

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 18TH MARCH, 2018 – BORIS JOHNSON

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BORIS JOHNSON

Foreign Secretary

AM: Well listening to that is the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson. Welcome Mr Johnson.

We have to be very clear and very careful of course about the evidence in this very serious matter. So you have said it's overwhelmingly likely that Vladimir Putin was responsible. You saw the Ambassador brush that aside. Why do you say that?

BJ: Well we gave the Russians a very clear choice and the Prime Minister said on Monday, as I said to the Russian Ambassador to the UK, you know, either help us to understand how the stockpiles of Novichok have gone missing and how some of it could have turned up on the streets of Wiltshire in this way, or else I'm afraid we will be forced, as the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons, to draw the conclusion, as we did in the case of Alexander Litvinenko, that the trail of culpability leads inexorably, to the Kremlin. And I think listening to the Russian response, listening again to the response of the Russian Ambassador to the EU with his satirical suggestion that this was done by UK agents from Portland Down, this is not the response of a country that really believes itself to be innocent. This is not the response of a country that really wants to engage in getting to the bottom of the matter.

AM: The Prime Minister told the House of Commons there were two possible explanations to this. Either this was a deliberate attack by the Russian state or else the Novichok has come out and become - and got into the hands of criminal gangs. You seem to be excluding the latter possibility now.

BJ: Well, we gave the Russians every opportunity to come up with an alternative hypothesis, such as the one that you have just described and they haven't. And their response has been a sort of mixture of smug sarcasm and denial, obfuscation and delay. So what we are doing on the Novichok and on the nerve agent, what we will do is tomorrow technical experts from the organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons will come from the Hague to the UK, we will share the samples with them. They will then be tested by the most reputable possible international laboratories. And I might just say in response to Mr Chizhov's point about Russian stockpiles of chemical weapons. We actually had evidence within the last ten years that Russia has not only been investigating the delivery of nerve agents for the purposes of assassination, but it has also been creating and stockpiling Novichok.

AM: So that was a direct lie that I was being given there?

BJ: But you will get that, and that is exactly the tactics that we've come to expect from Russia over the last few years. And one of the things that has really struck me in the course of the last few days, as we've been talking to friends and colleagues around the world, is the difference between their reaction this time and their reaction to the death of Alexander Litvinenko. And then back in 2006 there was a much more hesitation, much more people saying well perhaps it could be rogue elements of the Russian state and so on and so forth. Now you have people such as Nikki Haley, the US Ambassador to the UN, with her very, very powerful denunciation of Russia. My Polish colleague Jacek Czaputowicz on Friday in London, pointing the finger squarely at Russia. And I think what that indicates is the change in people's attitudes towards Russia because of the experience of the last ten years.

AM: Do you worry a change in their attitude to us. They don't really care anymore what we do or say.

BJ: I think that they – it's obvious that they do care and I think that is one of the reasons why the UK is as it were in the Kremlin's crosshairs, because they look at us and they think this is the country that time and again has called Russia out, has stood up to Russia when it comes to Crimea, to what they've been doing in Syria. And just to get back to the point I was making just now about the national response –

AM: That's a point I want to ask you about. Are you absolutely sure it's this mysterious thing called Novichok? We talk about this all the time now. We all assume that it's that. How are we sure?

BJ: Obviously to the best of our knowledge this is a Russian-made nerve agent that falls within the category Novichok made only by Russia, and just to get back to the point about the international reaction which is so fascinating. People have all now experienced whether it's in America, Germany, France, say nothing of the Baltic countries, the Balkans and Poland, they've all experienced Russian meddling. Malign, disruptive Russian behaviour over the last few years. They can see a country that is going in the wrong direction and that's why they're so inclined now to not to give Russia the benefit of the doubt and to stand shoulder to shoulder with the UK.

AM: Do you think, given that background that 2% is enough for our defence spending? An awful lot of your colleagues, including Tobias Ellwood, Defence Minister, it's no longer enough. What's happened to the dollar, but also the threats that we now face from the east, that we do need to protect ourselves better as a country than we have been doing and we need to spend more money?

