

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 17TH OCTOBER, 2021

PRITI PATEL, MP

Home Secretary

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AM: This has been a terrible shock for the whole country. The awful death of David Amess. But for you it's personal because he was a neighbour and a friend.

A: Well, good morning Andrew. That's absolutely right. I knew David, I've known him for nearly 30 years. He was a dear, dear friend to me and a fellow Essex MP as well, so just the work we did together, the common causes and as your viewers will appreciate you know when you're involved in grass roots party politics you come up together through the grass roots. You support each other and there are many, many campaigns that David and I have worked on, been together on. Common causes. Going to Southend to support him, you know he'd come to me to support me as well. That was David through and through. And he was – he just had this infectious personality and energy that I think has just touched so many lives.

AM: And of course you are Home Secretary. How did you hear about this?

A: So, tragically I heard, I heard not long after the event actually took place on Friday and we were on a away day. We had Regional Cabinet on Friday so for me it was news that was coming through during then, Friday afternoon. So as you can imagine both as Home Secretary and David as my neighbouring MP, a close friend and colleague I was desperate, absolutely desperate to find out everything that I possibly could around the circumstances And then quite frankly our world was shattered as the news started to come together, the details emerged for all of us and for David's dear, dear family.

AM: Now he had tweeted the time, the place and the address of his Constituency Surgery and even put a photograph on so it was easy to identify. Do you think MPs are going to have to stop doing that now?

A: So – Andrew – there are a range of - there are a lot of measures for MPs in terms of how they go about conducting their business, you know and no great surprise, you won't be surprised with my instincts on this, how I feel about this. We're here to serve. We're here to be accessible to the British public and our surgeries, our engagements that's down to who we are and how we engage with the public. There are ways in which we can do things differently, clearly around surgeries. You've just mentioned you know publicising them. Moving from publicising appointments to pre-booking appointments. Making sure that appointments are checked thoroughly, that the backgrounds on individuals are checked. If I may say, a lot of those measures are already in place right now. Those measures are being looked at again and the Speaker and I are working through – actually we're doing a lot of practical things right now in terms of advice for MPs. But I think it's fair to say we all have to be incredibly self aware, conscientious as to how we conduct our business and put safety front and centre of this.

AM: Do you think MPs should be offered police protection for their surgeries? They may not want to take it but should they be offered it?

A: So, there are protective measures available to Members of Parliament. So that's – there are a whole suite of measures and many of these measures came together post Jo Cox's murder. So we have something called Operation Bridger that was stood up after the tragic, tragic murder of Jo. And with that protective measures based on MP's engagement with the police, sharing information about your whereabouts. What you do, where you're going, events, surgeries, things of that nature, but also making sure that your risk is assessed in a thorough and practical way. There are a range of

measures in place, so this isn't about just saying you know, let's just go for option A) have bodyguards or security. There's a panoply of measures and we have to be proportionate in terms of the risk individuals are subject to. And that is based on one on one engagement with the police who do those assessments.

AM: I was talking to Lisa Nandy about the huge amount of abuse that MPs, but particularly women MPs and perhaps particularly women MPs of colour are getting at the moment. Some of them very very vile and violent and personal and whether or not social media companies should be obliged to make public the anonymous identities behind which some of these attacks happen.

A: So – this isn't new. Let me be clear about that. I've been a Member of Parliament for same time as Lisa actually, around 11 years. I can this as someone that has been subject to a lot of abuse over a consistent period of time.

AM: Did you feel unsafe before? I mean Home Secretary you get protection as Home Secretary. As an ordinary MP did you feel unsafe?

A: I've always been conscientious about safety and my security because I've been subject to abuse from the first day I became a Member of Parliament. There are people that have been subject to police action, not just cautions but have gone to court because of the abuse that has come my way. I don't think that is – I just don't think abuse in public life from people, anonymous individuals and even individuals that the police find is acceptable. We're public – we're elected politicians, we come into public life to be a force for good effectively, to serve our constituents, to serve our country. But you've asked the question

AM: About anonymity.

