

Missing in Action - Boris Johnson's 'Global Britain' in a Post-Brexit World

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Officially, the Boris Johnson government, in a post-Brexit world sees Global Britain punching way above its weight as it has traditionally done in the past. The [gov.uk](#) website makes this quite clear. "Global Britain is about reinvesting in our relationships, championing the rules-based international order and demonstrating that the UK is open, outward-looking and confident on the world stage." However, relations with the USA and EU have dramatically soured in recent weeks and other international allies look on exasperated at Britain's rapid decline, knowing that Boris Johnson and his administration do not have what it takes not just to repair the wounds of Brexit but rebuild Britain fit for the international arena.

It is laughable to think that Britain can claim to be championing the rules-based order. It's dubious global arms and munitions sales is a good example, so is London's reputation as the world's laundromat. The Chagos Islands is a lesson in global immorality. The treatment of Julian Assange is another. Attacks on the judiciary, legislature and the media are the new rules and order. Even Boris Johnson's rise to power has been built on a raft of lies, facilitated by a foreign state global surveillance machine that stole the privacy of millions and usurped democracy. Britain's ruling elite is now seen as little more than a criminal clique of billionaires aided by a syndicate of corporate malfeasance facilitated by shadowy geopolitical players. Deep down, we all know this – but so does everyone else.

Global Britain and international security

Dozens of presidents, prime ministers, foreign and defence ministers and military chiefs gathered in Bavaria last weekend for the annual Munich Security Conference, but the U.K. was notable for only one thing — its absence.

Johnson declined an offer of the most coveted spot on the podium, ceding the spotlight to French President Emmanuel Macron, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Even Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg was there among others. However, U.K. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab didn't bother to turn up, nor did Defense Secretary Ben Wallace, even though neither of them was affected by the much-heralded reshuffle, given as an excuse for their absence (which took place three days earlier).

"Needless to say, as a former ambassador to the Court of St James, I am saddened by the absence of senior ministers of Her Majesty's government at @MunSecConf this year," [tweeted](#) Wolfgang Ischinger, the veteran German diplomat who chairs and organizes the Munich conference, a major foreign and security policy fixture since the Cold War.

A token was there. Conservative MP Tobias Ellwood, a former soldier and minister who chairs the defence committee, and he was clearly dissatisfied with the U.K. turnout. "Having

a presence at events like this is critical especially in the post-Brexit world.” ‘*Global Britain’ gone fully introvert?*” Carl Bildt, the Swedish former prime minister and foreign minister, [asked](#) on Twitter.

Britain, missing in action at one of the most prestigious and important global gatherings is a [mystery](#). There are no excuses for not turning up and it was noticed.

Global Britain and EU

A Brussels blueprint says the EU will seek to police UK subsidies, impose rules on its tax regime and ask the government to commit to aligning with the EU’s standards forever. Britain was always aware that these were the rules but for Boris Johnson, not getting your way means blaming everyone else. That’s what the mainstream media headlines are reporting as they toe-the-line given the threats the government is throwing around at the media in recent days.

The prime minister’s fury with Brussels has emerged after his chief negotiator, [David Frost, and his 40-person Brexit task force](#) met this week to finalise the UK government’s negotiating position. It didn’t work and now no-one is speaking to each other. By all accounts, the two trade negotiators are in the midst of tearing each other apart. And so, before it all gets going, France has [warned](#) that talks between Britain and the EU over a future trade deal will turn nasty. And they have.

As an example, just 12 days after Brexit, the UK [falls foul of its own rules](#) that the U.K. introduced itself in 2014 for heavy goods vehicles. The levy it imposed discriminates against foreign truck drivers because British ones can get refunded for the tax they pay. That goes against the EU’s philosophy of treating citizens from all of its countries equally. So less than two weeks after leaving the European Union, the U.K. is already back in trouble with the bloc. And trucking is not just big business, it’s systemically important of course. While Brexit day was meant to enable Britain to finally throw off the shackles of the Brussels bureaucracy, the U.K. government now finds itself having to answer questions over an obscure transport tax that the EU doesn’t like. It’s a dispute that has explosive potential, and may well end up in court.

It’s a clear reminder that although the country technically ended its 47-year membership of the EU, the transition period that extends until the end of 2020 means Britain is still bound by the bloc’s rules and jurisdiction. And Britain doesn’t get a say in any decisions or policymaking, EU law applies in full, so it can’t really argue. But then, we knew that didn’t we – still, it’s their fault, isn’t it! Relations are plummeting.

Global Britain and the USA

The so-called ‘special relationship’ is now seemingly in flames. The pushing out of Kim Darroch, UK ambassador to the US – and a longtime British civil servant – because of Donald Trump’s childish tantrums is an illustration of the toxic political environment that has emerged. It’s what happens with populists.

