

## [Transcript] Leading / 39. Theresa May: Donald Trump, David Cameron, and 'Brexit means Brexit' (Part 2)

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And me, Alistair Campbell.

And we're very, very lucky, very generously. Prime Minister Theresa May has given us a second go where we're going to be getting more into talking about her time in government. And those of you who are lucky enough to listen to the first episode will have seen a lot of our conversations around actually the business of politics, her values, something about her childhood, a lot about public service. But now we're getting into the nub of the matter. And on this, I'm going to hand over to Alistair.

So tell us, the circumstances are becoming Prime Minister. How do you describe them?

Well, it was a different experience from some, although not all. Of course, what had happened was we'd had the referendum on Brexit and David Cameron came virtually straight out and said that he was going to resign.

Do you think he should have stayed?

I mean, at the time, I thought he should have stayed. I think looking back, probably, he's right. I think he said that it would have been difficult for him to stay.

It was hard enough for you.

Well, it was, but at least it was somebody coming in, rather than the person who'd called for the referendum.

Just to interrupt on that, just again, to explain to international listeners.

So what had happened is David Cameron had called the Brexit referendum.

Brexit obviously won 52-48. He'd campaigned on the remain side as did you and me and obviously Alistair. So there was a possibility for him to stay on as Prime Minister and try to implement a Brexit deal. His sense was that probably he wouldn't be trusted by the people who'd voted Brexit to negotiate the remainder. I mean, are we what we're hearing in a sense that he'd anticipated, to some extent, some of the problems that you were going to face, there was a fundamental structural challenge about somebody who voted remain negotiating a Brexit deal? Well, I think it took some time for me to perhaps come to the view that I now have that some of those who were certainly in parliament who were Brexiteers found it difficult to comprehend that a remainder could deliver a Brexit deal. I won't go into the details of deals and so forth, but I think there was that sort of, for some, there was just that fundamental feeling that it ought to be a Brexiteer. And I guess David probably felt a bit of that. I felt that it should be possible because it was so close, as you say, Rory 52-48. It had to be a Brexit deal that actually recognised the concerns of the remainers. And therefore, you had to bring both sides together and try and find a way of moving forward together. But your rhetoric at the time was very much leaning towards the 52. Brexit means Brexit, red, white and blue, citizen of nowhere. That kind of rhetoric was that you trying to say to the Brexiteers, however I voted, this is now what I am going to do, regardless of what you think of my beliefs. Was that a deliberate tactic? Citizen of nowhere was actually something slightly different. It wasn't about Brexit. But what I said when I said Brexit means Brexit was to get over my absolutely passionate belief that regardless of the fact that it was a close vote, we had to deliver on where the majority had voted.

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And that's why I find it so difficult where there were people wanting second referendums and so forth. And I'd always taken this view. So in previous years, when within the European Union, some countries had a treaty changes, had had referendums, they'd come out against the changes. And basically, the politicians have gone, oh, they're good people. You really don't know what you're doing. They had made changes though. Tweaks, in order to be able to go back and say there's a slight change, I think. And that really made me very frustrated. It comes through the book. I get the feeling that you're much angrier with John Burko, European politicians, people like me who were doing the second referendum campaign, than you are with people that I see as the real abusers of power, Johnson who lied, Cambridge Analytica, the Russians, all the stuff that we just turned a blind eye to, that I, if you like, couldn't let go and probably still can't let go. Well, it's not that I'm angrier with one group or another. But that's how it comes over in the book. Well, I think absolutely fundamentally that it was important to deliver Brexit because 52% of the population had voted for it. And when I look back at the referendum, you mentioned Boris Johnson as an individual, obviously who led the Brexit campaign. I don't see the vote so much as being about an individual or even about a figure on the side of a bus. And that was obviously a figure that it was claimed that the extra money could go in the NHS if we left. It was a lie. We talked about values and standards in public life. It was a lie. As it happens, when I put the extra money into the NHS, I think it was, I'm writing, saying it was slightly more than was on the figure of the, on the side of the bus. Different, different, different, yeah. We won't go there. I did believe fundamentally that we should be delivering Brexit. I didn't see the referendum about an individual or, as I say, a particular figure. I think there was something more fundamental behind the referendum. Yes, it was about leaving the European Union, a simple thing on the face of it. I think for a lot of people in the country, they felt left behind. They felt the politicians weren't listening to them and they wanted change. And the referendum, the Brexit vote, was a much a vote for change as it was about the EU. So I was very much with you very strongly through that and supporting your deal very strongly. And then at the very last stage, trying to push through a customs union as a compromise and see if we could reach out to Labour. I mean, I found it a very painful experience. And a lot of what you wrote, I resonate with. Obviously, from my point of view, I have a strong contempt for the hard Brexit here. I think the idea of a no-deal Brexit was grossly irresponsible. And I felt that Boris Johnson and others massively underestimated what the consequences of threatening a no-deal Brexit would be or what it would be to drop off the edge of a cliff without a transition, etc. But I also agree with you that I found it intensely frustrating that one of the reasons we couldn't get the votes through was that Remainers refused to believe that a soft Brexit was the best option on the table and that if they rejected the kind of Brexit that you were pushing for, which was a sort of customs union Brexit, we'd end up in a worse Brexit. They still believed that if they could defeat everything, they'd get a second referendum or something. And when I look at the numbers, that final customs union vote, we lost by... June 13.

