

ANDREW MARR SHOW

29<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2019

BORIS JOHNSON, MP

PRIME MINISTER

AM: My first guest this morning is the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, who's sitting here with me. Prime Minister -

BJ: Good morning Andrew.

AM: Good morning. Did you know Jo Cox?

BJ: I don't believe that I ever met her, no, but can I just say on the issue – because I didn't serve in Parliament much during that period, I was, I was running London. But on the issue of threats to MPs, which I think that you've just been discussing with your press review panel, let's be in no doubt that the threats to MPs, the abuse of MPs, particularly female MPs, is absolutely deplorable and something that we do a great deal in Parliament and as a government to try to counteract and to give MPs the security that they deserve. But things, admittedly at the moment, are very tough and there is a great deal of abuse being directed at everybody and it's particularly reprehensible when it seems to be directed at female MPs.

AM: So when Paula Sherriff, the Labour MP, who was a friend of Jo Cox raised the subject of death threats being made against her in the House of Commons, you describe that as 'humbug.'

BJ: Well that's not true. That's not quite right. If I can, can I just explain what I, what I –

AM: I've got the quote here.

BJ: Well you're right that I used that word, but what I was referring to Andrew, and I want to make a very important distinction between that issue of threats and abuse directed at MPs which is totally unacceptable and which we have to prevent, and what I think is the legitimate use of old, tried and trusted metaphors to describe certain parliamentary Acts or indeed events in politics. And if you cannot, if you cannot use a metaphor like

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surrender to describe the surrender Act, then in my view you're impoverishing the language and diminishing parliamentary debate. And that was the point I was making. If I can just explain why I feel so strongly about that –

AM: Can I just break in for a second, can I just break in for one second, because it was very clear what was going on. She said I've had death threats against (you). You described her words as 'humbug.' Humbug means speaking falsely.

BJ: No, no, no.

AM: Do you think that she was speaking falsely in any way?

BJ: No, no, no, of course not.

AM: Do you regret using that word about what she said?

BJ: No, because what I was saying, but what I was saying –

AM: You don't?

BJ: - what I was saying was that I think it is wrong that parliamentarians should be crowded out from using words like surrender.

AM: She wasn't talking about that. She was talking about a death threat to her. Humbug means deceptive words.

BJ: No, no, no, of course and I totally – I'm just trying to beseech you to understand that there two separate things here and I totally get the point that Paula was making about death threats. And I loathe that kind of behaviour. What I'm trying to say, what I'm trying to say, on the surrender - I think it's important for our viewers to understand why the surrender Act is so pernicious, because -

AM: I'm going to come to that later on, I promise you but before we do –

BJ: - because it really is very damaging.

AM: Before we do I want to stick with the real problem of threats against parliamentarians and many other people in public life. You said in the House of Commons, 'that the best way to ensure that every parliamentarian is properly safe is to get Brexit done.' That sounds quite close with, 'agree with me or take the consequences.'

BJ: No. Well, I'm afraid that's a kind of –

AM: Well that's a quote.

BJ: - ridiculous. I mean what I'm saying and I think what most people in this country would agree –

AM: Do you not think you're playing with fire in this?

BJ: - the Brexit discussion has been going on for far too long and it is true that tempers on both sides have now become inflamed, and it's very sad to see this continuing. And the best way to, can I just, the best way to end this –

AM: Let me agree with you about that.

BJ: Well good. Would you agree with this as well -

AM: The country, the country is divided and angry.

BJ: The best way to end this is to get Brexit done on October 31<sup>st</sup> and move the country forwards. And that is what we are going to do.

AM: This is about the tone of the debate. The country is angry and the country is badly divided and you would have thought that a prime minister would be trying to calm things down, but you appear to be trying to whip things up.

BJ: No. Let me, I understand why you say that, but let me try to repeat the, what I think is the important point, Andrew. This has been going on for a long time and people do feel that their vote in 2016 has not been respected and they feel that they're being taken for granted and they feel that their opinions are not being taken seriously. And so what we need to do –

AM: But the language has been very tough from Number 10.

