

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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MICHAEL FALLON

SM: Sir Michael, was it a mistake to call this election?

MF: No, I think the prime minister was right to ask for a bigger majority to open up the Brexit negotiations and to build a stronger, fairer Britain. Beyond that she didn't have an elected mandate herself, she wanted a bigger majority. That hasn't transpired and now we have to get on and make the best of it.

AM: And she's entirely responsible for this. She decided to call the election, she made it about her, she said, 'it's me, me, me.' Lots of the country said, 'no, no, no.' And as a result we're in a position of chaos. Therefore the whole process has been thoroughly irresponsible has it not?

MF: Well, hang on a moment. You know, the Cabinet supported her in that election campaign.

AM: So it's your fault too?

MF: Yes, we all take responsibility, of course. She's won the most seats, 56 seats more than Labour. She's won the biggest share of the vote for 34 years. It wasn't the big majority that she wanted, we now have to get on and make the best of it, there is no other party that has any legitimacy or credibility in forming the government, we will now form that government with the support of the DUP.

AM: Do you believe you won this election?

MF: Well, clearly what happened was we did not get the large majority we wanted. But we have the largest number of seats, and under our constitution it is our duty and in the national interest to form a government. We are the only legitimate party to be able to do that, and we're going to do that.

AM: Because you see, Theresa May said at the beginning of the campaign, 'if I lose just six seats I will lose this election.' How many seats did you lose?

MF: Well, look, we did not get the majority in this election of course, but we have the most seats, we have the biggest share of the vote, and it now falls on us to carry on.

AM: But you had a majority –

MF: We had a majority, sure.

AM: And now you don't.

MF: Yes, of course, and we get the result of the election, we fully understand that and we understand what people are saying to us. However, the Queen's business must now be carried on. We have Brexit negotiations opening in just a few days' time. We have to continue to build a strong economy. It falls on us now to build a government in the national interest, and that is what we are working with our friends in the DUP to do.

AM: Well, this election process has made the situation much, much worse, and it was partly because of the way the campaign was conducted. Did you feel during the campaign the prime minister and other ministers were being a bit robotic, were not answering questions properly, were not engaging with the British people in the kind of vigorous conversation that we expect at election time?

MF: Well, the prime minister travelled thousands of miles and too far more –

AM: It's what she did when she got there.

MF: Well, she took far more questions from the public actually than Jeremy Corbyn did.

AM: She didn't answer them, that's the trouble.

MF: Well, she tried. She certainly tried to answer them. She did the television interviews and so on. But look, yes, we understand the result. It was not the result we wanted. But now we have to get on and make the best of it, and that is the work that faces us this week and that is the work we will complete.

AM: You say you understand the result. So what changes as a result of that understanding? What do you do differently now?

MF: Well, clearly a minority government requires a different approach. You've already seen some changes in personnel in Number 10 Downing Street.

AM: Do you welcome that?

MF: I welcome that, of course. It's going to require a different approach. We're going to see, I hope, more collective decision making in the Cabinet. I and other senior colleagues have made that clear to her, and I think you will also see that she will want to work much more closely with the parliamentary party, both in the conduct of business and in the development of policy.

AM: So can I be absolutely clear, you have said to the prime minister, and your colleagues have said to the prime minister, you want to return to traditional Cabinet government rather than government by advisers, and you want much more listening to the 1922 Committee of Tory backbenchers?

MF: Well, I'm not going into the private conversations that I and other senior colleagues have had with the prime minister, but I think she absolutely understands that a minority government will require a different approach, a more collective approach, and she'll want to work very closely with the 1922 Committee, with the backbenchers, as I said, not just on the conduct of business but also on the development of new policies.

AM: So the Cabinet is back?

MF: Well, the Cabinet, we've always had Cabinet government, we've had good Cabinet discussions, but a minority government, as I said, is going to require a different approach and an even more collective approach than we had.

AM: How is the Prime Minister?

MF: The prime minister obviously was, on Friday I think she saw, been up most of the night like the rest of us.

AM: There were rumours that she was in floods of tears when the results came in.

MF: I don't know about that, but clearly she'd been up most of the night on Thursday night. Don't forget, she's also during the campaign had to be prime minister, and I and other senior colleagues have had to deal the two terrorist attacks, we've had ongoing security issues. She's had to go on running the business of government as well as leading the campaign. So I hope she'll be catching up on some sleep now, but getting on with the work today of forming a new government and cementing that alliance with the DUP.

AM: Well, let's come on to that directly. Are you trying to do a formal coalition with the DUP?

