ANDREW MARR SHOW, 18TH NOVEMBER, 2018

DOMINIC RAAB

Former Brexit Secretary

AM: Dominic Raab’s resignation this week was the single most dramatic moment of all, but it was odd. He resigned in protest at what he sees as the awfulness of an agreement he himself has apparently negotiated. Rum business. He joins me now. Who negotiated this, Dominic Raab?

DR: It was a team effort and I came in in July. A lot of work had been before, so a mixture of the Cabinet. Me as Brexit Secretary and David Davis before, we deputised for the Prime Minister.

AM: This is your deal and you resigned over it. Bit weird.

DR: Yeah. And actually I think we got very close to a deal that would be faithful to the referendum, sensible and pragmatic. Remember I took up this post after the Chequers announcement, which was already very controversial. I want to make a success of this, but two or three of the changes, as I set out in my resignation letter, I’m afraid rendered this deal fatally flawed. And in good conscience, when you think about the long term good of this country economically, democratically, when I look my kids in the eye and I think what will this country be like in ten years, I didn’t feel able to sign up to this.

AM: Does this deal mean that we leave the EU, in your view?

DR: Notionally yes, but for example I think it takes a very predatory approach to Northern Ireland. If you look at it the analysis is the Cabinet was told Northern Ireland will be treated as a third county for regulatory purposes. Don’t think that’s consistent with keeping the union together. The bridge –

AM: So it threatens the union in your view?

DM: Absolutely. That was one thing. Secondly the bridge from the end of the implementation period to the future relationship with a combination of customs union and single market with no
possibility to get out, no democratic country in history has ever signed up to something like that. And then finally – final point and you’ve got it there. It’s the outline future relationship, and bullet point 2 makes clear that far from the Chequers proposals or even a Canada style arrangement, actually the permanent basis of our future relationship will be this customs union single market hybrid. Debilitating for the economy in my view and also devastating – AM: That was the basis for going forward. Who authorised that?

DRL: and devastating for trust in our democracy given the promises we made at the last election.

AM: Who authorised that?

DR: It’s not clear to me. I’ve asked that question. The change made at the –

AM: Well if it wasn’t you and you’re the Brexit Secretary, paid to be the Brexit Secretary can only have been the Prime Minister.

DR: Well I don’t know. I asked that question in Cabinet and I haven’t had a particularly good answer. It was described as a drafting change but I think if you look at it – you’ve got it there in front of you – it is very clear that the future relationship will be based on this combination of the – basically the backstop with the cooperation –

AM: “Build on the single customs territory provided for in the Protocol,” is what it’s saying.

DR: Exactly.

AM: And that must have been negotiated by the Prime Minister. There’s nobody else who could have done it.

DR: I don’t know the answer to the question, I don’t impute bad faith to anyone, I just cannot sign up to that because it is a clear breach of the promise every Conservative went into the last election with.

AM: Now the Prime Minister’s office says that if you look at the way out of this customs backstop area there is a way out for
Britain, it’s complicated, there’s negotiations, there’s good faith in both cases, there’s lots of legal language, but we do have a way out.

DR: That’s not correct and that’s not in fact what the Cabinet was told. There is a possibility to get out but the EU has a veto over it. So we would be signing up to accept rules and laws made by the other EU member states with no regard for the UK’s circumstances from economic policy to social policy and we’d have no way out. No democratic country in history has signed up for that.

AM: So we’d be stuck inside this arrangement and then presumably the EU would be able to do whatever it wanted with us – in terms of asking for more money.

DR: The argument is made let’s get this over the line and play for the second half. The future relationship negotiations. But precisely because of what you’ve just shown there it will tilt the advantage in favour of the EU and prejudice, frankly taint the second phase of negotiations. So I think it is a fatal flaw. And the shame of it is, I have to say – I’ve supported this Prime Minister all the way through her premiership, I still do now –

AM: Really?

DR: yes, but let me explain. We were close to a deal and actually if these two or three points were changed I still think a deal could be done, but it’s very late in the day now and we need to change course.

AM: Do you think she’s going back to try to do that?

DR: Well I don’t know and the reason I resigned was it was clear to me that Cabinet had decided to accept the deal that she proposed and I was being asked to go and sign on the dotted line with Michel Barnier and I just didn’t feel in good conscience I could do that. But I support this Prime Minister. I want her to
succeed, but I do think we need to change course, otherwise we will regret if for the foreseeable future.