BJ: What we need to do is to move on and the way to do that is to get Brexit done on October 31<sup>st</sup>. And if I can just come back to the accusation –

AM: Let me read something that one of your colleagues and one time friends Amber Rudd said, she said: 'the sort of language I'm afraid we've seen more and more of coming out of Number 10 does incite violence. The casual approach to the safety of MPs and their staff is immoral.' She thinks you are playing with fire.

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BJ: Well, obviously I don't agree with Amber and I must just get back to my key point which is if you look at what the surrender Act does, it would force, and this is its intent, it would enforce, it would force –

AM: I keep saying I'm coming onto that later and I will.

BJ: Ok. But this is, this is the, this is the, but this is the reason why if I may say so, people are so indignant.

AM: Well it's about language, this isn't it? Sorry, it's about language.

BJ: Because that, and I think the reason they are indignant, the reason they are indignant is because they understand that that is what it is trying to do and they don't like that fact being exposed to the wider public but that is the reality.

AM: Let me put to you something else that one of your colleagues told The Times the other day. They said 'that if Brexit wasn't done - by the date you say - there's the risk of a violent popular uprising.' Do you agree with that?

BJ: No.

AM: You don't?

BJ: I think that the best thing for the country and the best thing for people's overall psychological health, would be to get Brexit done. And that's not just I who think that. If you look at, if you look at the, where the public is, where people are, whether they voted Leave or Remain they really think that it's up to Parliament now to get this thing over the line. And that is what we're going to do.

AM: Alright, but that's a slightly different point. I hear you but it's a slightly different point. Out there, as I say again and again, you're a very, very practiced and skilled user of language, if I can put it that way, you know that the words you use, when you talk about 'betrayal,' when people talk about 'traitors,' when people talk about a 'traitor Parliament,' that has effects out there and you

know it has an effect. Do you not accept that you have been very loose and perhaps dangerous in your use of language?

BJ: No, okay, well let's take this on directly because I think it's very important that people understand why I used the term 'surrender' to describe the Act because what it does –

AM: It's a war term. It's a warlike term.

BJ: - it compels the Prime Minister not only to extend – or it would compel, try to compel the Prime Minister not only to write a letter to Brussels extending our membership of the European Union, at a cost of a billion pounds a month and allow the EU to set the conditions by which we remain, it would also allow the EU –

AM: You said you would answer this head on. You're not, you're going back to your original talking point. You're not answering it head on.

BJ: Yes, I am, I'm saying that it is entirely legitimate to use such martial –

AM: Words such as betrayal?

BJ: And let me give you an example. Martial metaphors, military metaphors are very old standard parliamentary practice. I think it was John Major himself when he was in some difficulties as he saw it, said, you know, 'when your back's against the wall it's time to turn around and fight.' To which everybody said, everybody said what have you got against the wall? But it was a slightly peculiar metaphor. But I think you will find the speeches of most politicians for centuries, for centuries have been studied with the use of military metaphor. And surrender, and surrender in this context –

AM: That may be true, but the language of your government right now goes to a different place.

BJ: I don't that's true at all. I don't think that's true at all.

AM: There's a piece all over the front page of the Mail on Sunday talking about your opponents, the people who back the Benn Bill, 'colluding with foreign powers.' That sounds very 1930s to me. There is a darkness about the language which you must know it's there.

BJ: Well I don't agree with that. I think what is happening, if I may say so, is that there is an attempt to conceal the effect of the surrender Act, the Benn Act, by a great cloud of indignation about the use of that term. And unfortunately the Act is intended to make it more difficult for the UK to negotiate.

AM: You're going back to your original talking point again and again and I understand that. Everybody watching understands that. What I'm really asking you, would it not be a big thing –

BJ: The point at issue is whether it's right to use the word surrender.

AM: - would it not be a big generous and helpful thing for you as Prime Minister to say do you know what, I may have gone a bit too far, I want everybody to calm down. Can you not say that?

BJ: Well, I certainly think everybody should calm down and I certainly think –

AM: Including you?

