ANDREW MARR SHOW
JANUARY 27TH 2019
NICOLA STURGEON, FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND

AM: Nicola Sturgeon, Scottish First Minister and a onetime protégé of Alex Salmond is with me now and because of the danger of prejudicing the trial there isn’t much we can say about this. But Nicola Sturgeon, you’ve known Alex Salmond for a very, very long time, he was a close friend. What was your reaction when you first saw the charges?

NS: Well, the developments of last week were a shock to everyone and there’s absolutely no denying that. But as you say, because charges were brought last week, these are now live criminal proceedings subject to the Contempt of Court Act, so there is not anything that it would be appropriate for me or anybody else for that matter to say at this time. It’s important now that we allow due process to take its place.

AM: I understand that, but can I ask you have Police Scotland spoken to you about this?

NS: Look, I will not comment on any aspect of the police investigation. That’s not a matter of choice necessarily, that is the obligations I, like everybody else, are under to respect due process.

AM: You are able I think to tell me whether you’ve spoken to Police Scotland?

MS: I am not going to comment on any aspect of the police investigation. It would not be appropriate for me to do so.
AM: All right. A political question then. Do you think this affair has any effect whatever on your campaign for another referendum in Scotland? Does it damage the SNP?

NS: No, I don’t think it has an impact on the future political and constitutional direction of Scotland. The case for independence is bigger than any one man. It’s bigger than any one woman. It’s not about individual personalities; it’s about what is best for the country now and in the longer term. It’s about how we put ourselves in the best position to protect our interests and build prosperity and fairness in Scotland, and that’s a case obviously the SNP is in at the leading position in making, but it’s a case that over the last few years has won many converts and the experience of the last two and a half years around Brexit – we face being taken out of the EU against our will, the views of Scotland have been largely disregarded I think has strengthened that case immeasurably and I think it is –

AM: Now you mention the Brexit word, I was wondering when that was going to happen. You’ve been in to see the Prime Minister and you’ve told her that you think there’s a case for another referendum on all of this. What did she say to you?

NS: Well, when I saw her last week we were principally talking about where she was going to go next on Brexit. That is the urgent issue before all of us.

AM: And did she tell you that?

NS: No, not really. I don’t think she has much of a clue herself where she’s going if I can be as blunt as that. It looks to me and you know I think it looks to anybody watching this as if she’s putting all of her eggs in the basket of trying to convince the hardliners and the DUP and the ERG to do what they weren’t
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prepared to do a few weeks ago and back her deal. There’s an air of unreality. There’s almost an air of the Prime Minister and her government being in complete denial about this. I mean yesterday there were reports in the media about how she might be close to getting a majority behind her deal by making a commitment to remove the backstop. Ignoring the reality that the EU have shown no signs of being prepared to agree to that. That’s why I think now Article 50 should be extended, there should be a request made for that and the SNP were the first party to call for that. That is now pressing and urgent and SNP MPs on Tuesday this week will vote for Yvette Cooper’s amendment. We think that request should be made now but nevertheless I think Yvette Cooper’s amendment takes us in the right direction.

AM: But you’ve said in the recent past as far as you’re concerned the right way forward is another referendum on this. Do you accept that there are not the votes for various reasons in the House of Commons for that to happen? So therefore for the time being that’s off the table.

NS: I don’t think it’s off the table. I do accept that as things stand right now there doesn’t appear to be a majority in the House of Commons and that’s because that for reasons that only he can explain or perhaps he can’t explain them, Jeremy Corbyn is fixedly on the fence on this issue. He said he wanted to try to get a General Election, he tried that and failed, so now it seems to me it’s incumbent on Labour to make its position on this clear. If it does so then I do think there would possibly be a majority in the House of Commons, so Labour at the moment are the block to that and I think that’s deeply regrettable.

