sure you’re discovering, as proprietors of Chelsea, the English press are a model of restraint, courtesy, balance, civility. (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Facts. Corroboration.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I’m sure they make a – I mean, some stories, they regard as too good to check. (Laughter.) There is no doubt about that.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** See, I think my analogy is it’s sort of like the American press in the time of JFK, since we’re talking about the Kennedys, in Maryland. They just won’t report it until they want to report it, even if it’s true. Fair?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I think the British media, probably like the media everywhere, I speak as a as somebody who loves journalism and I do love writing still, they’re much more thin-skinned than you expect. All they want is love, really, like everybody. It’s a terrible mistake to attack them. They feel very wounded. I just recommend being nice to them.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** That’s good advice, talk to them and be nice to them.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, I think so. I think so. Give them stories. Say you’re going to try to encourage the £2.5 billion to go to Ukraine.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Well, I think I’ve got a better story. Brexit, right?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. (Laughter.) But on the £2.5 billion, I mean, could we say that that would be the preference of the proprietors of Chelsea, that it should go to – I mean, that would be a story. I think I could get that on the front page. (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** So, so… (Laughter.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Listen, I’m just chucking it out there as an idea, a popularity building measure.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** It’s true, or you just refunded to Clearlake. (Laughter.) Clearlake investors.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** That’s an alternative story. It would also be frontpage stuff. (Laughter.) I think on the whole with the punters, it might be less popular.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** But with our LLPs, it’d be more popular. With our investors, they’d be happier. (Laughter.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, it might be very popular with the people in this room. I can’t think of it.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Tell us about Brexit. Got you elected. It prevailed, some good, some bad. Five years later, what would you change about it, how it was written, implemented? What’s the five-year look back on Brexit?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** The reason I was elected and the reason I became prime minister was because we weren’t doing it properly. And people were just getting totally fed up because the whole point of Brexit was to take back control of your legislative system and to recover your independence. And I think sometimes, people in the United States think, this European Union thing, it’s great. It’s like what we did when the states of the U.S. came together.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** The revolution.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Or the creation.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You did lose the 13 colonies. We’ll get to that in a minute. (Laughter.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, we did, and we lost them over the principle that there should be no taxation without representation, and that countries should not be governed in an undemocratic way by overseas powers, if I recall. And wasn’t that the principle? Yes, and that was what was at stake in Brexit, because it was totally wrong that a country with a longstanding democratic tradition, like Britain, should be part of a project to create a pluribus unum, as it says, I think on your unit of currency, a single state. That is not something that, with a single parliament, with a single legal system, a single currency, a Supreme Court with an intensifying body of jurisprudence.

Now, that was the great American project, because you had a single language and a single culture. And frankly, the 13 colonies hadn’t been in existence independently for very long. And it wasn’t a bad idea. But for Britain, it wasn’t the right project. And Brexit was right just in principle, but it also turned out to be right in practice, because when we talk about the COVID vaccines, it is a fact that because of the stuff I had to do to take us properly out of the EU legislative system, we were able to approve the COVID vaccines, both Pfizer and AstraZeneca, and then I think Moderna faster than any other country in Europe.

And that meant literally that by March 2021, we had vaccinated 45% of our population. And the EU, on average, had done 10% of their population. Brexit save lived. Brexit saved lives. Point number one, because there were hundreds of thousands of elderly people in my country who got a vaccine, who would not have had one at that speed, had we remained in the EU.

I would mention lots of other things that we did, the AUKUS pact with the United States, with Joe Biden and Australia simply would have been impossible within the EU. I think the UK stance on Ukraine would have been impossible.

And there are dozens of other things that we’re doing now, from AI to bioscience, whatever, where we’re trying to make the UK, and this is a message for all you Clearlake investors, more attractive for investors, because we have a different approach to regulation, whether in, as I say, financial services or all these other sectors. And those Brexit dividends, they’re already appearing, but they’ll over the long term, I think they’ll be worth a huge amount to our country.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Tell us about your time as mayor of London. What did you enjoy? What’s your biggest accomplishment?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I loved every moment of it. I think the most important thing we did was to make London safer.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Do you want to take over LA? (Laughter.)