BJ: - I think I've been a model of restraint. But I think everybody should calm down and I think that it's very important – I mean as I say there are two separate –

AM: So you don't regret the use of the word humbug at all when an MP is discussing a death threat made against her?

BJ: I think it is wrong in principle that politicians should be prevented from trying to use –

AM: That's a different thing entirely.

BJ: - words like surrender.

AM: I'm asking you about your word humbug. Not about surrender. Your word humbug when an MP has just described a death threat against her.

BJ: Yes, but the word –

AM: It's very straightforward, everyone can understand it.

BJ: I know and I think what people can also understand, if I may say so, Andrew, is that my use of the word humbug was in the context of people trying to prevent me, us from using the word 'surrender.' And that, do you understand?

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AM: I don't quite understand. It seemed to me that she was talking about something very specific and you answered with a very specific word.

BJ: Well in that case, well in that case, in that case that was a total misunderstanding and I, and that was wrong and I, obviously Paula –

AM: So you admit that was wrong, okay.

BJ: But that, but that was not my intention. My intention was to –

AM: So you can say sorry for the misunderstanding at least?

BJ: I can certainly say sorry for the misunderstanding, because my, absolutely. But my intention was to refuse to be crowded out from using the word surrender to describe the surrender Act. And I hope you've got that. Yes, have you?

AM: Yes. You said right at the beginning of your time in Number 10, you stood on the steps of Number 10 and you said one of my prime interests in doing this job is to reunite the country, bring the country back together again.

BJ: Yes.

AM: And the problem with that is not just the language you have been talking about but the sense that your government is a government entirely, full out, flat out for the 52% and crush the 48%. You're never going to unite the country doing this.

BJ: But I'll just get back to my original point. I don't think – we haven't got a prayer of uniting the country until we get Brexit over the line. That's my crucial point, Andrew. I believe that we've been waiting for three and a half years now to deliver on this result and we've just made a – we've been talking now for about 15 minutes about language and Brexit. What the country wants to hear is what are we doing –

AM: What's going to happen next.

BJ: - for their priorities. And we're announcing –

AM: All we hear is get Brexit done.

BJ: We're announcing today that we're going to be building 40 new hospitals –

AM: I'll come onto that as well.

BJ: 40 new hospitals as part of the biggest investment in hospital infrastructure for a generation. And I have to say that I think that is what the British people want to hear about.

AM: And the British people will hear about it when we get onto it, but before we do –

BJ: And when they hear, Parliament made a huge effort – can I just – can I just complete a point. Parliament made a huge effort to come back early to debate Brexit, fine. But did you actually hear anything in the course of those debates which advanced the store of human knowledge about Brexit? Absolutely not. What Parliament wants to hear and what I think the people of this country want to hear is what we are doing for them on their priorities and that's the NHS, it's beating serious and violent crime, taking knives off the streets –

AM: While you're going through your list here in Manchester, Parliament next week is probably going to have a Vote of No Confidence in you. My question is a very, very strange one. Do you want to win it or do you want to lose it?

BJ: Well you know, Andrew, there was a moment – I mean we've twice asked the Leader of the Opposition to see if he will fulfil his constitutional function and actually try to deprive me of office and form a government. He seems to be curiously reluctant to do so.

AM: Well it may be coming soon now.

BJ: And if it does then let's see. In fact you may have seen the other night I asked MPs on I think not just the Labour Party but all parties to see whether –

AM: Well they've heard you. They've heard you. My question again, is would you actually –

BJ: They looked at their shoes the other night, let's see what they do.

AM: They've heard you now, would you like to lose a Vote of No Confidence because that gives you the election you are burning to fight?

BJ: I think what is definitely true is that the people of this country need to have a Parliament that is devoted solely to their good and

to their interests and they need a Parliament with a clear majority Conservative government to get on with a One Nation agenda. And you've spent a lot of time bashing me for my use of language.

AM: No, no. I'm not bashing you.

BJ: Look at what we are doing as a government.

AM: I'm going to come to all of those things, but that means that you need an election and that means that actually you would quite like to lose a Vote of No Confidence because thanks to the Fixed Term Parliament Act and all the rest of it, that is your short route to an election.

