AM: Welcome, Mr Johnson.
BJ: Good morning, Andrew.
AM: I have to call you Mr Johnson.
BJ: You can call me what everybody else does. I saw that item. It is not, it is not being obeyed anywhere, in so far as that edict has any –

AM: They’re still calling you Boris.
BJ: They are.
AM: All right, well then Boris. Can I ask you about the speech that you made. You talked about the world being dominated by strong men and an ebbing of democracy. What does that actually mean in terms of changing our foreign policy?

BJ: Well, what I’ve discovered is that people around the world don’t see us through the prism of Brexit and they don’t even see us through our membership of the EU. They look at Britain as a great global player. I’ve been in Pakistan where I saw huge amounts of British money going into education – I think six million Pakistani girls in the Punjab, a massive amount of work being done in Afghanistan to help to bring peace there. British troops on the line in Cyprus and British sailors, British Navy actually helping to solve the problems of migration in the southern Mediterranean. I’ve just seen that just in the last couple of weeks, and everywhere I go people say, what are you doing to help us, what are you doing to combat this particular problem that we have? And we are out there. And the point I’m trying to make is I think sometimes people in our country don’t understand how we are seen abroad or they don’t realise what a huge player we are. And that was the message I was trying to get over.
MR BORIS JOHNSON

AM: But, but when it comes to for instance, ‘strong men around
the world’ we’re not actually doing very much are we? When it
comes to Aleppo and Putin we’re dancing around on the sides
wringing our hands and doing very little.

BJ: I saw what Peter Hitchins had to say, I saw the conversation
with Christina about that. Honestly, I really think there’s a mistake
to think that whatever happens in Aleppo and other areas of rebel
held Syria could amount to a victory for Assad or for Putin.

AM: He does seem to be on the edge of winning.

BJ: Winning. Let’s just look at that idea. Winning. I mean what is
he going to win?

AM: Taking back control of the city, having his soldiers and the
Russians in control.

BJ: Sure, but over the last five years or more you have seen
400,000 people killed and the vast majority of them have lost their
lives at the hands of the regime. It is impossible to imagine that
the people of Syria, millions of them, are going to be reconciled to
an Assad led government.

AM: I’m not saying it’s an attractive result. I’m just saying after
this civil war it may be the end of the war, it may be a result and
in brutal realpolitik terms maybe it’s better that the war ends even
as it were with the wrong guys winning?

BJ: Well let just go back to that. They won’t win in the sense that
they’ve sowed the dragon’s teeth of radicalisation and retaliation
and regression. There are millions of Syrians who won’t accept
that outcome, who will continue to fight on, so the best outcome
is for President Putin and the puppets that he supports, for them
to get to the negotiating table and do a deal that transitions, that
moves Syria away from the Assad regime. In the end there can only be a political solution. That’s what we’re saying in the UK government and I think that is right. So I would take issue with your concept of winning. And what the UK is doing is to continue to put pressure on – Syria.

AM: Not much. He doesn’t look like a man who’s under pressure.
BJ: Well, if you look at what’s happening to the Russian economy, it’s, you know, it’s not in particularly good shape. It’s been shrinking. That’s partly because of the oil price, but also because of the sanctions that are in place now.

AM: But he’s got the US President now of course.

BJ: It’s Britain that has been in the forefront of applying that ligature of sanctions and we continue to do so. So all I’m saying Andrew is don’t underestimate what we’re doing.

AM: Are you worried about Donald Trump’s friendship and admiration for Putin?
BJ: As I’ve said before I think it’s very important to be as positive as we possibly can about our relations with the administration to be and actually so far the contacts have been extremely productive. I know the Prime Minister has had two good conversations.

AM: Very interesting, but not an answer to what I ask you. Are you worried about the friendship with Putin?

BJ: Well the answer is no, because I don’t believe that in the end that will significantly affect certainly our relations with Washington and I think it will – what we will see –

AM: That’s clear.
BJ: what we will see is I think an understanding by the US administration that the scene there in the Middle East is very complex. You’ve got Iran, you’ve got Russia and you’ve got a Congress in America that is actually, certainly on the Republican side, very sceptical, to put it mildly, about both Russia and Iran and so I think there will be a confluence of thinking about that. And don’t forget, the relationship between the UK and the US is the paramount political fact of the last hundred years.

