09042023 Gastech 2023 Boris Johnson

**Gastech 2023**

**Boris Johnson**

**Introducer & Moderator: John Defterios, CNN, International Journalist**

**Singapore**

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(Break for introduction.)

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Let’s welcome the Right Honourable Boris Johnson, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, leader of the Conservative Party, Foreign Secretary, and Mayor of London on two occasions. (Applause.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you. Thank you very much, John, for that wonderful, detailed introduction.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Thank you. I try not to go too far.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** And Chris was so excited to see you behind the scenes, I had to recognize Sir Chris Hudson.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think I knighted you in recognition of your services to UK tax revenues over the years.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Yes. I’ve lived there on four occasions. I’ve got to say, this last time I’m not so pleased about it.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’ll mention that. We’ve got to sort that out. We need to cut the tax.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I appreciate that. We’re going to look at the global scene first and then back our way into the UK. Despite taking more than a day to get over here, you seem pretty sprightly. We had a discussion before we came on stage --

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Hard as nails, we are. Hard as nails, we are. We were Qatar Airways. Malaysian Airways is very good, too.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** All the way to Singapore. The former prime minister was saying they had a crowd of 8,000 in Sao Paulo. It wasn’t very intimate, so this is quite a different audience.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, there was a crowd to welcome me at the airport, too, of young women, but it turned out they were waiting for someone called Post Malone. (Laughter.) It was a bit of a disappointment when I emerged. (Laughter.)

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I’ve got to say, that’s a pretty powerful table.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** They know who Post Malone is. I had no idea.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** That’s a pretty powerful table with a lot of net worth of market cap. They all wanted to take a group selfie, so you still have some drawing power.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, not with this group of young women, I didn’t. (Laughter.)

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Let’s get pretty serious. I want to start on your views on where we are today, because we’re in a period of disruption.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Number one, obviously, your support for Ukraine. Russia’s invasion into Ukraine now is a year and a half in the running. We don’t see an easy exit. President Xi has a pretty tight grip on power in China. Is this an era of autocracy that will actually chip away at democracy, in your view? How concerned should we be about that? I’m going to keep you to three minutes. That’s what we’re trying to do per answer.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Very quickly. Bet on democracy, folks. Bet on liberal capitalist democracy. It’s the worst system in the world, except for all the others. Right? Whatever happens in democracy in the UK, and strange convulsions take place and people like me end up in Singapore rather than in Westminster, that’s fine. (Laughter.) But in the end, it’s democratic parliaments, back-benchers, MPs, the checks and balances that stop leaders from doing dumb things like invading countries they don’t need to invade. Putin’s war has been a disaster for Russia. It’s been a disaster for the world. Of course, it’s been appalling for the Ukraine. It’s been pretty good for the oil and gas industry that isn’t Russian, by the way. I don’t know whether you guys think so, but there’s been a big opportunity to sell oil.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Certainly, a lot more appreciation.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Correct. In a democracy, Putin would never have done that. Xi Jinping, you mentioned him. John, would he have kept going with the zero COVID thing if he’d had back-benchers, if he’d had people to say, “Don’t do it”? I think there’s big merit to having democratic checks and balances. But more important than that -- far more important than that, freedom to choose your rulers goes with freedom to speak your mind, freedom to do deals with whoever you want, freedom to live your life however you want -- within reason, providing you do no harm to others. That is the thing that produces the climate that leads to innovation, that leads to commercial prosperity, that’s why London. That’s why New York. That’s why these cities continue to be the places where you’ll find massive, massive investments in the technologies of the future.

Bet on the US. Bet on the democracies. Culturally, I talk about Post Malone. Who around the world listens to Russian rock music? (Laughter.) Does anybody? Do you? Are you aware of any Russian rock --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** There’s that one group that got arrested.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Who listens to Chinese technofunk music? What I’m saying is if you go to Brazil, where I’ve just been -- as you pointed out just now -- they’ve got Adele, who’s a British singer, they’ve got Paul McCartney -- it’s full of people singing English songs from England in Brazil. That is because, in the end, it’s the liberal capitalist democracies that produce the innovation, that produce the cultural excitement that people want to invest in. Bet on them.