BJ: Well I think the most honourable thing for the Opposition to do would be to fulfil their constitutional function and to agree to have an election. They could do that either under the method you described or under the Fixed Term Parliament Act. And we've offered them both ways forward. And that is the way for us to take the country forward.

AM: In that election we both know it's going to be an election very much about Brexit. There's going to be the Brexit side of the argument, the Leave side and the Remain side. Your problem, one of your electoral problems, is that your side of the argument is divided between the Conservative Party under yourself and the Brexit Party under Nigel Farage. Big two page advert in the Sunday Telegraph today, a very very simple message from them, they want to leave without a deal, get it done. Now can I ask you straight forward, as it were on the record, would you ever do an electoral deal with Nigel Farage?

BJ: No. And there's a good reason for that. And that is that the Conservative Party is the oldest, greatest political party in the world. It's a big broad church and we don't do deals with other parties. And we're going to deliver Brexit, we're going to deliver it on October 31<sup>st</sup>, but we want to concentrate on the priorities of the British people. That's why I'm so proud to be coming on your show this morning to discuss NHS funding, to discuss what we're

doing by the way with northern powerhouse rail. Hooking up Manchester to Leeds –

AM: There's lots to talk about, I know -

BJ: Well you keep saying there's a lot, but I'm, I'm, will you, will you, will you –

AM: Your own slogan says 'get Brexit done' and we're talking about Brexit, that's what we're talking about. It's the central thing that you confront as you know perfectly well.

BJ: And there's a reason why we need to get it done. Obviously there's the opportunities of Brexit, there's the democratic point, people's wishes need to be fulfilled. But there's also the fundamental point that our country now needs to move on. And they feel it deeply and I feel it deeply. This is an amazing country. It has a fantastic future. We can do incredible things with infrastructure spending at the moment because of low interest rates. We are going through the biggest investment in the NHS for a generation. I'm incredibly proud of that. Let's get on with it.

AM: I'll come onto that in a second. We have just been talking about No Deal. You used to say the chances of a No Deal were about a million to one against. Then they narrowly shortened in your view to about 50-50. What is your candid, honest view of the chances of a deal now?

BJ: I think obviously the chances of a deal or No Deal depend very much on the common sense of our friends and partners. It has not been helped by the surrender Act, our chances of getting a deal, I'll be very clear with you.

AM: Or by what's going on in the House of Commons which involves you as well.

BJ: No, I'll be very clear with you. That is not the case. The issue is that in Brussels if they suspect or if they think that there is a realistic chance that the UK can be kept in by any means whatever, beyond the 31<sup>st</sup>, that clearly takes away a lot of our negotiating freedom of manoeuvre. That's obvious.

AM: So is it more likely than not that we're going to have No Deal?

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BJ: I do think, I do think there is a good chance and we're working incredibly hard and I will be – you know I've been having conversations with Brussels and will continue to work tomorrow and in the course of the next few days, right up until October 13<sup>th</sup> to see if we can get this thing over the line. And there is a good chance.

AM: Can we still leave the EU on October 31<sup>st</sup> without a deal?

BJ: Of course we can.

AM: You say of course but the law says something very different. How do you get around the Benn Act? Everyone's scratching their heads about this. I'm going to give you various possibilities about this. It's suggested in today's papers for instance you could use EU law as being superior to British law. That's one idea.

BJ: Look, with great respect, with great respect Andrew, I'm not going to discuss a hypothetical situation that may arise if and when the Benn Act were to come into effect.

AM: Would you use contingency powers? Would you send somebody else to do it?

BJ: I'm sorry to say what we want to do is get a deal and there is no purpose in discussing the hypothetical scenario in which the Benn Act -

AM: Well here's a non-hypothetical question then. Have you spoken to any other EU heads of state and asked them to veto an extension?

BJ: I certainly am not now going to go into the discussions I'm having with other EU heads of state -

AM: Ah, you might have done?

BJ: - about -

AM: Viktor Orban perhaps?