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I don’t know. I don’t know what I –

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Because I can ask.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** It seemed lovely. It seemed very safe to me. I cycled, I went along the, what’s it called, the beach from Santa Monica to somewhere else, Venice somewhere. It was absolutely beautiful. I mean, okay, there was a few people sort of (makes noise). (Laughter.) I think there was quite a lot of people who had drugs or something, but that was okay. (Laughter.) It seemed peaceful.

I think the most important thing, if you’ve got a problem of gang crime and knife crime, which is what we had in London when I took over, is to empower the police to fix it. And we had what was then a pretty controversial system of stop and search, and that worked. And we cut. In my time in London, we cut the murder rate by 50%, and we cut the crime rate overall by about 20%. I wouldn’t want to comment on the current Labour mayor and what he’s done, but it became very safe. And safety is the number one thing for investment, because it’s a big economic advantage for people to know that a city is safe.

We also did a huge number of things to level up. My political campaign is about leveling up the whole of the United Kingdom. And that means using infrastructure, skills and technology to give people chances they might not otherwise get. And in London, we put in huge amounts of – we improved the railways, the tube. And a lot of the areas of the city that had been run down became much more prosperous, and a lot of investment came in.

And I think by the end of my term, I was only mayor for eight years, but in those eight years, life expectancy in London for men went up by something like 18 months. And for women, I don’t know, for some reason it’s slightly less, because they already live longer, about 16 months. There you go.

I mean, it’s an absolutely unanswerable statistics, I would have thought. You live longer under conservative mayors. (Laughter.) That was my slogan. And it’s flattened off now under Labour, of course.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** That’s what Mike Bloomberg said, so there you have it. And you were born in New York.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I know, and Bloomberg – I was born in New York. Yes, it was a very expensive decision, it turned out to be, because when I was mayor of London, your Internal Revenue Service, you’ll all be delighted to know as American taxpayers, is a totally ruthless, insane body. (Laughter.) They pursued me for the tax, the capital gains tax on the sale of my primary residence. Can you believe that? Even though I hadn’t lived in America for 45 years or something like that. I mean, it’s unbelievable.

And my bank, such is the tyranny and extra territoriality of the American financial system that my bank sneaked on me. Barclays Bank told the American – I mean, it was unbelievable. (Laughter.) They said, we notice that this guy was born in America, and he’s just sold his primary residence. Do you think this might be of interest? I mean, unbelievable. (Laughter.) Makes us look like some pathetic colony.

I had to go and renounce, and it was actually, I was very – it was a very emotional moment because although I also had a British passport, I had to go and swear that I was of sound mind.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You still have the American passport?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** No, I gave it up. I gave it up.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You gave it up? You gave it up.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I could get it back, I’m told, if I could prove that at the time I relinquished it, I was not of sound mind. (Laughter.) That’s still open to me. But it was a wonderful thing, being American or being also American, purely by accident. But my father was studying then. He was a student. He was at Columbia University.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** And he was a diplomat, I think, at the World Bank.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** No, he was doing a diploma in agricultural economics, I think, at Columbia.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** But subsequently, you grew up in America, right?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, yeah, for a few years. I was quite small when I left, yeah.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Prime Ministers, who’s your favorite historically? Talk to us about that.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** In the UK?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Yeah.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I think it’s got to be.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You’ve got Churchill, Thatcher.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. No, it’s got to be Winston Churchill because he had the biggest span of any. I mean, I think he was in Parliament for 65 years. Someone’s going to correct me on this now. And he was quite a… He first flew an airplane in 1913 himself, 1913, and was still flying when they’d only been invented 10 years earlier or something. And he was still flying them in the Second World War. And he was just the most extraordinary guy.

And I mean, his biggest achievement was persuading America to come in on the right side in the Second World War, and thank goodness. And I think things really would have been different without him. I mean, really, I think that without him, Europe, the continent, my continent would have been plunged into a terrible racist tyranny, and history would have been very, very different.

