

## Boris Johnson's resignation triggers Brexit chaos

Politics Editor [Niamh Carroll](#) assesses the impact of the Cabinet resignations on the Prime Minister and Brexit

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Image: Annika Haas

Theresa May faces perhaps the biggest challenge of her troubled premiership, as Boris Johnson became the second major Cabinet minister to resign within 24 hours today. Foreign Secretary Johnson followed the Minister for Exiting the EU, David Davis, in resigning from the Cabinet in protestation at the Brexit deal struck at Chequers by the Prime Minister, which has been described as a compromise for hard Brexiteers.

The Chequers deal on Friday resulted from difficult negotiations with a deeply divided Cabinet. Many had described it as a 'soft Brexit' deal, which proposed a free-trade area for goods involving the United Kingdom and the EU. While questions remain over whether Europe would accept the deal proposed by Britain, initially many business leaders had reacted positively to the plans. Furthermore, it was hoped that the proposals represented a solution to the Irish border problem. However; within 48 hours Brexit secretary Davis had announced his resignation casting major doubt over the prospects of other Brexiteers Conservative Party backing the deal.

Davis said that the deal represented a betrayal of the kind of Brexit the electorate had voted for, and therefore, he could not, in good conscience, support it. He was followed by his Deputy at the Department for Exiting the EU, Steve Baker. Many Brexiteers have praised Davis' decision, with Conservative MP John Whittingdale calling the decision "an enormous act of principle and bravery" in a Tweet. David Davis is respected as a committed Brexiteer by many on the Tory benches, and his decision to resign accordingly

marked the Chequers deal as a “bad” Brexit for many who campaigned to leave the EU.

Boris Johnson is perhaps less of a Brexit ideologue than his former Cabinet colleague, Davis. His decision to join the campaign to leave the EU in 2016 came after careful consideration rather than an instinctive, long-held Euro-scepticism as is the case with many Brexiteers. Post-Brexit, Johnson has now become a vocal critic of the PM with regards to Brexit, this is a role that works well for him, allowing him to become the voice of dissenting Conservative MPs within the Cabinet. Like his decision to support Leave in the first place, the former Foreign Secretary's relatively recently acquired status as ardent Brexiteer could be regarded as the result of political calculation.

Johnson's resignation is not something he felt compelled to do for fear of betraying his principles, instead it is a careerist move made by a Cabinet member with obvious ambitions of becoming Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is more vulnerable than ever; it seems that she faces a choice between dropping her hard-won Chequers deal or losing her cabinet. Johnson senses this vulnerability and is taking advantage of it. He is seeking to position himself as a viable alternative to Theresa May, who will stand up for the principle of Brexit.

Already there are rumours of a vote of no confidence in the very near future against Theresa May. In order to trigger a no confidence vote against a Conservative leader, 48 letters are needed from Conservative MPs. Earlier this afternoon, the BBC Laura Kuenssberg had reported there were rumours among Conservatives that “the magic 48” had been reached. While it seems that the 48 letter threshold has not been reached, May's position remains precarious for the time being. Theresa May seems determined to cling on to her position, with Downing Street sources stating that she would fight any vote of no confidence.

Even if the Prime Minister can remain in power, the future of Brexit has been cast into even greater doubt than prior to her apparent breakthrough at Chequers. The Conservative parliamentary party is deeply factionalised, yet no faction has the majority required to pass their version of Brexit. If the Brexiteers were to get their way, then we would see Remainers leaving the Cabinet in similar fashion to Johnson and Davis. Yet it seems that a ‘soft Brexit’ is unacceptable to those who campaigned to leave the EU. The result is a stalemate situation among Conservative MPs that will have implications for the whole country. With even the governing party bitterly at odds with each other over Brexit, it looks increasingly likely that Britain will not be able to reach any agreement at all with the European Union.



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