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Well, no, I mean, there was a big loss at the beginning, but the final customs union vote, we lost by one MP abstaining and one voting against. And I just remember looking at horror at Remain voting colleagues walking into the same lobby as Marc Francois and the other kind of hard Spartan Brexiteers to destroy a moderate Brexit. I mean, it seemed like a sort of moment of madness. Well, it became, it was, if you like, in microcosm, what we've been, what we have talked about previously in terms of world politics, it became so polarized. And it was almost, you had to be on the Brexiteer side, it was 100% the hardest possible Brexit. And on the Remainer side, it was 100% no Brexit. That's where it sort of came to in the end. And that's the problem. You couldn't get people trying to find the center ground, if you like. And it was one of my deep frustrations was everybody kept talking about the past in a sense. So the Brexiteers were talking about how much we should be giving up. We don't want this from the EU. We don't want that from the EU. Some of the Remainers on the other side were talking about how much can we keep. My point was, which I obviously didn't get across as well as I'd hoped, is we shouldn't be looking at it like that. We should be saying, what is our future relationship? How do we build a future relationship that is going to be the best for the UK? And actually, I thought that one that would be the best for the UK in economic terms would also actually be the best for the EU. Can I take one of the most mysterious bits, which is the question of the votes of the DUP? So the Unionist side in Northern Ireland were incredibly important in these final votes because they were actually the swing vote. If they'd come across, some of this legislation could have got through. And on the face of it, it seemed to me obvious that they shouldn't go with the Boris Johnson Brexit. Boris Johnson Hard Brexit was going to put borders in the Irish Sea. It was going to cause huge problems for the politics in Northern Ireland. And yet, for some astonishing reason, they ultimately sided with Boris Johnson against you. And it didn't matter how much time I spent talking to them, or David Lidington spent talking to them, or you presumably spent talking to them. What was going on there? What's your reading of why they believed his lies like the public did? Did they really believe him? Because I remember having a conversation with Ian Pasey Jr. about this, where I said, surely you can't believe Boris Johnson. He said, oh, no, we know Boris Johnson of old. And yet, they still stuck on his side. What was going on? It was a paradox because often, they would say to me, when I was putting the deal to them, which would have involved us legislating to help ensure that there wasn't the border down the Irish Sea, they would say, oh, well, that's only going to be national legislation. We can't trust who might come after you. Well, hey, you know, they made the false move, if you like, in relation to that. There was a point where they were coming round and we were, you know, had we been able to have that debate, which at that point in time, on the deal, which the Speaker John Burko then said, we couldn't put that motion to the Commons. And we were in sort of two to three days away from the DUP saying, yes, we're going to support this, which would have brought a lot of conservative colleagues behind us, and might then have brought, I don't know, but might have brought some of Labour if they saw we were going to win the vote. But we lost it as a result of that decision that we couldn't put that motion to the House. One of the things that drove the DUP is I think they like, if possible, to work as a collective to work together and never to have anybody voting a different way, and therefore were driven by whoever was the most extreme, if you like,

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with in their number. Do you not think that when we talk about, to go back to your book, *The Abuse of Power*, that in a way, so you become Prime Minister, because of David Cameron losing the referendum, you then, because you're so far ahead in the polls, caught an election which didn't go according to plan. And then as a result of that, you have to do a deal with the DUP to stay afloat in Parliament. Is it not fair to think that's a bit of an abuse of power, particularly in the DUP, who I've had many, many deals with over the years, are playing very hardball

and fighting very, very hard for their interests as a minority in Parliament, as opposed to the broader national interest? Well, I think, I mean, the question was, did we want to have aimed to have a degree of stability in Parliament in terms of getting government votes through, hence the confidence and supply agreement. So we weren't obviously in coalition with them, but there were certain subjects on which they had agreed that they would support, so that we could get budgets through and so forth. And that's about trying to ensure that government can operate. And that's why we looked for that agreement with them. And I still think it was the right thing to do. I mean, I think it was unfortunate in the Brexit debate that the only other Northern Ireland politician in a Northern Ireland elected MP was Sylvia Herman, who tried her best. She's a wonderful woman. She kept the argument going about what was actually happening,

one would have a negative or positive impact on Northern Ireland. And she did her best, but of course, the numbers were with the DUP. Let's take a step back for a second from Brexit.

So we've touched on George Osborne, David Cameron, their rise in their party.

So what did you actually make of them? Yes, I suppose the thing, I mean, the thing about David was there was just this sense in the party when he came into Parliament that he was always going to be a leader and a prime minister. And I'm not quite sure where that, where that arose.

My first experience of David, actually, was when I was fighting the barking by-election.

And they did this thing, there was three of us fighting by-elections at the time, including Philip Hammond in Newham. And they did a mock press conference and some of the spads,

and he was a spad to Michael Howard, came in and was, I had never met David before.

He sat there and asked me this really awkward question. And I remember saying after us, who was that? And it was David Cameron. Was that your first encounter?

That was my first encounter with him. Did you spot something then?

