

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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AM: You are calling for the debate tomorrow, Theresa May we know is going to come to the House of Commons and explain why she did what she did. Would you like to see a proper debate and a vote at the end of that?

JC: Yes, I would. Because I think parliament should have a say in this, and the Prime Minister could quite easily have done that. She took a decision sometime last week that she was going to work with Macron and Trump in order to have an attack on the chemical weapons establishments in Syria. She could have recalled parliament last week. It's only the Prime Minister can recall parliament. Or she could have delayed until tomorrow when parliament returns itself. There is precedent over previous interventions where parliament has had a vote, and I think what we need in this country is something more robust, like a War Powers Act, so that governments do get held to account by parliament for what they do in our name.

AM: And if there is now a parliamentary vote, would you like that to be a vote which would, as it were, tie her hands to stop a repetition of what happened this week happening again?

JC: What I would like is a vote which outlines the process that could now happen. That is giving the OPCW the chance to go in and fully investigate everything, including the debris from the bombing attack. But also a very strong steer to our government to now go back to the UN and promote a resolution and work might and main to bring Russia and the United States together on this so that we do get a political process in Syria, as well, of course, as the removal of chemical weapons – which was done after 2013 when Lavrov and Kerry reached an agreement which had a big effect. After all, several hundred tons of chemical weapons were destroyed as a result of that process. It can be done, it's hard

work and it takes patience, but surely that is better than the danger of escalation of this conflict into a proxy war between the US and Russia over the skies of Syria.

AM: You mentioned the OPCW there, the Organisation for Prevention of Chemical Weapons. Now, do you accept that when they reported last year that Assad was responsible for a chemical attack in 2017 they were right?

JC: I've no problem with their reporting, their investigation, or the quality of it, but they must be given the chance to do it now. There is evidence of course, very strong evidence about the use of chlorine, which is not itself a banned substance because it's so easy to make, but clearly as a weapon it is illegal. That has been used by a number of parties in the conflict, but there is quite clear evidence there. The OPCW must be given the chance to report on it. They are, after all, on their way to Douma, they may even be there now.

AM: They are there now, I think, and we've got reports in the papers of the smell of chlorine coming from the clothes of children and so forth.

JC: Indeed.

AM: If they came back and said, yes, this was Assad's regime, there was one helicopter above it and this was a chemical attack against international law, would you then be in favour of using missiles?

JC: I would then say confront Assad with that evidence, confront any other group that may be fingered because of that, any other – who may be, I'm saying may be, I don't know. And then say they must now come in and remove and destroy those weapons, as they did in 2013 and 2015. But the wider context has to be promotion of a political solution and a ceasefire. We cannot go on – 400,000 people have died in Syria, two million are external refugees.

AM: But nobody died as a result of these attacks, and they may have degraded Assad's chemical weapons facilities really substantially.

JC: There may be other ones we don't know about. There may be a fallout from it. But the point is also of the legality of doing it. Because if we want to get the moral high ground around the world, as a member of the Security Council, as a country with a long tradition of international involvement, shall we say, then we have to abide by international law. And I say to the Foreign Secretary, I say to the Prime Minister, where is the legal basis for this? The legal basis would have to be –

AM: Humanitarian, they say.

JC: Well, would have to be self-defence or the authority of the UN Security Council. The humanitarian intervention is a legally debatable concept at the present time, and I would have thought, from the point of recalling parliament or waiting two days things could have been different. But it looked awfully to me as though the Prime Minister was more interested in following Donald Trump's lead than anything else. And this is policy made up by Twitter.

AM: We're not in favour of that. Are there any circumstances at all in which you would favour firing missiles at Syria? Any circumstances?

JC: If – I can only countenance involvement in Syria if there's a UN authority behind it, and that's why I want to say this: if we could get to the process in the UN where you get to a ceasefire, you get to a political solution, you then may well get to a situation where there could be a UN force established to enforce that ceasefire. That surely would save a lot of lives. At the moment everybody's pouring arms into Syria, there are 12 countries involved in the war in Syria and there are, as I say, 400,000 dead already.

AM: But there was a UN international mechanism for looking at the responsibility of different groups for chemical weapons attacks, and that no longer exists because the Russians vetoed it last year. They vetoed UN resolutions on this six times now.

There's no reason to think they will stop.

JC: Both sides have either vetoed or threatened to veto. There hasn't, that obviously has not been agreed.

AM: But the UK is kind of paralysed in this.

