

Beat: Politics

Boris Johnson - conference speech

2017 Conservative Party conference

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USPA NEWS - The annual conference of Britain's Conservative Party. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson speech in full.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson -

As our hearts go out to Las Vegas today we are reminded once again of the attack that took place here only a few months ago, on innocent and music-loving young people. And if there is a message to our American friends it is this: that they will come through it and they will come back from it stronger.

Because this city has shown that nothing and no one can bow the indomitable spirit of the people of Manchester, which in recent years has reinvented itself as the great thrumming engine of the northern powerhouse, with its vast potential to generate jobs in finance, in academia, in journalism and the arts "" and that's just the ones held by George Osborne.

And since our subject this afternoon is how to win the future and build Global Britain I want to introduce our superb foreign office team: Our PPSs Conor Burns and Amanda Milling and our whip David Evenett. And our ministers : covering the Middle East "" already one of the most expert parliamentarians in that field "" Alistair Burt, and covering Africa Rory Stewart. Like the pharaohs of upper and lower Egypt they are double hatted ministers in the sense that they simultaneously represent the FCO and DFID "" bringing together our foreign policy with our aid programmes.

In the Lords we have Tariq Ahmad, who is working on ensuring that next year in London we make the most of an institution that takes 2.4 billion people and 52 of some of the fastest growing economies in the world and unites them in admiration of the service provided by Her Majesty the Queen "" the Commonwealth. And we will have a summit to do her justice.

And just back from Burma "" making clear this country's disgust at the treatment of the Rohingya "" Mark Field. And dynamically triangulating between Europe and America decoding President Trump for President Juncker and vice versa. We have that Mount Rushmore of wisdom Sir Alan Duncan.

We have a great team and we are getting on with the job and yet frankly, folks, as I absorb the general tone of the national conversation I don't think I have ever known so many to be sunk in gloom and dubitation about Britain and the world. Every week I pick up British-edited international magazines, of the kind that you will find in the briefcases of jet setting consultants. Glossy-covered, elegantly written, suspiciously unread. And every week these publications have found new reasons to be slightly less than cheerful about this country.

Every day a distinguished pink newspaper manages to make Eeyore look positively exuberant and across the world the impression is being given that this country is not up to it. That we are going to bottle out of Brexit and end up in some dingy ante-room of the EU, pathetically waiting for the scraps but no longer in control of the menu. And the most pessimistic of them all is not the media or our friends in the EU commission or the excitable M Guy Verhofstadt "" far from it "" it's Jeremy Corbyn. That Nato bashing, Trident scrapping, would-be abolisher of the British army whose first instinct in the event of almost any international outrage or disaster is to upend the analysis until he can find a way of blaming British foreign policy. And whose response to the grisly events in Venezuela is to side with the regime "" simply because they are fellow lefties. He says he still admires Bolivarian revolutionary socialism. I say he's Caracas.

At a time when the world should unite to condemn Venezuela's Maduro, we have the leader of Britain's official opposition giving cover to a government that is jailing opponents, shooting demonstrators, intimidating journalists and repressing human rights.

It is a disgrace "" and I can tell you there are many Labour MPs who feel appalled that their party is still led by this man and his peculiar belief "" expressed in glutinous victory-style Chavista rallies up

and down the country "" that he somehow won the election.

He didn't win. You won "" we won. Theresa May won. She won more votes than any party leader and took this party to its highest share of the vote in any election in the last 25 years and the whole country owes her a debt for her steadfastness in taking Britain forward as she will to a great Brexit deal, based on that Florence speech on whose every syllable, I can tell you the whole cabinet is

united.

Of all the areas where Corbyn is content to talk this country down, there is none more ludicrous and vacillating than his policy on Brexit. In the customs union one week, out the next, in the single market, out the next.

In out, in out.