No, other than he was really awkward in the question. He asked me, one of the things that you don't write about in the book, but I felt, and one of the reasons that I felt

happier with you as Prime Minister than with David Cameron is my experience as those first six years,

2010 to 2016 that I was in Parliament, was I did at times feel the word I kept coming back to was a lack of seriousness. I felt that things were quite slick. They were quite well communicated, but I often really struggled to get the Prime Minister at the time to really focus on policy details. Now, maybe it'd just be me. Maybe I was just sort of an irritating pushy back bench or trying to talk about policy, but I did feel when you came in that there was more a sense that you were trying to put around the cabinet table people who you wanted to be running these farms. You wanted to have more earnest, serious conversations. Do you recognize any change

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of tone with your government? I mean, I hope that, I mean, we were slightly talking about this earlier in terms of the cult of celebrity and so forth. But for me, politics is a very serious business. It is a job, but it is a job which is of service, and you're actually making decisions that affect people's lives. So you need to do that seriously and perhaps pay less attention, I suppose, in my sense, less attention to what's going to hit the media than in what is actually going to have a real impact. And I think that's not always the case.

And why did you not become sort of more, I mean, it's rather interesting because you would have thought that you could have become quite bitter and sort of unreconciled to politics in the world. And you could be simply saying, you know, the whole thing's been wrecked by populism and the media and polarization, and I don't want to have to do with it. Instead of which, you're actually saying, no, I rather do believe in the system and I'm staying and I'm going to be a good constituency MP and I believe in parliament, I believe in the system we need to bring better people. What do you think it is in your character that allowed you to see these very strong negatives? I mean, your book is terrifying as an account of what's wrong in the British state and yet come out at the end of it saying, I still want to encourage 18 euros to go into politics, I'm proud of parliament, I'm going to stand again in the election. How do you balance those things? Gosh, that, I think, I suppose my instant answer to that would be, it's because I believe in people and I believe in the possibility of people being different. And I'm hopeful, I think, as we were saying earlier, I think we have to work at this, I think we have to work to encourage a wider variety of people to come into politics and to see politics as a career and as a way forward for them. And I look around and there are some really good people in politics who are really genuinely trying to make the country

a better place. And ultimately, in some senses, the world a better place. So I suppose it's a belief in people, ultimately, that means that I think that all is not lost.

As Rory said, you're standing again. Can you honestly, hand on heart, say that after all we've seen in recent years, that the Conservative party deserves to be re-elected into government? Can you honestly say that? Because of my fundamental beliefs in what conservatism is about, yes, I can say that, and I will be working hard to make sure that we are re-elected. Right, okay. So is it happy we're getting on so well?

Oh, come on, Alastair, you didn't expect me to come on this and suddenly say, oh, I think it should be Labour. Of course not. The fundamental differences between us are such that I still believe. You see, I think conservatism is about giving people a sense of security, but also freedom and opportunity. I believe in that as well.

Then why are you in the Labour Party? Yes, I believe in the Labour Party as well.

Look, if you said you didn't want to list the prime ministers, but David Cameron, I could look at him and think, yeah, well, he looks the part, sounds the part, doesn't look like a terrible human being. I can say exactly the same about you, but I can't say that about what's followed. And I think that a combination, if you put together austerity, Brexit, Johnson, who I think has been, and I think you're very soft on Johnson in the book, I have to say, and then Liz Truss and what she's done. And now Sunak inventing policies about taxes on meat and seven bins and all this populist nonsense he's doing and the state of the economy. I think you're going to have a fight on your hands. I'm pretty sure you're going to win your seat.



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It's, I mean, look, the next election is not going to be easy on either side.

You think the truth deserves to win?

I do think we deserve to win, but it's not going to be easy for us because, I mean, you can see the polls. I mean, I think they're narrowing a bit, the most recent ones. But if you look at that, and we've been in a long time, but on the Labour Party side, you've got an awful lot of seats to win if the Labour Party is going to get into government.

Absolutely.

I think we should take a break back in a minute.

I'd love to take us back to the fundamentals. So you had watched David Cameron and George Osborne. You'd sat in their cabinet for years, watching them around the table.

You'd watched Tony Blair. You'd watched Gordon Brown. What was going on in your head during those periods? What did you learn that was positive and negative about governing and leading from these three previous Prime Ministers that you'd seen? Give us positive first, then I'll come to you on the negative. What did you learn positively from Blair Brown and Cameron? It's interesting because my first thought was about a negative rather than a positive.

I think one of the things I found difficult, and obviously I was Home Secretary under David, but on Opposition Front Bench when Tony and Gordon were in power, one of the things I found difficult was a sense that the first thing you had to consider was what the media headline was going to be. And I'm sorry to say this, Alistair, because obviously you were there helping to create the media headlines for Tony. It's a bit of a caricature of that. It's a bit of a myth. It's a bit of an abandonment. Carry on. And also, that was your job. I think my job was more to help Tony Blair formulate strategy than execute strategy, and part of that was managing the media. I honestly don't think it was the main problem. I think there are a number of journalists who might argue with you. Yeah, but they're not as important as they think. The public are important.

Anyway, so to come back to it, so your sense was that their first question was about the headline. The sense that the politics was going in that direction, that it was as much about communication and whether or not you got the headline rather than the substance of the issue.

Now, obviously I served in David Cameron's government. We dealt with an awful lot of really substantive issues, and I like to think I tried to address some of, obviously within the home office, but politics was going in that direction. Yeah, and it was a culture that I recognized. I remember with Liz Truss coming in as this is my first baby job as a minister. I was the environment minister, and she was the Secretary of State in DEFRA. And she said to me, as soon as I arrived, Rory, I want you to produce a 10-point plan on the National Park. So I said, oh, terrific. I'll get this Chief Executive of the National Parks. Few weeks' time, we'll have a lovely plan for you. And she said, no, I wanted in three days' time.

I wanted on Friday for the Daily Telegraph. We never did that.

