

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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MICHAEL GOVE

AM: That is the problem you face now, isn't it, Michael Gove, that many of your own party, many of the newspapers, many people see you as somebody who has betrayed your close friend, Boris Johnson, I think betrayed your close friend David Cameron, and for that reason you're not going to win this leadership contest?

MG: I'm in this leadership contest because I want to advance certain arguments and certain principles. I believe that we need to have as the next prime minister, someone who believes that Britain should be outside the European Union and who argued for it. Now, I have taken some difficult decisions, but I've always taken those because I put my country and my principles first. If I'd really wanted to be leader out of personal ambition, I could have announced my leadership bid last weekend. There were a number of people who were asking me then to put my name forward. But I deliberately, deliberately did not do that because I wanted to put the national interest before my personal interest.

AM: Or because you deliberately wanted to destroy Boris Johnson's career. I mean, you did not have to do it in the way you did it. If I had been like you, and I had had a difference with a friend, I would have driven across the road – across London to my friend and I've said, 'there's something we need to discuss.' You didn't do that. You left him in the dark until the very last moment, humiliating him publicly and destroying him publicly.

MG: I came to the conclusion reluctantly, after throwing my heart and soul for four or five days into trying to get Boris to become the leader of the Conservative Party, that he could not do that job. And right until the 11th hour I was talking to parliamentary colleagues and friends seeking to persuade them that Boris could lead this country and could be prime minister. But in the final 24

hours there were actions that were taken, decisions that were ducked, that lead me to believe –

AM: Which actions and which decisions? Because this really matters.

MG: It's been laid out in some clarity in the newspapers. Boris had the opportunity to build a team, Boris had the opportunity to lay out a particular vision in the last 24 hours, and I felt that he did not step up to that challenge. And there was a deadline. In different circumstances we could have had a conversation, but the deadline was noon the next day, and I faced a basic choice: could I recommend to the country and to my colleagues that Boris was the right person to lead us as prime minister? I could not in all conscience do that. I knew that by taking that decision, all sorts of people would attack me personally. But I love my country, I could not recommend that Boris was prime minister, I had tried to make that work, and therefore it would have been a genuine betrayal of principle and of this country to have allowed Boris's candidacy to go ahead with my support.

AM: So instead you betrayed him by not going to see him and telling him what you were doing and letting him go out just hours before he was going to announce his leadership thing, and it all felt that it wasn't just a decision by you, it was an operation by then. The press were squared, the middle class weren't prepared, but there was an operation going on at that point.

MG: No. I took that decision long –

AM: Lots of people moved to your camp very, very quickly, phone calls were made to journalists very, very quickly, at a point where Boris Johnson himself didn't know what was going on.

MG: I took the decision very late on Wednesday evening. I went to bed at 1.30 in the morning. I reflected on it. I woke up early in the morning and decided –

AM: You called him at 7am and told him.

MG: I decided that I could not in conscience make that recommendation. I talked to my closest colleagues and my wife.

And then I made that decision, and I sought to ring Boris that morning, I spoke to one of his colleagues and lieutenants, and I explained my position. But the clock was ticking, and the decision had to be made before noon. Now, the question that I faced was a basic one: of course people were going to criticise me for not following through, but ultimately throughout my political life I've asked myself one question – what is right for this country? And if there is a personal cost to me, I will bear it.

AM: You're running for prime minister, there isn't a personal cost. You've got what you wanted. And your party is saying this is exactly like Ed Miliband stabbing David Miliband in the back.

MG: There'll be people who will say all sorts of things, but there's been, as you can see in the newspapers, personal criticism directed against me. There's one other thing: I withdrew my support for Boris, Boris could have chosen to go on if he wished to. The fact that he didn't, I think is telling. And one of the things that I would say is that my judgement about what is right for this country will always guide me. And on that basis I came, as I say, reluctantly and with a heavy heart – because I enjoyed working with Boris during the referendum campaign, I think he has great talents and great abilities. But you need something else to be prime minister. You need to have that grip, that executive authority, that sense of purpose, that clarity. I had hoped that Boris would show that, but in the end it wasn't there.

AM: But you don't have it either. You're not capable of being prime minister. You said so yourself, as you know.