Faster than one of those members of the shadow cabinet who gets sacked before she knows she has even been appointed. A kind of manifestation of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. It would be disastrous. And in leaving Britain in this limbo "" locked in the orbit of the EU but unable to take back control. Unable to do proper free trade deals. Labour would inflict a national humiliation on a par with going cap in hand to the IMF.

And yes, I know: in making these sorts of points we come up against a difficulty we must accept that when we talk about the 1970s we imagine people instantly understand about power cuts, the three day week, union bosses back in Downing Street, state-made-British rail sandwiches. We think they get the reference but unfortunately going back to the 1970s sounds to too many people like a massive joint revival concert by David Bowie, Led Zep and the Rolling Stones. And that is because people can remember the Stones and Bowie and Led Zep, monuments of global culture but they have totally forgotten that those bands, along with so many other wealth creators were driven overseas by Labour's 83 per cent tax rate.

They have forgotten that the problem used to be the brain drain, not people wanting to hear. They have forgotten that we had to fight and win battles of ideas and in a way that is entirely understandable "" because our victory has been so comprehensive.

If you listen to the aspirations of the young people I meet around the world, you will find there is not a single successful global economy that would dream of implementing the semi-Marxist agenda of McDonnell and Corbyn of nationalisation and state control.

And wherever you find enterprise and initiative and start-ups and innovation and economic growth it is where people have followed ideas that were pioneered by our party and by our country- and in this city of Manchester ""from India, to China, to Vietnam, to Thailand, where free markets and deregulation and privatisation have helped lift more people out of poverty than ever in history. To the central and east European economies that this party "" and not the Labour party "" helped on the path to freedom and democracy. You see it in Estonia, tech hub with a high degree of social protection "" where they have a flat tax of 20 per cent. In Romania they have a flat tax of 16 per cent and free health and education AND higher education. In Hungary they have a tax rate of 15 per cent "" 15 per cent? We are all tax-cutting Tories but even I think that is going a bit far.

And yet how crazy it is that a quarter of a century after the working people of these former Soviet bloc countries risked their lives to throw off the shackles of socialism "" while the Labour left sneered at them and made excuses for their oppressors -the shadow leader and shadow chancellor are seriously proposing to put place the British people back in bondage "" a £200bn renationalisation programme. A display of economic masochism that would do incalculable damage to the future of our children.

That's the difference between this Conservative party and the Labour party: We want a country with a government that works for everyone. Corbyn wants a Britain where everyone works for the government.

This battle of ideas is not lost in memories of the 1970s. It is back from the grave. Its zombie fingers straining for the levers of power and that is why we cannot rest.

We may have the most illustrious battle honours of any political party but now we have to win the battle for the future and the way to win the future is not to attack the market economy, not to junk our gains but to make it work better "" make it work better for the low paid "" turning the living wage under this Conservative government into a national living wage.

Make it work for all those who worry their kids will never find a home to own "" building 100s of 1000s of homes.

Make it work better for parents who can't find good enough childcare "" with 30 hours free care for 3 and 4 year olds.

And above all help people who are struggling, by driving benefit reforms that have helped millions back into the dignity and self-esteem that goes with having a job and which has seen inequality fall "" as the Chancellor pointed out yesterday "" to the lowest levels for three decades.

And to win the future we must communicate once again the central idea: Our one nation conservatism that, for all its faults, an open free-trading and thriving market economy is the only sustainable way to create the wealth we will always need to help the poorest.

The surest way to finance the platform of great public services and great infrastructure that themselves enable business to succeed.

And the only way to win the future is not to retreat from the world, not to abandon globalisation but to play our part, as we always have, in making the world safer and freer "" and therefore more prosperous and that is why we must believe in global Britain. Not dismiss the very notion of a world role "" as Corbyn does but accentuate and be proud of that role.

There are places where it is simply our moral duty to British passport holders, like the overseas territories in the Caribbean where

those islands have been overwhelmed by the biggest catastrophe for 150 years.