And I said, you know, Secretary of State, I just ran a chance to talk to the Chief Executive before we produced a 10-point plan. She said, come on, Rory, I can write it for you already, you know, get more young people into nature, connect the cities with nature, et cetera. Seven points.

So I wrote it for you. Sure enough, on Friday, bang, there it was, you know, Secretary of State, seven point plan for the National Park. My conclusion from that is that it wasn't really policy. It was a press release, masquerading as policy.

But, Rory, can I just jump into both of you? I honestly think that Cameron Osborne

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learnt the wrong lessons about Tony Blair. I think they saw that. That's what they saw. And what they kept underestimating was actually his seriousness about long-term strategy. I really do think they've got that wrong. And I think it's one of the reasons why they couldn't adapt to him at all. You like Gordon more than Tony, don't you? Well, I think in a sense, you know, look, Gordon and I are both the children. Some daughter of the Mans. Exactly. There you are. There's that.

And I think probably... Which for internationalists mean both their fathers were priests. But I think also in terms of, you know, seriousness, it was perhaps more a sense of, as both people who get really frustrated about some of the sort of responses to politicians about how do you feel about something? How do you, you know, there's an issue there that needs to be addressed. I think there's a similarity of a person in that sense. Yeah. Tell us a little bit more about this question of headlines. So just sort of develop this idea of press release. Just do that, it's like we're off even more. No, it's forget about you and Tony Blair. This general theme of press release, mass grading is policy. Tell us a little bit about how it works and practice and why it's dangerous. I think it can be dangerous because it in a sense helps to fuel the populism and polarization of politics that we see today. And it tends to encourage the thinking that there are easy answers to what are often very complex problems. And so that's why I think, you know, there's a problem there where what you're looking for is the headline. You may have an issue that you're dealing with and want to comment on that and get a headline out of that. But the issue comes first. And it must be awfully difficult to strike the balance, you know, my great hero in government was my boss, David Gork. And David was wonderful at sitting down with civil servants and genuinely seeming to listen to the problems and come up with a sort of reasonable solution. And this is a master of work. But I guess in some ways, he was less successful politically than my other three bosses who were Liz Truss, Pretty Patel, and Boris Johnson in getting the media headlines. Is there a sort of binary choice? I mean, are you sort of condemned to either be kind of serious, but not hugely popular or get the media headlines and not be serious? Or are the politicians you've come across who are able to navigate this? Tony Blair. I knew he was going to say that. I knew it. It was going to say Tony Blair. It's so obvious. I have to confess, I'm going to have to do this, Alistair, because you say that Tony Blair was a long term strategist. I didn't see much long term strategy in Tony Blair. Just take Northern Ireland. Take that alone. That was a long term strategy. Take education reform. Which I might say, the work on Northern Ireland started by John Major.

I agree and I acknowledge that. And you're being tribal too.

I'm not. I'm just saying, I think your party has subpaid a large price.

I'm not moving on because I've got one. I've got one.

Can I just give an example of a politician maybe outside the UK?

Well, I don't think it's an either or, Rory. I think you can be a serious politician and still make sure that you're getting the media headlines.

Partly that's if you're the serious politician, it's about who you have around you who can help you to generate that sort of sense of the media headline.

And who did you see either in British or international politics who thought almost got that balanced right? Oh, goodness me. Angela Merkel, for example.

Angela Merkel, would you care about the media?

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Or Macron? Do you think they were?

Macron was.

Yes, Macron, who was serious but had a good Jacindor at Ardern?

Right, okay.

I wasn't going to raise this, Theresa. I wasn't going to raise it until you two launched this full frontal assault on the most successful government in modern times.

When you stood up...

There is no money left. Remember that. The most successful government you've ever...

Oh, you say, but twice you mentioned it.

As you mentioned, it was a terrible mistake that when a guy's trying to be friendly to an incoming chief secretary, he's paid a very heavy price.

When you said that when you were talking about the Human Rights Act and you said that somebody had been given leave to stay because they had a cat, that was not true.

No, initially, it was true in the first case.

It was true.

It was.

There was a court case written for headline.

No, it was not. It was not. The court...

A case went to court and somebody was allowed to stay because of the cat.

No.

Somebody was allowed to say who had a cat.

Okay, I'm going to intervene here.

So let's take us back to...

You're sitting there as a senior shadow minister.

You're a cabinet minister.

And we're looking at what you're learning about politics during that very, very long period.

I guess, you know, 20-year period where you're watching senior politicians.

We've talked a little bit about the negatives.

And the big negative you brought out was this sense of press release, mass grading as policy.

What are the sort of positive skills that you began to learn about politics?

You were teaching politics to a young person.

What would you say that period taught you about what made a good or a bad politician before you became prime minister?

Well, I think what makes a good politician, first of all,

is you've got to have a set of values that you yourself are operating to.

I think you mustn't allow yourself just to be blown by the wind according to what appears to be the issue that people are most concerned about.

Sometimes it's right.

Sometimes something comes up that you do have to address.

But you've got to be able to know what your aims are.

And did it take you some time to get there?

I mean, was there a sense that you got more confident with that as time went on?

I think more confident, probably.



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Yes, yes, as time went on.

And more confident at saying, no, I went stand for this.

This is what I want to do.

I think so, yes.

And I think the other thing I would say to somebody who wants to be in politics is, if you're going to become a member of parliament, the importance of being that member of parliament, when you become a minister, you're a team with your civil servants.

You are all working to deliver government policy.

