

Luck will not be enough for the UK's next prime minister

The UK's Conservative party is choosing its – and the country's – next leader. It's a job with even more potential pitfalls than ever

GAVIN ESLER

There is no precise formula for success in politics. It's a peculiar alchemy of talent, tenacity, temperament and timing. The British Conservative party is now in the middle of a messy leadership race, which will result in its third prime minister in three years.

The apparent favourite is the former foreign secretary Boris Johnson, but why some people succeed while other, better candidates fail remains a puzzle. The US Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes famously observed that President Franklin Roosevelt owed his success to "a second-class intellect, but a first-class temperament." In his famous radio "fireside chats", Roosevelt certainly showed that he understood how to communicate with ordinary Americans.

Some British political observers believe that Boris Johnson is likely to become our next prime minister because he is also, in some way "relatable". Mr Johnson's personal life, even his appearance, seems chaotic, which perhaps makes us feel better about our own foibles.

Showing a degree of humanity in politics definitely is useful. The UK's outgoing prime minister Theresa May was noted for her tenacity, but she was so distant and cold that she frequently appeared robotic. When faced with the prospect of meeting victims of the disastrous fire at Grenfell Tower building in London, two years ago, she couldn't manage to do what most of us would have done and console them. Bill Clinton, on the other hand, and Barack Obama were leaders of first-class intellects who proved themselves to be big on empathy, too.

The first major politician I ever



Boris Johnson is the top contender for the leadership of the Conservative party.

met was a far-right British Conservative, Enoch Powell. Powell was talented – a former army brigadier, who rose through the ranks, and a professor of classics. However, he is best known for his appalling comments about race relations in Britain. He was sacked and ended his career a kind of exile in Northern Ireland. He wrote: "All political lives, unless they are cut off in midstream at a happy juncture, end in failure, because that is the nature of

politics and of human affairs." When I interviewed Powell, he made what I thought was a much sharper observation. He said that while politicians reach the level of the top table of government, in the Cabinet as senior ministers, owing to talent, they get to be leaders because of luck.

Many talented, tenacious and thoughtful politicians get near the top but do not quite make it. William Hague, now Lord

Hague, was leader of the British Conservative party for a time. His misfortune was that his time was 1997 to 2001, the years when Tony Blair strode the world political stage. Hague got nowhere and quit.

Then there is Ed Miliband, a very intelligent, talented man and one-time leader of the British Labour party. In May 2015 during a very tough general election campaign which many people – including his closest advis-

Civil unrest destroys cultural heritage

Museums and other places of wonder must not only be protected but also restored

THOMAS KAPLAN

Unfolding in many of the ancient capitals of antiquity, an epic struggle for the soul of humanity is occurring in plain sight. Even before we factor in the chaos of modern-day Syria and Iraq, could there be a more depressing symbol of cultural cannibalism than the obliteration of mankind's inheritance in the plunder of Mesopotamia, or the deliberate destruction of Palmyra?

Yet a forceful riposte is emerging from the Middle East itself. The fruit of a longstanding partnership between the UAE and France, Aliph – the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas – constitutes a genuine call to arms to safeguard our collective birthright. Created just over two years ago after a conference in Abu Dhabi in December 2016 on the protection of endangered heritage, this ambitious enterprise could not be more timely, as obscurantist narratives spread worldwide, not just in the cradle of civilisation.

Governed by a foundation

board and based in Geneva, Aliph is an alliance of sovereign states, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Morocco, China and Switzerland, international organisations, private partners and leading experts in the field. With pledges worth more than \$60 million already paid out, it finances the implementation of preventive care, emergency response and restoration programmes for cultural property at risk of destruction or damage. The foundation most recently announced its flagship project, the long-term restoration of the Museum of Mosul in Iraq.

In both spirit and purpose, Aliph emulates what is arguably the region's most far-reaching cultural initiative – Louvre Abu Dhabi. In the UAE capital, Louvre Abu Dhabi represents a rare green shoot of determined idealism. Evinced by the UAE's resolve to share not only common interests but also common values between West and East, the museum provides remarkable insight into the conjoined history of mankind. From Islamic and Hindu art to illuminated

Hebrew manuscripts and the recent addition of Rembrandt's beautiful oil sketch *Head of a Young Man in Prayer*, depicting Jesus with his hands clasped in prayer, this joyful celebration of the profound interconnectedness of global civilisation since the beginning of time – a first in the Arab world – lifts our spirits and gives us hope.

But in its audacity, Louvre Abu Dhabi raises its own questions and forces us to reflect. At a time when erecting walls seems to be the fashion of the day, can the preservation of ancient heritage really build bridges between people? In an era of widespread scepticism about concepts such as enlightenment and universalism, can masterpieces of art truly advance a cause greater than mere accumulation or display?

Perhaps the best answer to those questions might come from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, a sort of prediction of the magnitude of precisely what Jean Nouvel's architectural jewel aims to accomplish. "Beauty will save the world," the book's protagonist Prince Myshkin declares, in a comment that the reader is free



Syrian army soldiers drive past the Arch of Triumph in the historic city of Palmyra, in Homs Governorate, Syria.

to interpret as evidence of either insanity or brilliance.

All art is contemporary when it is created. Yet it might take decades, if not centuries, to determine what endures as "signif-

icant" in the arc of art history. The greatest artists surpass conventional realism and become transcendent. Members of that sacred pantheon – giants such as Shakespeare, Bach or Rem-

brandt – changed their medium forever and, in doing so, made a contribution that changed the world.

Amid the international celebrations marking the 350th anni-