AstraZeneca -- talking about COVID -- which were the vaccines that really worked? Which were they? I’ve got a lot of respect for China, but in the end, it was the western pharmaceutical companies backed by global finance that produced Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna, the ones that actually worked -- I’m just saying.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I don’t want to get too personal, but you had a brush with death.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** With COVID. What was it like? I can remember the day when people --

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Brush with death? It was my moment of maximum political popularity. (Laughter.) When people seriously thought I was about to die, John, I promise you there’s a spike.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** That’s one way to get popular.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** The post-Ukraine gas spike had nothing on that. (Laughter.) When the British public thought there was a genuine possibility that I might be removed from the scene. The NHS was wonderful.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** You said something interesting behind the scenes is that they don’t tell you how bad you’re doing.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No. Well, they don’t want to depress you. It was very early on. They didn’t even give me steroids, so we just didn’t know. I’m totally fine.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** This is a gas conference, and I used to cover energy for 30 years.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. I know. A long time, yes.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Did you think we got too complacent on Russia, particularly Gerhard Schroeder as chancellor?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** He rolled into Nord Stream and then went to Gazprom and convinced Angela Merkel and German industry to go all-in on Russia. Was that a strategic error, in retrospect?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It was. But on the other hand, look at what Germany has done. Germany has divested massively. Germany’s gone from 40% dependence on Russian gas to less than 5% -- zero? Is that right? That’s the measure of Putin’s catastrophic mistake. He’s managed to push away his best customers.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** What is it in global government that we don’t do that global mapping? That seemed like a mistake from the beginning with the pressure from Gerhard Schroeder and he used German industry to lean on Mrs. Merkel. We do know that the Chancellor and Germany has a historical relationship with Russia. You’re a man of history.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, look, if you’re German, these are big, deep issues. No two countries did more damage to each other 80 years ago than Russia and Germany. I think I’m right, if you look at the casualties, you look at what actually happened in the Second World War, it was appalling -- absolutely appalling. Germans have an abhorrence of such conflict ever again, the Ostpolitik is very important to people in Chancellor Schroeder’s party -- less to Angela Merkel, but certainly, they wanted a different relationship with Russia.

Look, historically, you can see why a German might feel like that, given what Germans did to Russians and Russians did to Germans. They did make themselves too vulnerable to Russian gas -- the whole of Europe was. But that’s over now. We’re, thankfully, in a different place.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Do you think there is an offramp in that conflict between Russia and Ukraine? Are we bold enough in the west to tell President Zelensky, who you have a personal relationship with, that he may not take back the territories that he’s lost, particularly Crimea? How do you get off of this if you were the Foreign Secretary?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, it’s very, very difficult. You can’t be more Ukrainians than the Ukrainians, right? I passionately want Ukraine to win. I want Ukraine to succeed. I believe that what Putin did was evil and criminal and this is a turning point for international law and for the world in the early 21st century.

But I’m living in Britain. It’s not for me to tell the Ukrainians that they’ve got to continue to lay down their lives for freedom everywhere. What they’re doing is heroic. They’re unbelievably brave, but they must decide.

Now, I don’t think that even if we were to tell them or even if a new American president was to tell them, “Sorry, folks, you’ve got to do a deal,” I don’t think they’d do it. I don’t think they would do it. That’s why we’ve got to keep backing them. They can win, and they will win. What Putin did was to disprove his own thesis. Remember his mad essay in 2021 when he said that Ukraine wasn’t really a country, this weird mixture of Nostradamus and Wikipedia, he wrote this long rant. It’s just tripe. It’s not true.