And what you must do is make sure that you pay the attention to the detail.

You know, you're going to be responsible for this.

You need to make sure that you can really put hand on heart and say,

I think this is going to work.

Now, sometimes you do something that you think is going to work, and then unintended consequences you find it doesn't.

But you've got to be able to feel that you've interrogated an issue and a policy until you are satisfied that it's the right thing to do.

Can we turn a little bit to some of the international element of the job of prime minister, which is a massive part of it.

I mentioned misogyny earlier.

Do you think Trump's view of you and Merkel was driven in part by a belief that women shouldn't really be in these very, very top jobs?

I honestly don't know.

If I'm honest, I never understood his approach to Germany and Angela Merkel, who seemed to any opportunity in an international environment.

I mean, I remember sitting at an event at NATO suddenly sort of go off on having a go at Angela Merkel.

And I could never really understand what it was that lay behind that.

Was it more personal than it was with you, do you think?

With you as well, he didn't show much.

I remember watching a press conference you did.

I think it was at Checkers.

And there was a sort of total lack of respect there.

Did you feel that?

Well, I think it was probably just as much the sense of him and his...

I think he was somebody who was more about him than he was about anybody else.

For sure.

For sure.

And therefore, the fact that you were another world leader standing next to him was sort of almost irrelevant.

He wanted to almost rule the roost.

How much do you worry?

Because you're quite negative about him,

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but you're also quite negative about Biden in relation to Afghanistan in particular, which I do understand.

We've talked about that a lot.

And I agree with that strongly.

Yeah.

But how much do you worry that if Trump were to come back as president, and he's currently the bookie's favorite, by the way, that actually that...

We talked earlier about the threat to democracy, that really does become a profound threat to democracy.

I mean, the thing, the characteristic I would cite about his presidency was the uncertainty.

This sense that you never quite knew what decisions were going to be taken.

Even when you were in the room with him.

Even when you were in the room with him.

And I think the first leader to go and see him after he'd been inaugurated.

And the aim of that was to get him to make a positive statement about NATO, because he'd been a lukewarm at best about NATO and America's role in NATO.

And we had the meeting.

And normally what happens is, obviously, there's been some pre-work among your officials.

You have the meeting, you agree, you go into the press conference, you know what's going to be said.

When I walked into that press conference,

I didn't know whether or not he was going to say what I thought he was going to say, i.e. that he supported NATO.

In fact, he did.

But there was always that degree of uncertainty, which I think is problematic.

I remember this was very striking because British foreign policy had been very aligned to US foreign policy since the Second World War.

I remember as a young diplomat asking an older ambassador what our policy on an issue should be.

And he said, find out what the Americans are doing and do a little bit less.

It was the kind of cliché of the 90s.

But when Donald Trump came in, that became very, very problematic.

I mean, I remember I was invited to attend something on Crimea and suddenly finding that the British government was uncertain which way the Americans were going to move for the first time in sort of 70 years.

And therefore, having for the first time to think, well, what do we do if he changes 180 degrees?

We've got to change 180 degrees to follow.

Or are we going to try to continue on this line?

And I guess maybe with Angela Merkel,

he sensed that she was somebody who probably would continue on her line and wouldn't follow the direction that he wanted to move the U.S.

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There was something deeply personal going on there.  
That first meeting at the White House was extraordinary.  
He was so rude and even by his standards, he was utterly obnoxious.  
And as I say, I genuinely don't know what lay behind that.  
But she did come under more attack from him than any of the rest of us.  
So I don't think it was just misogyny, which was your question, Alistair.  
I think there was probably something else, but I don't know what.  
But just on this foreign policy point.  
So this question of how the U.K. relates to the U.S. and foreign policy,  
what happens if you get a U.S. president who suddenly changes course  
in the extent to which U.K. foreign policy then has to react to that move?  
Yes. I mean, I think slightly worried by your description of what the elder  
ambassador said to you, because we should have our own foreign policy.  
It might happen that it is very closely aligned to the American foreign policy.  
But we have to be able to understand what we believe and what we think,  
and therefore the direction we want to go.  
If all you're doing is saying, well, let's just follow them,  
then you do have difficulty.  
Should I? You absolutely need to know where the U.K. stands on any particular aspect.  
Do you regret giving him what he clearly saw as a massive honor of the state visit  
on that very, very first meeting shortly after he became president?  
Don't you think you should have sort of held on to that for a while?  
Well, look, this is the U.K. in the United States.  
Regardless of the personality, he's the leader of the free world.  
And I think that it was important to, in a sense, reach out in that way,  
and partly about ensuring the relationship between the U.K. and the U.S.  
So you felt you had to do it?  
I think, yes.  
And let's talk about another major foreign policy moment in your premiership was Salisbury.  
And again, to remind us, Salisbury was where the Russian military intelligence service  
attempted to assassinate a Russian intelligence officer who defected to Britain in an attack  
in Salisbury that killed innocent civilians.  
Just give us a bit of a sense of... I'm not going to ask you how you felt, okay?  
But just talk us through what happened when you first heard, what your first reaction was,  
what you then had to do, and how you saw that whole thing pan out.  
And of course, I do write about this in the book, but it is... I mean, I remember I was sort of sat  
down by my private secretary who dealt with home affairs and told about this couple who'd  
been found on this part bench in Salisbury. And there was a bit of concern about their  
state of health, obviously. But it was sort of... It might be perfectly innocent,  
was the sort of first message. It might be perfectly innocent. Then, of course,  
comes clear that he was a former Russian intelligence officer.  
And therefore, you start to think, well, hang on a minute, this has probably got more to it.  
Then the recognition that it was the use of a chemical weapon,

