

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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RORY STEWART

AM: Welcome. It's a fairly diverse field at the moment, but nonetheless, if you make it through to the last two that's two Old Etonians who both went to Balliol College, Oxford, in the last two. It's hardly diverse. Would the country not be better off choosing, for instance, a Pakistani bus driver's son?

RS: I think you're right to point to that. I would say by all means focus on the five years that I spent at school, but also look at the five years that I spent in Afghanistan, look at the five years that I spent serving my country in Iraq and in the Balkans, and let's look at me overall.

AM: So your biggest idea in terms of the great big Brexit conundrum facing the country is a citizens' assembly. This would be chosen sort of randomly by poll. Just explain just exactly how it would work.

RS: So two stages: first thing is to get parliament to try to get Brexit through. In the end we live in a parliamentary democracy so we have to begin by convening parliament, and if I'm lucky enough to be elected as leader I would come in with a mandate from the Conservative Party members, the associations of the country, and I could make a different request to Conservative members than the prime minister perhaps was able to in the past. And I would hope also the results of the European elections would make Members of Parliament realise that we need to get Brexit done and get that deal passed. But if it failed, the plan B, the fall-back, would be to go to a citizens' assembly. So that would be like a jury selected very scientifically across the country, whittled down to be representative of the country as a whole, given them three weeks to go through the details of it and then make recommendations.

AM: They're chosen by rote, effectively. So somebody watching this programme right now has to realise that if Rory Stewart makes it all the way through and becomes Prime Minister they may get a phone call in late August, early September saying, 'terribly sorry, give up what you're doing, your job is now to come and sort out Brexit for us.' That seems like passing the buck.

RS: Much sooner than that is the first thing: that I'd want to get this done soon, so I hope they'd get the phone call in late July, and it would work like this: you would go to select randomly from the electoral register 50,000 people. You would then, as you say, write or phone them to check who's available. And then you'd use a polling company to make sure they were representative of the country, north against south, women against men, Brexit against no Brexit. And the reason to do it is to release the pressure from Parliament. Parliament is gridlocked and stuck. I would give Parliament another go and I would say to Parliament this is the last chance saloon, get it done. But if you're not going to get it done let us have the citizens' assembly, which is what they did in Ireland on abortion, and actually really worked.

AM: How long did it take the Irish citizens' assembly to come to a decision?

RS: Longer.

AM: A year.

RS: They sat much longer, but they only sat at weekends, and I think they didn't sit on every weekend. I believe, having sat down with the constitutional experts at UCL and talked to people involved in the Irish Assembly, we can get this done in a matter of weeks. And I would only be doing it as the fall-back. I want parliament to do it and I want to deliver it as soon as possible.

AM: I put it you there really isn't the time for this. We have a small number of months before October, a few months before October. In October, by which time the EU is back and proper negotiations start, you have just three weeks to come to a

conclusion. There is no way they're going to be able to do this before the end of October.

RS: Two things. Firstly, there is no new negotiation with Europe. Anybody who's pushing for that is pushing for delay. We're still going to be stuck in Europe for years to come if they think they're going to get a new negotiation out of Europe, and I've said again and again I'm not going back to Europe to negotiate. Secondly, we live in a parliamentary democracy. There's only one route through this which is to get it through parliament. So I would start with parliament, and if I couldn't get it through on the first stab with parliament you'd got to the citizen's assembly and then back with a recommendation to parliament. We've got to unlock parliament.

AM: So what do you do if your citizens' assembly recommends either leaving with no deal or says we must have a second referendum, two things you've said you're completely opposed to?

RS: Well, firstly, I think it's very unlikely because a citizens' assembly will be chosen – okay.

AM: They're not unlikely, because looking at all of the polling at the moment the consensual centre ground has vanished on this, and actually the two most popular options by far are no deal or remain via a referendum.