What he’s done with his invasion is created the strongest national feeling I’ve seen anywhere in the world. There is no force in politics stronger than national feeling -- stronger even than religion probably, certainly in this case. The Ukrainians are fighting for their hearths and homes. The Russians aren’t. Those poor Russian kids are fighting for a war that they don’t really understand and they’re losing their lives at a huge rate as well. That’s the first reason why the Ukrainians are going to win.

Secondly, we continual underestimate Ukraine. We thought they would lose in a week, remember? In February 2022, my advice from my officials in defense intelligence was that it would all be over in a week. The United States people were saying the same. It was rubbish. They kicked them out of Kiev, then later on, they kicked them out of the Kharkiv region.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Do you think they’ll have a settlement, though?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No. I don’t. I really don’t. If you look at what’s happening today around Bakhmut, you can see that the Ukrainians have the makings of a success. It will take time and it will be miserable, but it is the only way through. You cannot do a deal with Vladimir Putin.

You’re all brilliant business minds, right? When you do a business deal, do you look at the track record of the person with whom you’re negotiating? You think, “Has this person ever welched on a deal before,” when you shake hands before you do it. Right? Would you do a deal with Putin expecting him to honor that deal?

I’ll tell you who thought he was going to do a deal with Putin was a guy called Yevgeny Prigozhin. That went well, right? (Laughter.) He thought he’d gotten bankable assurances from Putin. How can you do a deal with this man? Putin ended up -- this is one of his closest supporters, friends, allies since they were on the streets of St. Petersburg.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** He was deputy mayor, yes.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. They grew up together. Then, Putin literally liquidates him.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Yes. You would say that Prigozhin stepped over the line, though, he made a run on Moscow.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, which is, by the way, an illustration of the difficulty Putin is in. He’s in all sorts of problems. To get back to your first question, how many minutes have I done on this question now?

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I think about five. (Laughter.) If I had a hook, I’d pull it, dammit. You’ve got a lot to say.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Quickly, Putin is going to lose this thing. He’s already, effectively, lost. People need to lose their superstition about the invincibility of Vladimir Putin and the Russians. They’re losing. They’re going to lose. The world will be a better place when it happens. And, no, he will not use nuclear weapons, because that would be about the dumbest thing he could do and it would totally terrify the Russian people.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** But he could use Donald Trump, and this is something you said if a US president comes in, I’ll ask you separately about the state of play in America. If Donald Trump came in, he made it pretty clear that he doesn’t want to sustain the US presence in Ukraine and that would put a fracture within NATO.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** He doesn’t want to sustain US presence -- but he doesn’t have a US presence. What Biden has done, and I really pay tribute to the Biden administration, they spent $45-50 billion without committing a single American soldier. That’s extraordinary. When I say that we can’t be more Ukrainian than the Ukrainians, I mean it sincerely. They are fighting for everybody.

When Ukraine wins, it will be very, very good news for the world and for democracies because it will mean that if you’re Xi Jinping and you’re thinking about what to do in the South China Seas, you will hesitate. People will make a different calculus about what could happen.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I was going to ask you about Taiwan. Looking at the example of Russia/Ukraine and Xi Jinping went after Taiwan, would the west have the will to protect Taiwan?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think increasingly, yes. It depends on the United States. The way things seem to be going, and the way congress is, I would put some money on that, yes. What has happened in Ukraine has helped, to get back to your first point, has helped to deter the autocrats from making goofs. That’s got to be a good thing for the world.

Now, you asked about Donald Trump. I’m going to dodge the question.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** You brought it back up. Now you’ve got to -- (Laughter.) Being very American about this, I wanted to get your opinion.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** We’re off the record, aren’t we?

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Yes, we are. The honest question I want to ask is: what’s it like in a meeting with the guy?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** There are several levels to this. First of all, it is very hard to be too hostile or to feel too hostile towards somebody who is very kind about you. That’s a normal -- can everybody relate to that?