A: - around anonymity. There is legislation underway led by Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Technology companies – I do a lot in the security space around online encryption. Believe you me, I am absolutely rigorous in my challenges to Facebook to

Twitter and to the CSPs, the providers and we will continue to be so. There is this whole issue about anonymity but it has to be proportionate and it has to be balanced. People also use media, social media for – through anonymity for a range of pro democracy movements for example and in a range of other cases.

AM: So you have to be careful.

A: We can't just apply you know a binary approach. But there is something very very corrosive, I mean I will put forward my own personal views right now. What we see on social media much of it, and this isn't just about MPs at all, Andrew, I've been children subject to the most appalling - appalling hate and abuse online. We know that social media platforms advocate all sorts of things that are harmful to all aspects of society. This is why the Online Harms Bill is so important and that is why I would say that if nothing else this is one area where all politicians can come together to really close that corrosive space where we see just dreadful behaviour, hate. We see suicide websites, we see all sorts of corrosive things online. This is what we really want to close down.

AM: So there's a lot more to do. Can I ask about worries have been expressed this morning that the long lockdown helped radicalise people. These so called lone wolf attacks.

A: Sure.

AM: Which obviously are very very hard to spot ahead of time and very hard to prevent.

A: It's a really important point actually, it really is. Coronavirus, pandemic, people being locked down at home, online, etcetera. But what I would say, to put this into perspective, we have the best security and intelligence agencies in the world. Now I know, I can't sit and share with you, I know how they worked throughout the pandemic. I know the work that they do in terms of watching individuals. Subjects of interest, tracking behaviours, monitoring anybody of interest.

AM: Are they worried about the lone wolf?

A: Their work is phenomenal. It's outstanding. Threats are always there and if you listen my colleague, even the Director General of MI5, he's spoken publicly about lone actors. When you speak about CT police leads. Those speak about lone actors and we've seen much more of that at both ends of the spectrum by the way. Islamist and extreme right. But what I would say is that across our CT police, our intelligence police in the agencies we have the best intelligence and security services in the world. And the work that we have put together more broadly in recent years, counter terrorism operation centres, etc, etc, looking at intelligence and fusing that with other aspects of information is first class.

AM: Before we leave this subject, you know Sir David Amess and what he would really like as his monument because he talked about little else. He would like Southend to be named a city. Is that something the government could do?

PP: Do you know, it brings a smile to me and it warms my heart because I think one of his last PMQs, actually, Questions to the Prime Minister, I was in the chamber, was about Southend, and I know Southend as an Essex MP as well. But that's not for me to say at all, you know, there'll work in government on that. But all I would say, I mean, you know, we'll always have - I think when David's name is mentioned going forward he'll just bring great cheer and smiles to everybody because he was Mr Southend, he was Mr Essex. You know, he'd always put Southend front and centre of his work, and that was David through and through.

AM: Well, let's turn to something that I'm sure is front and centre of your day to day work, which is migrant crisis going on at the moment. In 2019 you promised that you'd make Channel crossings an infrequent phenomenon. And then last year in August you said you were working to make the route unviable. Now, so far 18,000 people have come across in 2021, and that's already more than double the 2020 numbers. So when are you going to get a grip?

PP: So, first of all we are seeing unprecedented numbers of people not just crossing the Channel or trying to cross the Channel, but actually migrants moving around the world. And you just have to look at a lot of the work that takes place upstream. I should also say post-Afghanistan as well, look at migrant flows and the migrant crisis, and they're all just building up there as well. Pakistan bordering on the border etc, etc. But you have specifically, and rightly so, a challenging question for me about crossings from France. There is no magic solution to this. There is no one solution that is going to stop this, which is why, in terms of the grip that we bringing, we are working with France, Belgium, near neighbours around border security and upstream activity based on intelligence and stopping the criminality. This is a criminal network, this is based on criminality. This isn't individuals individually buying boats, this is a net..