AM: Let’s not go to a hundred years now. I’ll give you that.

AM: I just want to carry on with the complicated Middle East situation and you’ve expressed a lot of moral outrage about the way the Russians and Assad’s regime have behaved, but I put it to you there’s another war going on in the Yemen away from the cameras where thousands of people have been killed, there have been bombings at weddings and funerals, millions of people have been displaced and are extremely hungry. There’s starvation theory there, and that is being caused by British jets with help from British advisors flown by the Saudi government. We should be ashamed of what we’re doing there.

BJ: I think again with great respect, Andrew, the war has not been caused by British jets at all.

AM: No, but it’s been prosecuted by them.
BJ: That is what you said. The war has been caused by the illegal takeover by the Houthi militias of the government in Yemen. That’s what happened. And there’s a campaign that is supported

AM: It’s a civil war supported by two sides.

BJ: there is a campaign that is supported by the Arab League, by a vast coalition and supported by the UN to move the Houthis out
of Sanaa and to restore the legitimate government. Now where you are right is that there are certainly very difficult questions that we have to address about the use of UK munitions and UK technology in that area. So far – I’ve got to be very clear about this cos everybody’s heard this a lot of times but it is very important. So far we do not believe that there has been a clear risk of breach of international humanitarian law in respect to the use of those weapons.

AM: I’m sorry, but the UN Panel has said there’s been 191 violations of human rights in those attacks and we’re talking about British Brimstone missiles, Typhoon jets and British help in targeting and some of that targeting has gone horribly wrong.

BJ: Yes. I must correct you about the British helping in targeting. The UK is supportive of Saudi Arabia and we have a longstanding - we have a longstanding partnership and alliance with Saudi Arabia, but please be in no doubt we are not engaged in the command and control systems of the operation and we are – you know you’re asking a very important question because we are very concerned about what is happening -

AM: It is very important.

BJ: - and we have raised our concerns repeatedly with the Saudis, but you have to look at the thing in the round and you have to understand that the Houthis and their supporters evicted, took over the government and are attacking Saudi Arabia –

AM: The rights and wrongs of the war are one thing, it’s the way that targeting has been done. Philip Hammond, when he was Foreign Secretary said that ‘we were involved in targeting to ensure that target sets are correctly identified,’ which hasn’t gone terribly well, let’s be honest.
BJ: No. We have tried – there’s a difference. We have tried to give general advice to the Saudis about how to do these things, but we are not – I think you said we were involved in the targeting. We are not involved in the targeting.

AM: Well I’m only quoting Philip Hammond here who says, ‘we do have a military presence,’ and he goes on and he says, ‘to ensure that the correct procedures to avoid breaches of international humanitarian law, to ensure that target sets are correctly identified.’ Now if that’s not targeting I don’t know what it is.

BJ: Well it isn’t.
AM: Target sets?
BJ: Yes, but we’re not actually in the kind of room looking at targets.
AM: We’re helping them doing some pretty terrible things is my point.

BJ: No, I think you’re misunderstanding what Philip was saying. We’re trying to help them to avoid breaches of humanitarian – international humanitarian law by giving them guidance about how targeting should work. That does not mean that you’ve got British officers sitting there trying to –

AM: Hundreds of people, they’ve killed hundreds of people at funerals and at weddings. If we’re helping them target we’re not doing very well.

BJ: We’re not helping them target, we’re trying to do general guidance about what they should be –
AM: Well let’s move on.
BJ: but your point is – look, your point is a good one and people should not underestimate the concern that we have about this. We’re deeply concerned and we have been making – in fact I had a conversation only yesterday with the Saudi, last night, with the
Saudi Foreign Minister, my counterpart, about this. Of course we’re making representations the whole time. At the moment we do not think –

AM: Would we consider putting back our military advisors?
BJ: - we do not think the threshold has been crossed.

AM: Okay. Let me move on to the great subject of the time which of course Brexit and we’re in this very, very happy position now where you don’t have to say Theresa May has said that we are not giving a running commentary, Andrew.
BJ: I can say that. Why can’t I say that? We’re not giving a running commentary about that.