BJ: Look, I'm not going to get into my discussions with any other EU head of state about the negotiations because they're extremely, they're interesting but they're also delicate. But let me answer your, let me answer your question.

AM: There's a much simpler way –

BJ: Perhaps there's an answer I can give to your question that will be useful to viewers, because I think it is certainly true that other EU countries also don't want this thing to keep dragging on. And they don't want the UK to remain in the EU truculent and mutinous and in a limbo and not wishing to cooperate in the way that they would like. They want a good deal. There's the opportunity now to get a good deal. What I would like is for the government to be able to get on and do that deal and we're working very hard. I'm not going to pretend to you that it's going to be easy, but it can be done. And it's a very exciting prospect.

AM: You think they don't all want another extension?

BJ: I think there probably are divided views, but I think there's a strong view, just as there is in this country, there's a strong view across the EU that it's time to move on. And they see also, they see the opportunity now to build a different kind of partnership with the UK. Because I don't think – there's an interesting thing – I don't think they really believe that as it were the UK can now just go back in or a second referendum would somehow solve it. I think they look at what's happening in the –

AM: Too much has happened?

BJ: That's right.

AM: Let's ask you about something else because a short way out of this great dilemma might be that right at the last minute, after the European Council in two weeks' time, you say I said I'd rather die in a ditch than do this surrender document, I am therefore not going to do it. I am going to stand down as Prime Minister. Would you do that?

BJ: No, well look I've, I've, I've undertaken to lead the party and my country at a difficult time and I'm going to continue to do that. I believe it's my responsibility to do that and I think that it's our job to get Brexit done on October 31<sup>st</sup> but to move the country on. And that's what we're discussing at this conference today. And that's why we're investing not just in 14 new hospitals, but as I was saying in northern powerhouse rail, connecting this city to

Leeds and then beyond. We're going to be putting in gigabyte broadband, we're massively accelerating the timetable for gigabyte broadband across the country. The opportunities, the opportunities for this country are huge. What we want to do with infrastructure –

AM: Can I ask you a very straight forward question. Have you apologised to the Queen over the prorogation bog up?

BJ: As you know, Andrew, that's a brilliant question, a typically brilliant question. I'm alas, as you know, forbidden from commenting on my conversations with Her Majesty.

AM: I'm not asking what she said, I'm asking did you apologise? Not asking anything about what she said, that's of course private, but you as Prime Minister – she must have been livid about what happened. Did you apologise to her?

BJ: Well I'm not going to go into my conversations with Her Majesty. But what I can say is that I do think that the judgement was certainly novel and has raised very interesting constitutional questions, and those need to be thought through over quite a long time.

AM: Do you think we need a new constitutional settlement?

BJ: Well, I think that the judgement by the 11 justices was certainly novel and peculiar, in the sense that they went against the Master of the Rolls, the Lord Chief Justice, in extending the remit of the court into what was, I think, obviously a political question. And the consequences of that decision are going to be working their way through for quite some time. Because I think there will – you are now already starting to see a –

AM: We're out of time.

BJ: - as it were, a backlash or people questioning the implications of that decision. And obviously – if I may just – I humbly and sincerely accept it.

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AM: Another issue I might ask you about, another issue I might ask you about –

BJ: I note that when MPs were called back to debate Brexit they didn't really have much to say about the matter.

AM: Another issue I must ask you about is Jennifer Arcuri. I'm not going to be prurient, but can I ask you first of all whether you think that declarations of public interest really matter?

BJ: Yes, I, I, I do –

AM: So let me remind you what you signed. You signed a thing which said, 'holders of public office' – in this case you – 'should act solely in terms of the public interest, they should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their families or their friends.' As she was certainly a friend of yours did you declare that interest?

BJ: Look. What I can tell you is that I am very, very proud of everything that we did in City Hall to promote the public interest and to promote the interests of London. And everything was done in accordance with the code that you have just recited.

AM: So you did declare the interest?

BJ: And everything was done with full propriety.

