

## THE ARGUMENT FOR

# GOOD FAITH

Zoom in on the human race. As individuals, we all rely on good faith, all the time.

Every arrangement we make with someone else, every purchase we make, every contract we agree to depends on both parties acting in good faith. We all know there are individuals who don't, of course, and we try to avoid them. At this scale, if an individual acts in bad faith, it may come back to haunt them, but we all know sometimes they get away with it. Lost in the daily deluge of human interaction, it may not amount to very much. The world does not notice.

Now zoom out.

At every level, acting in bad faith becomes harder to get away with because it is more noticeable.

Zoom right out to the level of the nation-state, and it becomes pretty much impossible to act in bad faith without it being noticed.

Our country has quickly lost its reputation for being a reliable, serious partner and become a nation whose word cannot be taken in good faith. What can be hidden in a population of millions or even billions of individuals is much harder to get away with in a population of 187 nations (give or take a disputed sovereign state). The world watches while our government toys with the idea of repudiating long-standing agreements, including a peace agreement that directly affects our own country, for the sake of temporary electoral advantage.



It's true that a change of government might bring one that is more reliable, more focused on working cooperatively to uphold the international law framework that makes the international sphere safer and more predictable. But what happens at the election after that? Will the rejectionists come back? What is to stop the UK see-sawing from one to the other?

Our electoral system makes us particularly prone to such swings. Quite recently, a Tory MP looking at impending electoral defeat blamed it on 'the electoral cycle'. The idea is that in a two-party system, you can only govern for a limited time before the population starts to blame you for their woes and, with only one alternative, vote them out. Rinse and repeat. Sometimes, the cycle is relatively long; at other times, it shortens.

And we should not ignore the fact that in the USA (another two-party system), even the consensus on Ukraine is under severe pressure. There can be no stability if the two available parties represent different world views. How can you trust a country that can flip from one to the other and is almost bound to do so?

That old British favourite 'the gentleman's agreement', which provided some stability, is gone.

Arguably, we should welcome this because that stability could only be guaranteed by a political elite with a degree of homogeneity, who agreed that some questions were best kept away from an 'unreliable' population. David Cameron's ill-conceived referendum on membership of the European Union destroyed that consensus.



So how do you get back some degree of stability - enough to make the country a partner to be trusted again? Even if it were possible, a return to the old gentleman's agreement would be unlikely to be accepted by the population as a whole - but with the lurch to the right the governing party has taken, it is impossible to think of the two parties finding enough common ground to reinstate an agreement that could last. It's gone.

The props that held up the theatrical set that was the 'British Establishment' have been exposed.

The population, better educated than previous generations, has seen the machinery that makes the magic show work.

It is time for the country to find another way to become politically coherent and mature. Politicians can no longer deploy a 'not in front of the children' attitude.

There is only one way such an outcome can be achieved. The whole system of government must change to allow the expression of a greater range of opinions and deliver an open debate about the issues affecting the nation's long-term economic and social fabric. It requires consensus to be generated and respected.



Constitutional reform is now essential to our future as a nation. It is necessary for domestic policy reasons and just as important for our foreign policy. International players need to see in the UK a stable partner, less prone to violent swings of behaviour.

If Britain wants to rejoin the international political mainstream, whether or not that includes membership of the EU, constitutional reform and a new, transparent democracy is essential. Rebuilding our system to more closely represent the wishes of the population as a whole should be the highest priority.

All we do as human beings is based on trust. We need to be able to trust our government in a modern democracy.



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