MF: No, this is not a coalition, this is what is traditionally called a confidence and supply arrangement, whereby the DUP will support us on the big things, like voting for the Queen's Speech or making sure the budget and the finance goes through. They support us on defence. On the big issues they'll be supporting us.

AM: You see, George Osborne suggested it would be chaotic now, because line by line by line they'll be coming in arguing about things with you.

MF: I think George is enjoying his job now as a commentator rather than a player on the pitch. We have to deal with the situation in the House of Commons that we have now. It's a minority government but we'll be working extremely closely with the DUP. We've already started working on outline proposals so that we form a government with their support.

AM: Can I ask you, have you got an agreement?

MF: No, we're working on outline proposal; you'd be pretty surprised if we had an agreement just in a single day.

AM: Well, last night when the BBC and the Press Association phoned Downing Street we were told there was an agreement, we could go ahead and report there was an agreement. A few hours later they confirmed that to us, later again they said, oh we're not sure, then there was a long silence from the DUP. Midnight there is no agreement. It already sounds, to coin a phrase, like a coalition of chaos.

MF: No, come on. It would be very, very surprising if something as important and as complex as this was stitched together in a single day of talks in Belfast both sides have got to work through. But what we do have now is an understanding on the outline proposals that would underpin that working agreement.

AM: So this is a crucial agreement. Will the public get to see it? Will you publish that agreement?

MF: Well, you'll see the outline proposals of the agreement, sure.

AM: So it will be published?

MF: Yes. Well, you'll see the proposal, which is they will support us.

AM: I know but they will be asking for stuff as well. They will not do this for nothing. We need to know what they're going to ask from you and whether you're going to give it to them.

MF: Well, they'll be making a statement too. They'll be explaining what their approach to these negotiations is as well. I'm not party to the negotiations, but they will be supporting us on the big issues, the big security and economic issues that face this country, and they will be helping us go into the Brexit negotiations and get the outcome that Britain wants.

AM: So these are your new close friends. Are you repulsed by gay people?

MF: Well, let's be very clear, just because they're going to support us, they're agreeing to support us on the economic issues, the big economic and security issues facing this country, it doesn't mean that we now agree with all of their views. We don't.

AM: And you don't agree with that one?

MF: We don't agree with all their views.

AM: Your new colleague Ian Paisley Jnr: 'I am pretty repulsed by gays and lesbianism. I think it's wrong, I think that those people harm themselves and without a care about it harm society. I hate what they do.' And on that issue and on abortion and women's rights and so forth, you are now in an alliance with a party which is extremely socially conservative and very, very different from the Conservative Party that David Cameron and George Osborne were trying to fashion not so long ago.

MF: We're not on government with the DUP. We're not in coalition with the DUP. They're going to support us, as I said, on the crucial economic and security issues that face this country. We do not agree, and we do not have to agree with any of their views on some of these social issues. And I certainly don't.

AM: Crucial economic and security issues, you said. Another big, big issue of course is the Northern Ireland peace process, and into that peace process is written that the British government has to be a neutral arbiter between the two sides, that you have to be fair and in the middle. How can you be fair and in the middle if you're relying on one of those parties, the DUP, for your very existence?

MF: Well, we've already had a friendship with the DUP that goes back many years before this election. We've already had a close relationship with the DUP. We have more in common with them than we do the other parties. But the DUP themselves want to

return an Executive to Northern Ireland, they have every interest in getting an agreement with other Northern Ireland parties, and will continue to work on that to bring stability to Northern Ireland.

AM: So they have very different views, not only on social issues, and we know that Ruth Davidson, for instance, tweeted that she had given a speech on gay marriage in Belfast immediately after this deal was announced. I wonder why she did that. Because a lot of people were very, very worried in your party about their social views, even if you're not?

MF: We do not share their views on some of these social issues. And we don't have to share their views, and we're not changing our policy on any of that. They are going to support us on the very big, you know, Brexit, economic and security issues that face this country. It doesn't mean we then have to go and agree with some of the stuff that you've read out. We don't agree about that.

AM: Well, let's carry on reading stuff out, or at least alluding to stuff, which is that you have been very, very strong in your views on Jeremy Corbyn and his connection with terrorism and all the rest of it. The DUP is supported by people like the Red Hand Commandos, the UVF, do you regard those people as terrorists as well?

MF: Well, the DUP has been part of the parliamentary process, part of the democratic process in Northern Ireland in recent years. They've been part of the democratic process. They want a settlement in Northern Ireland, they supported the formation of the Executive and they want to see the Executive back at Stormont governing Northern Ireland, so they're part of the democratic process now, whatever happened in the past.