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Novichok on the streets of a UK city. Thereafter, of course, it's all about how much you're able to say to... Making statements to parliament, how much you're able to say to parliament. Everybody is clamouring to know as much as possible. And that's when it's quite difficult in government, because sometimes you just have to be restrained on what you're saying for a variety of reasons. Different reasons, because presumably, you start getting information quite quickly that suggests strongly that Russian military intelligence are involved. And you begin seeing this very impressive police work that tracks the perpetrators. But there's presumably a moment where you're 90% sure, but not 100% sure. And you're worried that if you come out and make a very clear statement, and then it turns out that something's gone wrong. But even when you're 90, you're aware of the consequences that you're then going to have to address.

Yes, yes. I think it's one of the challenges is resisting the temptation to try to respond to this clamour for information right up front. And knowing the point at which you can give people information. I was very clear, and indeed the UK system was very clear, that we needed to have the evidence, because we were going to be wanting to persuade other countries to follow us in taking action on the Russians, as we did. It was the biggest ever expulsion of Russian intelligence officers across the world. We won the votes in the OPCW. That was because we were able to sit countries down and take them through the evidence that we had on this. So it was important that we didn't say too much until we could back that up.

You sat there with a lot of these world leaders, and sometimes you're capable of being quite patient and quiet and letting other people talk. What did you notice by sitting and listening and watching some of the other world leaders, the Putin's, the Trump's? I don't really met Berlusconi, but these different people operate. What do you think you might have noticed about them that you wouldn't have noticed if you yourself had been a noisy man?

Goodness me. First thing I would say is I did not meet Berlusconi, and probably I'm grateful that I did not meet Berlusconi. I did at many times. You're giving me a watch.

We won't go there, Alastair. No, I didn't keep it. Don't worry.

I think one of the lessons is that it is about this sense of speaking when you have something to say. Okay, there are international fora where it's X-speaks and then you speak and then somebody else speaks and so forth, but it's that sense of not just piling in there for the sake of it. And I think that is a female male thing. Men will often want to be showing that they've got something. They want to say this, whereas women are more willing perhaps to sit back and listen and judge the point at which we intervene in these debates. I think learning that actually if you pile in from the beginning, that doesn't necessarily make people respect you.

We've talked a little bit about my old boss. Let me ask you this question.

Who do you think was the better Prime Minister of the United Kingdom? Tony Blair, Boris Johnson or Liz Truth? I would like to think and I would hope that in the number of Prime Ministers that we've had over recent years that I actually did my best to make a good fist of it. That's Tony Blair then.

You think I like Tony Blair?

No, I'm saying that you're not defending Boris Johnson or Liz Truth.

Okay, Boris Johnson, force for good or not?

Boris had significant qualities. He has significant qualities. He's charismatic. He's able to communicate well with people, but I try not to look at individuals.

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He's had a massive impact on this country. You cannot argue it's been for good.

I look at the issues and there are a number of issues on which I disagreed with Boris and I've made that clear in the House of Commons from time to time.

I'm going to come in my final question. One of the things that strikes me is you are surprisingly lacking in bitterness. I mean, your experience was absolutely brutal. You tried to get a moderate compromise Brexit deal through and I think you've been vindicated because we ended up with a harder

nasty Brexit, but you were unable to persuade members of your own party, members of the Labour Party, so you would have been deeply disappointed in that. You were betrayed by intimate colleagues.

I found it difficult enough trying to adjust to people who were deserting you and going over to Boris Johnson. I wasn't Prime Minister. I still traumatized by some of these people that were some of your great champions and going over and giving hostage videos and dorsing the other side. You then found yourself having to watch other Prime Ministers takeover who you were opposed to in policy terms and in values terms. Yet somehow you've emerged from it all, not in the state in which I emerge, thinking, this is absolutely appalling. These are terrible people in the House of Commons, they're treacherous, they're betrayal, what on earth is happening to my party? You've actually come out saying, I really believe in this, I want to encourage young people to go into this, I'm going to stay as a member of Parliament, I'm going to keep going and you're resisting the temptation to be drawn by Alistair into saying what I imagine you may sometimes feel about Boris Johnson, but you're not saying on the podcast. What is it that allows you to avoid feeling that sense of rage and bitterness and keep going because that isn't true with many politicians we interfere? It's interesting. I think maybe in your contrasting my approach to how you're feeling about some things, Rory, I suspect part of that is because of the length of time I've been in politics. I've been involved in the Conservative Party for, I won't say how many years, but many, many years as a local councillor is involved in local associations, helping others to get elected and then standing myself. So I've seen politics for a long time and therefore perhaps coming into Parliament and then into government, not a better experience, but more experience of how politics can be and how politicians can be. And then, well, I just think I'm a sort of, hopefully I'm just kind of calm sort of person and it doesn't mean I don't sort of think, why did they say that or why have they done that? But actually at the end of the day, I always want to really want to focus more on what we're doing next and getting to the end goal. And just to respond to Alistair, of course, in his previous question, Conservative government is always better than the Labour government. That's my view. I fundamentally disagree with that, as you well know. And I think history is, recent history has proved me right. My final question, you say in the book that you'd like, you know this isn't going to happen because Brexit, as Rory said, is so fundamental to your Premiership. But you said you'd like your legacy to be viewed through the Prism of Modern Slavery and net zero. And of course, on the main podcast this week, Rory and I talked about Rishi Sunak's recent speech where he does seem to me to be going down a very populist polarising route on the issue of the climate. And I just wonder whether you shared our concerns that that is a worrying move. Yes, if I may just say a word on modern slavery, because obviously I write about that in the book as well. And I'm setting up a global commission on modern slavery and human



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trafficking because I think it really is an issue that we've got to give more political momentum to across the world because the number of people in slavery has increased in the last few years.

