UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson maps out post-Brexit agenda

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Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson outlined the strategy to be pursued by the Conservative government as it initiates the UK's exit from the European Union (EU).

Johnson spoke at the Conservative Party conference after Prime Minister Theresa May confirmed that the government will trigger Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty by the end of March 2017. Once this is done, the UK enters a formal two-year period in which to negotiate a British exit from the EU.

The media focus on Johnson's speech was over the fact that he referred to Africa as a country and not a continent. But this is of a piece with Johnson's imperialist arrogance, exemplified by his speech, which focussed on the need to aggressively expand British interests under the guise of bringing "democracy" to the world.

Speaking of the post-Brexit world, Johnson stated, "I believe that the vote on June 23 was for economic freedom and political freedom as well." Britain "should have absolutely no shame or embarrassment in championing our ideals around the world...this should be the message of global Britain to the world: that we stick up for free markets as vigorously as we stick up for democracy and human rights."

The British ruling elite are gearing up for a NATO-led military conflict with Russia, utilising the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. To stake Britain's place as the premier US ally, Johnson used his speech to escalate the government's propaganda offensive against the Putin regime.

Referring to the war in Syria as "part of a wider arc of instability that sweeps across from Iraq to Libya", he denounced "the continuing savagery of the [Syrian President Bashar-Al] Assad regime against the people of Aleppo and the complicity of the Russians in committing what are patently war crimes. …"

Russia's actions, in alliance with Syria, asserted Johnson, are "making it impossible for peace negotiations to begin." He naturally neglected to mention that the Western imperialist powers had fomented the Syrian civil war through their Islamist proxies, in order to achieve "regime change". Nor the moves by these proxies, many allied with Al Qaeda, to prevent peace under instruction from their paymasters.

Pledging the UK to leading a militarist agenda in Europe, Johnson declared that, post-Brexit, Britain "will remain committed to all kinds of European cooperation—at an intergovernmental level whether it is maintaining sanctions against Russia for what is happening in Ukraine. …"

Johnson complained that the wave of triumphalism that had swept the bourgeoisie in the early 1990s with the dissolution of the Soviet Union—its hope for the "final triumph" of "western liberal values and ideals" and of "free-market capitalism"—had come badly undone.

Instead, said Johnson, "in many eyes the notion that we could endlessly expand the realm of liberal democracy was badly damaged, alas, by the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and symmetrically our model of free-market Anglo-Saxon capitalism as practised in London and New York was seriously discredited by the Crash of 2008, and the global suspicion of bankers."

"[W]e have taken those twin blows like punches to the midriff; and we have been winded and sometimes lacking in confidence in these ideals," he said.

This had to be reversed, Johnson continued, with Britain pursuing an aggressive interventionist foreign policy to supposedly ensure "Freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to practice whatever you religion want and to live your life as you please."

Johnson has carefully cultivated an image as a

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buffoon, which is used to package his extreme right-wing views. Even so, in amongst all the cheap and crass jokes, the remainder of his speech recalled the "White man's burden" rationale of the "civilising" mission of the British Empire, used to justify its rape and plunder of Africa.

After asserting, "I am not going to pretend that this country is something we are not," Johnson went on to issue a eulogy to Britain's former imperial conquests.

"Every day I go into an office so vast that you could comfortably fit two squash courts and so dripping with gilt bling that it looks like something from the Kardashians," he declared. "[A]s I sit at the desk of George Nathaniel Curzon I sometimes reflect that this was once the nerve centre of an empire that was seven times the size of the Roman empire at its greatest extent under Trajan and when I go into the Map Room of Palmerston I cannot help remembering that this country over the last two hundred years has directed the invasion or conquest of 178 countries—that is most of the members of the UN. …"

While declaring such halcyon days are "gone forever", Johnson's message was that the appetite of British imperialism remained undiminished.

Over and again, Johnson insisted that Britain had to return to its role as the "global champions and agitators" for "free trade". And this meant overcoming any arguments that "we are too small, too feeble, too geopolitically reduced to have that kind of influence."

He boasted, "I have confirmed to myself that we have in the Foreign Office the finest diplomatic service in the world—covering far more countries than the French with only 70 percent of the budget."

Despite the loss of empire and the debacle of the Iraq War, he said, "it would be a fatal mistake now to underestimate what this country is doing or what it can do…it is simply not the case that every military intervention has been a disaster. Far from it…"

It is notable that Johnson cited the "achievement" of the UK's armed forces in Sierra Leone, "where we were instrumental not just in ending the civil war, but in wiping out Ebola"—referring to the 2000 imperialist adventure instigated by the Labour government of Tony Blair. Continuing his orientation to Africa, Johnson added that another successful campaign was the "bold programme to tackle the pirates" in Somalia. Here, "British ships took them on, with all the courage and decisiveness of our 19th century forebears. …"

The government was prepared to use its military resources ever more broadly, he bragged, "[W]hen we give our armed services clear and achievable missions we can still be remarkably effective and with 2 percent of our GDP spent on defence we will be the leading military player in western Europe for the foreseeable future. …"

In order to further the UK's geo-strategic interests, Johnson declared that "soft power" was also a critical factor as it allowed "the vast and subtle and pervasive extension of British influence around the world."

In this regard, his praise of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was highly significant. Over the past several decades, the UK's state broadcaster has ditched any notion of its purported "impartiality" in favour of semi-naked propagandising for the predatory operations hatched by British imperialism. Along with the nominally liberal *Guardian* newspaper, much of the BBC's output is now based on demonising the Russian and Chinese governments.

Johnson said effusively, "No matter how infuriating and shamelessly anti-Brexit they can sometimes be I think the Beeb [BBC] is the single greatest and most effective ambassador for our culture and our values. …"

Given the mass opposition to imperialist war and the discrediting of the capitalist profit system over the last decade, alluded to by Johnson, it is necessary for the ruling elite to create an ideological basis for further imperialist banditry and secure a constituency for it. From among the upper middle class and the pseudo-left, advocacy of imperialist militarism, under the pretence of pursuing "democracy" and "human rights", is aimed at securing the requisite devoted adherents. This was the crux of Johnson's speech.

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