JC: Paralysed is too easy a word and is really a council of despair. And Tony Gateris(??) is alarmed by what's going on. And what he said on Friday I think was very prescient. He said we're in danger of recreating the Cold War between Russia and the United States in Syria. He asked for an appeal to all powers to do something and come together. Surely the killing has to stop, a ceasefire has to come into place, and is in the hands partly of us, but particularly of Russia and the United States at the UN to promote that.

AM: Can I put it to you there's something slightly strange going on here.

JC: Strange?

AM: You are against the use of missiles against Syria under all circumstances, and out there public opinion is broadly speaking on your side. You have a reputation for being a plain speaker in these subjects, can you not just say I'm against using missiles against Syria under all circumstances, it's always wrong.

JC: I've made it very clear that the use of missiles anywhere has consequential effects. What is presented on media and is often fed in by defence departments all around the world is that it's all surgical, clean all over. Well, unfortunately the world isn't quite like that. The longer term effects are of other people that are killed, are of other people that are affected by it, and of course look at this history of this world, ever since 2001 we've had all these wars. We've had a growth of terrorism, we've had a growth

of instability. Surely we've got to start looking at things in a different way.

AM: Trump said he is locked and loaded to carry on this. Do you think we are still at a point where we could see real genuine hot war between Russia and the West?

JC: Well, President Trump has a way with words, that's for sure. I hope it's just exaggeration on his part. Well, quite clearly any country that's deeply involved in Syria could cause an awful lot more trouble now if they wanted to. I hope that President Trump will listen to wise counsels, listen also to wise counsels outside the USA and pick up the phone to Putin and talk.

AM: Okay. You mentioned the UN just now. 2015, there was a motion to send missiles elsewhere, it had UN backing, and you still voted against it.

JC: Yes, I was not –

AM: So it's not the UN, it's the issue.

JC: Well, the issue was what would the effect be of it? Would it in effect spawn something worse? Would it kill civilians? And was there another way of doing it, such as cutting off the supply of finance and supply of arms to Isis. Now, remember, our exports, our exports that go to Saudi Arabia, for example, end up killing people in the Yemen. But also end up somewhere in very bad hands, in Syria and other places. We've got to think through what we promote as policy.

AM: Absolutely. 2014, another motion in the House of Commons about the use of air power, in this case against Isis in Syria, Iraq, and again you vote against. Emily Thornberry votes the other way. But as a result of that, surely Isis has been defeated. It was air power that defeated Isis, you were against it and you were therefore wrong?

JC: Well, the point I was making was on whose side are we getting involved? And at the end of the day Isis was going to be

confronted by ground forces, and it was from Kurdish people and other forces –

AM: Who have won.

JC: Fortunately Isis is no longer the power it was, but some of the other groups that are part of various forms of opposition in Syria are not far away from Isis in their approach to the world.

AM: But given these people were throwing gay men off buildings, were beheading and all the rest of it – have been defeated. Surely a vote against that was wrong.

JC: Of course they – no, I'm not saying it was wrong at all. What I'm saying is a process that involves cutting off arms and money that can be used to kill wholly innocent people has got to be there. Because the arms and the money are still flowing into the region, albeit now to probably slightly different groups.

AM: But if you were Prime Minister you would never, ever authorise the use of force against countries?

JC: No one would ever say never. What I would say is –

AM: Almost never though.

JC: No, what I would say is there has to be a process where the objective is to bring about peace, to bring about a resolution to conflict, to bring about a political solution. Listen, there's going to be no military winner in Syria. The war could go on and get worse.

AM: Many people say that Assad has effectively won that civil war, he's mopping up opposition in different parts of the country, but he has basically won.

JC: The hatred and the desperation of many people in Syria who are not supporters of Assad, maybe not even supporters of other groups, is going to be there for a long time. The Kurdish people –

AM: Meanwhile he's in charge.

JC: The Kurdish people need to have their identity, other groups in this diverse country need to have their identity. Surely there

has to be a role for the United Nations. That's why the UN was founded.

AM: One final historical question because 2013 there was a similar kind of suggestion that we would go to war with Assad, we'd remove some of his chemical weapons, and the Labour Party again stopped that happening. 2013, he was much weaker, he might have lost that war. He's now much, much stronger. Surely there should be some embarrassment or even shame on the part of the Labour Party that that attack didn't happen when it was still possible to have stopped this terrible man doing what he's been doing to his people ever since?

