

Following its General Election, the UK has returned to being a normal country. It has demonstrated the strength of its political stability and its democratic institutions.

There is a sense of palpable relief, not just confined to Conservative voters, that Britain now has a stable government, with a decisive majority, that is likely to be in office for the next five years.

Three things happened on December 12th. Firstly, the Government now has both an overwhelming mandate and the power to deliver Brexit in the next few weeks.

Secondly, the attempt by the hard left that control the Labour Party to change the course of British history was rejected by the country as a whole. Labour MPs were defeated by Conservatives in a swathe of constituencies in the North of England and in the Midlands that have been solid, working class Labour strongholds for half a century.

Thirdly, with Brexit no longer the toxic issue that has dominated British politics since 2016, Government, Parliament and the Civil Service can concentrate their energies, again, on health, education and employment, not to mention foreign and defence policy.

The Scottish Nationalists are riding high and won most of the seats in Scotland. They are demanding another independence referendum which they will not get. Nor do they deserve to. The last independence referendum, in 2014, was described, by them, as a once in a generation vote. They lost that vote and it takes more than 5 years to change a generation!

In any event, their share of the popular vote last week was 46% with 54% of Scots voting for pro-unionist parties. That is almost exactly the same as the majority that rejected independence in 2014. Nothing has changed.

There is one further point I would emphasise in this short report. For months it has been alleged that the rise of Boris Johnson means that Britain now has an extreme right-wing government and that the Tories have rejected their moderate, pragmatic history. That was always nonsense, and this has become apparent in the last week.

Whether on climate change, free trade, a rules-based world order, the Iran nuclear deal and a whole host of other issues Johnson has little in common with Donald Trump other than a shock of white hair and a disconcerting populist style.

Far from lurching to the right Johnson has adopted the respected mantle of "One Nation" Conservatism which has its origins in Disraeli. His stated domestic and economic priorities are closer to Harold Macmillan than Margaret Thatcher. His social views, on gay rights, abortion and immigration are progressive rather than reactionary.

One note of caution, however. Johnson is an opportunist, as his adoption of Brexit showed. Ideology means little to him. For the next few years moderate, pragmatic Toryism will be his creed.

Thereafter, he doesn't know where his political instincts will take him so why should I?



Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind KCMG QC

Sir Malcolm Rifkind is a former British Foreign Minister and Minister of Defence and was one of only four ministers to serve throughout the whole 18-year tenures of both Margaret Thatcher and John Major. From 2010-2015 he was Chairman of the UK's Intelligence and Security Committee and is a Visiting Professor at the Department of War Studies at King's College, London.