And because he held on, he didn’t do a deal, he didn’t compromise with Hitler, as a lot of people said he should, and because he persuaded FDR to come in, history was different. I think of all the ones that I’ve looked at, I’d give it to him.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** And speaking of consequential English/British historical figures, talk to us about the royal family, your exchanges with the Queen.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, she was a most remarkable woman. And I’m not allowed to tell you anything controversial that she said, but she did say some pretty extraordinary things from time to time. (Laughter.) But she was a very, very… She’d known everybody. She’d seen it. I think there wasn’t a single American president she hadn’t met. I think maybe she didn’t meet LBJ or something like that, but she’d met absolutely everybody. She’d met Mao. She’d seen the whole thing. She’d served in uniform in the Second World War.

And so, when you went to her house, or should I say her castle, Balmoral, it was kind of eerie, being driven around at top speed over the moors by this 93-year-old woman, and literally with no bodyguards. And she would put the foot down and just tear over, and having taken drink, as far as I can remember, but not over the limit. (Laughter.) And she was absolutely amazing.

And the British prime minister has to go and see the monarch every week to try to kind of explain what’s going on. And with her, it was a bit like a kind of confessional. She was so nice, and she reminded me very much of one of my beloved grandmothers. And I felt there was almost nothing I couldn’t tell her. And so, she used to listen to my appalling confessions with every sign of supportiveness. And it was wonderful.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** And did she have parties during COVID? (Laughter.) She must have.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I think, Behdad, we’ve cleared that one up. With a great respect to your interrogation, I think we’ve – (laughter) – I think we’ve redefined the events in question. But no, look, she was an inspiration to the country during COVID. And actually, she was heroic. She gave some wonderful speeches. And I think she and the Duke got vaccinated very early on, very publicly, Prince Philip, in a way that was, I think, very encouraging for everybody. One of the reasons why we got vaccinated quite so – not everybody had four doses like you, but we did it pretty fast.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** It was not as much of a wedge issue in, I think, England as it was here (crosstalk/inaudible).

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** No, it wasn’t really political. We didn’t have people like Mr. Kennedy saying it was all Bill Gates. Well, there were some people who said Bill Gates was planting a silicon chip in you, but it didn’t catch on. But the Queen was an absolutely wonderful, wonderful person, but the King is doing a great job, too, absolutely great job.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** And then, before we go to a few questions, since you are American, your favorite American president?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** So far? (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** You’ve got, what, 46, I think?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I think I’m with FDR. I think he pulled our chestnuts out of the fire. What he did was incredibly important. And look, I mean, not for me to judge, but I think that the way he tackled the economic crisis, not everybody necessarily agrees or approves it, but at least he went at it hammer and tongs. And I think, pretty much, it worked. And I think you can have a great enterprise economy, where politicians lead by helping to provide great infrastructure and the foundations on which business needs to build. And I think FDR kind of got that right, and I’d give it to him.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** All right.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Plus, he came in on our side in the Second World War after almost two years of letting us bleed out. (Laughter.) But anyway, never mind. That’s the truth.

And by the way, when did we stop paying for Lend-Lease? Does anybody know this? The wonderful United States of America gave us a loan. You remember the Lend-Lease?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Yeah.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Does anybody know about Lend-Lease?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Lend-Lease Act.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** It was a system by which the U.S. loaned Britain for the cost of our war effort from 1939, 1940 onwards. And the last payment we made was in 2005, I’m proud to say, under the government of Tony Blair. One thing about the Brits is we pay our debts. One thing about the Americans, as I discovered when I was mayor of London, is you jolly well exact your pound of flesh. (Laughter.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Let’s take a few questions.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I think we covered the waterfront here.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mic.) I have a lot of admiration for the English system. And obviously, the reason we’re a democracy here in America is because we inherited the British system. We’re sort of like what Rome is to Greece, we are to England and to the UK. But I was just curious, do you think there could ever be a figure in British politics that would do anything like January 6th, like a storming of Whitehall? Could you ever envision something like that, Prime Minister Johnson?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** No, I don’t think so, and I’ve made my views clear. I mean, the January 6th thing, I think that was a terrible thing. And America is a shining city on a hill, folks. I mean, America is the last, best hope of the world. And it really is awful when you see people around the world able to point fingers at America and say that democracy is in trouble.

