

Boris Johnson Impressed with Israel, Thinks Islam Leaves Much to be Desired

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Boris Johnson is the front-runner in the Conservative Party to succeed Theresa May as Prime Minister. He has held a multitude of jobs in his hyperactive life. He was first a journalist, writing for *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and *The Spectator*. He wrote about politics, society, culture; a man of many interests, for a time he even wrote a column on cars. He was an MP from 2001 to 2008 and again from 2015; he served two terms as the Mayor of London, from 2008 to 2016, cleaning up the moral squalor left by Ken Livingstone, who had claimed that Hitler originally supported Zionism; Johnson was the Foreign Secretary in Theresa May's cabinet from 2016 to 2018, when he returned to Parliament as a backbencher.

He has a complicated and interesting ancestry. According to Wikipedia:

Johnson's maternal grandfather was the lawyer Sir James

Fawcett. Johnson's paternal great grandfather was Circassian-Turkish journalist and political figure Ali Kemal, who served for three months as Minister of the Interior in the government of Damat Ferid Pasha, the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire. With unequalled passion, Kemal condemned the attacks on and massacres of the empire's Armenians during the First World War and inveighed against the Ittihadist chieftains as the authors of that crime, relentlessly demanding their prosecution and punishment. Kemal was murdered during the Turkish War of Independence.

Kemal was the paternal grandfather of the British politician Stanley Johnson. On his maternal side Boris Johnson is of mixed English and French descent and is a descendant of King George II of Great Britain. Johnson's mother was Charlotte Fawcett. An artist from a family of liberal intellectuals, she had married Stanley Johnson in 1963, prior to their move to the U.S. She is the granddaughter of Elias Avery Lowe, a palaeographer of Russian-Jewish descent, and Helen Tracy Lowe-Porter, a translator of Thomas Mann. In reference to his varied ancestry, Johnson has described himself as a "one-man melting pot" – with a combination of Muslims, Jews, and Christians as great-grandparents.

Not everyone finds Johnson appealing. Some people regard Johnson as having quite deliberately constructed a public persona as a ruffled, upper-class twit (educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford), which has allowed him to be consistently underrated by his political enemies, whom he then manages to run circles around; others think he is a tad too ambitious. And, of course, he also has his many admirers, whom he does not disappoint. Whatever the case, he has certainly climbed not one, but several greasy poles, rather nimbly.

Johnson has not had much to say about Islam, "but what there is is cherce." He famously wrote in that he opposed banning veils, including burkas (he meant "niqabs"), in public. **But he**

added that it was “absolutely ridiculous that people should choose to go around looking like letter boxes.” This enraged Muslims, and many others, who raked him over the coals for his insensitivity.

Baroness Warsi, a Muslim in the Conservative Party, said that “What offends me is that Muslim women [should not be] a convenient political football to be used by old Etonians.”

Johnson was then accused by others of “fanning the flames of Islamophobia” and described by Labour MPs as a “pound-shop Donald Trump.”

Stewart Wood, a Labour peer, said on Twitter: **“The general view of Boris Johnson’s insulting remarks on Muslim women is that it betrays unthinking Islamophobia.”**

Some of his Conservative colleagues, too, including Theresa May herself, asked him to apologize for the “letterbox” remark, which he refused to do. There was much huffing and puffing, but Johnson held his ground. It was not just a funny remark, but an apt description of the niqab (which Johnson had conflated with the burka) – and once you hear it, you cannot forget. “Letterboxes.” Of course, that’s exactly what they look like. In fact, the comedian Rowan Atkinson (Mr. Bean, Blackadder), said that it was a very funny and accurate remark, for which Johnson need not apologize. That did more for Johnson than any statements by his political friends. You don’t take issue with Mr. Bean.

Johnson has also been disturbed by what he has learned about Islamic texts. In 2005, he wrote an article in *The Spectator* about Muslims and their faith:

To any non-Muslim reader of the Koran, Islamophobia – fear of Islam – seems a natural reaction, and, indeed, exactly what that text is intended to provoke.

It is too bad that he described “Islamophobia” as “fear of Islam” instead of, more accurately, as an “irrational fear or hatred of Islam.” He ought to have added that the word was deliberately put into circulation in the 1970s, apparently first in Iran, to call into question all critics of Islam by labeling their criticism a manifestation of “Islamophobia.” He need only have written: “Muslims and their apologists have taken to charging all critics of Islam with ‘Islamophobia,’ that is, ‘an irrational fear or hatred of Islam and of Muslims.’ But to any non-Muslim reader of the Qur’an, it is perfectly rational to feel both fear and hatred of what is written in that book about Infidels.”