So, Donald Trump always came across to the UK and said some very amusing things about how supportive he was of me, which didn’t entirely destroy my political career. (Laughter.)

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** There were a lot of balloons out on Westminster.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. It was quite damaging, but it wasn’t fatal. (Laughter.) You can’t dislike somebody -- do you know what I mean? For no reason that I can immediately see, very strongly supportive of you, then it takes your -- you lower your guard. So, I have good relations with Donald Trump. You would all find him, I think, amusing company and the soul of politeness and courtesy -- like so many Americans, actually compared I think sometimes to Brits, he has extremely good manners.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** That surprises me.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, it’s true. He has extremely good manners. (Laughter.)

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** People are laughing at this. I think it’s surprising. I think everybody would agree with me.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s true. He has extremely good manners.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Behind closed doors.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. The soul of old-world courtesy and lays on a great dinner and you’ll have a great conversation.

I’ve got to say that I disagreed with what he did on the January 6th thing. That was a major, major goof. We as democratic politicians, and I’ve said this to him, we as democratic politicians have got to accept it when the election goes against you. We have a game -- cricket, right? When the umpire puts his finger -- cricket is not really big -- you have cricket in Singapore? Yes? Come on. When the umpire gives you out in cricket, which is what happened to me, by the way, even though you’re not leg before wicket or you haven’t been caught behind or whatever, if you know what I mean -- does anybody know cricket?

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Yes. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Okay. If the truth is that your pad was not in front of the wicket when the ball struck it or the ball did not lick your bat as it went past on the way to the wicket keeper’s gloves, but the umpire nonetheless gives you out, then you’ve got to walk.

Now, in Donald Trump’s case, I was not out, he was out. (Laughter.) Okay? He was out. He should have -- it was very bad. It was really bad. We, as democrats, have to say that we have faith in our institutions, and we do.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** He’s trying to break the institution.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, these are matters for American domestic policy. I disagreed with that strongly.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** You disagree that he’s trying to --

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, no, no, no, no. I disagreed strongly with what he did. I don’t know whether he’s trying to -- but I disagreed strongly with what he did with the election. I think he should not, not, not have cast doubt on the democratic process like that. Absolutely wrong. There’s no way he can just do a deal on Ukraine. That’s not true. I don’t see how that happens. There are all sorts of -- you heard me explain why that’s not true.

But here’s the good news: I don’t think that he -- if Donald were to get in, I don’t think that he would pull the plug on the Ukrainians. I don’t think he would.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** He has 91 counts against him, four cases. It’s not unheard of. We had a civil war 158 years ago, it took four years, and I was in the States this summer. A lot of people talk about the potential for a civil war if he’s elected and he’s in jail and he’s not allowed to take the presidency. I know you have a fondness for America, but give us your views.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I love America.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Do you think democracy can survive?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. Democracy in America is robust. Whatever Donald Trump did -- in robust health, too. I don’t think there will be a civil war in America, to answer your question. That’s not true. The wall is a peaceful and orderly transition from one government to the next based on the will of the people. That’s what happened and that’s what will continue to happen. I don’t think that you’ll see anything of the kind in America. People shouldn’t worry about that.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I wasn’t planning to talk to you about this, but --

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Go on.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** The choice between Joe Biden, who is over 80, Donald Trump is knocking on the door of 80, maybe in the jail house. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Knocking on the door of 80 in the jail --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Can we do better? Don’t you think better should come out of America? What’s your view?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I wouldn’t wish, as I say, to damage the chances of either candidate by offering my support. (Laughter.) I used to be an American. I was born in New York City, I was.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I know.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It was a very expensive decision, it turned out to be. The inland revenue service -- they’re tougher than ours, John. We would not tax you if you were a Brit on the sale of your primary residence in America.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I know this very well.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You know this.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** My wife complains about it.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’m just telling you. I sold a house in Islington when I was mayor of London. I had four British children. I had a British passport. My bank -- this is the American wire fraud stuff, the banks, every financial institution in the world is basically terrified of doing something illegal in America in case they all get extradited. My bank rang me and said I was going to have to pay tax on the sale of this property. Can you believe that? (Laughter.)

