

International

Joe Biden no lover of Britain's 'Trump clone' Boris Johnson

UK leader described as 'physical and emotional clone' of Trump

LONDON: The political bromance between Boris Johnson and Donald Trump leaves Britain and its transatlantic "special relationship" exposed if Joe Biden wins next week, just as the country needs all the friends it can get. The UK is divorcing the European Union and looking to revitalise partnerships elsewhere, but has managed to antagonise President Trump's Democratic opponent over its Brexit plans for Northern Ireland.

French President Emmanuel Macron has at times also strived to keep Trump close. But the British prime minister is more closely associated with his fellow convention-shredding populist in Washington. "There is a lot of frantic repositioning going on at the moment here in London by this administration in Britain," former Conservative finance minister George Osborne told CNN on Sunday. "But I don't think Joe Biden will feel particularly warmly toward this British government, and they're going to have to work very hard to change that," he said.

Last December, as Johnson closed in on a general election victory, Biden showed his disdain in describing the Conservative politician as a "physical and emotional clone" of Trump. The president has himself praised Johnson as "Britain's Trump", and the prime minister's own long trail of provocative comments has come back to haunt him. Biden was vice president to Barack Obama when Johnson, in 2016, wrote that Obama was anti-UK owing to his "part-Kenyan" heritage and "ancestral dislike of the British Empire".

Trump with better hair?

That remark was highlighted recently on Twitter



Johnson seen as Trump 'with better hair'

by Obama's deputy national security advisor, Ben Rhodes, who sees Johnson as Trump "with better hair" and a higher IQ. Many veterans of the Obama administration are likely to populate a Biden White House. If elected, it will be up to Biden and his team to decide whether "to litigate and punish the past or focus on the future", according to Heather Conley, director of the Europe program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

"I am comforted that populists are chameleons: they take on the hue of the political moment. I trust should vice president Biden win, Mr Johnson's hue will change dramatically," she told AFP. Trump's relationship with previous British prime minister Theresa May was awful.

But he was effusive about the New York-born Johnson when the "tough" and "smart" former foreign secretary replaced her last year.

Johnson in turn has lauded Trump's "many, many good qualities", in marked contrast to the arm's-length mistrust displayed by others such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Yet Britain, next year's president of the G7, remains far more aligned with France and Germany—as well as Biden—on climate change, Iran, Russia and collective defense under the NATO umbrella. A post-Brexit US-UK trade deal is still a work in progress under Trump, who characteristically is said to be driving a hard bargain after slapping tariffs on Scottish whisky amid a wider spat with the EU.

Voting for Reagan

Conley said that Biden, as a "dedicated transatlanticist", was likely to resolve Trump's trade row with the EU and Britain, as part of a

could only confirm that 19,888 driver's licenses—mainly from China and Hong Kong—were confiscated. Lizette Escobedo, director of civic engagement at the NALEO Educational Fund, a non-profit that promotes political participation of Latinos, said that mistrust in the electoral system is common among Florida Hispanics in both parties. The problem, she explained, is that "many Latinos don't actually trust the electoral process. They're afraid that their votes are not going to count."

The organization seeks to counter this perception at the national level with voter education campaigns. "Florida is our largest digital ad buy budget that we have for this election," Escobedo said. She said that Latinos are particularly vulnerable to disinformation because they define their positions in the American political system "based on the political systems that they have in their home country." Latin America has a long history of authoritarian regimes from both the left and right, often sustained by elections flagged as fraudulent.

Racism and anti-Semitism

Last month, US representatives Debbie Mucarsel-Powell and Joaquin Castro asked the FBI to investigate the spike in disinformation directed at Latinos in South Florida and to "consider efforts of foreign actors to spread disinformation" in this regard. Many of these conspiracy theories favor

fire with artillery fire on combat positions in various parts of the frontline.

Azerbaijan and Armenia have been locked in a bitter conflict over Karabakh since Armenian separatists backed by Yerevan seized control of the mountainous province in a 1990s war that left 30,000 people dead. Karabakh's self-declared independence has not been recognized internationally, even by Armenia, and it remains a part of Azerbaijan under international law. The current fighting broke out on September 27. Armenia and Azerbaijan accuse each other of having targeted civilians and of breaking the previous truces. Repeated calls for calm do seem to have had any effect.

After coming under heavy shelling at the start of the fighting, Nagorno-Karabakh's main city Stepanakert has been quieter in recent days. AFP journalists in the city yesterday said the night had been calm. Ten minutes before the ceasefire took effect an explosion was heard and a plume of smoke seen on a nearby hill. There were fewer sounds of fighting coming from the frontline yesterday morning than in previous days, though rounds of shelling could be heard in the distance.