BJ: Well, we are one of the biggest spenders on defence in NATO as you know where we contribute about 20% of European defence

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spending already and it's quite right that we should spend well on our defences. And we do.

AN: My question is should we be spending more than we are targeting at the moment?

BJ: We must make sure that we are adequately and properly defended and certainly that is a case that I make and other -

AM: You will be making to the Chancellor and others.

BJ: - other ministers certainly have been making that case. But when it comes to the defences of this country we are also ensuring that we're protected against cyber-attack and attacks on our critical national infrastructure and other such threats.

AM: We read today that there has been increased worry about attacks on the infrastructure. Electricity supply, nuclear power stations, water and so forth. Is that something the government is worried about at the moment?

BJ; Well as I say, it's something obviously – it's a threat that has changed over the last few years because cyber-attacks are a relatively new development, but we have the National Cyber Security Centre, we have fantastic preparations against such threats.

AM: You'll have heard the Ambassador talking about Nikolai Glushkov do you think the death of Mr Glushkov is connected to this affair?

BJ: That's a matter for the police and they have to get on with their investigations. I have no evidence of any connection.

AM: Now the Ambassador also said that the Russians are prosecuting the deaths of the daughter of Mr Skripal and Mr Glushkov because they're both Russian citizens and that their

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people will be arriving here and talking to our police, looking for cooperation. Will they get cooperation?

BJ: We have wanted cooperation from the Russians in this matter for some days and we've been greeted with a lot of sarcasm and I think plainly an attitude of a country that is guilty. If we can genuinely be of assistance to the Russians in getting to the bottom of what has happened then we will do that. I rather doubt whether they are entirely serious.

AM: If Russian investigators arrive in London and say we're interested in the attack on Yulia and the death of Mr Glushkov, we would like to work alongside the British police and have access to the investigation that we're conducting they will be given that?

BJ: We would do everything we can to assist in getting to the bottom of what has happened. Whether it is appropriate to have Russian investigators on UK soil engaged in trying to get to the bottom of this I somewhat doubt, but what we will certainly do, as I said earlier on –

AM: Is we will help as far as we can.

BJ: No, what we will do is we would ensure that – and this is the – I'm afraid the Ambassador was completely misleading about the UK's obligations under the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We have followed those obligations to the letter and what we will be doing now is getting the samples and making sure that they're available to the technical experts to allow them to elucidate exactly what they are. And I think you would agree that they are a rather more reliable and I think the British people can have much more confidence in what they do than in any Russian investigation.

AM: Let's move on to what happens next. We kicked out 23 of their people we regarded as spies, they kicked out 23 of ours, tit for tat, is that that?

BJ: Well, there is a normal symmetry in these diplomatic affairs and you would expect that. Look, you've got to understand –

AM: Is it going to go further than that symmetry is what I'm asking really.

BJ: We will discuss at the National Security Council this week what further measures, if any, we may want to take. But I would just stress this. That the UK is already pursuing a number of measures. Hardening our borders. Of course we're pursuing the diplomatic expulsions.

AM: Let me ask you about money.

BJ: But we are also going to be using the tools that are available to us under existing statute to pursue those who may have corruptly obtained their wealth. We'll be going further with what is called the Magnitsky clause in the sanctions Bill and so all these things are moving forward together.

AM: Two weeks ago the Labour Party put down Magnitsky Act amendments and the Conservatives voted against them. Why was that?

BJ: Well, there were deficiencies in the way those amendments were drafted which didn't make them suitable, but we are working to get provisions that will allow those who've been responsible for gross violations of human rights to be prosecuted and not to be able to come to this country.

AM: To be absolutely clear, as a government you've going to go after named individuals who have in the past been able to wash their money through London, invest in housing and so forth and you're going to grab their money?

