

Double question of the day: when do we postpone leaving..

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I am not willing to go back to debate on Brexit right now. This post is not seeking to do that. There are other issues to worry about right now. The rights and wrongs of a debate that wholly unproductively dominated UK politics for three years do not need to be revived at this moment.

But that does not mean that we do not need to talk about the process of leaving the EU. Whether or not it was wise to set a date for leaving on 31 December 2020 in January of this year is, again, not an issue worth reopening. Many things that seemed possible at that time now seem to be so remotely plausible that one wonders what world we existed in then. The shift in our paradigms has been so great that no wonder some of us feel at last a little disorientated.

And yet Brexit goes on. When almost everything else seems impossible, and despite the fact that the entire British cabinet has been wholly distracted from the Brexit process, which is one of overwhelming complexity, we are still apparently leaving on 31 December.

In itself this seems staggering: that anyone would contemplate adding a further disruptive event into the economy at a time when it will so obviously be suffering quite considerable economic stress is almost impossible to believe.

But it's worse than just the admin shock that the now inevitable hard Brexit on that date will impose. The problems Brexit will create are not peripheral in the current economic situation. They are existential.

I have already [discussed the risk of food shortages in the UK](#) this morning. Of course, they may not happen. But the risk that they might is real. And the chance that any impediment in supply chains will increase that risk is stronger still. And yet that impediment is precisely what the government intends to add into that supply chain, and in a very few months time.

The same risk does, of course, also exist in every other imperilled supply chain, of

which there are now literally hundreds of thousands.

So, just as business, and our society, will need all the help it can get the government is still planning to place the biggest possible impediment it can create in the works of the UK economy.

Not only is it insanity to keep to the Brexit timetable when so much time has been lost to Covid-19. It is insanity to do so when the risk of sticking to a now hopelessly outdated plan is so staggeringly high.

The simple question has to be asked, which is why would anyone want to do this? I stress, I am not arguing for the cancellation of Brexit. I have accepted our fate, albeit that the time will come when we will need to reverse it. Instead, I am saying just defer that departure. Now is not that moment.

And what is particularly interesting is that I rather strongly suspect that MPs, the public, the media and business will all over coming months come to think this. All will say that they have more than enough risk to face without this. Johnson may implacably oppose the idea of deferral. But he already heads a government whose management of the coronavirus crisis gives considerable reason for concern as to its competence.

My suspicion is that Tory MPs, being Tory MPs and so dedicated to power, will quite rapidly sense the threat in this as the autumn develops. There will then be Johnson's 'Norway debate' moment, to draw the comparison with Chamberlain, when he might survive a vote in the Commons on this issue, but still not survive the visit from the people in grey suits that will follow, and will have to fall on his own sword.

There is no way Johnson can remain as Prime Minister and not deliver Brexit. Johnson is a weak prime minister despite his parliamentary majority, precisely because he has shown himself unable to manage almost any aspect of the current crisis. His MPs will, by the autumn, have almost no confidence left that he will be able to manage the self-imposed blow of Brexit as well. And I suspect they will dispense with his services rather than risk the chaos, a general election and all that follows from that.

Remember, Tories are ruthless with their leaders: they lead only so long as they are useful, and then they are dispensed with. That will apply just as much to Johnson as anyone else. I think his days are numbered. And it will be Brexit that will do for him.