More than 1,000 people have been reported

with three Energy heavyweights, Noble Energy, Shell and Delek. The deals, which last 25 years, allow operations at the Aphrodite gas field, discovered in block 12 south of the island in 2011. Aphrodite's reserves are estimated at 127.4 billion cubic meters (m3) of gas.

In return, Nicosia is expected to earn revenues estimated at \$9.3 billion over 18 years, according to calculations by its energy ministry. Italian firm ENI and France's Total are also mounting exploration activities further west, particularly in block 6 at a site called Calypso, which could contain between 170 and 225 billion m3 of gas. Meanwhile further south in block 10, US giant ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum announced the discovery in 2019 of the Glaucus-1 field, which could house 130 billion m3 of gas.

Other fields

The East Mediterranean has been "an explorer's paradise in the past decade with giant low-cost gas discoveries", explained Aditya Saraswat and Pranav Joshi, analysts at Rystad Energy. In Israeli waters, local company Delek



READING: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson reacts as he sits with hospital workers during his visit to Royal Berkshire NHS Hospital to mark the publication of a new review into hospital food. —AFP

wider fence-mending policy if elected. "But certainly issues related to Brexit are going to be addressed much differently in a Biden administration than the Brexit enthusiasm of the Trump administration—and even that hasn't been easy going," the expert added.

The US-UK trade negotiation has been attracting close attention from Democrats, since Johnson in September introduced legislation that unilaterally strips Brussels of a role in regulating future trade between Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland. Biden, who speaks passionately of his Irish roots, warned that the trade deal would be dead on arrival if Britain, via its Brexit

policy, undermines Northern Ireland's Good Friday peace agreement.

In public, the British government refuses to take sides in the November 3 US election. But some Conservatives are showing no such reserve. In 1992, Johnson's former finance minister Sajid Javid moved to New York to work as a banker. Writing in the Daily Telegraph last week, he reflected on hearing Ronald Reagan's final speech to the Republican convention that summer. The former president appealed to "your best hopes, not your worst fears", Javid said. "Only one of the candidates can credibly say the same. Britain is better off with Biden." —AFP

False info, conspiracy theories target Florida Hispanic voters

MIAMI: Less than two weeks before the US presidential election, conspiracy theories, racist posts and disinformation are targeting Hispanic voters in Florida, a key constituency in the battleground state. A purported election fraud concocted by Democrats, an alleged plot among Jewish, Black and LGBTQ people to interfere in the election; these are some of the stories that have spread among voters in the United States, and among Florida Latinos in particular.

Take influencer Liliana Rodriguez Morillo, a Donald Trump supporter who is the daughter of singer Jose Luis "El Puma" Rodriguez. The Miami-based Venezuelan shared an image to her 485,000 Instagram followers of fake driver's licenses confiscated in Chicago. "All registered to vote Democrat!" she wrote in Spanish. "Will there be fraud November 3? Are we playing dumb? Vote in person!"

There is no evidence that the licenses were linked to the Democratic party or to voter fraud. And US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) spokesman Steven Bansbach told AFP that CBP

Third attempt at Karabakh ceasefire quickly collapses

STEPANAKERT: A third attempt at halting weeks of fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh collapsed quickly yesterday with Armenia and Azerbaijan trading accusations of violating the US-brokered ceasefire within minutes. As fighting over the disputed region enters its second month, international mediators are scrambling to bring a stop to frontline clashes and shelling of civilian areas that have left hundreds dead.

The latest "humanitarian ceasefire" was announced by Washington on Sunday, after truces brokered by Russia and France fell apart over previous weekends. It took less than an hour after the ceasefire was due to begin at 8:00 am for the first accusations to be made. Azerbaijan's foreign ministry said Armenian forces had shelled the town of Terter and nearby villages in "gross violation" of the truce. Armenia's defense ministry said Azerbaijani forces had "grossly violated" the cease-

Gas and tensions in east Mediterranean

LONDON: The discovery in recent years of huge natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean has whetted the appetite of nearby countries but exacerbated geopolitical tensions between Turkey and its neighbors. Relations have been strained in recent months following Turkish exploration and drilling operations in waters claimed by both Cyprus and Greece. Here is the latest on these so-called "blue gold" reserves.