AM: Is this deal worth 40 billion quid?
DR: No.
AM: So we’ve got a deal which is not worth 40 billion quid, but you’ve said this morning we’ve been bullied by the European Union and you’ve said this morning that that’s because the Prime Minister lacks political resolve and will.

DR: I think actually government as a whole. We were very clear in the course –
AM: But she leads it.
DR: No, sure and I take my responsibility and we’re a Cabinet as well. We have a system of Cabinet government. But I do think we’re being bullied. I do think we’re being subject to what is pretty close to blackmail, frankly, for your viewers at home, and I do think there is a point at which, it probably should have been done before, where we just say I’m sorry, this is the United Kingdom of Great Britain Northern Ireland, we cannot accept those dictator terms.

AM: So whose political will and resolve was lacking?
DR: Oh, the government as a whole, but ultimately of course
AM; The Prime Minister, surely?
DR: - I’ve been arguing with the Prime Minister for a while that actually we need to say that there’s a line in the sand beyond which we wouldn’t move.

AM: To quote your ally, Boris Johnson, you’re trying to have your cake and eat it, aren’t you? You’ve actually made a devastating attack on the Prime Minister’s Withdrawal Agreement, you have resigned from the government, triggering a political crisis and now you’re saying you support the Prime Minister who doesn’t have the
will and resolve to carry on and negotiate this. It’s a pretty weird position to be in, is it not?

DR: Well in fairness, you say Boris Johnson is my ally, he’s a friend and a good colleague but he’s not any ally. I’m supporting this Prime Minister. But the truth is people expect their politicians to be able to be true to their convictions and be honest. I couldn’t, in good faith, for the reasons I set out in my resignation letter that we’ve gone over, sign this country, the country I love up to that deal.

AM: Neither of us know at this stage whether there’s 48 letters in for a leadership challenge. If there are will you back the Prime Minister against that?
DR: Absolutely.
AM: Under any circumstances you would never stand against - stand for the Tory leadership in these circumstances? You’d back her all the way through?

DR: I would back her. I would never in these circumstances send a letter in to the 1922 Committee. Don’t think that’s right. I also think all of this leadership stuff is a total distraction from the historic moment that we’re at which is to get this deal over the line. I believe it is salvageable but on its terms as it’s currently presented it is clearly damaging economically but also in terms of our democratic control – remember there are some things this deal would deal in terms of take back control over immigration policy and we wouldn’t pay the vast contributions to the EU in terms of money. But the number one reason people voted to leave was to be master of our destiny, to take back democratic control over our laws. This will stop that from happening.

AM: I Dominic Raab am not going to stand in a Tory leadership contest?
DR: I’m not even getting sucked into all of that.
AM: No, I want you to agree with that statement.
DR: Well no, I’m not.
AM: Ah!
DR: I’m supporting this Prime Minister. I will not – I will not be supporting anyone who is sending in letters to the 1922 Committee and in a vote of no confidence I would support her.

AM: You’d support her even though you think she hasn’t got the will and resolve to do this in the negotiations?
DR: No, look I’m saying I’ve got huge respect for her. Remember in the 2017 election I was a backbencher. I was defending her to the hilt. I’ve served under her as Justice Minister, Housing Minister and Brexit Secretary. I’ve always been loyal and professional, but also tried to behave with integrity. So I will support this Prime Minister and I want her to get this right. I think she can but we must change course on Brexit.

AM: All right, well you’ve used emollient language just now but Number 10 are not using emollient language about you. In fact it’s really – government source, it’s a really unpleasant language. They say: “we always called him – and that’s you – we always called Dominic Raab the suicide bomber. Raab just went through the motions of carrying out the negotiations until it suited him to detonate.”
DR: Well then why was I appointed in July?
AM: Well, that’s what they say about you now.
DR: Okay, well look, I’m not getting into the name calling business. As you’ve seen, I’ve been very careful. I like this Prime Minister and I respect her and frankly, this silly childish name calling business I never engage in it. But I do think we have a long term decision for our country that will affect our children and theirs and we’ve got to get it right. So I can’t just somehow roll over on something which for me would be a breach of conscience.
AM: Do you think this Withdrawal Agreement will get through the House of Commons?