I don’t believe it. I don’t believe democracy is in trouble in America. If you look at the history of the United States, democracies have always been pretty turbulent here, actually. I mean, you have a record of assassination, which is… tragically. It’s long been turbulent, but it is robust. And whatever you say about that event or those events, there was a peaceful transition from one administration to the next in accordance with the will of the people.

That’s actually what happened in the end, and that’s what is going to happen again at the end of this year. And people around the world need to remember that, because there are plenty of countries, I’m afraid, where that isn’t what happens, and where, I’m afraid, it’s always clear what the outcome of the election is going to be. The mere fact that that election and so many American elections are so heavily contested, so uncertain, is, of course, a sign of the robustness of the system. It’s a good thing.

And look at Russia. Look at so many other places. Everybody knows what is going to happen in those elections.

The power genuinely is with the people, and that’s why this country is so creative and so extraordinary. I mean, there’s something going on in America, whatever the politics, that is truly exceptional, the growth rates, the creative fecundity, the tech sector. It’s still very, very remarkable. And so, I mean, I deprecate what happened. It was wrong, but in my view, it doesn’t mean that American democracy is seriously sick, no.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** It’s a great question. Pat?

**QUESTION:** (Off-mic.) My question is empires do fail, though, right?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mic.) And just wondering, is there a cautionary tale there that empires don’t always last, they go away? What happened there, and what might happen with us?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** I think that’s absolutely right. And history is, you said from the Greeks to the Romans. I think somebody once said that the Second World War was the war of the British Succession. Who was it was going to be? Was it going to be Germany? Was it going to be America? The answer was emphatically America, and America is the hegemon for now.

I happen to think that that situation will last quite a long time. America is not an imperial power in the way that we were. You don’t run colonies in the way that we did, very wisely. I think the United States has military bases in about 80 or 90 countries. You’ve got a different approach. (Laughter.) Just saying. But good. I mean, by the way, it’s not a bad thing.

But if you wanted some crystal ball gazing about the United States, really, I flew in over the desert. What’s it called? I don’t know what the desert’s called. And I looked down at California, this supposedly immensely populous state, right? I think you must have more people in California than any other state.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** I think it’s the fourth biggest GDP in the world.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** No, but I mean, in terms of people. I mean, which is more popular?

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** What is it, 25 million, 26, I think geography (crosstalk/inaudible). What’s the California population?

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** From the air, compared to Western Europe, to say nothing of India or China, you look down and you say, where is everybody? I mean, America is blessed with an incredible natural landscape, resources, but also the potential to develop. And what’s happening and what I think is so important in the U.S. is that the virtually everywhere you go, there is some tech scene going on wherever, some great university in virtually every state. And so, talent and opportunity or rather, opportunities distributed over the whole country, it seems to me, in a way that it isn’t in the UK. And we need to emulate you.

And there’s something about American energy and optimism and willingness to try things.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** Innovation, entrepreneurs.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Innovation, entrepreneurs and, frankly, a willingness to admire people who succeed, which is different from the culture in Europe. And this is a young country, economically. It’s in its infancy by comparison with these ancient civilizations of India and China, or zones of mass population for a very long time.

If I had to pick the country of the future, looking at all that evidence, population density, universities, attractiveness to talent and investment, innovation, I’m going to be putting my chips on America for a long time to come to that.

I don’t know whether that really answers your question, but it doesn’t mean that America has to be an empire. But as Winston Churchill said, there are empires of the mind, right? And if American ideals, freedom, democracy can permeate the world, that will be all to the good.

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** On that note, thank you for joining us.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** My pleasure.

(Applause.)

**BEHDAD EGHBALI:** We appreciate it.

**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

END