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INTERVIEW:

LIAM FOX

FORMER DEFENCE SECRETARY

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ANDREW MARR:

And so to Dr Fox. The Sunday Times here has Niall Ferguson, the historian, asking the question against a picture of Margaret Thatcher: Has the West gone wobbly? Is the answer yes?

LIAM FOX:

No, I don't think it has, but I think that given the political fatigue that set in after the long involvement in Iraq - the first time back in 2003 – I think there's a real reticence by politicians to get involved again. I think that is a mistake because if you look at what ISIS represent in terms of threat - a humanitarian immediate threat, the threat of Jihadists coming back to threaten us at home – and, perhaps more potentially lethal, a clash between Saudi and Iran by proxy or directly, you simply can't disaggregate the risks ...

ANDREW MARR:

Absolutely not.

LIAM FOX:

... and we have to recognise that inactivity is not really an option here.

ANDREW MARR:

If Britain decided to come in alongside America, what in practical terms could we offer?

LIAM FOX:

Well if the US is asked to come in, it's likely to be more special forces, better reconnaissance, better intelligence, possibly (as we've heard) surgical air strikes.

ANDREW MARR:

So will we be offering all of those things too?

LIAM FOX:

Well there's nothing that we have in specific assets that the Americans don't have. The Americans might, however, want to use British bases, they might want to share intelligence with us. I think we should be willing to do that because if we allow the situation at the moment to get out of control, the risks are absolutely horrendous.

ANDREW MARR:

I mean the situation is pretty close to being out of control already given where ISIS are, close to Baghdad. If Britain was asked to use British planes in surgical strikes against ISIS, do you think we should do that? Could we do that?

LIAM FOX:

We could. I don't think we would because the Americans have an infinitely greater military capability.

ANDREW MARR:

So we're slightly 'After you, Claude' on all of this?

LIAM FOX:

Well it's I think about political support for the United States. Remember the West is seen as a single entity. There are those who say if we don't get involved, if we hunker down, then we'll be fine. There'll be no backlash against us.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) They won't come after us.

LIAM FOX:

That is utterly, utterly wrong because the Jihadists don't hate us because of what we do. They hate us because of who we are and we can't change that. It's our values and our history that they detest more than anything else.

ANDREW MARR:

And a lot of these Jihadists are coming back to Britain, have arrived already. What can we do about that? Could we take away their passports? Could we say you have chosen the Caliphate. You're no longer British. You can't come back?

LIAM FOX:

Well we can technically take away people's passports ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) While they're out of the country?

LIAM FOX:

... and it's something when they come back, we can remove citizenship. We can do that. We have the security services to ensure that they are watched and that they don't pose a greater threat.

ANDREW MARR:

Not enough perhaps?

LIAM FOX:

Well that's a real question that we're going to have to ask – whether the security services have adequate resources for an increased threat – and that's a question that politicians will have to take into account in judgements on spending allocation, but also to the powers that they have that reflect the increasing need. You've got people at the moment in the light of Snowden saying that the state has too many powers; we

have to restrict the powers of the state. We'd better start to reconsider that.

ANDREW MARR:

What kind of powers should we be giving, in your view, the security services to deal with this threat?

LIAM FOX:

Well the whole areas of intercept, for example, that need to be looked at. But we've got a real debate on it and it's a genuine debate in a democracy between the libertarians who say the state must not get too powerful and pretty much the rest of us who say the state must protect us.

ANDREW MARR:

So more surveillance, more manpower and probably more money as well?

LIAM FOX:

If required. It's the first duty of the state to protect its citizens.

ANDREW MARR:

And to be absolutely clear, if I'm a Jihadi and I've been fighting and having a great time beheading people out in Iraq and in Syria and I come back to the UK – I arrive at Heathrow Airport with my passport – what can in practical terms be done to stop me coming home and spreading my poison here?

LIAM FOX:

Well there are limits to what we can do. In a free society, we have the ability to move

...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) So ultimately I can come back to Cardiff suburbs or wherever?