AM: The entire country are really, really angry with that phrase and the other one, we’re going to get the best deal for Britain. Of course you’re going to try and get the best deal for Britain.

BJ: You’ve just taken my two best lines.
AM: I’m so sorry but we can put them to one side from now on.
BJ: outrageous. All right.
AM: David Davis has been very very helpful this week in talking about the fact that we may well be paying money into the EU for some considerable time, in return for access to markets and Philip Hammond jumped on this and said, yes, yes, yes, absolutely right. Do you agree with this?

BJ: I think I may even have said this when I – on the many occasions I came to talk to you during the referendum campaign.

AM: I’ve checked and you didn’t.
BJ: Well I certainly said it during the campaign. I’ve always thought that there were aspects of EU cooperation and I’ve said this many times, of the Erasmus programme for instance or Horizon funding or whatever for research, where actually – and some of these programmes don’t even involve countries that
aren’t even in the EU. To be part of that in the future might be a good idea, certainly would be a good idea, involves paying in. I haven’t got a problem...

AM: This is slightly different. This is paying money in, in return for access tariff free to parts of the single market.

BJ: Well you know, that is obviously something that David Davis is considering. It doesn’t mean a decision has been taken.

AM: It doesn’t. Would you not consider that to be acceptable is my question?

BJ: Well you know I’m not going to, as I say, I’m not going to get involved in the minutiae of our negotiating position before we trigger Article 50. What I will say, and this very important, cos people will want to hear this, I do believe that as a result of Brexit we will be able to take back control of the money that we currently give to Brussels and not only that we’ll be able to take back control of the money that Brussels currently spends on our behalf. Now that is a very important -

AM: I’m sorry to jump into semantics at this point.

BJ: No because people say what about the 350 million? What about your bus, what about the NHS?

AM: They do.

BJ: They do and they’re right to raise it, but the crucial thing to understand is that very large sums of money will be coming back to this country which will be capable of being spend on priorities such as the NHS. And that will be one of the outcomes of Brexit.

AM: But if very large sums of money are not also going into the EU in order to buy ourselves access –

BJ: That is a pure – that is a speculation.
AM: It’s a speculation made by the minister in charge of Brexit in public to the CBI, you know, so it’s not exactly an obscure leak. It’s quite a big thing. And a lot of people will be watching and think hold on a second, after Brexit are we going to be paying large amounts of money to the EU in return for access to markets?

BJ: No I’ve given you an indication of the kind of payments that I think might be sensible.
AM: So small, not large?
BJ: My own view is I see no reason why those payments should be large and as I say I do see a big opportunity for us to take the money that we’re getting back and spend it on other priorities.

AM: One way round this which has been suggested is that the money could come from our current aid budget therefore leaving the money coming back into the NHS and all the rest of it. That seems to a lot of people a bit bonkers.

BJ: Well you know you’re ...
AM: I’m just trying to be helpful.
BJ: You’re trying to anticipate, if I may say so, the negotiating position that we’re going to have and I think that we’re very clear. The Prime Minister has been very clear about what we’re trying to do. Brexit gives us a chance to take back control of our borders, to take back control of quite large sums of money, not to be run by the European Court, so not to have EU law in this country and fourthly, to be able to do free trade deals. Now within those four
AM: How important in that four?
BJ: - ideas is a wealth of information. That is all you need to know I think to understand the very exciting agenda that the Prime Minister has for Brexit.

AM: Except that luckily we are getting a little bit more information at the moment and again David Davis has said to the CBI, talking about all of those companies who are worried about not having
enough labour to carry on doing what they want to do. People picking lettuces and working in supermarkets and care homes and all the rest of it. He has said we are not going to disadvantage British business. Whatever deal we do we’ll allow people to keep coming into this country. Again is that a fair thing for him to say, do you agree with that?

BJ: I think that is reasonable but I think I certainly have said before on your show that I’m in favour – as I said in my speech on Friday Brexit must not mean

AM: You’re in favour of migration and also controls?