Judged purely on its scripture – to say nothing of what is preached in the mosques – it is the most viciously sectarian of all religions in its heartlessness towards unbelievers.

No other British politician from a major party has been as clear-headed about Islam as Johnson here shows himself to be. It is no wonder that Muslims in the Conservative Party, like Baroness Warsi, are threatening to leave it should Johnson become Prime Minister. He’s a threat – the Man Who Knows Too Much.

In the wake of the London bombings, Johnson also questioned the loyalty of British Muslims, and insisted that the country must accept that “Islam is the problem.”

It will take a huge effort of courage and skill to win round the many thousands of British Muslims who are in a similar state of alienation, and to make them see that their faith must be compatible with British values and with loyalty to Britain.

That means disposing of the first taboo, and accepting that the problem is Islam. Islam is the problem.

What is going on in these mosques and madrasas? When is

someone going to get 18th century on Islam's medieval ass?

Note that Johnson says that Muslims will have to change, will have to make their faith "compatible with British values and with loyalty to Britain," and not that the British must change in any way. Hovering in the background is the question of what might happen if it turns out that Islam simply cannot be made "compatible with British values."

Then there is Johnson's enthusiasm for Israel. On a trip to that country, he made such pro-Israel remarks that scheduled meetings with both a Palestinian youth group and an organization of Palestinian businesswomen were cancelled, as a sign of their displeasure at Johnson's denunciation of the BDS movement; a brief meeting with the Palestinian prime minister, Rami Hamdallah, did go ahead. What had Johnson done to earn such anger? **During his three-day visit to Israel, he had repeatedly criticized the BDS movement's calls for a boycott of Israeli goods, describing the campaign as "completely crazy" and promoted by a "few snaggle-toothed corduroy-wearing lefty academics."**

During his last trip to Israel, Johnson delivered the inaugural Winston Churchill speech in Jerusalem.

He said in that speech: "If we look at the history of modern Israel there is no doubt that the comparison [between Churchill and Israel] can be extended, and that **there is something Churchillian about the country he helped to create. There is the audacity, the bravery, the willingness to take risks with feats of outrageous derring-do.**"

As Foreign Secretary, Johnson has lashed out at the "preposterous" and "absurd" focus of the UN Human Rights Council on the Jewish state, labeling it "disproportionate and damaging to the cause of peace."

Johnson has on one or two occasions been critical of Israel's

use of force. After several months of violence at Israel's security fence with Gaza by Palestinians engaged in the Great March of Return, Johnson issued this statement: **"I am deeply saddened by the loss of life in Gaza, where peaceful protesters are being exploited by extremists. I urge Israel to show restraint in the use of live fire."** Johnson had been wrongly informed. Israel had already been exhibiting extraordinary restraint in the use of force. Those rioters were hardly "peaceful protesters"; they were throwing large rocks, Molotov cocktails, kites, even grenades, at soldiers, and letting loose incendiary kites that would come to earth in Israel, where thousands of acres have burned up as a result. Occasionally the Palestinians fired guns. These were never "peaceful protesters.'

Nor did Johnson realize just how much restraint the Israelis were displaying, using rubber bullets and tear gas to discourage the rioters, constantly broadcasting warnings to stay away from the fence, and using live fire only against those who arrived too close to the security fence. The Israelis aimed to hit rioters below the knees, but those who managed not only to get to the fence but were in the process of breaching it, ignoring all the warnings being broadcast in Arabic from the Israeli side, and all the while lobbing deadly explosives at Israeli soldiers, could expect at that point to be met with deadly force.

Boris Johnson is deeply disturbed about Islam; he apparently has done what so very few politicians in the West have done – that is, he has read the Qur'an. His conclusion that "judged purely on its scripture – to say nothing of what is preached in the mosques – it is the most viciously sectarian of all religions in its heartlessness towards unbelievers" is unassailable and bracing in its accuracy. If he continues in this vein as Prime Minister, he may yet undo the damage done by several of his predecessors, since the days of Tony Blair, in their solicitousness toward Muslims.

Johnson admires Israel – keep those words in mind – for its **“audacity, its bravery, its willingness to take risks with feats of outrageous derring-do.”** He repeatedly denounces the BDS movement, and mocks it as full of corduroy-jacketed academics” of a leftward bent.

In short, when it comes to Islam and to Israel, Boris Johnson, who behind his smokescreen of japes has shown himself to be a much more serious student of Islam than, for example, Tony Blair, who claimed he carried a Qur’an around with him. It was not Blair, but Johnson who has actually *read the Qur’an, for god’s sake*. Boris Johnson, that “one-man melting pot,” is ready for his closeup. Let’s hope he gets the chance.

First published in