

The steady collapse of government

Published: January 13, 2026, 2:14 am

There is a lot of commentary around today on the cancellation of the budget that was scheduled on 6 November.

Some discuss how this undermines Sajid Javid, not that he needed much undermining as far as I can see.

Other comments note that this will be an extraordinary year without a budget.

Although it is appropriate to note that this might have saved the government publishing massively embarrassing forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility showing just how bad the impact of Brexit is now thought to be.

But the issue is bigger than that. This is about the collapse of functioning government. Governments that cannot go about the routine business of government are not governing at all.

In this case the lack of a budget is most especially bizarre. That is because it is possible for this government to function. It passed its Brexit proposal at second reading. It got its Queen's Speech through, quite surprisingly. A sensible budget might well have progressed, as could other measures. The Commons is surprisingly consensual, quite often.

In other words, this lack of government is by choice, and not by necessity. Boris Johnson is denying his ministers and parliament the right to do their jobs. No one else is but him.

And as is now also obvious, he can have an election whenever he wants. He simply has to recognise he has to cooperate with others to achieve that goal. Again, then, any paralysis is self-chosen.

And the question has to be asked as to why that is? What makes Johnson not want to govern when this was, apparently, the thing he most wanted in life? I have three suggestions.

First, like Cameron but more so, he has no clue what to do with power. Now he is PM his lack of idea as to why he wanted the post, other than for its own sake, is painfully clear.

Second, Johnson has something he wants more than to govern, which is to Brexit, although he has never given any clear indication as to why that is. No wonder conspiracy theories abound.

And third, precisely because he does not know what the benefit of Brexit is, and fears he may be accountable for it, he'd rather create any range of distractions he can to prevent attention being given to his own failures. Like all persistent liars, he'll accept anything that delivers short term survival without considering the consequences.

But the result is that effective government has ended in the UK. And that is profoundly worrying.

I have no great concern for Javid. I do for the impact that the failure of government has on the UK. And we now appear to be suffering that fate.