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BREXIT FLASH: BORIS VERSUS PARLIAMENT

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- BBC reports that UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson is asking the Queen to suspend parliament from about 11 September until 14 October, just ahead of the 31 October Brexit day. Parliament is scheduled to return from its summer recess on 3 September. The suspension would de facto lengthen the three-week pause which parliament usually takes in late September and early October as the political parties hold their annual conferences.
- The reported move comes after opposition leaders yesterday agreed an approach to prevent a no-deal hard Brexit through legislation once parliament is in session again. Johnson's government only has a one-seat majority in parliament. In addition, up to 30 of his own Conservative MPs oppose a hard Brexit so strongly that they may vote with the opposition to prevent it.
- Suspending parliament would shorten the time that the opponents of a hard Brexit would have to stop such an outcome by either passing a law to prevent the hard Brexit or by toppling Johnson. In the latter case, a new interim government would then seek a Brexit extension ahead of potential new elections and/or a new referendum.
- If parliament is indeed suspended from c11 September until 14 October, Johnson would likely claim that this strengthens his bargaining position versus the EU: with less time for UK parliament to stop him, the EU would have to take his threat of a hard Brexit on 31 October even more serious. The EU may thus be more willing to cave in and ditch the controversial "Irish backstop".
- This logic has three snags: (1) The EU is already taking the hard Brexit risk serious. (2) Even if Johnson tries to ramp up the pressure, the much bigger EU would still believe that the UK has much more to lose from a hard Brexit than the EU. (3) The move strengthens the EU suspicion that Johnson's prime motive is to win snap elections shortly after Brexit rather than to conclude a deal with the EU – see our [Brexit-EU update from 27 August](#). Ireland would have to agree to any deal on the Irish border.
- If parliament is indeed suspended until Johnson's government formally sets out its agenda in a "Queen's speech" on 14 October, time for parliament to stop a hard Brexit would be very short. Also, the government may try to use procedural tricks to thwart such attempts for a while – until Brexit has happened on 31 October. Nonetheless, it probably would remain possible for parliament to prevent a hard Brexit if – big if – the opposition and the Tory moderates were to get their act together.



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- Suspending parliament would accentuate the hard Brexit risk and the UK's constitutional crisis. In a way, a need for a Prime Minister to suspend his own parliament because he seems to lack a majority for his key policy – the approach to Brexit – is not exactly a sign of strength, to put it mildly.
- I leave the question as to whether Johnson could indeed get parliament suspended against its will to constitutional experts.

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