

Boris Johnson, International Leader



by Michael Curtis

Who makes me dream all day? Dreams I know can never come true, well you to guess, no one but Boris.

In one of his more melodramatic moments President Charles de Gaulle once complained, “How can you govern a country which has two hundred and forty-six varieties of cheese?” Prime Minister Boris Johnson might now utter a similar complaint. A striking sign of the times is that cuisine in Britain is regarded as equally or more palatable than the much-touted fare in France. Some calculations indicate Britain produces 1,000 different kinds of cheeses compared to only 550 in France. They are not simply familiar classics like West Country Cheddar, Caerphilly, Wensleydale, but versions of the most popular French cheeses, Camembert, Brie, Roquefort, and Reblochon. Cheese and wine go together, so it not surprising

that French companies have bought vineyards in Britain. And gourmets know that a country once scorned for warm beer and dripping fish and chips, now offers Dover sole, turbot, crab, fresh lobster on menus.

No one is likely to confuse the haughty regal Charles de Gaulle in style and character with Boris Johnson, showy with his disheveled fluffy blonde hair and humorous and entertaining bubbly personality, overweight, ambitious and competitive and a serial philanderer, whose favorite film is *The Godfather*. But the comparison of Johnson's current actions concerning Ukraine with those of France under President Emmanuel Macron illustrates the reality that Britain not France is playing a significant international role on defense of security.

It is plain that Boris has and is making a greater contribution with his practical actions to the support of Ukraine and defeat of the war criminal Vladimir Putin than the grandstanding Macron in France or most of the EU members. The difference is stark; Macron has declared there must be "no humiliation of Russia," referring to its leader Putin who Boris has called a "21st century tyrant." Boris has been a leading member of NATO, an organization that Macron in 2019 called "brain dead."

Boris has had a successful career. Born in 1964 in Manhattan, he has a mixed pedigree including a maternal great grandfather who was a rabbi in Lithuania. He was educated at top prestigious schools: Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. He was chosen to be president of the student Oxford Union in 1986. He became a journalist, a favorite on British TV talk shows, author of a number of books, including one on Winston Churchill, and then a conservative Member of Parliament in 2001. He was elected Mayor of London in 2008 and reelected in 2012. He returned to Parliament, becoming a prominent advocate of the Leavers, for the UK to leave the EU. He was appointed by prime minister Theresa May as foreign minister

for a short time, then in 2019 was elected leader of the Conservative Party and became prime minister.

Boris Johnson's main and immediate task, in addition to the Protocol for Northern Ireland, was to reopen Brexit negotiations and complete British formal withdrawal from the EU, which was completed on January 31, 2020, though differences remain over a number of issues, migrants, fish, fuel. The date was for Johnson, "the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act in our great national drama." That drama was to be more histrionic than expected with the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The fundamental irony today is that the country and Boris, implementor of Brexit that broke away from the EU, is now leading the defense of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression and bolder in confronting Russia to a greater extent than Brussels.

An unexpected consequence of Brexit is that Britain has not been isolated and marginalized as many predicted but has under Boris become the most active country and a leader in European politics. It is resuming the international role Britain once played, as in the confrontation with Russia in the Baltic during the Crimean war in 1854, and its preparation to send a fleet to protect Copenhagen in 1864 against a threatened German attack. Boris's boldness in the Baltic has echoes of strong leaders such as Pitt the Younger, Winston Churchill, and Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady who rescued the Falkland Islands.

It is not too strong to say that Britain has been the foremost European and NATO member, indeed Europe's only great power in dealing with the Ukraine conflict. The contrast with Macron is telling. The French president was reluctant to agree to sanctions on Russia or to supply heavy weapons to Ukraine. Macron asserted there should be no humiliation of Putin. Instead of reinforcing NATO, Macron has proposed a new European political community. Macron is also opposed to

Ukraine becoming a member either of the EU or NATO. In contrast,

Britain has played a decisive role in supplying weapons, in training and equipping the Ukrainians, and in strongly supporting sanctions against Russia.

Boris has been bold. He was the first western leader to visit Kviv, walk the streets with Zelensky, and address the Ukrainian parliament where he received a standing ovation. Boris told the Ukrainians, in Churchillian terms, that their heroic defense against Russian aggression would rank as "Ukraine's finest hour... you have exploded the myth of Putin's invincibility."

Boris broke new grounds in flying to Stockholm and then to Helsinki to see the leaders of Sweden and Finland, two non-aligned countries during the Cold War, before they announced their plans to apply for admission to NATO. In a bold move Boris signed a mutual security pact with the two countries. Sweden has islands near the Russian base of Kaliningrad, and has a military of 21,500 troops and 100 tanks. Finland has a 830 mile border with Russia, that runs close to St. Petersburg, an army of 6,850 troops and 120 tanks.

Britain is aiding these two countries with security measures, Royal Navy warships have begun to patrol the Baltic, while the armies and the RAF are involved in joint exercises. Britain has agreed to share intelligence with Finland and Sweden as part a new Northern security network that will include the British-led NATO force in nearby Estonia. This is a dramatic challenge to Putin who cited NATO enlargement as a main reason for his invasion and who always declared opposition to the expansion of NATO membership, but who on May 16, 2022, was obliged to say he had no problem with the application of the two countries. However, Putin also warned that the "expansion of military infrastructure to the countries will certainly invoke our response."

The decision of Finland and Sweden is a dramatic change from their long-term military non-alignment policies. The world is leaving one era and beginning another. Non-alignment dates back more than 75 years for Finland and two centuries for Sweden. They recognize, as Boris has asserted that the security environment has fundamentally changed, and that the only country that threatens European security and is waging an invasion and aggression is Russia. The only problem for the application of the two countries is Turkey which wants the Nordic countries to halt support for the Kurdish militant groups in their territory, before it agrees to their NATO membership.

Britain is playing a bold role, calling on allies to win the battle for Ukraine and prevent any further aggression by Putin, and to commit to further waves of sanctions as long as Russian troops remain in Ukraine. Sanctions in sensitive areas must remain. There is also need for a program like the Marshall plan to help rebuild Ukraine after the aggression has ended by a complete Russian withdrawal and peace agreement.

The solution for security is not the ambiguous European Confederation which President Macron has proposed but more likely an association of Britain with Scandinavian and Eastern European states proposed by Boris, now the international statesman. The emergence of Boris as an international figure worthy of admiration deserves some form of award. If the natural candidate for the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, Volodymyr Zelensky is not chosen, why not Boris Johnson, so long as he combs his hair. If not him, who?