DAVID GAUKE

ANDREW MARR SHOW
JANUARY 29th 2017
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AM: The Prime Minister said that it was wrong, this policy. Why is it wrong?
DG: Well, I think it is divisive, and actually Theresa May when she was Home Secretary said this when the policy was, if you like, announced by candidate Trump, that it is divisive. I think there’s all sorts of practical difficulties with it. I have enormous sympathy with those who are affected by it. And obviously there is a particular concern which, as Nadhim was pointing out, has emerged over the course of yesterday of the implications it may have for British nationals, which is of particular concern for us.

AM: He also said, Mr Zahawi, that this would pour petrol on the flames of Muslim extremism and have exactly the opposite result to what Donald Trump wanted. Do you agree with that?
DG: Well, I think there are real risks with it being counter-productive, and the point that, you know, is worth pointing out, we don’t have that policy, we wouldn’t contemplate going down the route of a ban in this way. We have a very different approach to it. So as I say, we disagree with the position that President Trump has set out.

AM: So the question is what happens now, because we have the British nationals engaged and so forth? Are we now going to make urgent representations to defend the interests of British people caught up in this ban?
DG: Yes. As we’ve said, we will make representations where we see that British nationals can be caught up with this. And clearly we have a role to play in terms of representing them and making those representations, and we’ve made the very clear. I think this is an indication of why it’s important that we have got a relationship with the new President. I think it’s worth appreciating
that if we are to have influence, the Americans are an important partner for us on national security and on the economy, and we need to have influence with them.

AM: So what was actually going on, do you think, in that notorious Turkish press conference when she was – and she knows all about this – as you said, as Home Secretary she’s been following this story for a long time, not a great surprise. And then this big announcement comes. Outrage around lots of parts of the world and she can’t feel that she can say anything at all in public about it. Is that simply because we have to make nice to the Americans?

DG: I think, as Nadhim actually I think put his finger on it, that the Prime Minister is not a shoot-from-the-hip type of politician. She wants to see the evidence, she wants to understand precisely what the implications are. She’d been in a series of very lengthy meetings with President Erdogan, and you know, she is someone who wants to see the briefing and understand it and then will respond to that. And I think, you know, there are times where, you know, there’s always pressure to respond within a news cycle and so on. The important thing is we are saying that we disagree with it, we do think it’s wrong.

AM: Isn’t it the case that because of Brexit and after Brexit – I know you were a Remain campaigner, but after Brexit we so need new deals with the Americans, the Turks, the Saudis, the Chinese, that far from being able to stand up and speak truth to power, say what we really think, we now have to be mealy-mouthed as a country?

DG: No, I don’t think that’s right. I think there is scope for us to disagree where it’s right for us to disagree. Sometimes privately, not always publicly, but there is scope for us to disagree as candid friends. But it is the case

AM: But dangerous to grandstand in this new situation?
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DG: Well, I think actually whether we were in this circumstance or not the United States, for example, is a hugely important partner for us for national security, wanting to ensure that the US remain engaged in NATO – put aside Brexit – is a really important objective for us. And the fact that the Prime Minister was able to go to the United States Thursday and Friday to do a press conference with the President and talk about a hundred per cent commitment to NATO, is to our advantage. So I think as a general rule it is always good to engage with countries like the US. But there is a point –

AM: You said for a second there, ‘put aside Brexit,’ let’s not put aside Brexit, let’s come to the legislation if we may, coming to the House of Commons this week. Is that amendable?
DG: Yes, certainly it’s normal.
AM: And the government accept amendments to it?
DG: Well, I would be surprised, but I think there are 70 or so amendments that have been tabled, so there will be an opportunity to debate those. But I mean, I think we have to remember what this legislation is about. It is about triggering Article 50. It wasn’t that long ago, during the referendum campaign, no one was particularly talking about whether there would be a need for legislation. You know, Jeremy Corbyn was saying we should trigger it straight away, you know, no question of legislation at that point. Of course we respect the Supreme Court judgement and there has to be legislation and we’re bringing that forward. But this is simply really about do we respect the result of the referendum.

AM: To give you an example, I mean, we don’t know which amendments will be taken by the Speaker and so on, but there’s a lot of support for guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens in this country, in a sense a parallel question to the Trump refugee ban that we’re talking about. Guaranteeing the rights of individuals, a lot of your fellow Conservative MPs are quite passionate about
that. If there was an amendment supported by the opposition parties and enough Tory MPs to actually go through the House of Commons, that would not be a disaster for the negotiations would it?

DG: Well, we’re clear that we want to guarantee the position of EU nationals who are here. The Prime Minister in her recent speech made it very clear that that was a priority area for her and she would like to progress that as quickly as possible.

AM: So we all agree?

DG: But we do also have to protect the position of UK nationals in the EU. Now, if we could get this issue out the way, protect both EU nationals and UK nationals, you know, we’d love to do that. But we do think we have to bear in mind that you don’t want to deal just with EU nationals here and then find that UK nationals are left in a vulnerable position. I don’t think that would be fair on them. So we want to deal with the two together.

AM: A lot of people will have seen on television those pictures of refugees who because of the Trump ban are now caught in frosty, chilly and very unpleasant refugee camps, nowhere to go, no future. Do you think in these circumstances it might be a generous properly British thing to do to offer some more of them a place in this country?

DG: Well, I think we have to remember what we’re already doing, and we are the biggest financial benefactor to refugee support in that area. You know, we are putting in huge sums of money. I think the US are head, but certainly per capita we’re by far the biggest contributor in this area. I think you know, we have to consider that the position is. It’s very early days on that. But we sometimes, I think, underestimate the contribution that we’re already making in the area in terms of helping refugees, as it’s quite right that we do so.

AM: One last question: we have pulled out of Euratom, this is infuriating a lot of scientists and the nuclear industry as well,
they’ve seen it as a completely incomprehensible decision. Why are we pulling out of Euratom?

DG: Well, Euratom is part of, if you like, the EU essentially. It uses the same EU institutions –

AM: Because it’s got European in front of it.

DG: No, no, it’s more important than that, and it does involve the European Court of Justice and so on. But I think that the important point is that we’ve said what we’ve said but we now need to see if there are ways in terms of the nuclear industry that we can work in a cooperative manner with other countries, and that’s what we will seek to do.

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