I say this to American audiences and they look at me in a very flinty way. They don’t care at all, nor does anybody else -- nor the Brits, by the way. The Brits thought it was disgraceful I wasn’t paying more tax anyway. (Laughter.) I had to give up.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I would suggest maybe the UAE would not be a bad idea, Singapore for your taxes.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You’re a UAE man, are you?

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I have a golden visa in the UAE, but I live in the UK. I’m a UK resident for the fourth time. I do want to be knighted, eventually.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** That’s right. (Laughter.) I think you’re making a very good case, but have you actually taken our citizenship yet?

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** No, I have not. My two daughters have citizenship.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** That’s fantastic. Congratulations.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** One born there.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Wonderful.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** She saved our bacon when we lived in the UAE because she had a UK passport, and that’s why we could come in before Brexit. I’ve got to talk to you about Brexit.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You can come in after Brexit. Sorry, before, more people have come in last year than at any -- the idea that Brexit --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Coming in on the small boats.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, no. (Laughter.) No. Well, sorry, that’s just a demonstration of the charisma and attractiveness of the United Kingdom. (Laughter.) They’re fleeing France -- rightly -- (Laughter.) for the relative stability and interest of the UK.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Sue-Ellen Braverman, who is the Home Secretary, she’s not making friends in France, let’s put it that way.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’m not --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** You’re not going to fall into that one?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, no, no. But what I will say, look, on Brexit, it is amazing, frankly, that it isn’t more unpopular than it is. There is so much negativity about this subject coming from the media --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Here we go.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s true. The problem with Brexit is that it was basically hysterically opposed by the British government of the day. 75% of the MPs were against it, 80% of Times readers, most BBC journalists, and you see that in the coverage.

The truth is, Brexit has delivered magnificently.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Can I interrupt for a second?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Speaking of the media and the Times, there’s a Times poll 10 days ago, 60% -- not of just Tory members, but overall -- want to go back into the European Union. You know this.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** We had polls like that before people voted to leave the EU by the biggest vote that anybody has ever seen in British democratic history.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Was it a good idea, though?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It was. Let me give you some figures. You talked about the American economy and the European economy. In 2008, just before the crash happened, when the crash happened, the EU with 500 million people was worth about $500 trillion -- sorry, the EU was worth $14-15 trillion. The US, with 330 -- 500 million people in the EU, $15-16 trillion. The US, about $15 trillion. The US, slightly smaller than the EU, even though it only has 330 million people. This is 15 years ago. Right?

Today, the EU, despite having more than 100 million more people, is now worth 50% less than the US. The US is now worth $25 trillion, the EU is worth -- the EU plus Brexit Britain -- is worth $19 trillion.

Now, what’s going on there is that the UK has not achieved full escape velocity --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** That’s a great line.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** -- to get out of the -- it’s absolutely true -- to get out of the orbit of the EU. The EU is basically hung up on a sclerotic model with very high costs that is not delivering the kind of growth or productivity gains that you’re seeing in places like Singapore or in the US.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I’m going to challenge you on that, if I may.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** That’s why -- the other thing about the EU and the reason it was right to leave it is it’s not just a set of rules of the club, it’s a project to create a United States of Europe and Britain has different parliamentary and political traditions and also a different global reach. It was entirely right for us to stop trying to hold them up in their plans to create a United States of Europe, to stop being the back marker, to stop being a pain in the neck and say, “Well, we’ve got an alternative vision and we want to be global. We want to reach out to friends around the world again,” like in Singapore, like in the United States or India or China -- wherever.