Cypriot fields

Cyprus, which has aspirations of becoming a major energy player in the region, has a key exclusive economic zone (EEZ), divided into 12 blocks and potentially rich in gas. Last November, it signed its first operating license



CLEARWATER, Florida: Angela Harrison, a supporter of President Donald Trump, waves at cars passing by near the Pinellas County Courthouse early voting polling station on Sunday. —AFP

Trump, who is head-to-head with Democrat Joe Biden in Florida, a crucial state in the November 3 election. Hispanics in Florida make up 17 percent of a 14 million voter electorate. Biden, the Jewish community, and African Americans have been the subject of disinformation. Venezuelan radio host Carines Moncada of Actualidad Radio, a mainstream Spanish-language outlet in Miami, recently associated the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement with witchcraft. —AFP



An Armenian soldier fires artillery on the frontline on Sunday during ongoing fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh. —AFP

dead in the fighting, mainly Armenian separatist fighters but also dozens of civilians. Azerbaijan has not released any figures on its military casualties and the death toll is believed to be substantially higher, with Russian President Vladimir Putin saying last week that close to 5,000 people had been killed. —AFP

begin exploiting the Leviathan field located 81 miles (130 kilometers) off the coast of Haifa in January 2020. Discovered a decade earlier, it is thought to contain 539 billion m3 of natural gas. The Tamar deposit—closer, at just 50 miles from Haifa—has been in operation since 2013 and its reserves are estimated at 238 billion m3. In addition, Israel has fields of smaller sizes, including Tanin and Karish. Neighboring Egypt also has a gigantic offshore field, Zohr, discovered in August 2015 by ENI, which could house 850 billion m3.

Gas pipeline

To transport this abundance of gas to the rest of Europe, and help meet its aim of reducing energy dependence on Russia, Cyprus, Greece and Israel struck an agreement in December 2018 to build a gas pipeline, called East Med. This 1367-mile pipeline is set to pass 106 miles south of Cyprus and end in Otranto, in southern Italy after crossing the Greek island of Crete and mainland Greece. —AFP

News in brief

Protesters target churches

WARSAW: Protesters targeted Catholic churches across Poland on Sunday in the fourth straight day of upheaval against a near-total ban on abortion in the EU country. Demonstrators chanted "we've had enough!" and "barbarians" inside a church in the western city of Poznan, according to a video clip posted on social media, in scenes that were repeated across the deeply Catholic country. The protesters were reacting to Thursday's ruling by Poland's constitutional court that an existing law allowing the abortion of damaged fetuses was "incompatible" with the constitution. The verdict is in line with the position of Poland's powerful Roman Catholic episcopate and the governing nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party. Protesters, brandishing placards bearing expletives and others saying "I wish I could abort my government", clashed with police and supporters of the ban outside a landmark church in central Warsaw. —AFP

Colombia rebel commander killed

BOGOTA: Commander Uriel, one of the main leaders of Colombia's left-wing National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels, was killed during a military operation, President Ivan Duque announced on Sunday. "This is a particularly important blow (to the ELN) because one of the most visible figures of this terrorist organization has fallen," the president said in a speech in Choco department, in north-west Colombia where the operation took place. According to the president, Andres Vanegas, 41, better known by his nom de guerre Commander Uriel, was responsible for kidnappings, murders and recruiting minors for his Marxist guerrillas. He is also accused of being behind a car bomb attack on a police academy in Bogota in January 2019 which killed 21 recruits. After that attack, Duque ended peace talks with the ELN that had been started by his predecessor, Juan Manuel Santos. —AFP

Chileans vote for constitution

SANTIAGO: Chileans voted overwhelmingly in a landmark referendum Sunday to replace their dictatorship-era constitution, long seen as underpinning the nation's glaring economic and social inequalities. The result set off wild celebrations across the capital and other cities after voters threw out the constitution left by the regime of 1973-1990 dictator Augusto Pinochet. Thousands of people flocked to the streets of Santiago amid a cacophony of horn-blowing to celebrate a crushing victory for the "Approve" campaign - by 78.28 percent to 21.72 with over 99 percent of the votes counted. "I never imagined that us Chileans would be capable of uniting for such a change!" said a jubilant Maria Isabel Nunez, 46, as she walked in the crowd hand-in-hand with her 20-year-old daughter. —AFP

Early US voting surpasses 2016

WASHINGTON: Early voting in the 2020 US election has surpassed all the pre-election ballots from four years earlier, an independent vote monitor said Sunday, with nine days still to go before the November 3 poll. Millions of Americans wary of crowded polling booths during the coronavirus pandemic and energized by an election fight that both President Donald Trump and his Democratic rival Joe Biden have framed as existential are smashing records for casting ballots, whether by mail or in person. The tally by the independent US Election Project, run by the University of Florida, said that as of Sunday more than 59 million people had voted so far. That is higher than the 57 million who voted early or by mail in 2016, according to the US Election Assistance Commission website. —AFP