AM: I understand that. But it's not pertinent to my point, it's not working at the moment.

PP: Well, there are various things that we doing, and if I may I'll come onto that. In the last twelve months alone the number of attempted crossings has gone up by 140 per cent compared to last year. There've been over 10,000 preventions this year - so when I say this year I'm speaking of January to August this year, by France. So we can't say that it's not working. Interceptions are working. The French police, who are supporting, the gendarmerie, we have a lot of work taking place with France and intelligence and also the police are now providing resources. That is working, but also the numbers are going up, which leads me then, Andrew, to some of the measures that we are bringing in place. Again, none of this will be fixed overnight, and I'm very vocal about this; as you know, I've spoken about this many times. No short term solution, no quick win, no quick fix. That is why we are changing our legislation in the United Kingdom. The Nationality and Borders Bill. We want to end - we have to end many of the pull factors that are bringing people to the United Kingdom. We want to stop the criminality. We are increasing penalties for people smugglers. We're doing much more

in terms of intelligence and cooperation and sharing upstream as well. We want to do much more returns agreements. These are the whole - there's a panoply of activity that we are doing.

AM: It's just that we keep reading about one measure and then another measure. British vessels turning back boats, and you know, what happens if people jump off the boats? There doesn't seem to be any easy answer to this.

PP: Well, this is a complicated issue. I come back to my point. There is no one solution that will fix this. If there was, believe you me, I'm sure my predecessors would have resolved this previously. And actually, speaking to my predecessors I also recognise much of the work that we've undertaken to stop illegal migration. Let's not forget, throughout the pandemic there's been less air travel, there've been fewer lorry movements. Hence the reason why there's more illegal migration through this very visible medium of Channel crossings. It is completely -

AM: It doesn't sound, Home Secretary, as if you expect the situation to get any better any time soon.

PP: We're working to it, absolutely. Go after the people smugglers and reduce the number of crossings. Let me be very clear about this, and I'd say this to your viewers as well, this is the work of this government and it is night and day. There is no complacency here. But it is difficult, that is why we're bringing the Nationality and Borders Bill forward. That is why we're bringing legislation forward. That is why Border Force have new powers and will have new powers in terms of returning boats or pushing back, but also intercepting at sea, all within the law, I should say, as well. All within the law.

AM: Let me turn to the other big - one of the other big issues facing the country this winter, which is covid. Cases are way up, hospitalisations are way up, deaths are beginning to rise as well. Have we got the virus under control?

PP: I think it's important to reflect as to where we are now compared to where we were last winter, last Christmas. I mean, we were in a difficult - it was absolutely difficult. Parts of the country were locked down, we were taking very, very strong measures. I think the biggest change, of course now, Andrew, from where we were last year to this year is that we are living with this virus. We are all living with this virus. And of course this year has been dominated by the vaccine rollout programme, which has fundamentally shifted the landscape and where we are literally looking to, I think, the next few months on the virus.

AM: So let me ask you about the next few months, because we're all watching hospitalisations and they're beginning to rise quite fast. We're going through Plan A at the moment, but you do have Plan B as a government, which is, you know, a return to home working, mandatory masks and vaccine passports? My question is whether Plan B is doing to be definitely enough?

PP: Well, I think first of all, you've mentioned hospitalisations because clearly hospitalisations right now are nowhere near - thankfully - nowhere at the level that they had been previously. And we have the vaccine. The vaccine is central to that. And obviously people are not as unwell and not as ill as they had been previously. So boosters rollout continues and obviously the vaccine is going to school age children now as well, which will all help, which will absolutely all help.

AM: But one thing you won't do is close schools, under any circumstances?

PP: Well, this is the point, this is why - and I've been involved working with the Health Secretary and others in terms of making sure we continue. We've got to live with the virus, but ensure that all the protective measures are in place, and that's absolutely virus (sic). We want to protect people's health and wellbeing.

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AM: Priti Patel, Home Secretary, thanks very much indeed for coming in to talk to us today.

Ends