MG: During the course of the last six months I've had to make some difficult decisions. I didn't want to be in this position, and if I'd wanted to be leader, if my sole ambition was place and position, if I just wanted the glory in the job, then I would have declared my candidacy last week when so many friends were urging me to do so. But I put my own personal ambition to one side and did what I thought was right for the country. And now

I'm entering this race because I think the next leader of the country needs to be someone who believes heart and soul that Britain should be outside the European Union. Who also has the executive experience of driving through reform and also, as well as that executive experience, will be someone who everyone recognises is acting, not from any personal motive –

AM: Hold on, hold on –

MG: - but is acting from principle.

AM: You brought down David Cameron, then you brought down Boris Johnson. Some people are saying that you are a kind of political serial killer.

MG: I didn't make the decision to call the referendum. That was David Cameron's decision. He chose the timing and he chose the basis. I thought hard, because you're right, I have enormous respect for him, but if you put friendship and personal relations before what is right when you're a politician, you're not serving your country. You have to serve your country by doing what is right. I believe that Britain would be better off outside the European Union, and a majority of people in this country voted for that course. So ultimately what matters is not the state of personal relations in Westminster, what matters is that the country has leadership from someone who argued and believed that we should leave the European Union, who's not interested in personal games, but interested –

AM: (interjects) You say it's not about personal games. What happened last week was a kind of personal game to end all personal games. It was the political assassination of Boris Johnson's career on live television in the most humiliating circumstances, where you said really humiliating things about him to the British people and destroyed him in front of all of us. If there is any definition of a bit of brutal kind of political knife work, that was it surely.

MG: I made it clear that I did not believe that Boris should be prime minister, after having worked incredibly hard over the preceding four or five days.

AM: How long have you known Boris Johnson, how long has he been a friend for?

MG: I've known him for many years. But –

AM: 30 years?

MG: But, when during the referendum campaign he campaigned with such passion and brio, I believed that he might become the person who could be our prime minister.

AM: You were close to him all that time and you didn't think before that he wouldn't make it?

MG: During that period he was supported by the architecture of the Leave campaign and he did a very, very good job. But critically, I wanted him to be prime minister, and I realised during those four days that he was not the man and this was not the time.

AM: You're a big Game of Thrones fan I think, is that right?

MG: I enjoy all sorts of television programmes, including your own.

AM: Thank you very much indeed. House of Cards?

MG: Yes, I saw the British version, I haven't seen the American version.

AM: You are our Frank Underwood, a lot of people are saying this morning.

MG: Well, as I mentioned earlier –

AM: Turn to that camera and says something sinister and it'll be perfect.

MG: As I said earlier, there are all sorts of people who will say disobliging things about me. I don't mind that. Because I would

rather that people said this is a man who sticks to his principles rather than this is a man who is worried about popularity and worried about words that are uttered in newspapers or on television programmes.

AM: Or indeed on television programmes. Now, another close friend of yours for the time being is George Osborne. You spent the last weekend with him, I think you're going on holiday with him and so forth. He remains close. You spoke to him all the way through the campaign. Let me read you again what he said this week: 'I think we're in a prolonged period of economic adjustment for the UK, we're adjusting to life outside the EU and it will not be as economically rosy as life inside the EU. It is very clear that the country is going to be poorer as a result of what's happening to the economy.' And then he talked about spending cuts and fiscal planning and so forth. Do you agree with him?

MG: Let me put you right on one thing first – I don't actually agree with him on that – which is that I didn't spend last weekend with George Osborne, I spent last weekend trying to make sure that Boris Johnson could become leader of the Conservative Party and threw myself heart and soul into it, absolutely unsuccessfully. Boris took the decision to withdraw. On the question of the economy, I outlined on Friday a plan for how we could take advantage of this new departure. The British people voted for change, not for business as usual. They want to ensure that we grasp the opportunities that leaving the European Union can give us. New opportunities to trade with countries like Australia and New Zealand, that have already been on the telephone demanding to get new arrangements here. But also there's much more that we need to do to change the economy, because the referendum revealed that even though our economy has been growing, not everyone has been benefiting from that growth. There are two Britains, there's a Britain that's done very well nicely out of our current economic arrangements, but a Britain that has been left behind. And my candidacy is specifically

designed to focus attention on working people on average and below average incomes who have been let down consistently in the past and who voted in such numbers for a change.

AM: And it's a radical change of direction, as you said yourself. It includes things like an attack on people at the top who have earned money you don't feel they have really deserved, in finances and so forth. And you have said again this morning what you can't stand is politicians making airy promises that never become legislation.

MG: Quite.

