AM: First of all, why are you banned from America, as you understand it?
NZ: Well, because as the order says, aliens from those countries, includes people whose country of origin would have been Iraq, as it is mine –
AM: You were born in Iraq.
NZ: I was born in Baghdad in Iraq. Last year when the visa-free travel, when it was taken away from dual nationals, the advice to us in the US Embassy was to go for interview. So myself and my wife, my wife and I both had to go and be interviewed, and it was uncomfortable but it was understandable because clearly the United States needed to tighten up its immigration policy, and of course visa restrictions are part of that. And I was granted then a 10-year visa after the interview, as was my wife. Our two sons, our twins, are at Princeton University, so we do need to travel quite a bit to America.

AM: Your sons are at university in America, and you’re a Conservative MP, how does it make you feel that Donald Trump doesn’t want you in America now?
NZ: Gosh, I don’t think I’ve felt discriminated against probably since little school when kids were very cruel, as a young boy coming from Iraq or Kurdish origin. For the first time in my life last night I felt discriminated against. It’s demeaning, it’s sad. One of my sons had a life-threatening illness last year and spent about two months in hospital in Princeton. Wonderful health care in Princeton University Hospital. But we couldn’t have travelled if we were going through the same thing now. And there are many, many other human stories that we’ve been hearing about from the community in the UK, and there are hundreds of thousands of people who were born in Iraq, with a Kurdish or Arab, or any
other ethnic group, who are now British citizens. And you know, I always thought we are equal as British citizens. I’m proud that Stratford-on-Avon, 98 per cent white, voted in Nadhim Zahawi, son of immigrations, an immigrant to this country as their Member of Parliament. And I hope he’ll reconsider this.

AM: And your passport, like my passport, says that Her Majesty’s government will look after us abroad. And so presumably you think it is now down to your government to make representations quite quickly to Donald Trump and the American administration to think again on behalf of British citizens caught by this.

NZ: Well, I’m reassured by my Prime Minister Theresa May’s statement, because she quite clearly says she disagrees with this, she quite clearly says she will make representations on behalf of every citizen. Now, I’m a successful man and a politician, it’s all the people who don’t have the platform that I have, who get stuck in an airport for hours and hours of no fault of their own. They’re British citizens and they should be looked after.

AM: And you made your displeasure clear on your social media platform. You tweeted a wonderful quote of Winston Churchill’s. I think we’ve got it up on the screen. ‘An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.’ Who were you talking about?

NZ: Well, anyone who turns the other way. I don’t think we should look away when President Trump makes a mistake, I think, as his closest allies. Theresa May made it very clear in that brilliant speech to Congress that when she talked about us going after the ideology of Daesh, not just on the battlefield, but the ideology. This plays into their ideology. This is counter-productive. It is –

AM: Flinging petrol on the fire.

ZH: Hugely. Well, just think of all the refugees, put aside those in my position, but the refugees from Syria and elsewhere who America has been a cradle of safety and humanity and care for
them, and freedom, in the past. The message to them today is you’re not welcome. I think that is cruel.

AM: Now, you must have watched, like all of us, Theresa May’s press conference in Turkey, where she was asked three times whether she condemned the American decision and she didn’t reply. How did that make you feel?
NZ: Well, I think my Prime Minister, quite rightly, was being cautious. It was a developing story. I didn’t know the details until very late yesterday. That this would apply to myself and to my wife and I. So I think her being careful is a good thing, but she was also very candid with President Trump, she spoke very candidly and very clearly in that speech to both houses, when she talked about us making this an opportunity to lead the world. And I think even, dare I say it, President Trump can think again on this.

AM: Well, at the moment he is due to come to this country and address both Houses of Parliament, including yourself and many other people maybe who are affected by this ban. Do you think parliament should think again about that?
NZ: Well, I’m hoping he’ll reconsider this position. I think this is hugely discriminatory. I think US law doesn’t allow for discrimination by nationality or religion. So I hope he’ll reconsider this, and it is, as I said, counter-productive to the fight against Daesh, which we’re all fighting together and he wants to defeat. So I hope he will reconsider.

(ends)