It is an eerie scene: Not a leaf remaining on the shattered trees. Houses turned into streaks of wooden and plastic litter. Boats hurled on top of one another or lodged absurdly up hillsides.

Of all the disasters in my lifetime, none has overturned the lives of so many UK nationals and yet we should pay tribute to the indomitable spirit of those islanders and together with Priti Patel and Michael Fallon the government will work to put them back on their feet.

And still our responsibilities go wider.

When we protect the world we protect British interests as well. When we campaign for the stability of the south china seas, that is because through the narrow pulsing jugular of the Malacca straits "" only 1.7 miles wide "" goes fully 25 per cent of world trade including huge quantities of British goods.

Across the Middle East and North Africa we are helping to bring peace and defeat terrorism. Not just because that is right in itself but because these will be the great markets of the coming century.

Just in the last few weeks I have seen British troops training the Nigerian forces to defeat the numbskulls of Boko Haram around Maiduguri "" where British doctors are tending the maimed victims of terror and as our helicopter swooped over the burned and deserted villages they said there was a risk of pot-shots from behind, and I said it was an occupational hazard in my line of work.

And every week, with UK help, the brave Nigerian forces are winning but you can't just tackle the problem in Nigeria. Those terrorists' AK47s are being smuggled down through the desert from the chaos of Libya and in Tripoli I have seen the charred ruins of our embassy "" the smashed snooker table and the room where Tony Blair once held a banquet.

But I was proud to run that Union Jack back up the flagpole and that embassy is being rebuilt. And if we in the UK can help solve the problems of Libya "" and we are making progress "" then that country can also win a great future. And until we sort it out you will find British ships off the Libyan coast, helping our Italian friends to cope with illegal migration. And that is what I mean by Global Britain, committed as team players and where necessary as leaders to the protection of the world and our common European home.

I have seen the 800 British troops in Estonia and congratulated them on resisting the honey traps allegedly placed in their way by Russian intelligence. At least they said they had resisted. They are a visible and powerful symbol of this country's unconditional commitment to defend the boundaries of Europe and the incredible freedoms we won in the 1980s and 1990s.

And I can't tell you how much our friends value Britain's contribution, in Europe and around the world because we have reached a unique phase in our history.

We are big enough to do amazing things. We have the ability to project force 7,000 miles, to use our permanent membership of the UN security council to mobilise a collective response to the crisis in North Korea. We contribute 25 per cent of European aid spending and yet no one seriously complains that we have a sinister national agenda and that is why the phrase global Britain makes sense because if you said Global China or Global Russia or even alas Global America it would not have quite the same flavour.

I am not saying that everyone automatically loves us or that everyone completely follows our sense of humour, though a lot more than you might think. But there is a huge desire out there for us to engage with the world more emphatically than ever before.

And after Brexit that is what our partners are going to get as this country is freed from endlessly trying to block things in Brussels committee rooms. Freed to stop being negative and to start being positive about what we believe in "" including free trade.

And yes we are leaving the EU "" but as the PM has said in her Florence speech we can create a deep and special partnership built on free trade with a strong EU buttressed and supported by a strong UK.

And since it is manifestly absurd to argue that European values or culture or civilisation are somehow defined or delimited by the institutions of the EU, we will be no less European. Britain will continue to be European in culture, geography, history, architecture, spiritually, morally, you name it. We are one of the great quintessential European nations. In many ways the most influential of all and that is because our most important exports are our values. British values. Embodied in this amazing metropolis of Manchester as they are in London and across the country.

A society that welcomes talent. That welcomed my ancestors from France, Russia, Turkey and heaven knows where. That is proud of the EU and other nationals that want to come here and that have enriched our lives. A society that does not judge you for where you come from or your background or how you live your life provided you do no harm to others that is the syncretic genius of our country.

And it is thanks to that intellectual cross-fertilisation that Britain is at the cutting edge of new markets and new technology. Think back

to how we have changed the world just in our lifetimes, and then imagine what we will have done in 40 years time, your lifetime ““ William Hague’s lifetime.