AM: So what is the legislation, how are you going to crack down on people earning too much? Are you going to introduce a super tax or what are you going to do?

MG: I think there are things that we can do to change the way in which companies specifically pay individuals for tasks that they perform badly. We have a problem –

AM: I'm looking for a specific policy proposal here.

MG: I'm explaining that specific policy proposal. We have a problem at the moment whereby individuals, when they run companies which they've never created, they're hired managers, pay themselves as though they were Steve Jobs, when in fact they behave like David Brent. And then at the end of it, when they've failed, they get massive payoffs and gilt edged pensions. I'm going to look at the laws that govern how corporate pay is fixed and how corporate payoffs are delivered, in order to ensure that we do not have a culture of payment for failure. I outlined before the general election that the Conservative Party needed to be warriors for the dispossessed. I explained after the general election that we needed to tackle the scandal of the undeserving rich. Politicians on the right have been complacent –

AM: And you are going to get those numbers down, you're going to tax or otherwise remove bonuses from people at the top of it, are you?

MG: I'm not going to use –

AM: It's not just words, you have to have a concrete proposal.

MG: Of course. Well, I launched my leadership bid on Friday and I explained in some detail then some of the specific problems that we have in income inequality in our society. I'm the candidate for the leadership of this country who's spoken most about the scandal of inequality, and who in office delivered plans in order to ensure that the poorest children and victims of the criminal justice system were at last supported in a way they haven't been before.

AM: We've done that, I think. If we go with you as a country we're going to be taking a gamble, and we're going to be taking a gamble on your judgement. I put it to you, your past judgement has not always been 20-20 perfect. Here is you on the Northern Ireland peace process: 'the Belfast agreement has at its heart, however, an even greater wickedness. It's a capitulation to violence, a validation of terrorism, the moral stain of such a process will prove had to efface, it is a humiliation of our army, police and parliament. But worse still, it's the denial of our national integrity.' I put it to you that there are lots of people walking around today, who if that peace agreement had not been concluded would be dead or maimed, and that was a horrendous error of judgement on your part.

MG: I certainly am glad that we now have peace in Northern Ireland, but of course, looking back at the process of negotiation, I think it could have been handled in a different way.

AM: You said 'wickedness'. You said, 'moral stain.' You said this was absolutely wrong. And you were absolutely wrong, were you not?

MG: There was a problem with the Northern Ireland peace process, but one of the things I would say now is that we now have peace in Northern Ireland. I'm delighted that we do. But there are things that we did during the negotiations and the way in which we handled the IRA that I would not have done. And

there are people, naturally, who felt as I did, discomfort, I'll put it no more highly, at the thought that people who'd been involved –

AM: There's a difference between a moral stain and discomfort.

MG: There is certainly a moral question about whether or not someone who'd been engaged in terrorism should be in office, and I found that very difficult. And of the reasons – one of the reasons, since you've asked me, it's a serious matter, one of the reasons is that I have clear principles and one of my principles is that I believe in the integrity of our United Kingdom, I don't like the idea that we should be allowing our country to be influenced by a terrorist campaign, and I believe that in standing for the unity of our kingdom and standing up against violence and intimidation I'm standing up for values which the majority of people in this country share.

AM: Would you therefore use the British parliament to forbid Nicola Sturgeon from holding a second independence referendum in Scotland?

MG: I don't believe that we'll need to go down that path. I believe – as I've explained to you before here – that there's no appetite for a second referendum in Scotland.

AM: Okay. And the other thing that seems to many people a bit of a policy misjudgement, you were a great, great supporter of the Iraq War and you said even after it was all over this was going to go down as one of the great British policy successes of modern times. After so many dead, do you still believe that?

MG: We're going to have the Chilcot Inquiry.

AM: Isis out.

MC: We're going to have the Chilcot Inquiry in two days, three days' time. There'll be an opportunity then to learn the lessons. But one of the things I think is right is that of course we need to be more modest when we're intervening abroad. Absolutely. But we also need to be resolute in the face of terror. And as the only

leadership candidate that has laid out a specific manifesto on how we deal with terrorism and how we deal with extremism, I believe that I've got the experience and the insight –

AM: .. in your inside pocket before this all happened, you must have been preparing this before it happened?

MG: No.

AM: Final question, I asked Andrea Leadsom this so I have to ask you the same question. David Cameron has published his tax returns. Will you before nominations close publish your tax returns?

MG: Of course, yes.

AM: Marvellous.

(ends)