

“One Drinks Party Too Many” at 10 Downing Street: Boris Johnson and Breaching the Lockdowns

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It might not be quite within the bounds of good taste to compare military calculations of a bridge too far – the title used in Cornelius Ryan’s [work](#) on the disastrous Allied airborne operation during the Second World War – with the latest foolish, mendacious and buffoonish efforts of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, but on some level, the analogy works.

Throughout the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020, the Prime Minister was pressing his own assault on the pandemic fortifications developed in response to SARS-CoV-2.

He had already shown himself incapable of understanding, let alone following health directions, shaking hands with infected patients, and furnishing the British public with inscrutable information.

But then came those libation, food-laden parties held during the lockdown phases, gatherings which often eschewed social distancing.

The interest last December was initially on Christmas gatherings that had taken place in 2020. The *Mirror* first noted that a Christmas Party [had](#) taken place at 10 Downing Street on December 18, 2020 under lockdown conditions that prohibited indoor social and household mixing. The rest of the UK was told at the time that Christmas lunches or parties were deemed primarily social activities and “not otherwise permitted by the rules in your tier.”

EXCLUSIVE: Boris Johnson 'broke Covid lockdown rules' with Downing Street parties at Xmas

When the country was in the grips of the second lockdown Prime Minister Boris Johnson allowed a festive party to go ahead in Number 10, it has been claimed

The party was the subject of discussion in a [clip released](#) by ITV featuring a former

spokesperson for Johnson, Allegra Stratton, who, giggles and all, is found conducting a mock press conference with colleagues. The video's release pushed Stratton to a tearful resignation, but few others walked the plank. Johnson was certainly not going to be one of them, [concluding](#) "that guidelines were followed at all times".

Evidence of more parties in government offices emerged, resulting in the establishment of an investigation led by Cabinet Secretary Simon Case. This mild effort, designed to distract and dissuade any investigations that might be conducted by the Metropolitan Police, went awry with revelations that the investigator had held two events in his own private office last December. Chase's replacement, Sue Gray, [once described](#) by Labour MP Paul Flynn as "deputy God", has been given more room to wander.

In the new year, Johnson finds himself facing a threat that promises to be graver to him than others, as if that was possible. It concerns yet another 2020 festive gathering that took place at Downing Street. Taking place in May that year in the Downing Street garden, the drinks gathering was held during the first lockdown and described by Johnson as a "work event". This implausible understanding was reached after the PM's Principal Private Secretary Martin Reynolds [invited](#) more than 100 Downing Street staff to "make most of the weather". No. 10 has also [claimed](#) that it was "untrue" to claim that Johnson was "warned about the event".

This is not deemed credible by Johnson's former top advisor, Dominic Cummings, himself a seasoned breaker of lockdown rules and a master of the elaborate fib. Opining ever darkly, and with keen malice, he is [of the view](#) that Johnson "knew he was at a drinks party cos he was told it was a drinks party and it was actually a drinks party." In his blog, Cummings [claims](#) that both he and one other advisor warned that such a gathering would "be against the rules and should not happen."

At the start of prime minister's questions in parliament, Johnson [tried to sound contrite](#). "I want to apologise. I know that millions of people across this country have made extraordinary sacrifices over the last 18 months." He claimed to know "the anguish they have been through", acknowledging that there were things "we simply did not get right."

Other parliamentarians were incredulous. Labour's Keir Starmer [called](#) Johnson a "man without shame" and asked whether the PM could "see why the British public think he's lying through his teeth". Chris Bryant, also of the Labour Party, [proved](#) cuttingly unsympathetic. "So the prime minister didn't spot that he was at a social event? Come off it. How stupid does the prime minister think the British people are?"

The PM's reactive strategy to being found out is one born in the cribs of privilege. Why take the blame for your own actions when you can find the locus elsewhere? According to the veteran news reporter Robert Peston, a scorched earth policy [is being considered](#) against certain allegedly culpable civil servants. Once they have been cleared out, Johnson intends to "live securely ever after at No. 10." Little wonder that Whitehall is both outraged and suffering a decline of morale.

Any hope of placing Johnson's head on the block, politically speaking, will have to come from within the Conservative Party. So far, six Tories have publicly made their case that they lack confidence in the PM. In a functional sense, any leadership contest [can only feasibly take place](#) if 54 Tory MPs write to the chairman of the 1922 Committee, the powerful

backbench body chaired by Sir Graham Brady. Scottish Tory leader Douglas Ross is one MP who has promised to do so.

Despite the Tory rumbles, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi is [strumming the tune](#) of “he’s human and we make mistakes.” To BBC Radio 4’s Today program, Zahawi claimed that Johnson had done enough. “He came to the despatch box and apologised and said he will absolutely submit himself to Parliament, because that’s our parliamentary democracy.”

Much stock will be placed on Gray’s report and how it goes down among the Tory faithful. Downing Street has chosen to neither confirm nor deny a *Daily Telegraph* account that Johnson has been interviewed by Gray.

As a former minister [told](#) Peston, the findings by the civil servant will define “the rest of her life”. She will hardly be remembered well for sacrificing her own colleagues to avoid the scalping of Johnson. The PM’s response then is bound to be something he has adopted during the entire course of his public life: apologise and hope it all vanishes.

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