That is where the growth is taking place. That is what the UK is doing.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Can I ask you, is that living off the past and it’s not a reality?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, sorry, it’s the EU -- no, the future. Come on. If you look at the past and the future, the past is the EU model. The future, I think, belongs in this region around the world.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** That’s a very good point. But today, and I’m feeling it living there, the growth is 0.4% in the latest quarter. European Union growth was 1%. For next year, the projection is for the UK to be below 1% with even a very sluggish European Union at 1.6%, so it’s not happening. It doesn’t feel like it’s happening.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** So, we’ve had an energy -- we didn’t have the right energy mix. Our problems have basically been caused by energy price inflation.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** With all due respect, that’s not the case, actually, because your import prices on fruit and vegetables are really high. This is not paying off. Now do you unleash the power -- it’s true, your inflation is higher than even in the European Union at this stage.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Actually, well, that’s not driven by the price of fruit and vegetables, it’s actually overwhelmingly driven by -- I’m afraid -- wage cost and wage inflation.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** True.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** But also by the cost of energy. Now, you’ve got to fix both things. You need to change your energy mix. We had a real problem when the war started because we were far too dependent on gas and got hit by that spike. The French have 53 nuclear power stations, we had about three. We need to do something to sort that out.

But if you look at the latest inflation figures, actually, the UK and France are just about the same.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Yes, 6.8%.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Just about the same. You talk about the growth figures, from 2016 Brexit vote to 2023, I think Italian growth was at 4.5%, German growth at 5.5% cumulative growth, UK growth at 6.8%.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** But today, you’re below Italy, believe it or not.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** We’ve got a problem because of the way we mishandled our energy market. That will sort itself out.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Can I ask you, if you were prime minister, what would you do differently today?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** A few things. First of all, well, no, I would do what I was elected to do. That’s what I would do. (Laughter.) I would continue with my -- there were several things that people wanted. They wanted a lower burden of taxation, we need to do that.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Please.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I don’t know why, I think our corporation tax is too high and that needs to come down. I think our levels of personal taxation are too high. I think we’re grossly overregulated. We have a huge proliferation of regulators in the UK. I think we could simplify all that.

Second thing is I think we need to have a different approach to wealth creation. I’ve mentioned these growth figures from the US and Europe. They’re truly stunning, but it’s not just about regulation and bureaucracy, it’s about attitude of mind. It’s about -- in the UK, there’s a tendency to be very snooty about people who make money and a tendency to think it’s a bad thing and to try to keep poor people down. In the US, that isn’t the case. In the US, there’s an honest admiration for people who make money and give a huge amount back to society. That’s a good thing. We need to get that.

The last thing we need to do is recognize that the UK has massive unfulfilled potential. It is the most imbalanced of all the major European economies. If you look at the UK, where the wealth and productivity is, it has been overwhelmingly in London and the southeast.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** [inaudible 0:37:34] leveling up, right?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Right. And you need to keep leveling up. If you look at Italy, you mentioned Italy, if you look at Germany, you look at France, it’s much more diffuse across the whole territory. The northeast, the northwest, the southwest of the UK, these are areas of fantastic potential and they’re coming up.

The US is the other great example of a society which has talent and enterprise everywhere. Every state in the US has a big university city, a conglomeration of talent, a tech scene, money flowing in.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** And they compete against each other.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** And they compete against each other. That’s now starting to happen in the UK. That was the project we were engaged in.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** You wrote the quintessential book on Churchill -- *The Churchill Factor*, which is a bestseller.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It was one of the top 100 books on Churchill published that year I think. (Laughter.)