On the net zero issue, look, I think the key thing for me is that Rory has kept- Rory, when you were a Prime Minister, your dream was almost married.

That Rishi has kept the net zero in 2050, which is what I put into legislation. I think that's important. He and I also agree that you've got to take people with you. I mean, the way I put it is you can't wag your finger at people and say, you can never fly again, you can never drive a car again, you can never eat meat again, you know, you've got to do all of these things. We won't get to net zero if people feel their lives have got to be completely upended. So you have to take people with you. And he's absolutely right about the national grid. I mean, we wait to see the detail that Jeremy Hunt- I'm waiting for a but. You can't divorce that speech and not have a little bit of a worry. There are, I happen to believe that as Chris Skidmore's review earlier this year, which was excellent, net zero review, that actually moving to net zero, developing the green economy

is the biggest economic opportunity of the 21st century. I would like to see the government embracing that rather more wholeheartedly than I think they have done at the moment.

Rory, maybe the very, very final question for you. Where do you stand on

Edritch against Boycott? The Edritch against Boycott question, one that keeps me up at night, that you have some things you don't have in common. One thing you do have in common is you have a much more profound knowledge and interest in cricket than I've ever achieved.

Well, that was because I was brought up with Test Match Special.

I think Rory is an Edritch man.

Yes, I think you see, I'm a boycott.

I'm a boycott.

Because steady.

Well, this is where we profoundly disagree.

Absolutely.

Absolutely agreeably about Edritch and Boycott.

Thank you so much, Prime Minister Theresa May. That was very generous. You give an enormous amount

of time. We've enjoyed an immense scene. I hope we can get you back again someday. Thank you. To talk about Brexit again.

You never mentioned it, Alistair.

I thought I was pretty restrained, to be honest. We should also tell our readers that the book is called The Abuse of Power. Honestly, it's been great. Thank you very much indeed.

Thank you.

I've enjoyed it.

I really appreciate it. Thank you.

So, Alistair, I was about to say we've got two Tories and only one Labour, and then I suddenly thought maybe that's a rubbish thing to say, because actually there have been so many Tory Prime Ministers recently, it's absurd. What did you think of her?

There is a nervousness and a caution about her. I think I often, I've said to you before about

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my mother saying of Gordon Brown that she think he had been a wonderful politician in the radio age.

And she's not by that talking about not being good on television. I think in his own way, Gordon is very good on television. But just that sense of being, I think the two of them, a little bit of a different age. I mean, interesting, her very first answer effectively was to sort of signal, which we already knew that she really doesn't like talking about her feelings. She doesn't like talking about personal stuff.

And she also talked to, I mean, she also immediately drew the analogy with Gordon Brown. She clearly likes him and admires him. And as you pointed out, they're both children of priests. They've both presumably brought it up in this quite puritanical Alistair Becker.

It's a funny thing. I was talking to Anna Ford, who's a BBC person, who's a friend of yours. And she was saying that she's also the daughter of a vicar. And she said it's an odd thing in a couple of ways. Firstly, you're sort of middle class and status, but you're kind of working class and income. And the second thing is that as a daughter of a vicar, you're expected to be very well behaved. So you either become very dutiful and well behaved or in Anna Ford's case, you're well. Yeah.

No, I think the sense you got of her childhood was sort of going around the place thinking that people were judging her because of the relationship with her dad. But at the same time, would exaggerate it if she kind of strayed from that path. I wonder whether that does, particularly as an only child, whether that means you don't necessarily have what we would define as a kind of fairly conventional childhood. I thought she was very reflective and thoughtful in some parts. I was actually quite pleased that she effectively apologised for the whole the vans thing. I thought that was awful. There were other things in the book. I mean, you were very kind about the book. And I was quite kind as well because I actually, I found an interesting book, but I found it really infuriating.

I remember I got some WhatsApp messages from you when you were in an absolute rage. I can almost share them with people, but essentially you said this is an absolute outrage, talking about abuse of power, and then you listed all the Tory abuse of power one after another. I think, for example, you said in the farewell, you said it's amazing you've produced this book without bitterness. And largely, I agree. But I think a light upon the whole Brexit story, and the only person really that she goes for is John Burko. She is, I would say, as I said to her, much angrier about people like me trying to get the second referendum than she is about Boris Johnson and the lies that he told and the lies that he told to her. I wonder whether that's true, though. I imagine she is furious with him, and I think she found it very, very difficult when Boris Johnson, and you'll remember she was standing up for the back benches and mounted some pretty extreme attacks on him, and obviously thought he'd behave disgracefully.

But it's a reminder of something that's so difficult to, that you and I know, but it's quite difficult to explain to the public, which is how tribal party politics is, how whatever her personal views are, if she said anything disobliging about the Conservative party or Boris Johnson, Labour would quite understandably put it over every single electoral leaf that former Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May says.