JC: Ed Miliband and others made the point then, as I do now, that there has to be a political process to bring about the end of the war. What we said was, go for the political answer now rather than allow the war to get worse and so many more die as a result of it. Surely we are an experienced nation, we have great skills and abilities, can't we use those abilities to save life?

AM: Let me turn to a related subject. You have now seen the intelligence on the Skripal attack in Salisbury. You've seen all the private stuff and you've heard about the Russians testing out this nerve agent on door handles and pursuing the Skripals, cybertracking them for five years now. Do you accept now that this was a state-sponsored attempt to kill them?

JC: I want to see incontrovertible evidence of it.

AM: And you still haven't?

JC: I want to see incontrovertible evidence of it. I am appalled and alarmed at the idea that anyone would use this nerve agent, and clearly it was an attempt to murder the Skripals on British soil. That is obviously absolutely wrong. The OPCW's job is to identify what the agent was, and they've done that. Sadly, it's not their job to identify who made it, or necessarily where it was made. And I do think we need to strengthen the role of the OPCW in the future.

AM: Do you seriously think there is any doubt about who's responsible for this?

JC: I think it's very clear that the nerve agent itself is very similar to those that have been made in Russia. Novichok is what we call it, and obviously there has to be some challenge to Russia on this, and that is what is going on, and I would obviously want to challenge the Russians on the production of this, as indeed I would any other country that's producing something which is wholly and totally illegal.

AM: Do you agree or disagree with John McDonnell then, who said this was a state-sponsored assassination attempt?

JC: Well, what I would say is if we're going to make a very, very clear assertion like that we've got to have the absolute evidence to do it. Because, listen, we believe in rules-based diplomacy, we believe in a rules-based international relationship. Therefore you've got to have absolutely incontrovertible evidence. Otherwise you reduce your ability to criticise people.

AM: I mean, the government are saying we have got that evidence and we have shown it to Jeremy Corbyn and he's still not convinced, what more can we do?

JC: Well, assertions and probabilities are not the same as certainty.

AM: There's no certainty in anything in life, but given what we know, surely the Russians are almost certain to have done this and that therefore there has to be some kind of consequence from us?

JC: I'm very clear of where the origins of this nerve agent came from, I'm very clear that there has been this nerve agent produced in Russia. What I'm saying is the OPCW must have the chance and the opportunity to identify and also it should have the powers, and I think we should give them the powers, to identify

the source and the culpability of it. At the moment they don't have that. The OPCW is a very important organisation. The safety of all of us, you and me included.

AM: Let's turn to one other issue, which is CHOGM, the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting coming up very, very soon now in this country. It's been suggested that this is the right moment for the British government to apologise to the rest of the Commonwealth for some of the wrongs and errors they have made when it comes to the Chagos Islands, when it comes to apartheid and other things. Do you think this is something that now needs to happen?

JC: I think it's very important that Britain recognises its historical role in many of these issues. I mean, for example, the treatment of people in Kenya during the uprising in the 1950s. There's been a sort of apology given on that. On the Chagos Islands issue I've been very closely involved for a very long time, that is going to come up at CHOGM, no question about that, and I think it's important that the British government just recognise what Britain did to the Chagos Islanders was immoral, was wrong and brutal. Put it right and give them their right of return. And so I think –

AM: So this is a general reset if you like?

JC: Well, I think the Commonwealth needs to have a more robust freedom in order to have those debates and those discussions. It is a unique organisation because it represents nations all across the world, all of whom have some kind of relationship with the British colonial past. But I like the Commonwealth, I want us to be involved in it, and I want to have a discussion with Patricia Scotland and others about how we might develop a Commonwealth education programme. If you think of the history children learn in India, the history children learn in this country, they could learn a lot from each other.

AM: And is the Prince of Wales the appropriate person to take over as head of the Commonwealth?

JC: Well, I think the Commonwealth ought to really get a chance to decide who its own head is in the future. The Queen clearly is personally very committed to the Commonwealth, but after her I think maybe it's a time to say well, actually the Commonwealth should decide who its own President is on a rotational basis. I'm looking forward to meeting quite a lot of people from the Commonwealth during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

AM: We've talked a lot about evidence and allegations in this conversation, the Russians, Lavrov is saying that what happened in Syria and what happened in Salisbury were both British government provocations, they were effectively staged by the British government. What's your reaction to that?

JC: Well, I'm quite surprised by them, and –

AM: By the events or the, what he says –

JC: Well, I'm surprised by – appalled by the events and surprised by his comments on it. I mean, that's a pretty big assertion to make. He's either got to back that up or withdraw it.

(ends)