DR: No, and actually this is a really important point to make. I think the biggest risk of no deal, which I’ve always said we should seek and strive to avoid, is that a bad deal gets voted down by parliament.

AM: Would you vote against this if it comes to the House of Commons?
DR: Yes.
AM: You’ll vote against it and the danger of that, as we’ve just been talking about all the way through the programme, is that it does take us towards a no deal entry (sic). That it’s hard to see – do you think the House of Commons can avoid no deal if it vote this down?
DR: Well, it’s uncertain territory, but the risk of no deal goes up. Also I think on no deal we just need to be a bit clearer about this. I’ve always said we should strive for a good deal. I think we can still get one over the line. And there are risks to no deal. We ought to be more honest about them. But we also –

AM: Well, let’s talk about no deal –
DR: Can I speak to the top line and then you can come in? We also need to be honest about the fact that actually, with will, with concerted effort, with real grit, as I’ve been looking at these plans that we’ve put in place since July, put out 106 technical notices – actually with resolve we can mitigate some of the worst risks. But the real issue here is the short term versus long term. We would face some short term disruption, but far better than to put the long-term economic and democratic interests of the country at risk.

AM: Well, to quote Matt Hancock, apparently, the new Health Secretary from the Cabinet, would people die? Can you
guarantee that people would not die as a result of there being no deal?

DR: You can't –

AM: That's what he said.

DR: Look, for example, on medicine. We got a very clear set of contingency plans to make sure that the stockpiling that we already do with the pharmaceutical industry –

AM: He apparently told people that he could not guarantee that people would not die.

DR: Look, people are making all of these sorts of, frankly, I think, slightly irresponsible statements. If you don't widen the roads you can't guarantee that road traffic accidents won't go up or down. But the fact is, this is a manageable problem, and I've looked at the plans –

AM: Okay, you say it's a manageable problem. Let's try and imagine somebody who's a car worker in the West Midlands whose job depends on very fast, frictionless, just-in-time delivery of components up and down, and who's thinking about the head of Jaguar Land Rover, for instance, saying this will cost his company more than a billion pounds, would be catastrophic – this is somebody who might well lose his job as a result of no deal. This is something he's been working for all his life, he's loses his job, lots of his colleagues do too. And you say it's a manageable thing. On your shoulders and on your conscience, surely, is going to be the job losses that come about if we have no deal.

DR: Oh, look, I think the risks are here on all courses that we take at this moment, and I agree that there will be risks, for example, if the EU takes in a no deal scenario a punitive approach and tries to choke the border.

AM: But you can't just blame them.

DR: No, no, but you've got to do two things. One, understand is that really a club you want to throw yourself back into their arms? Or over the long term what would the effect of being tied to the EU with the approach it takes to regulation have on
jobs? And I think that the risks are there short term, they can be managed, they can’t be eliminated. But the far graver risks for our country are the long terms risks of a debilitating attachment to the EU.

AM: Well, let’s remind ourselves what the government itself says would be the effect on growth in the British economy of no deal. And it is, at the worst end of things, nearly about 8.7 per cent shrinkage of the economy, on your plan. On your proposal. Because you are driving us close to no deal. You are, aren’t you?

DR: You’ve got the head of the WTO has said that no deal wouldn’t be a walk in the park, but it wouldn’t be the end of the world either.

AM: Minus eight per cent.

DR: Well, I don’t agree with those assumptions. And I’ve had quite –

AM: Those are your –

DR: No, no, the Treasury and –

AM: And your own officials from your own party.

DR: And I’ve challenged them over the last two or three months, because actually I think the factors that you plug into those assumptions obviously can make a big difference. And actually if we take –

AM: The Chancellor told us, they were his figures.

DR: Of course. But look, the reality is if we have a real grip on the borders delivery route and make sure that in relation to border crossing, particularly Calais-Dover, we could reroute some of that trade as swiftly as possible, whether it’s the Dutch or the Belgian ports that are really keen on that business – if we had a fiscal approach, so in the Treasury a budgetary approach which says, we’ll put rocket boosters up the economy to see it through what I admit will be difficult period, and if at the same time we took the money that we’d otherwise be giving the EU and gave that to support
businesses, we would see that through. And in the long term we would be able to take advantage of the huge opportunities of leaving the EU, which have almost totally been eclipsed by the current narrative.