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BJ: Well, we live in a democracy under the rule of law. It's not open to me as a politician in this country to direct the law enforcement agencies to go after such and such a person. That's what they do in Russia. What we have said and we have statute now since April last year under the Criminal Finance Act to do this. We have said that where people have obtained wealth by corruption and where we can see a link with the Kremlin, with Vladimir Putin, it may be possible to have unexplained wealth orders and other sanctions on those individuals. And that work is going on now and it will be intensified. But you would not expect me to reveal the names.

AM: No, indeed. Labour says that part the Conservative hesitation in this is that you as a party have been taking far too much Russian money for far too long and there's the case of the lady Lubov Chernukhin who paid £160,000 to have a game of tennis with you. Did that game actually take place?

BJ: Can I just make a point about this whole anti –

AM: You're going to say good Russians and bad Russians. I know that.

BJ: No, I am actually and I'm going to say –

AM: I was going to say back to you that this lady's husband was a minister of Vladimir Putin and was given an award by Vladimir Putin, so he was close to the regime. And you as a party were prepared to take £160,000 from her so that she could have a game of tennis with Boris Johnson. Bit odd.

BJ: Well if there is evidence of gross corruption in the way that gentleman you mentioned obtained his wealth or – then it is well within the – it is possible for our law enforcement agencies to deprive him, deprive him of his wealth with an unexplained wealth order. That is a matter for the authorities. It's not a matter for me and it is very, very important now, because I'm getting a lot – people are emailing me from Russia who feel that – they feel that

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Russians - no it's very very important that we stress the Russians themselves are in no way the object of our wrath. It is not the Russian people.

AM: I just want to pursue this particular case if I may.

BJ: We have no quarrel with the Russian people.

AM: Did the tennis game actually happen?

BJ: It did.

AM: It did. Are you happy that the same lady – do you know enough about the origins of that money? She has now paid £30,000 to sit next to the Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson and have dinner with him. Are you happy about that?

BJ: Look, unless and until evidence is produced against individual Russians, I do not think that the entire nation should be –

AM: It's a difficult balance, I absolutely agree, but –

BJ: It is very, very important. There are many Russians who have come to this country and made their lives here, and contributed magnificently to our culture and our society. And they feel threatened.

AM: I understand that. But on the other hand –

BJ: It is very important –

AM: - let me remind you of what Marina Litvinenko, the widow of Mr Litvinenko, Sasha, said. She said, 'Theresa May and the Conservatives need to be very selective who you're friends with. When you allow people with money to come to your country and make a business you need to be sure what kind of money these people try to bring to your country,' because very often, she says, it's come about inappropriately. All I'm saying, it's very difficult to know exactly the source of the money that you take.

BJ: Well, that's why we have the National Crime Agency, that's why we have the National Economic Crime Unit, that's what they are there to do. They are there to get to the bottom of whether somebody's wealth has been obtained corruptly or not. But really and truly it is very important that we do not allow a miasma of suspicion about all Russians in London -

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AM: I accept that.

BJ: And indeed all rich Russians in London, to be created. Some of them may be –

AM: Because the Conservative Party would be short a lot of money, if that was the case.

BJ: Some of them may have obtained their wealth by – and I have to say I think it is quite extraordinary at a time when you have two people lying gravely ill in hospital in Salisbury, when a police officer is still not out of hospital, for the fire somehow to be turned on Conservative Party funding. To be best of my knowledge all possible checks have been made. And they will continue to be made.

AM: You'll have seen the story this morning about Cambridge Analytica, this data collection company, in trouble for harvesting information from Facebook and then using it to target potential voters. They were involved in the Brexit referendum and the American elections as well.

BJ: Yeah, I'm afraid –

AM: They've been summoned back to the House of Commons. Do you think there should a proper investigation?

BJ: I've got to be honest with you, Andrew, it's not something I've focused on.

AM: Well, let's move to something you might have focused on, I'm sure.

BJ: I'm sure there are – the general point can be made, if there's some crime then I'm sure that the law must follow its course.

AM: The Brexit Select Committee has suggested that we may have to delay the triggering of Article 50 because we're not ready. What's your response?