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** You’re downplaying your great mind. I did find it very interesting that he was prime minister twice -- 1941-45, and came back 1951-1955. Correct? Will I be able to call you not the “former” prime minister of the UK, but prime minister again?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, no, no, no, no. I am blissfully engaged in a life of domestic tranquility and happiness. (Laughter.) At the moment, let me put it this way --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Are you live streaming this to Carrie?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, no, she’s fine about it. I have a wonderful life. It would be fair to say that my beloved colleagues in Parliament are somehow finding themselves able to rabble on without me -- my conservative colleagues. They’ve seen to be able to -- they’re overcoming their grief. They’re mastering -- (Laughter.) Somehow.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** That near-death experience made --

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Even though I won’t hide it from you, they’re now 25 points behind as opposed to only a handful of points behind when I was prime minister, even so, they somehow have a grip on their emotions and they’re able to survive, and it’s a wonderful thing.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Can we rule out --

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I feel like a parent who’s done his job and they’re getting on and doing their own thing.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Should I never say never? Do you see a comeback?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You never say never, but I just want to say one quick point about Brexit again, because it is so important. Because I know you think you don’t, but I promise you, you’re absorbing nothing else except remainder anger from the BBC, from the FT and everywhere else.

The COVID vaccine which we distributed at record speed, we would not have been able to do that vaccine rollout had it not been for Brexit. In March of 2021, we had vaccinated 45% of the UK population against about 10% in the EU. That was because we came out of the European Medicines Agency, out of the European vaccine program, and we did it ourselves. Believe me, that would not have happened without Brexit.

Secondly, in this part of the world, we have to work together on our defense and security. We would never have done the Orcus security arrangement with Australia and America had it not been for Brexit. So much plaster came off the ceiling in the Elysee Palace -- gilded plaster. The foreign office would never have allowed it.

Number three, the UK would never have been able -- you mentioned this right at the beginning -- to stick up for Ukraine in the way that we did and to take an independent stance. Because the policy on Ukraine was contracted out to France and Germany under the so-called Normandy process. They ran it, and we for historical reasons didn’t have a role in it. If we stayed as part of the EU foreign policy system, I don’t think the UK would have played such --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Can the UK get its mojo back, though, or not? Can it get its mojo back? It doesn’t seem like it right now.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** The biggest critics of UK mojo, we exceed in all sorts of sports, right, in the UK. I’m trying to think of one. (Laughter.) Okay, we didn’t win the women’s football.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** The women’s football team were fantastic.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Come on, we lost.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** But it did extremely well.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, we lost. We haven’t won a football tournament for a long time now. But the Olympics, even though we had [inaudible 0:42:36] percent of the population, right, we consistently come like second or third in the world in the Olympics, which is pretty extraordinary.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** You had a great Olympic Games --

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** But there’s one sport in which the Brits are absolute all global champions, and that is running Britain down. (Laughter.) The problem with the British -- it’s true. If you look at the British media, they love it. Read The Guardian today, it’s hysterical. You’d think there was bubonic plague raging and a major earthquake -- London is a great and might be the greatest city on earth. It’s the place people want to come and live for a long time to come.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Four occasions.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. And under our leveling-up project, that’s going to be the case for the whole of the UK. There are great universities in every UK city or every big UK city. It’s the place to go, the place to send your kids. It’s got a fantastic future.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I know you flew 29 hours, but I think we’d be remiss if we didn’t get your sense of the meetings you had with Queen Elizabeth -- rest her soul -- and the rise of King Charles to the throne as a result of it. What’s your biggest takeaway? I’d love to get your insight on what it’s like to meet with her, your personal impressions, her steely character.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, she’s incredible.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Did she like you, by the way, like Donald Trump did or not? Did she like you?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, if she did, she was far too polite to say so. (Laughter.) I was her 14th prime minister. She’s seen them come, she’s seen them go. She knew every American president except -- I think it was LBJ she never met. She knew everybody. She’d met Mao Tse-tung. She knew absolutely -- and she had this incredible memory for history and politics. She absolutely loved politics. She was very thoughtful, very considerate when you met her. She made a huge effort to make you feel -- when you went to stay with her at Balmoral, which you have to do as prime minister, it was a pretty terrifying experience.

