

British Brinkmanship: Boris Johnson's "Clandestine" Visit to Kyiv, Amidst Secrecy

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Two British citizens, Shaun Pinner and Aiden Aslin, who went to Ukraine to fight for the now-disbanded "international legion" of foreign mercenaries created by Kyiv in early days of the war and were fighting alongside neo-Nazi Azov militia in Mariupol, were captured by Russian forces and fervently appealed to the British prime minister for their immediate release.

Image on the right: Viktor Medvedchuk (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)



The Britons appeared on Russian state TV on Monday and asked to be exchanged for Viktor Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian politician who is the leader of Ukraine's Opposition Platform and an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He was charged with "high treason" and "aiding terrorism" by the Zelensky government and was placed under house arrest, from where he escaped and was rearrested last week. He is currently being held at an undisclosed location by the SBU, the fearsome Ukrainian intelligence agency being used as a tool for political persecution by the autocratic regime.

One of the captives wearing a T-shirt bearing the emblem of Ukraine's infamous Azov

battalion, Aiden Aslin, made a [direct appeal](#) to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson:

“If Boris Johnson really does care like he says he does about British citizens then he would help pressure Zelensky to do the right thing and return Viktor to his family and return us to our families.”

Asked on Sky News whether a possible swap was something the government would get involved with, Britain’s Northern Ireland minister [Brandon Lewis said](#) on Tuesday: “We’re actually going through the process of sanctioning people who are close to Putin regime, we’re not going to be looking at how we can help Russia.” Reading between the lines, neither would the Boris Johnson government be looking at how to help British citizens.

“We always have responsibility for British citizens, which we take seriously. We’ve got to get the balance right in Ukraine and that’s why I say to anybody: do not travel illegally to Ukraine,” Lewis added while conveniently overlooking the fact British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss publicly acknowledged she supported individuals from the United Kingdom who might want to go to Ukraine to join an international force to fight.

She [told the BBC](#) on Feb. 27, days after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, it was up to people to “make their own decisions,” but argued it was a “battle for democracy.” She said Ukrainians were fighting for freedom, “not just for Ukraine but for the whole of Europe.” The British government is as criminally culpable for inciting citizens to join NATO’s crusade in Ukraine as gullible volunteers who actually joined the fight in the war zone on the call of the government.

Favoring providing lethal weapons only instead of deploying British mercenaries as cannon fodder in Ukraine’s proxy war, Defense Secretary Ben Wallace took a nuanced approach and said with diplomatic overtones Ukraine would instead be supported to “fight every street with every piece of equipment we can get to them.” In other words, Ukraine would be made an “ordnance depot” of NATO powers on Russia’s western flank.

On April 9, Boris Johnson undertook a [clandestine visit](#) to Kyiv amidst much secrecy and tweeted a picture sitting beside Zelensky after the visit. Johnson’s trip came a day after the EU’s top executives, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell, publicly visited Kyiv and met with Zelensky.

British media hailed the “daredevil feat” of taking the train journey in the war zone by the prime minister and compared him to the fabled British secret agent, James Bond 007. During the visit, he pledged 120 “armored vehicles” and new “anti-ship missile systems” to Ukraine.

The British government also announced it would be sending £100 million of military equipment, including more Starstreak anti-aircraft missiles, helmets, night-vision devices and body armor. The United Kingdom guaranteed an extra \$500 million in World Bank lending to Ukraine, taking the total loan guarantee to up to \$1 billion.*

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