AM: I’m joined by the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt. Mr Hunt, welcome.
Can I first of all ask you are we absolutely sure there will be a meaningful vote on the Prime Minister’s deal on Tuesday?

JH: Yes, and good morning, Andrew. And I think it’s too soon - I’ve been talking to four European Foreign Ministers over this weekend – I think it’s too soon to say that this process has run into the sands. But if we’re going to get this over the line there needs to be realism on both sides. On the UK side, those of us who strongly believe that we must implement the referendum result, need to recognise that we can’t wish away the parliamentary arithmetic. And if it’s not this deal, it’s likely to be something less appealing, less representative of what people voted for. People worry about being trapped in a customs union by the backdoor, but we could end up in a customs union by the front door if we get this wrong. But that realism also needs to come from the European side, because – and people sometimes make the comparison to a divorce, but divorcing couples rarely end up living next door to each other, and we will remain Europe’s next door neighbour and it is in Europe’s strategic interest to make sure that we remain the best of friends, we’re their biggest trading partner. And that’s why I think with that realism it is possible to find an outcome that works for everyone, but it’s going to need a lot of work.

AM: When you say we might stay in by the front door do you mean that we might negotiate away the red lines and as Theresa May said in her Grimsby speech we might end up with a form of Brexit which is very soft, involve the customs union and so on?
JH: Well this is what I mean by saying we can’t wish away the parliamentary arithmetic and –

AM: So parliament could push us to that position? Could push you to that position?

JH: If the deal fails then in the end the government has to obey the law and parliament’s responsible for the laws. And that’s why we have an opportunity now to leave on March 29th, or shortly thereafter. And it’s very important that we grasp that opportunity because there is wind in the sails of people trying to stop Brexit. And I just want to make this point, Andrew, ’cause it’s a very important one. If you want to stop Brexit you only need to do three things. Kill this deal. Get an extension and then have a second referendum. And within three weeks those people could have two of those three things and as we heard from John McDonnell now, quite possibly the third one could on the way through the Labour Party. And so we are in very perilous waters and people who want to make sure that we really do deliver this result need to remember that if it fails people aren’t going to afterwards say it was this person’s fault or this group of people’s fault. They’re going to say there was a party that promised to deliver Brexit, we put them into Number 10 and they failed. And the consequences for us as a party would be devastating.

AM: So if her vote goes down, Theresa May would choose to renegotiate a different kind of deal?

JH: Well I don’t want to talk about what happens if her vote goes down.

AM: Well she has.

JH: Well, the reason I don’t want to talk about it is because if we get involved in that kind of speculation, then I think it makes it less likely the deal will get through and we are all focusing – and we’re hoping very much we’ll get some improvements to the backstop that will make that possible. But the stakes are very high.
ANDREW MARR SHOW, JEREMY HUNT MP, FOREIGN SECRETARY

AM: Nevertheless, a couple of very, very important Constitutional questions. If it goes down and the Commons votes to take no deal off the table, in your view is the government bound by that vote?

JH: Well the Prime Minister has said that she will listen to what parliament says in that respect. But I don’t want to –

M: That’s slightly different. Is she bound by that vote?

JH: Well she is – she said she will listen to it and she’s a woman of her word, and that’s really why it’s the case that if the deal doesn’t go through what we’re going to end up with I think is something much less appealing to people who want to honour the referendum result. So this is a very big moment.

AM: If there is a vote on the floor of the House of Commons to take no deal off the table, how will you vote?

JH: Well I have made up my mind how I’d vote in that situation, but again I don’t want to get drawn into that because I think if the whole debate about –

AM: I’m sorry but you know your colleagues have said they would.

JH: Yeah, but if the whole debate is about how this or that Cabinet Minister will vote in this or that situation, then I think we make it less likely that we’ll get the deal through. But I’ve been very clear right – no I will say this. I have been very clear from the outset that I don’t think we should be taking no deal off the table. I think it’s very important that if we’re going to get the deal we want, we keep no deal on the table.