BJ: Well, I don't think that's true at all. And I think that we're making great progress in the negotiations and I hope that we'll get a good deal on the implementation period in March. The

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House of Commons voted overwhelmingly to trigger Article 50 and let's get on with it.

AM: There's another report today, however, saying that our border arrangements simply won't be ready in time. We need more time to do this. Are you concerned that the thing is going to slip?

BJ: No. I think what most people in this country want, whether they voted Leave or to Remain, they want us to get on and deal with it.

AM: Why did you feel it necessary to write a letter to the Prime Minister saying that there might be a hard Irish border?

BJ: What I said – I don't wish to go into –

AM: I've got the quote here. We can help with the quote.

BJ: You can- what you have is, I'm afraid –

AM: 'It is wrong to see our task as maintaining no border. Even if a hard border is reintroduced we would expect 95 per cent of goods to pass.' So you used the phrase, hard border, twice, which is interesting because you are a member of a government which says there's not going to be hard border.

BJ: The whole point about the letter was to say we don't need a hard border, okay. And that's the policy of the government, and that's what we're going to produce. And if you read the Prime Minister's Mansion House speech, which was excellent, you would have seen that she produced a number of solutions for the avoidance of a hard border, and that was what I was advocating and that was –

AM: So you are singing from the same hymn sheet. You said you were going to publish the letter. When are you going to do that?

BJ: It is up to the media organisations that leaked a part of it, if they choose to -

AM: You said you would publish it.

BJ: Well it turns out - we do not, as a matter of course respond to leaks by putting the whole thing into the public domain, but I can

assure you that the letter said the exact opposite of what you've just claimed it said.

AM: I just read a bit of it. These are words and words mean things and so forth.

BJ : And they don't, as it happens, mean what you want them to mean.

AM: 'It is wrong to see our task as maintaining no border. The government... to stop this border becoming significantly harder. Even if a hard border is reintroduced,' you say, and then you go on. Even if a hard border.

BJ: If you read – well –

AM: Well, let me read, publish it.

BJ: What I was saying is very clearly in line with what the government as a whole has been saying for a long time, which is there is no need to have the hard border. There are ways of avoiding it. As the Prime Minister said in her excellent Mansion House speech, and I suggest that you quote that and read that.

AM: Okay, I'm going to quote something back at you as well. Do you think that Russia intervened in the Brexit referendum?

BJ: I have no evidence for that.

AM: You've said in the past you didn't think they successfully intervened, but you have no evidence they intervened at all?

BJ: I simply have no evidence that the successfully intervened, no.

AM: Okay, one last Brexit-related question, then we can move on. We haven't spoken for a little while. As one of the great cheerleaders for Brexit, when you look at what's happening now, when you look at the fact that the European Court will have some influence on us after we leave, when you look at the fact we're going to be pay money in to be a member of some agencies, and you look at the timescale of all of this, are you completely cheerful that it has happened, turned out as you wanted it to do?

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BJ: I think we've got ourselves into – I do, I think that the Mansion House speech was a great step forward and I think it shows exactly the type of deal we want to get. We're not going to have the influence of the European Court of Justice. We're not – I don't know what you're saying, this sort of BBC claptrap. We're not going to be paying in

AM: It's not BBC claptrap, it's the Prime Minister's claptrap.

BJ: We're not going to be paying in after we come out. Yes, there will be an implementation period but after we come out we'll have what is effectively a gigantic free trade deal with all sorts of bolt-ons and the advantage of the new arrangements, as the Prime Minister spelt out at Mansion House is that it will be possible for either side to do things differently, to do things in their own way, and there will be an independent arbitration panel that will be able to decide – can I just finish the point? – there will be an independent arbitration panel that will be able to decide whether or not there is distortion of trade entailed. So we have, you know, on money, on borders, on laws, you are seeing the fulfilment of the pledge to take back control

AM: We have to take back control of the clock and the time because we have run out of time. Boris Johnson, for now, thank you very much indeed.

(ends)