RS: So why am I saying it's unlikely? It's because the country and the assembly would be split, 52 per cent Brexit, 48 per cent Remain. It's extremely unlikely that they would agree on one of the extreme options. Extremely unlikely they'd agree on no deal or a second referendum. It is more likely, given the experience of these assemblies all around the world, is that they would come to a compromise. If they did, and I'm prepared to accept there's a possibility —

AM: They might well not.

RS: There's a possibility they might. Parliament is sovereign, so if they make a recommendation to parliament that is completely unacceptable to parliament, then it won't go through. And then what is the worst case scenario, Andrew? I would have wasted a few weeks of your time and we would have to go back to parliament again. But in the end –

AM: With you as prime minister we'd be exactly where we are. You're a very, very erudite, clever guy, but this sounds to me like a gimmick, and quite an unsuccessful gimmick at that.

RS: It was very successful in Ireland with an issue of abortion, which was very polarising and divisive, because it gets people with the details. In this case –

AM: You're prime minister. You know, you're in charge and if this assembly produces something which you agree with, then yes, you use that to put pressure on parliament to try and get a result. But if they disagree with you, you just ignore them.

RS: The important thing is we live in a parliamentary democracy. I'm campaigning against candidates who are pretending we're living in the United States and we're going for Presidential politics where some big man just says this is going to happen. The question to people who are saying that, my opponents, who are not talking about parliament, is how are they going to get it done? How are they going to negotiate some different deal with Europe? How are they going to get no deal through parliament? We live in a parliamentary democracy, and what I have to do is work with people. I need 45 more votes.

AM: You have said all the way through, 'I am the compromise candidate, if you believe in compromise vote for me.' In that spirit, can I ask you what you view is of membership of the single market and the customs union?

RS: I personally think the single market would be a big mistake, because I believe that people who voted for Brexit, at the very minimum, would want not to have control over immigration –

AM: Customs union?

RS: If what you mean by that is an arrangement where we have zero tariffs, zero quota access to European markets in which we can sell British cars in, and if we can get that without regulations over the City of London and without immigration coming to Britain and leaving all the institutions of the European Union, of course, and I think that would be a good thing for the British economy.

AM: So you'd be happy with a customs union, but you'd want it without the immigration aspect?

RS: I don't want a customs union in the sense that Turkey has a customs union. What I want actually is there in the prime minister's withdrawal agreement. I want frictionless trade. I want the thing that 270 MPs voted for, and we need to get 45 more on board. And I know this feels terrible to people, because they've seen that defeated again and again, but it is the quickest, the most constitutional, the most legitimate way of getting it done. And the other candidates, who are promising what they can't deliver, are going to let people down terribly. So if I'm lucky enough to win this race I will at least have been honest with people from the beginning, that it's difficult, that there are no easy solutions to Brexit. If there were, it would have been done already. But at least we're not wasting your time pretending there are going to be new negotiations.

AM: Let me push you on the frankness point, because one of the things you've said very clearly in this studio, that you would legislate against no deal. Now, as soon as the EU hears that the pressure comes off. If they're really scared of no deal – big if – and you've taken it off the table, then there'll be another delay and another delay and another delay and Brexit will not happen.

RS: The big if, is the point. They're not scared of it because it's not a credible threat. The European Union knows that no deal cannot get through parliament. So in a negotiation – I've spent a lot of time in negotiation, I started as a diplomat at the age of 22, you make threats that are credible and that help your negotiation.

But if your threat is something you can't deliver and if it's something that's going to damage both your economy and the European economy it doesn't help you in the negotiation.

AM: So that Brexit's gone. In effect you are the Remain candidate in this aren't you?

RS: Absolutely not.

AM: Then how do you get us out? I just haven't heard how you get us out.