You have to go to a barbecue. And the Queen gives you a sausage barbecued by the Duke of Edinburgh. Then she clears it all away in Tupperware boxes and she makes her own vinaigrette and stuff. It’s all pretty mind-blowing.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** I would imagine.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** She drove me and Carrie in her own car. I’ll tell you something. When I was prime minister, and actually even now, I have wonderful detectives, members of the Metropolitan Police Force who are here tonight. And they drive me around still. I drive myself, increasingly. But when I was prime minister, I never, ever drove myself.

But I went up to stay with the Queen at Balmoral. This is a woman of 93-94 years old. She just got into her car and started bombing down these public roads with no escort -- nothing. In fact, she was exceeding the speed limit, as well as I could tell. (Laughter.) Scattering people in her path. It was mind-blowing. She didn’t have any security. It was ridiculous. Why do I have security as prime minister, but the Queen of England doesn’t have security? I thought it was totally -- anyway -- I’m not saying that, I love the detectives, by the way, we don’t want to lose them.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** And you behave.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. She was very charming about any goofs you make. I once told her that I had a nightmare that I turned up late for a meeting with her and the Duke of Edinburgh. She said, "Oh, yes, were you naked?" (Laughter.) Because, apparently, that’s what people normally feel. Have you ever had that dream? Have you had that dream, by the way? Who’s had a dream where they were --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Where I woke up naked?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** -- where they’re meeting the Queen and they’re naked?

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Not me. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I haven’t. I didn’t have, but anyway, there you go. But her biggest -- to your point, he greatest achievement of all, I think, was the way she worked -- she built a modernized monarchy. Invisibly, she was continually changing and modernizing that institution. When the time came for the succession to King Charles, it took place absolutely seamlessly and with the full -- full support of the British people. That was the really remarkable thing. Being in the House of Commons that day and seeing all those Labor MPs who you might expect some of them to have been quite firm republicans, absolutely emphatic in their allegiance to the new king. That was her achievement. That was her crowning achievement.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** That’s a good place. I could talk to you about climate change and the rest, but --

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, no, climate change -- this is the hydrocarbon industry, they’re going to fix climate change. (Laughter.)

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** You did say one of your biggest concerns is the momentum toward net zero. This is an industry that takes it very seriously, by the way, and they’re moving really rapidly on decarbonization.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** How do you see climate change and the role of this industry? Not to keep everybody in separate camps, the UAE is hosting COP28, as you know, and they want the hydrocarbon community at the table. What are your views?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’ll tell you, it turns out that I was being, quite rightly, castigated earlier on because it turns out that COP26, we failed to do that. That was not my decision, folks. But I certainly think -- we didn’t have enough of the big oil companies at the meeting. But I think that the solution is in the hands of the fossil fuels and hydrocarbon industry. We can fix it. There’s always going to be a need for oil --

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** Should we take climate change more seriously, in your view?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think we already do take it pretty seriously, don’t you? Hands up, anybody here who’s actually a climate change denier? Is anybody a denier? I was talking to a pilot the other day who told me that it’s absolutely true that air turbulence is getting worse. If these things are exponential, that will tease people off if they’re really rattling around like peas in a rattle on their way to their holidays in Greece. The British public will come up rough. We’re already seeing all sorts of other effects. Clearly, something is going on. Exponential effects could be very, very damaging.

We’re doing a lot. We’re going as fast as we reasonably can. The one message I would have for everybody is that we in the UK are taking net zero very, very seriously. We’re going to deliver it. We think that there are the technical solutions to do so. We’re going to make the right regulatory framework to enable the big investments to be made.

**JOHN DEFTERIOS:** It’s already happening, actually. It’s moving pretty fast. Thanks for letting us go long. Thanks for doing a 29-hour flight to get here and being so spritely. Can we give a nice round of applause for the Right Honourable Boris Johnson?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you. Thank you.

(Applause.)

END