AM: We may be on the edge before too long, who knows, of another General Election as a result of all of this and it looks at the moment as if Labour will go into that with its current position, of
being as it were a pro-Brexit party, a party that thinks that Brexit must happen. Given that your own views on that could after an election, if there was another hung parliament, could the SNP actually work with Labour now?

NS: Well look, we'll have to wait and see what Labour's position would be. Firstly we have to wait and see if there would be a General Election. It's pretty inexplicable that Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Leader here in Scotland doesn't appear able to say what position on Brexit they would take in a General Election. Look I've always –

AM: Can you give me an answer to my question?

NS: Well I'm trying to but I'm simply recognising the many hypotheticals underlying your question. I've always said, I said it in the 2015 General Election if you recall, I said it in the 2017 General Election that the SNP would want to be part of a progressive alternative to a Conservative government if the arithmetic lent itself to that. That remains the case. But obviously Labour have to be willing to work with the SNP as well as the SNP being willing to work with Labour. And until now the blockage to working together like that has come from the Labour side. But I would always want to do whatever I could as Leader of the SNP to keep the Tories out of Downing Street.

AM: So that sounds like yes to me, you could work with Labour. Can I ask you about a second independence referendum. You have said again and again that this must be resolved, this question, by spring this year. We're not that far away from spring, it may not feel like it but it's coming quite close. If we get a no deal Brexit, if we leave the EU without a deal at the end of March is that the moment you finally say it's time for another independence referendum?
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NS: Well I said once we know which direction this is going in and I hope that will be over the next few weeks – it has to be over the next few weeks – I will set out my views at that time on the best timing for another independence referendum. I think, and let me be clear about this, I think the people of Scotland should have the ability to look again at independence. The material change in circumstances since the last referendum, our experiences over the last two and a half years, not just facing exit from the EU and being taken out of the single market against our will with damaging economic consequences, but our views being ignored, I think make that important. But in terms of the best timing –

AM: If all that is true then surely with a no deal actual exit happening at the end of March that is the time, that is the deadline for you to have made your mind up about this.

NS: I think if you listen carefully to what I’m saying here that is the timeframe in which I will set out my views on that. I don’t know at the moment whether we’ll have no deal or whether the UK will be leaving with a deal or whether Article 50 will be extended, but within that general timeframe I’ve already said that’s when I will set out my views on the best optimal timing for the people of Scotland being able to look again at this issue of whether decisions should be taken here in Scotland or whether we allow decisions to be taken in Westminster with all the damage that’s doing.

AM: Nicola Sturgeon, neither of us know anything about what’s going to happen. Let’s accept that. But in the circumstances, can it be absolutely clear, by the time Britain leaves with no deal, if that’s what happens – it’s quite likely – if that’s what happens you will have made up your mind and declared that it is time now for another referendum on Scottish independence yes?
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NS: Within that timeframe of when the UK is leaving, so if the UK is leaving at the end of March, we don’t yet know whether that will be the case, we don’t know whether it will be with a deal or without a deal, but within that timeframe yes, I think I’ve been pretty clear to that, that’s when I would intend to set out my views on the way forward for Scotland.

AM: That’s your deadline. If by some chance Britain did do another referendum on Brexit and decided to leave – sorry, to stay inside the EU would that mean another Scottish referendum wasn’t necessary?

NS: Look, I’m not going to get taken too far down the road of hypotheticals here. I want to see the UK if possible stay within the EU because even if when Scotland becomes independent it’s in our best interests that the rest of the UK has a close constructive relationship with the EU, preferably that it remains a member of the EU. So that’s why I’ve tried hard to be part of finding solutions for the whole UK. But I don’t want Scotland to be dragged out of the EU with all of the damaging consequences of that against our will. Now as you say I’m not trying to dodge these questions, but there are a number of unknowns and hypotheticals here which is why within the timeframe you set out I will set out my views on the best way forward. But I think it is important to see what unfolds over these next few weeks before I do.

A: Nicola Sturgeon, I think we have shed a tiny little bit of light on one aspect of this immensely complicated business, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

Ends