AM: Same question really about an extension, because everyone now seems to think it’s almost inevitable there’s going to be a short extension. Do you agree with that?

JH: Well, if we get the deal through this week then we can leave either on the 29th of March or very shortly thereafter. There might need to be a short period of time for what’s called a technical extension to get the necessary legislation through. If we don’t, we will end up in Brexit paralysis, and my appeal to my colleagues is to think about what our constituents want, because they want to
get Brexit over and done with. You can see in the papers this morning there is an overwhelming public desire to move on. That is not just about because they’re fed up with it, it’s because actually they want to bring the country together after a very divisive period and that’s what we have to do.

AM: So we’re in the position where it is likely, despite all your best hopes, that this deal goes down again, presumably she brings it back yet again and that we then get votes on delaying and on taking no deal off the table. If those go against the Prime Minister she is bound by those. And at that point in effect, I suppose she’s admitting that in her speech as well, you have more or less lost the initiative when it comes to these negotiations, you have lost the authority of parliament?

JH: Well that is the risk you take. But also let’s look at the opportunity we have. We have a deal on the table, that means that we can leave the EU, that can deliver us control of our money, our borders, our laws. It has the backstop, which we’re trying to improve at the moment –

AM: But ‘Absolutely terrible’, David Davis says. He was Brexit Secretary, he said this is one of the worst deals any government has ever proposed.

JH: Well, in any deal you have to make compromises, but this deal delivers the vast majority of what people voted for. And the question that everyone has to ask themselves is, if we take this deal, could we go on to deliver everything we’re seeking? And the answer is we can. The negotiations will be very tough over the next two years but we will have left the EU, we’ll be able to move on to the next stage. And that’s what people at home want now in this situation.

AM: We understand what you want. Do you think a delay is now the most likely outcome?
JH: Well I hope it isn't, but it depends on parliament and it also depends on the European Union, and the point I would make is that - and this is borne out by my conversation with European Foreign Ministers, that a delay is not in the interests of the EU either. They don't want the shadow of Brexit hanging over them. They've got lots of other things that they want to deal with and that’s why this is a very important moment for us. There is a risk and a possibility that we end up losing Brexit if we get the votes wrong in the next couple of weeks, and I think that’s something that in their hearts most MPs know would be a very big mistake.

AM: Let me turn to one of those other issues, and the big issue of the week. Is there a link between knife crime and police cuts?

JH: Well, I think if you listen to what Theresa May says and what Sajid Javid said, it’s clear that there are many causes of knife crime, and if you are to tackle them –

AM: But is there a link?

JH: Well, she has said that resources matter, and that’s why we’re increasing the resources going into the police. Remember, we inherited in 2010 the worst financial crisis since the Second World War. We took a number of very difficult measures to put the economy back on its feet. As a result of those measures we’re now increasing police budgets, and that I hope will deal with some of the concerns people have about manpower.

AM: So when Theresa May first of all said there’s no direct correlation between these crimes and police numbers, she was wrong about that, wasn’t she?

JH: What she was saying is that there are many causes. Of course resourcing matters, but so too does prevention, which is why we’ve announced a big increase in resources to help get people off the street, give people alternatives. So too do legislative changes, which is why the Offensive Weapons Act is coming through. So all these things together can help us deal with this terrible problem.
AM: Up and down the country people are losing their children, their siblings, people are being killed in appalling knife attacks, and the police are absolutely clear that more numbers are needed. They say it again and again and again. They’ve got a very small increase in policing this year. When is the government actually going to act to protect people?

JH: Well, we have been acting, and that’s why I think it’s wrong to suggest that the government hasn’t understood the concerns the police are raising. Because we have started increasing the police budgets. In fact, there was a very famous budget where Labour were expecting George Osborne to cut police budgets, and he protected them. And then in the last budget, the budget was increased. We are in the process of sorting that out, but the context we had was an economy that had been bankrupted under the last Labour government, and we had to get the economy going. We’ve been creating all those extra jobs, and we’re now in a position where those resources are starting to be increased.