AM: So you did declare the interest? And you'll be able to say that when you're –

BJ: No, I said that everything was done in accordance with the full –

AM: I asked you a specific question. You have to declare an interest. Did you declare it?

BJ: There was no interest to declare.

AM: She was a friend of yours, she got public money, she got access.

BJ: Let's be absolutely clear, I am very, very proud of everything that we did, and certainly everything that I did, as Mayor of London. And I may say that the current Mayor of London could possibly spend more time investing in police officers than he is investing in press officers and peddling this kind of stuff.

AM: Are you embarrassed about all this stuff? You don't seem embarrassed at all.

BJ: Well, I'll tell you what I reckon is going on. I really think that people can feel that this country is approaching an important moment of choice and we have to get on and we have to deliver Brexit. And I think that there is – on October 31<sup>st</sup>. And there is a large constituency in Parliament and elsewhere who do want to frustrate that objective. And rightly or wrongly, rightly or wrongly, they see me as the person most likely to deliver that objective. And I'm going to get on and do it. And so I think that...

AM: Do you think it's a political attack, based on what you're saying? Can I ask you about another –

BJ: You've got to be realistic if you're in my position. And you've got to expect a lot of shot and shell.

AM: Front page of the Sunday Telegraph, 40 new hospitals, you say. Actually it's six new hospitals over five years.

BJ: That's right.

AM: At £2.7 billion. And the rest is aspiration, it's hope, one day maybe.

BJ: No. There is a long term infrastructure plan for 40 hospitals, and there is going to be seed funding for all 40. Six are going to start immediately: Whipps Cross, Epsom and St Helier, and various others, Princess Alexandra and three others. That is all – that is all going ahead, and I'm incredibly proud of that. But there are then 34 more than are coming down the track. And that is the right thing to do for this country.

AM: Ok. Isn't the real problem in the National Health Service is staffing, and that is – including all those Eastern European nurses going back home already. That is the real problem. You go to hospitals up and down the country, there's a shortage of nurses. In many cases a shortage of doctors. It's not the shiny new

infrastructure we need. We do need that, but we also need the people.

BJ: Yes, and that's why we're going to have an Australian-style points-based system to control our immigration, to make sure that our NHS can attract nurses from around the world. And that's why, I think, by the way, it's crazy for Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party to go for their absolutely uncontrolled immigration approach that they announced last week. I mean, one of the reasons I think it was disappointing that Parliament was called back early was because there were so many extraordinarily bad Labour policies that they, you know, might otherwise have been heard, they've decided that they want a four-day week. Which frankly – a four-day week which would hit the poorest -

AM: This is the Tory Party conference.

BJ: I know, I'm reflecting on last week's one. They've decided they want to abolish all fee-paying schools even though Jeremy Corbyn himself attended one. They want to abolish Ofsted. They want to abolish Ofsted. No, they want to abolish Ofsted -

AM: Let me ask. Let's forget Ofsted. To be honest, Jeremy Corbyn's views of Ofsted are not what we're here to discuss. We're here to discuss the Conservative Party. You have a plan for Brexit. If it doesn't go according to shape is there any chance whatever of bringing back Theresa May's deal in some form, a meaningful vote for the House of Commons, yes or no?

BJ: I think there's a good chance of getting an excellent deal and that's what we're working towards. And I am going to be talking to our European partners about it. But what I can tell you, Andrew, is that under no circumstances will we allow the UK to be trapped in the existing proposal, the arrangements that make sure that we are retained in the European tariff structure, retained in the customs union, retained in the single market with no say on those arrangements. We must get rid of the so-called backstop. And that's what I've always said and that is what we're going to do. And we're going to come out on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

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AM: A great flow of passionate language but you didn't say no, you didn't say no.

BJ: No, we're certainly not bringing back Theresa – forgive me, we're not bringing back the current withdrawal agreement. Absolutely -

AM: Under any circumstances, alright. Prime Minister, thank you very much indeed.

BJ: - no way. What we want to do is come out on October 31<sup>st</sup> and deliver on a fantastic domestic agenda.

AM: And we must come out now. Thank you very much indeed for talking to us, Prime Minister.

(ends)