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This is your 'Churchill moment' Boris - if you have what it takes

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Your premiership will be assailed on all sides CREDIT: PA WIRE

We need a bold leader who will put their 'head into the lion's mouth'

Dear Boris,

First of all, many congratulations on getting to the last round of the Tory leadership contest. Although I supported Michael Gove, I'll be voting for you. If you win on 22 July, after only 11 years and 71 days in parliament, you will have entered No.10 faster than any other of the fifty-four prime ministers except Pitt the Younger (2 years as an MP), Lord Bute (5 years), Henry Addington (6 years) and David Cameron (9 years). It will be an extraordinary achievement. Of course in order to avoid going down in history as an even shorter-serving premier than George Canning (119 days), you are going to have to show remarkable boldness the moment you cross the threshold.

The screams of rage and anguish from Remainers of all types and parties that greeted Dominic Raab's proposal to use the prorogation of parliament (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/06/27/theresa-may-warns-boris-johnson-against-proroguing-parliament/>) to avoid either a general election or second referendum shows how scared they are of it, rather than how undemocratic they say it is. If they genuinely believed in democracy, they would have abided by the democratic vote in the referendum rather than constantly attempting to subvert it.

I have been advocating prorogation since February, as the obvious way out of a situation in which the sovereign will of the people is being thwarted by the non-sovereign will of MPs. When you prorogue parliament – as I believe you will ultimately have to given the alternatives - you will be likened to King Charles I, although he did it for 11 years whereas you will hopefully only need to do it for a few weeks. Parliament is prorogued three times a year for Recess anyhow; this one will simply be for a month or so longer.

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It is in fact the profoundly democratic thing to do, overriding a parliament that has spent three years refusing to deliver the real Brexit for which the British people voted. The reason our constitution is unwritten is to provide the Government with opportunities in precisely these kind of circumstances.

You will also be accused of having no national mandate. Yet as John Brooke pointed out in his biography of King George III, 'All successful war ministers – Chatham in 1757, Palmerston in 1855, Lloyd George in 1916, Churchill in 1940 – have been thrust on the Commons by backstairs intrigue.' Your mandate will be by the majority of Tory MPs and a majority of the wider party, a far better one than any of those four great leaders. Although this is of course not wartime, Brexit is by far the greatest peacetime crisis this country has faced since the Falklands, arguably even Suez.

If you prorogue, the smack of firm government will be admired by the next election in 2022, by which time the short-term ructions caused by a no-deal Brexit will have bedded down and some of its long-term advantages will have started to be felt.

If you funk prorogation and call an election instead, the historian in you must acknowledge the need for an [electoral pact with Nigel Farage](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/06/19/tory-brexit-party-coalition-would-spell-disaster/) that allows the Brexit Party to fight at least thirty seats in Labour's Midlands and Northern heartlands unopposed by the Conservatives, thereby preventing Corbyn from entering No 10 and allowing you to preside over a pro-Brexit coalition government.

It's what Lord Salisbury did with the Liberal Unionists in 1886, forming the basis of a coalition that kept the Tories in power for seventeen of the next twenty years, and Brexit is the 21st equivalent of Irish Home Rule in its scope and importance. You'll recall how in one of the debates on Irish Home Rule, an MP threw a book at Churchill's face, drawing blood. Ironically enough, it was the parliamentary rulebook.

With regard to your colourful private life, as Robert Blake said of Disraeli, you seem deliberately to erect obstacles for yourself, partly for the pleasure of overcoming them. That of course must stop when you get to No.10, not least

because there will be more than enough obstacles erected by others. At least you won't be as bad as David Lloyd George, who, when asked whether he would be taking Mrs Lloyd George to the Paris Peace Conference, replied, 'Would you take sandwiches to a banquet?'

You have often been accused by your detractors of believing [you are Winston Churchill](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/06/20/will-boris-johnson-follow-churchills-example-treats-beaten-tory/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/06/20/will-boris-johnson-follow-churchills-example-treats-beaten-tory/>). Many of the reviews of your Churchill biography were wildly unfair, such as the one from Professor Sir Richard Evans that attacked you for saying that the Germans captured Stalingrad, claiming that they hadn't, when of course they occupied the city centre for several months in 1942-43. You only have to visit Field Marshal von Paulus' headquarters underneath the GUM department store in what is now called Volgograd to know that.

Accusing you of believing you are Churchill is an easy sneer to make, often by people who couldn't write a biography of him like you did, one that sold 280,000 copies (which is almost as many as my 'Churchill: Walking with Destiny'). In your capacity for inducing jealousy and rage in people – and your ability to inspire hope in others – you obviously have learnt some lessons from the great man. It is not that you are channelling some inner Churchill, but that you learnt from him.

Luckily, as a fellow Churchill biographer, you know how much our mutual hero followed the bold course. 'You must put your head into the lion's mouth,' he wrote in 1900, 'if the performance is to be a success.' As he told Stafford Cripps in September 1942, 'I myself find waiting more trying than action,' and you'll remember the naval signal he sent out in November 1943: 'Improvise and dare.'

When it comes to Brexit and saving your premiership, which will be assailed on all sides – including by some Tories – the minute you enter No 10, you should take Churchill's advice. Good luck!

My fondest regards,

Andrew

Andrew Roberts is the author of 'Churchill: Walking with Destiny', published by Penguin

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