AM: This is coming from somebody who caused enormous amusement and surprise around the place when you said this about the Calais-Dover crossing.

CLIP:
DR: We are and I hadn’t quite understood the full extent of this, but if you look at the UK and you look at how we trade in goods we’re particularly reliant on the Dover-Calais crossing, and that’s one of the reasons why – and there’s been a lot of controversy about this – but one of the reasons why we’ve wanted to make sure that we have a specific and very proximate relationship with the EU to ensure frictionless trade at the border.

END OF CLIP

AM: Okay, that is kind of embarrassing isn’t it?
DR: No. Shock, horror, Cabinet member takes on big job and says actually they’ve learnt a bit more – No, no, what I said was I hadn’t understood, appreciated quite the full extent of not only the challenges, but also the solutions to it. So to be honest with you, anyone that goes into a big job, if they’re serious and not arrogant or frankly ignorant about it, learns more. And what I’ve learnt is yes, for example, take food. We rely on ten per cent of our food to come through Dover-Calais. Now, that’s a significant challenge. Actually we’ve got 90 per cent of food supply coming from other sources, so actually that’s the way you address the risk and make sure, yes, it’s there but you can manage it.
AM: Let’s return to what’s likely to happen over the next few days, the next week or so. So this goes into the House of Commons in due course and you say it’s going to be voted down, you’d vote against it. It is suggested that what might then happen is we see the markets plunging, the pound plunging, a general sense of crisis and oo-er inside the Tory Party and it goes back to the House of Commons and is voted on again. Is that plausible?

DR: I think it’s very unlikely. But what’s true to say is it would be very uncertain and I think that the biggest risk of no deal is taking a bad deal to the House of Commons. Because I think MPs will look at it and will examine all the costs and the risks and the pros and cons in exactly the way you’ve described, then have to come to a judgement on it.

AM: We’ve had people from other parties suggesting that it is perfectly possible for the Commons to unite around another referendum, and possibly even a general election in due course.

DR: Well, look, the reality is parliament can pass resolutions, but they wouldn’t be legally binding. There’s not the time to pass legislation to demand or direct to government to do anything – there’s certainly not time enough to have legislation for a new referendum. So actually we would end up in a no deal scenario, which is why it’s very important to take the action now which can mitigate, minimise or manage the risk.

AM: Alright. Among all the possibilities going forward, one – we don’t know the answer to this – is the 48 letters going in to challenge the prime minister. You’ve said you would not write a letter yourself. What is your message this morning to those people sitting at home wondering whether to do that?

DR: It’s a total distraction from what we need to do. We need to get Brexit over the line. We need to support our prime minister. I’ve got huge respect for her. I wrote that in my
resignation letter. It’s not flim-flam. I’ve worked with her very closely on Brexit, and I think there’s still the opportunity to get this right. Support the prime minister. But she must also listen and change course on Brexit.

AM: And there are group, we’re told, of five Cabinet ministers inside the Cabinet at the moment trying to persuade her to change direction. She’s going back to Brussels next week. She may indeed change direction. Are you talking to those people? Are you helping them?
DR: Well, if anyone comes and wants to pick my brains I’m happy for them to do it. I was obviously –
AM: And have they?
DR: Oh of – we’ve been talking over the last week intensely and everyone wants to do the right thing and support the prime minister. The problem for me –
AM: So you’re discussing with people like Andrea Leadsom the possibility even at this late stage of tweaking the deal?
DR: Well, look, you know, I only resigned on Thursday morning, so I can’t say I’ve had extensive conversations but we need to talk and be as constructive as I can. The difficulty for me is that I was being asked to go over to Brussels and sign on the dotted line with Michel Barnier on a deal, which as I said, in good conscience I didn’t feel was right for the country.

AM: They’ve stayed inside the Cabinet and the view from them might be that you ran away from the hard decisions and they have stayed to try and keep the ship afloat.
DR: Well, not one of them has said that to me. But of course, as I said, that’s why I answered the question before in the way that I did – I was being asked to go and sign –
AM: Do you think they should resign?
DR: I was being asked to go and sign on the dotted line. And I couldn’t agree to do that.