

UK's Boris Johnson hails Ukraine's “finest hour” and pledges more military equipment

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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has addressed Ukraine's parliament, striking a Churchillian pose as he described war with Russia as the country's “finest hour”.

Johnson is the first world leader to address the Ukrainian assembly since the war began in February. His speech, delivered by videolink, follows a walkabout in Kyiv with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky last month.

The UK continues to position itself as the leading voice in Europe for an escalation of the NATO-Russia war over Ukraine, in order to curry favour with the United States. Johnson's appearance followed European Union discussions the evening before on an embargo on Russian oil to be phased in by the end of the year, after months of needling from Johnson and the British press over Germany's energy reliance on Russia.

German opposition leader Friedrich Merz, head of the Christian Democratic Union, was visiting Ukraine as Johnson spoke. He has accused German Chancellor Olaf Scholz of “procrastination, dithering and timidity” over the war.

The UK prime minister's speech was filled with nationalist rhetoric, hailing “the immovable object of Ukrainian patriotism and love of country”. He saluted “Ukrainian democracy against Putin's tyranny” on the day the same parliament to which he was speaking banned the activities of political parties “who justify, recognise or deny Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine,” according to the news agency Interfax.

Johnson's invoking of Britain's Second World War history, employing the phrase from Churchill's June 1940 speech, “This was their finest hour”, reinforces a broader lying narrative of the NATO powers. His implication is that Russia's invasion, a reactionary response to the threat of NATO encroachment on its borders, is a twenty-first century version of Nazi Germany's military campaigns.

The deceit is twofold.

First, the Russian invasion cannot be remotely compared with the genocidal offensive of the Third Reich. Any such allusion is designed to minimise the horrors of the Nazi war of annihilation in the East, whip up a frenzied anti-Russian hysteria, and draw a veil over the destruction wrought by the wars of the United States and its allies in recent decades in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Second, it is the NATO powers allied to Ukraine and using it as a proxy who are pushing for a wider war in the East, with the aim of the collapse and carve-up of Russia. This has been essentially admitted by the US Secretaries of State and Defence and the Speaker of the House, variously declaring Washington's intention to “bring Russia to its knees”, “breaking [its] back” militarily and pursuing the conflict “until victory is won”.

Johnson made a point of lamenting how the NATO powers “failed to impose the sanctions then that we should have” in 2014, “when Crimea was taken from Ukraine”. He vowed “we cannot make the same mistake again”.

Last Wednesday, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said Britain and its allies must “double down” and “push Russia out of the whole of Ukraine”. This would include seizing Crimea, annexed by Russia and considered vital to its security. Her stance was backed by Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.

An article published in the *Guardian* Monday, by the head of Chatham House's Ukraine Forum Orysia Lutsevych, applauds Truss, asking, “What would victory actually mean now for Ukraine—and for Europe?” She answers, “Any ending must be decisive,” referring to a claimed “consensus among the [Ukrainian] people regarding the return of Crimea and Donbas to the control of Kyiv” and the “collapse of Putinism as a doctrine and an end to Russian claims to territorial dominance elsewhere in eastern Europe and Central Asia.”

Ukraine's objectives “coincide with those of its allies”,

Lutsevych concludes.

To these ends, the US and the European powers are piling weapons into Ukraine, many of them destined for its far right and fascist military formations, including the Azov regiment occupying the besieged Azovstal steel works in Mariupol. During his speech Johnson announced the dispatch of an additional £300 million of British military equipment, including electronic warfare equipment, a counter battery radar system, GPS jamming equipment and thousands of night vision devices.

This comes after the declaration in parliament last week that the UK would be sending Brimstone missiles and Stormer air defence vehicles to Ukraine and is considering shipping Challenger 2 tanks to Poland to replace others gifted by Warsaw to Kyiv. The UK is already one of the biggest contributors to the NATO-Ukraine war effort and has now given half a billion pounds of military equipment, besides training tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and deploying thousands of its own troops, tanks, ships and fighter planes to Eastern Europe, and special forces to Ukraine itself.

The US has supplied \$3.7 billion in declared military aid so far and is making \$20 billion more available.

The working class is being made to pay the price of this warmongering. Ahead of his Ukraine speech, Johnson gave an interview to the *Good Morning Britain* news show. Challenged on the worsening cost-of-living crisis, the prime minister ruled out any support for families facing an historic collapse of their incomes, warning of an “inflationary spiral” and declaring “[W]e have to be prudent.”

Johnson complained, “We’re already spending £83 billion a year to service the cost of government debt; that’s huge, that’s far more than we spend on defence”.

He made these comments on the day energy company BP announced its highest quarterly earnings in a decade of \$6.2 billion, citing “exceptional” oil and gas revenues, and the Office for National Statistics revealed four in ten Britons are struggling to pay for gas and electricity and being forced to buy less food.

Price rises, de facto wage cuts, and government austerity are having a devastating impact on living standards and provoking widespread opposition in a working class deeply skeptical of the government and NATO’s declared intentions in Ukraine.

A worried piece by the *Financial Times* European Economics commentator Martin Sandbu published Sunday warned, “The expression is ugly and its content even uglier, but ‘Ukraine fatigue’ is a real risk in western

democracies.” Under the headline, “Western leaders must prepare public for a war economy”, Sandbu declared, “The cost of living crisis is likely to get worse before it gets better.”

No trace of popular sentiment finds expression in mainstream politics. The newspapers, most jubilantly the *Guardian*, are reporting that Johnson’s Conservative Party could lose more than 500 local government seats in the local elections in their worst result since the 1990s. But this will do nothing except transfer responsibility for implementing austerity policies from Tory councillors to their Labour, and in some cases Liberal Democrat and Green, counterparts.

Were a general election called tomorrow and Labour to win it, the same would be true of the UK’s foreign policy. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer said in response to Johnson’s speech, “We support the provision of military equipment”. He refused even to criticise the timing of the statement, two days before the local elections, saying, “I don’t think our arguments about the timing cut much ice” and that he did not want the parties to be “divided” over support for Ukraine.

Starmer also solidarised himself with backbench Tory MPs demanding higher military spending: “I do think the government is going to have to come back to Parliament and look again at defence spending and I know many Conservative MPs think that as well.” He called on the government not to cut “a further 10,000 [personnel] from our armed services”.

Labour’s unanimity with the Tories on all fundamental points of policy means its sole criticism of Johnson is that he is not up to the task of carrying them out, with a relentless focus on the “partygate” scandal. The absurdity of official political debate in Britain was summed up by the *Good Morning Britain* interview when Johnson was asked “Are you honest?” not in connection with his absurd claim that the UK was not involved in Ukraine to “drive some geopolitical change”, but with lockdown drinks parties in Downing Street.



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