The result of recent finger-pointing from across the pond is that Boris Johnson needed to distance himself from Donald Trump in December’s election. Since then, Johnson has cancelled a trip to the US planned for next month after a furious phone call from President Donald Trump in which [Trump slammed down the phone](#) on the prime minister. He was

apparently 'apoplectic' with fury.

In fact, Johnson had been due to visit Washington last month but repeatedly delayed the trip after a series of rows with the president. First, it was over Iran, then Huawei, and all along there was the rejected request by the prime minister and Foreign Office to extradite the wife of a US diplomat that killed one of our own and did a 'runner.' The Harry Dunn incident ultimately made the British government look weak in front of its own citizens. In the meantime, Trump has decided to focus his indignation at the European Union and is currently engaged in ramping up the trade war over there instead. But even this was an opportunity for Trump to threaten that he'll do a deal with the EU before doing one with the UK. It all demonstrates the real damage being done to the US-UK alliance as relations continue to fall.

Global Britain and everyone else

After the three and half years since Britain's EU referendum, it has become clear there never was a plan B. Aspirations of reviving its past global influence have fallen into what looks like a nightmarish delusion espoused by the political and media mouthpieces of the right-wing. As mentioned earlier, far from being a small island nation punching way above its weight – Great Britain, as it was once known, is the now the weakest link of the global power super league.

Britain currently has no influential role even at traditional global meetings. No representative went to the annual Davos meeting this year for the first time. Its influence at the G7, G20 and other global summit's is now somewhat limited. This was the cunning plan of Dominic Cummings to ban attendance as it was *"a waste of time sipping Champagne with billionaires."* Like it or not, *"being there is absolutely critical as we redefine what the West stands for"* said a clearly angry Tobias Ellwood, Chair of the UK's Defence Committee.

Seen from Japan, Britain is no longer recognisably British. Brexit means that a substantial investment in the country over several decades now needs to be relocated. Foreign Minister Taro Kono, bluntly told Boris Johnson: "Please no no deal. Please no no-deal Brexit." With thousands of Japanese people in Britain and billions invested – it is already walking away. From the [Japan Times](#): *"A whopping 70.8 per cent of Japanese manufacturers in the United Kingdom have been negatively impacted, the survey by the Japan External Trade Organization showed. Japanese companies in the United Kingdom said they have curbed capital spending because their clients are considering relocating operations outside the country."*

To Germany, British democracy has failed and is now led by crooks. Jan Fleischhauer is a senior columnist for [Der Spiegel](#) – "What haven't I read about Boris Johnson? He is a charlatan, a huckster, a notorious liar." Another newspaper wrote that Johnson was the British version of Donald Trump – albeit a "baby Trump".

France is watching UK politics with bewilderment and complete disillusionment and is now treating no deal as the most likely scenario. No deal would mean "chaos" for the 30,000 French businesses that export to the UK, according to the [head of the employers' union](#). It would wreak havoc in Calais and no-one is impressed. Relations between the two countries is rapidly descending, with President Macron taking the lead in many global events.

[Corporate relocations](#) are a case in point. Honda has announced the closure of its huge

Swindon plant, Dyson has moved to Singapore, Ford has closed its Bridgend factory, Barclays has moved £170bn of its assets to Ireland and UBS £32bn. Lloyds of London, the global insurance and reinsurance firm said it was working on transferring all European Economic Area (EEA) business to Brussels and HSBC, the banking and financial services giant announced that it was shifting ownership of its Polish and Irish subsidiaries from its London base to a French unit. As a result of Brexit, Panasonic has relocated (to Amsterdam), P&O (to Cyprus), Sony (to the Netherlands), AXA (to Ireland), Moneygram (to Brussels) and there are many more. It just not very – ‘global’ if global operations leave.

In the end

‘Global Britain’ – a phrase that provokes mockery and even indignation both domestically and internationally is partly the vision of a nostalgic and nationalistic attitude of the world order as it is right now – a mess. It is already becoming clear that Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings don’t have what it takes to lead an invigorated Britain on the global stage. Just for a start, to gain any semblance of international respect, Britain needs to reaffirm accountable democratic government in a world where [democracies are falling](#) like pins in a bowling ally. Constitutional, legal and administrative institutions that uphold civil society need to be reformed for the modern world and properly supported in a world where they are undermined to make space for populists. And Johnson is just that – a populist who has made a career out of undermining Britain’s institutions.

America, France, Germany and Japan. These are some of the countries that really mattered to Britain in the recent past. Britain is now dallying with China on critical infrastructure projects and incredibly forgiven Russia for all of its misdemeanours (if we can call such serious criminal acts that) and accepted a pile of ‘dark money’ to keep the Conservative party funded.

You are not witnessing the creation of a new ‘Global Britain’ – but more the [dying embers](#) of a global domain with a fantasist at the helm guided by Dominic Cummings, whose skill is stealing elections from democratic norms. You can’t build greatness on the footings of deception.

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