RS: I want to leave all the institutions of the European Union – through parliament, Andrew. It's the only way that anyone can get us out. All these other people are just saying, 'I'm going to go to Europe and I'm going to shout 'give me a deal,'" and they're not telling you how they do it. So I am the only candidate who can get us out. I'm the only candidate who can get us out quickly, because I'm the only candidate who's noticed two facts: number one, Europe is not offering a second deal, and number two, I'm going to take it through parliament. And those are the two truths and it's the quickest way of doing it.

AM: Alright, let's talk about the campaign itself. You signed a campaign pledge, 'I will not speak ill of fellow Conservatives, I will not engage in personality attacks on others.' And you have broken that again and again and again. You've called Boris Johnson a great prancing elephant, a clown, offensive, poisoning our politics, and Pinocchio. Do you look in the mirror when you're shaving in the morning and think actually I've let myself down?

RS: No. What I learnt in Iraq and Afghanistan is there were too many people trying to be polite. Nobody called out the problems. You have to point out when there's a challenge. We're at a crossroads in our country. We're making the most serious choice about who our prime minister is going to be. And in Iraq and Afghanistan when I criticised people I was told that I was ruffling feathers, that I was being divisive. It's because you don't criticise, because you don't speak uncomfortable truths, that you get in a

mess. This is the moment in this leadership race to say who – and it's a very brutal question – who do you trust to be your prime minister? How is Boris going to deliver Brexit, how? He keeps saying, 'I'm going to deliver it,' and it would help –

AM: You don't trust him to be prime minister.

RS: I don't even know what he believes. He won't talk to me, he won't talk to you, he won't talk to the public. We want to know what he believes, we want him to sit at this debate tonight and tell us. Because the real problem in politics, and this is what I'm discovering when I'm walking out and when I'm talking to colleagues too, this isn't just in public – is a problem of trust.

AM: You've said different things now about whether or not you would serve under Boris Johnson. Under any circumstances.

RS: I would not serve. I would not serve under a Boris Cabinet. I'm not in this to be in the Cabinet. I'm in the Cabinet already. If I want to be in the Cabinet I could just stay and keep my mouth shut. I want to change this country and I want to challenge and say there are two completely different visions facing our country. Boris's vision and my vision. His strategy on Europe and mine. His view of economics and mine. And the question is who is going to represent us, who do you want as your leader?

AM: You've said if he's taking us towards no deal and he's shutting the doors on parliament as part of that process you would simply open up another parliament in Methodist Central Hall over the road. Have you spoken to anybody else about this? Have you spoken to the Speaker about it? Have you spoken to colleagues about it? Would there be anybody apart from Rory Stewart sitting in that building?

RS: If somebody suspended parliament and if they literally tried to block our parliamentary democracy, I'm very confident that every single Member of Parliament would join me in Methodist Central Hall.

AM: Ken Clarke has said this morning that in those circumstances, in the circumstance of no deal, he would vote to bring down the Conservative government to stop that happening. Would you?

RS: I keep getting asked this again and again. And I've said it is an important question, if I lost. But I'm going to win. Because in the end I believe in the Conservative Party. I believe in my colleagues. This isn't me as an individual. The difference, I hope, between my campaign and others is that I'm a team. I'm incredibly proud of David Gauke, I'm incredibly proud of Gillian Keegan. Very proud that Tobias Ellwood is now supporting. We're a team of people who believe that we can trust the people and it's a two-way process.

AM: Okay, finally. People look at this contest from all sorts of perspectives and they see what's happening in the Boris Johnson campaign and there's a sense of inevitability, that he cannot now be stopped. Why do you think he can?

RS: Because nobody has yet had the chance to question him. And as soon as you question him, as soon as I sit down with him and ask the big question how – how are you going to deliver Brexit, how are you going to get a no deal through, then it begins to come off the rails. At the moment there is a great assertion. But we are a moderate country. This is not a Trumpian country, this is a country which is pragmatic, which believes in common sense, believes in fiscal responsibility, and that's a hugely popular message because it's a message about trust.

AM: Rory Stewart, thanks very much indeed for talking to us this morning.

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