LIAM FOX:

It may well be possible and we then have to decide what measures are required in terms of state powers and state resources to make sure that you are watched, so that

you don't preve... you don't pose a greater threat to the civilian population.

ANDREW MARR:

I suppose practically we couldn't deport people into ISIS territory because we couldn't get there?

LIAM FOX:

Well it's a real worry. It's a real worry and it's a problem that's going to be with us for a very long time. And at heart it's an ideological battle and we have to realise that we have to win the ideological battle as well, and that takes you into whole areas of diversity in our society and how we deal with that and how we relate it to commonality.

ANDREW MARR:

Do you think we should bring back control orders?

LIAM FOX:

Only if we think it can provide us a positive benefit without some sort of counteracting disincentive to do so.

ANDREW MARR:

Let's turn now to the other great political story, which is David Cameron's fight to stop Mr Juncker becoming Leader of the EU in effect. Now it's clearly a fight that many people in the Conservative Party would agree he has to take on, he has to fight, and yet it's a fight that he's going to lose. How is that going to affect his standing in the party?

LIAM FOX:

Well I think it's been a real pleasure to watch a British Prime Minister do what he thinks is right in Europe rather than taking an utterly pusillanimous approach which we've seen too often in previous governments. If the Juncker agenda is wrong for the people of Europe, including the people of Britain, then the British Prime Minister is right to stand up against it. Now he may not win the battle, but it's so much better to see a Prime Minister willing to fight a battle and take a bloody nose than not fight at

all because to not do so simply gets us on the juggernaut route to ever closer union.

ANDREW MARR:

Absolutely. But a Juncker led EU would presumably not be an EU which is going to give us the kind of big changes to our relationship that we need to stay in?

LIAM FOX:

Well the question is whether the other European countries, who very often privately say that they share our agenda for change, are willing to stand up in public to do so. There has been a sea change in Europe. It's just that the bureaucracy and the European leaders don't seem to have noticed that there were major in-roads made by Eurosceptic and anti-European parties just a few weeks ago in European Elections. Now the question is will they take any notice of the people or will they continue on the same direction?

ANDREW MARR:

What would be the changes to our relationship with the EU that would convince you at the time of a referendum to campaign for us to stay in rather than to leave? What do you need to get?

LIAM FOX:

Well I want us to have a much looser relationship with Europe. If I was to characterise it in one phrase, it would be back to a common market. I want us to see lots of powers coming back to the United Kingdom and other member states.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) End of free movement as far as we're concerned?

LIAM FOX:

I think if you can get free movement to be related just to the labour market, then that's where I'd like to go. I don't believe in ever closer union because the logical end point of ever closer union is union and that's not what I want to see.

ANDREW MARR:

So if David Cameron is unable after the Juncker fight to lose that phrase “ever closer union” from the original Treaty of Rome, if he’s unable to do much about so-called benefit tourism and so forth, then your view would be we should actually leave the EU?

LIAM FOX:

Well the first thing is to win the General Election, so that we’re able to have a referendum on the issue and only a Conservative Government can provide that. Of course a Conservative Government would then have to renegotiate the terms that it was going to put to the people in a referendum.

ANDREW MARR:

So we’re now in this referendum territory. Some people have said that Liam Fox is going to be the man who leads the No Campaign.

LIAM FOX:

That depends entirely on what is in any renegotiation. As I said to you, I’ve made my own position very clear – that I want a much looser relationship. But I also think the Pri...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And if we can’t get that, you’d prefer to be out rather than in?

LIAM FOX:

(over) Well I think the Pri... Being out holds no fear for me, but if we’re able to get a relationship closer to the one that the British people voted for back in 1975 – a looser relationship – then that’s all fine and dandy.

ANDREW MARR:

It sounds like a potential Leader of the No Campaign to me. Liam Fox, thank you very much indeed for joining us today.

INTERVIEW ENDS