She would now, because you're talking about former, she would, I understand why she,

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I completely understand why she didn't say vote Labour, we'd be terrible for 13 years. But I think of the former Prime Ministers, and I think also to have gone into such detail, and there are bits of the book that are really interesting about Hillsborough, about Grenfell, Windrush, all these things, and she rightly picks on police, councils, etc. But I think if you were to think of the most egregious abuses of power, how do you not address what Johnson did? How do you not address what Johnson did?

I think she's signaling towards that. I mean, she has a go at Jacob Rees-Mogg, doesn't she? And she points out that, and it's one of the real problems of the Conservative party, which is people like Jacob Rees-Mogg present themselves as these sort of Victorian traditionalists standing up for the old constitution, and-

They're wrecking it.

Yeah, and he and Boris Johnson were all, you know, campaigning on Brexit to give power back to Parliament. But she explains in the book that Boris Johnson was trying to use arcane pseudo-medieval laws and trying to tell her to go to the Queen to overrule Parliament and do stuff which, as she points out, would have been not just distracted the Constitution, but catastrophic for the Queen to drag her into that kind of stuff.

I do hope she, at some point, she writes a more conventional memoir. And by conventional, I don't mean self-serving like a lot of political memoirs are, but actually something that just chronologically goes through her life and her career. We didn't, we had a lot of time with her, but actually we didn't really get into a lot of the kind of foreign policy stuff that I would maybe like to spend a bit more time with her on, and also some of the characters that she had to deal with. And I didn't push back hard enough on the councillor point. She's obviously, she was a local councillor. She's very, very fond of local councillors. I think there is a problem, actually, if Parliament is too dominated by local councillors. I think they're a very important part of Parliament,

but almost by definition, they're people who haven't had much of an opportunity for international experience. And that's very, very different. Obviously, the Parliament after the war, where 70, 80% of MPs had served in the military had been abroad. And I think one of the reasons that Britain becomes more isolationist, I noticed this when I was a young member of Parliament,

nobody wanted to be on the foreign affairs select committee anymore. 30 years earlier, it was very prestigious. I thought the one point where I think she really did become, I thought particularly as it was towards the end of the time we had with her, where she became very tribal was in relation to my old boss. Yeah, I was quite taken aback by that.

But you must presumably must have sensed it that to keep themselves going from 97 onwards in tribal politics, they need a bogeyman and Blair must have been, I mean, they have to, Well, I was it for most of them. Yeah, but they have to talk themselves up to that. I mean, to actually, but now being, that's what I mean about being reflective after the time.

Like you talked to Cameron and Osborne privately, and they talk about Tony Blair, well, they call him the master. Yeah. And but I felt with her, I was pressing a button there that was, I don't know, I thought that was, I was really quite taken aback by that.

But I think she also sees Tony Blair, David Cameron, George Osborne are slightly the same thing. And I think she has a problem with what she sees as kind of over slick over these sort of

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communicating, kind of quite dashing young men. And she, and I think she's quite sincere in feeling more sympathy for for Gordon Brown. I remember feeling that I remember feeling that when Gordon Brown took over, I thought, actually, David Cameron is going to be in real trouble because the country is looking for something more serious. And Cameron didn't come across for serious, but I was very surprised that she that Brown didn't win that 2010 election. Hmm. Interesting. Yeah. But overall, I mean, I mentioned at the Lido this morning, they said, where were you yesterday? I said, I was interviewing Theresa May for the podcast. And there was one guy who said, oh, God, I mean, and he's not a Tory at all. But said, God, I'd have a back like a shot compared to what we've had since. So she does well by comparison with what's followed. We did quite explain. I mean, the, I think one final sort of geeky thing is how strange that 2017 election was. And it's, it's relevant for what we often talk about. Yeah, we didn't really get into that. It was pretty. Yeah. So she was 20 points ahead of the polls, which is where Kirsten is in relation to the Conservatives and Labour is in relation to the Conservatives. They lost it during the campaign. And lost it during the campaign, but also lost it because of our weird electoral system. She had the biggest increase in any party's share of the vote since 1832 or something mad. She had the biggest percentage share of the vote since 1983. So it was kind of mind-blowingly record numbers. But because of the way our electoral system works, the Lib Dems collapsed. Quite a lot of votes went to Jeremy Corbyn as well. She ended up essentially losing her majority, despite getting far more people voting for her than had voted for David Cameron. And maybe she should start backing

PR. Interesting. You know, when we interviewed Hillary Clinton, she was very much like, I didn't lose that election. I won that election. I was just defeated by the technicalities. And that's part of what I mean by her not having any bitterness. I've never heard her say, I didn't lose that election. You know, technically, I won it because I got a million more votes and all this kind of stuff. And I do think the bitterness thing is interesting. You're right, maybe the books got a bit of it. But what she went through, I didn't really kind of rub her nose in it, but Grant Shaps, Gavin Williamson, I mean, these people just went for her. And Gavin Williamson had been her chief whip and then flipped and went in behind Boris Johnson. And a really grisly group of people coming after her. And I must have felt very, very strange, including people like Damien Green, who'd been, I don't know, quite been, you know, one of her very good friends that Oxford endorsing Boris Johnson after the leadership. So compared to, I think, the way that possibly Hillary Clinton feels, certainly compared to the way I feel. It's pretty remarkable, she's still standing. Yeah, I'll give her that. Now, Gordon, if you're listening, if Theresa May can come on, so can you. Welcome any time. See you next week. Okay, Roy. See you next week.