JH: Lots more to talk about. Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe. You’ve extended diplomatic immunity to her. In real terms, in a prison cell what kind of change does that make?

JH: Well, it is a very unusual measure. It’s the first time it’s happened for more than a hundred years, to do this. And it may have some legal significance, it may make it easier to get consular access. But what we’re doing is we’re elevating this to a state-to-state dispute with Iran. And what we’re saying is at the heart of this there is an innocent mother separating from a loving husband, her four year old daughter. She’s actually been in prison for more than half of that child’s life. And you know, Iran is a great civilisation, it goes back many, many centuries. Whatever disputes they may have with the United Kingdom, they shouldn’t be using an individual innocent woman as a pawn of diplomatic leverage.

AM: She is a British citizen. Was Shamima Begum’s child a British citizen?
JH: Yes.
AM: Why did the government not go over there and reclaim that child and bring her back to her family in Britain before the child died?
JH: Well, we have been trying to do everything we can. It’s an incredibly distressing and sad situation but the...
AM: You could have rescued that child.
JH: Well, let me tell you what we’re doing. What we’ve been doing. We are one of the biggest donors, the second biggest bilateral donor to those refugee camps.
AM: Sure, but the child has died.
JH: Let me finish.
AM: You could have gone in there and got the child and brought the child back.
JH: You say that, but this is a war zone. The mother chose to join a terrorist organisation, to leave a free country to join a terrorist organisation, and we have to think about the safety of the British officials that I would send into that war zone as a representative of the government. And so all those considerations. Now, Shamima knew when she made the decision to join Daesh she was going into a country where there was no embassy, there was no consular assistance, and I’m afraid those decisions, awful though it is, they do have consequences.

AM: The son made no decisions and made no choices like that. Almost every major news organisation in Britain has been able to get into that camp. And therefore it seems likely that the Foreign Office would have been able to get into that camp and bring that child home.
JH: Well, a journalist is able to travel to different parts of the world, that is part of your profession, Andrew. And they have some protection from the fact that they are press. Sending a British government official into a war zone in a situation where you’re getting advice that those officials’ lives may be put at risk is a very different matter. And that’s why, working with Penny
Mordaunt, the International Development Secretary, we have been looking at how we can get in touch with these children, how we can find a way to get them out. Sadly, in this case, as we know, it wasn’t possible.

AM: I asked John McDonnell just now about anti-Semitism in the Labour Party. Does the Conservative Party have a zero tolerance attitude to Islamophobia?
JH: We do, and we have a zero tolerance policy to all racial prejudice. And that is demonstrated by the fact that we’ve just suspended the membership of 14 people for posts that they put on Facebook.

AM: You’ve got a councillor, Mick Murphy, who compared Muslim children to rubbish bags. And he was suspended and then he was allowed back into the party. And there’s lots more examples like that. What is really going on?
JH: We act, you know, quickly and decisively. I don’t know the details of that individual case, but there is a very big difference between us and the Labour Party, and that is that, in the Labour Party’s case, the problem goes right to the very top, because Jeremy Corbyn thinks that the foundation of Israel was a crime. And that is why he’s unable to distinguish between anti-Semitism and Israeli foreign policy. When it comes to Islamophobia, I don’t pretend that we don’t have (talking together) we do something about them.
AM: Baroness Warsi, who is one of yours, a leading Muslim Conservative, says there is institutional Islamophobia inside the Conservative Party.
JH: Well, I have a lot respect for Sayeeda Warsi, she’s been a lifelong campaigner against racism. We’re engaging with her. We’re not going to close our ears to what she says. But as I say, we are determined to do something. In the case of the Labour Party, I’m afraid, because of Jeremy Corbyn’s views on foreign policy the problem goes right to the top.
AM: Very quickly, why Yemen?
JH: Because this is the conflict that the world wants to forget. And people say there’s going to be a humanitarian crisis if the fighting starts again. The truth is there is already a humanitarian crisis, and that’s why we want to do everything we can to bring the war to a close.
AM: Jeremy Hunt, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.