We are going to crack global warming, with British clean technology and British green finance ““ in which we lead the world.

We will get to a point where we generate as much clean energy as we want and eventually we will stabilise our world populations and raise per capita GDP above all by promoting female education ““ which is at the heart of all British overseas policy ““ and we should be proud of the young women and girls that we are helping to teach, in Africa, in South Asia ““ six million of them in the Pakistani Punjab alone.

And if we can drive on that great cause of female empowerment and education, the Swiss army knife that solves so many problems, then I believe we will eventually find a cure for the psychological contamination of radical Islamist extremism. Just as we have eradicated smallpox and polio.

It came and it will go. And we will have problems ““ of course we will have problems. Humanity will always have its afflictions in mind or body because without pain and doubt and anxiety there can be no pleasure and no triumph and no success. But success will be achieved not by allowing the UK to retreat from our global role but by reinforcing that role and breakthroughs will come not through the edict of some bureaucrat in some Corbynist ministry of plenty but through the effort of inventors, scientists, business people, students and dreamers of whom we have so many.

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And to all those who are worried about the UK today, let me remind you that it was only eight years ago that we stood on the verge of the nastiest recession for 70 years and I remember being taken up on to the roof of City hall ““ which I then ran ““ by a female American TV journalist and she said ““Mr Mayor ““ look around you ““ no one is building anything, ‘ and the irritating thing was she was right; the cranes were gone from the skyline; confidence had deserted us.

Well look at London today, storming ahead ““ even if the new mayor isn’t a patch on the last guy. He seems to spend his time trying rather ineffectually to ban things. Why not try doing something for a change?

And look at the UK ““ with the lowest unemployment rate for 42 years. The highest number of people in work ever, the number one destination for investment into Europe and every time one of these facts emerges it is reported in tones of slight disapproval, and with the inevitable qualification ““ despite Brexit.

It is time to stop treating the referendum result as though it were a plague of boils or a murrain on our cattle or an inexplicable aberration by 17.4 m people. It is time to be bold, and to seize the opportunities and there is no country better placed than Britain.

Which is not only the place where the atom was first split but has become a gigantic cyclotron of talent in which people are coming together from every discipline to produce constant flashes of inspiration and indeed we are the global capital of innovation we export more TV programmes than any other country in Europe ““ five times more than the French.

We export a programme to Cambodia called Neak Neng Klay Chea Sethey, which means who wants to be a millionaire. And it is thanks to the triumph of conservative values you are allowed to become a millionaire in Cambodia without being despatched for re-education by some Asiatic John McDonnell.

We lead the world in bioscience and fintech and some branches of AI and cybernetics ““ and what is Labour’s first instinct on hearing the news? Tax robots! and then make them join the union. Did Manchester become great by taxing the spinning jenny?

We have a growing space programme run by my brother Jo Johnson and I have a candidate for the first man we gently blast into orbit and that is the superannuated space cadet from Islington and I know he has an innocent and voletrousered air but his domestic policies would rack up unfair debts for our children and grandchildren and his foreign policies would imperil not just this country but our friends and neighbours as well. Conference, we cannot allow it to happen.

200 years ago people used to come to this city to see something revolutionary ““ the beginning of the modern world and once again this country has had the guts to try to do something new and different to challenge received wisdom with a democratic revolution that we can turn into a cultural and technological and commercial renaissance.

There are people say we can't do it. We say we can. We can win the future because we are the party that believes in this country and we believe in the potential of the British people. We have been privileged collectively to be placed in charge of this amazing country at a critical moment in our history.

We are not the lion. We do not claim to be the lion. That role is played by the people of this country. But it is up to us now "" in the traditional non-threatening, genial and self-deprecating way of the British "" to let that lion roar.

Click on 'More Information' link below to view the youtube video.

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