AM: Are you not slightly uneasy about their continuing links with those kind of groups?

MF: Well, look they are committed to stability and peace in Northern Ireland, they've been part of that negotiating process for

many years now, they want to bring peace to Northern Ireland and that will be something we'll be focusing on as well.

AM: Now, one area where they definitely take a different view from the current government is over Brexit. Over key aspects of Brexit. And it's not just them. Ruth Davidson, who has had a great victory in Scotland, 13 Conservative MPs now in Scotland, has made it absolutely clear that she wants – she says, 'what's really clear is that the Conservative Party, having failed to win a majority now needs to work with others and that means we can look again at what we hope to achieve as we leave the European Union.' Do you agree with that?

MF: Well, first of all, the parties that wanted to frustrate Brexit, who don't accept the result of the referendum, were the SNP and to some extent the Liberal Democrats, and they didn't make any progress at the election. We want, as Ruth Davidson wants, a successful Brexit.

AM: An open Brexit, is that right?

MF: Well a successful Brexit that is a new partnership with Europe, that is careful about the trade we already do with Europe, that comes to some agreement on the immigration that we can accept from Europe, and that enables us to continue to pursue new markets elsewhere.

MF: Has there been a Cabinet level discussion of any kind so far on slightly changing our view of Brexit.

MF: The new Cabinet obviously will meet early next week. Our view of Brexit, I don't think has changed. We want a partnership with Europe. We want an agreement that maximises our access to the single market, comes to an arrangement on immigration, continues the security cooperation we already have with Europe. As I say, a successful Brexit and agreement that is in the interests of us, but is also in the interests of Europe.

AM: And do you think you've got a majority in the House of Commons for this now?

MF: Well, I think we have a majority for that, yes. I think everybody wants to see an agreement in the end that does respect what the British people voted for last year, make sure that our cooperation with Europe continues, our trade with Europe continues, our security cooperation with Europe continues.

AM: But Philip Hammond, who was in line to be sacked and he got a big majority, has already spoken to the prime minister and said that he wants a slightly more pro-business approach in the Brexit negotiations. Things are already moving underneath the surface aren't they?

MF: I'm not sure your party to Philip Hammond's conversation with the prime minister, and I certainly was not party to it.

AM: But you wouldn't be surprised by that?

MF: We want to work with business on this. It is very, very important that we're careful about the existing trade we do with Europe, about access to the single market, in whatever new arrangement we come to. It's also important we don't lose the cooperation between our intelligence services, between our police forces, the security cooperation we have in Europe. As I've said, we want a new partnership with Europe and we're going to be working hard for that.

AM: David Davis in the small hours of the election morning, before all the results were in, said this: he said, 'we want to leave the customs union and the single market but get access to them, that's what we've put in front of the people, we'll see by tomorrow whether they've accepted that or not. That will be their decision.' And by and large they haven't accepted that.

MF: Well, the baddies that wanted to frustrate the decision of the British people last year didn't make any progress. The SNP lost seats, the Liberal Democrats didn't make any progress at all.

AM: Could you at least talk to the Labour Party – you know this is one of the parties trying to frustrate Brexit and have taken a more nuanced approach. In terms of getting a kind of grand coalition view representing sort of 84 per cent, in that case, of the British electorate, would you not talk to them and ensure there is a joint position?

MF: Well, I welcome the fact the Labour Party have shifted their view now and do not seem to be calling for a new referendum. And you know, they like us I hope now want to have a successful Brexit and an agreement that works for us, that works for the European Union, that does not jeopardise the jobs and trade we do with Europe but still implements the overall result of the referendum last year.

AM: These are very uncertain times and this is probably a very unfair question but how long do you think Theresa May can last as prime minister?

MF: Well, we have a duty now to form a government to get on with the Brexit negotiations which start in a few days' time, to continue the successful economic growth that we have. She's our elected leader and I think you'll find the parliamentary party when it meets in the early part of next week, the parliamentary party will rally behind her and give her its support in what is now a different situation, a minority government, but working in harness with the DUP.

AM: The former Chancellor of the Exchequer just described her as a 'dead woman walking'.

MF: I don't agree with that. She won the biggest share of the vote since, I think, the 1987 election, for over 30 years. She did not achieve what we wanted, which was a bigger majority, but it is now her duty to – with us – to form a government and to pilot this country through the Brexit negotiations.

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