BJ: Yeah. Brexit must not mean Britain becoming closed in on itself and what I was trying to get at is that we are a dynamic global economy, open to the world. We now have the chance, and Theresa has been absolutely clear about this, we now have the chance to be the world’s leading campaigners and agitators for free trade at a time when global free trade is no longer growing as fast...

AM: And it’s under threat from your friend Donald Trump and others.

BJ: Well I don’t think that it’s necessarily under threat from the United States. I think the United States can become again a great champion of free trade in the way that it needs to be. But there are pressures around the world, there are people who want to haul up the drawbridge and we’ve got to fight against that and that is the way to global growth.

AM: But to be absolutely clear, as one of the key voices behind the Leave campaign, the promise is control. The British government decides how many people come in. The promise is not we’re going to stop people coming in in large numbers?

BJ: Well, for what it’s worth my own personal view is I think that last year the 330,000 net was very high.
A: Very high.
BJ: Too high. You’ve got to have a system of control that allows you to get down below that and so I would be in favour of a reduction, but you know, you can still have a very open and dynamic economic with immigration running at a reasonable level. That’s what we want to see.

AM: George Osborne said a very interesting thing I thought last week, he said the trouble with politics is that we make promises, we make mistakes and then we have to stick by them year after year after year ad nauseam and I would put it to you, Boris Johnson, that the promise to get immigration down to 10s of thousands was a mistake made by David Cameron and we look at the numbers outside the EU and inside the EU and we all know, you know, I know, everybody watching knows that it’s a nonsense and it is time to bury this and forget about it.

BJ: Look, what I’ve always argued is that the crucial thing about immigration is to build public consent for what is happening and I think it’s only by taking back control that you can do that. And it’s only by taking back control you can get the numbers down at all and then you have to go to people and say look, you’ve got to understand, there is a sense in which the sheer desire of the world to come to this country, high skilled workers, is a massive compliment and tribute to the UK economy.

AM: But really? That is tens of thousands? Really?

BJ: That is the case that I have made. I think you would agree. Throughout my time when I was Mayor of London and consistently throughout the referendum campaign, I believed – AM: But you wouldn’t choose to stick to tens of thousands, would you? No.
BJ: A pledge has been made to get immigration down and the only way you can do – Theresa has rightly said – the only way you can do that is by taking back control.

AM: Now you've had a lot of stuff in the papers again today, people briefing against you over your views on immigration and elsewhere and a lot of jokes and stuff made about the way you tell jokes. Can I put it to you again in this new spirit of openness and honestly and candour and fair play –
BJ: Is that a new development on this show?
AM: No, it’s always been on this show. It’s spreading around the rest of the country.
BJ: I see, right.
AM: I hope. Nonetheless, you have been out there, you have said talking about fruity things about Prosecco and small spherical objects and so forth. Can I put it to you that the Boris Johnson sense of humour doesn't necessarily translate into other languages and that perhaps you have to rein it in a bit?

BJ: No on the contrary. I think what is – what people appreciate – my own view – you know as people have pointed out all too often, if you take things absolutely literally then there are very few parts of the world or leaders that I have not at one time accidentally offended or insulted. And so my whole life if you took it all that seriously would be a sort of endless itinerary of apology. But seriously, what I find is that people do appreciate frankness and they do appreciate people saying what they think as much as possible and what I have genuinely found in the last few months is that the mood in – amongst our European friends primarily but also in the rest of the world who were all a bit startled by Brexit to begin with, the mood has really changed and they are starting to see the positive possibilities. So when you go around –

AM: So they’re not going to punish us? They’re not in a kind of angry mood? And you’re not making them angry?
BJ: Less and less. I think a certain amount of plaster did come off the ceiling immediately after the Brexit vote and you did see some quite intemperate language from some of our friends in the rest of the EU. That has definitely gone and I think people are – well people - what the EU wants to achieve is a partnership and I think that beneath it all and there will be more strum and drang between now and the end of the negotiations and it may get, it may get pretty hairy at times and you know there may be some difficult bits.

AM: There will, yes.

BJ: But beneath it all there is a massive fondness for the UK and a desire to do the best possible deal. They understand we have long standing problems, they now want a new partnership.

ENDS