HEADLINES:

- Labour shadow foreign secretary Douglas Alexander refused to rule out a coalition with the Scottish National Party.
- He dismissed talk of removing Trident, even as part of an SNP coalition, saying, “the responsibility of defending this country is not something that is the subject of simply trading away interests one way or the other”.
- He also admits that polls are particularly hard on Labour at the moment.
ANDREW MARR:
And now we’re going to turn to the Shadow Foreign Secretary, also Labour’s Head of Campaigning, Douglas Alexander. So, Douglas, what is the attitude of the Labour Party to Syriza and this anti-austerity movement? Do you welcome it? Do you hold your nose? You’ve got a choice.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well the central lesson that I draw is that people in Greece wanted change. No two countries, no two economies are the same, as we’ve heard. They’ve lost a quarter of their economy over the last four years, unemployment’s around 60 per cent. We face a different challenge here in the United Kingdom …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well we’ve had austerity here too, of course.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
… which is to secure a recovery that extends beyond the city of London and reaches the kitchen tables of people right across the country. But I do recognise that right across Europe since the financial crisis, there has been a breakage of the link between the wealth of the nation and the finances of ordinary families. And that’s exactly the same challenge that we face here and that’s why this election will be a choice between a failing plan from the Conservatives and a better plan for working families from Labour.

ANDREW MARR:
But if you’re Foreign Secretary in due course, there will be a very straightforward choice: do you side with Angela Merkel and Germany saying no rewriting of the debts; or do you side with Syriza and the leftist uprising? Which is it going to be?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well actually you appreciate we’re outside the Eurozone, thanks to the actions actually of the last Labour government …

ANDREW MARR:
Sure but they’ll both be wanting your support.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
… and primarily in terms of the funding and the deals between Greece and the Eurozone, that’s a matter for Eurozone members. But of course we’ve got a strong interest in the United Kingdom …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You’re on the fence?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
… not just in stability within the Eurozone, but also growth. The problems that Greece faces is not just a fiscal problem. It’s a growth problem and that’s why we’ve got a very strong interest in seeing higher levels of growth across the Eurozone in the years ahead.

ANDREW MARR:
This is a massive, massive challenge to the Eurozone, what’s happened in Greece and potentially in Spain in due course as well. Do you think it’s a good thing or a bad thing?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well, listen, there’s a fundamental question: is the economy run for the people or do the people benefit from the economy?

ANDREW MARR:
So it’s a good thing?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
And in that sense no, as I say we’ve got to make sure that Greece meets its responsibilities but is able to do so in a context of stability and growth. Those conditions certainly do not apply at the moment. That’s why there’s a heavy responsibility both on the new Greek government and on Angela Merkel and other Eurozone leaders to make sure that there’s a constructive dialogue in the weeks ahead.
ANDREW MARR:
You may have seen Nicola Sturgeon on this programme last week laying out her demands for any kind of arrangement with the Labour Party and I want to ask you about those. She said, first of all, that she wants to rewrite the so-called vow demands for the nature of home rule; she wants more powers for Scotland’s Parliament. Is that something you think the Labour Party could talk about?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well I did watch that interview and it seemed to me that Nicola in this seat got herself into a rather curious position of saying she wants a Labour government and the way to get a Labour government is not to vote Labour. I’ve got a different message. The …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) She wants a Labour government dependent upon the SNP, which is slightly different.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well of course she would effect that that’s what she wants, although I personally think that she may well actually want an in/out referendum on Europe and a Tory government because those would be the most propitious circumstances for further independence in Scotland. But to come back to your substantive point …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
… I think if you look at the vow that we put in place, that benefits Scotland not least because of the Barnett formula. What Nicola is now proposing – full-fiscal autonomy – would rob Scotland of £4 billion of financing through the Barnett formula.

ANDREW MARR:
So if she …
DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
It would mean the end of the Barnett formula and that’s before we even consider the fact the oil price has fallen from more than $100 to around $50 a barrel. If we’re strong for Scotland, we should be supporting the Barnett formula, not the kind of proposals that we saw from Nicola last week.

ANDREW MARR:
Another thing she said was we demand an end to austerity economics and effectively to tear up and rewrite the Ed Balls plan for the next five years. Is that potentially on the cards?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well actually the first and only fiscal commitment of the Scottish National Party is an immediate 3p cut in corporation tax. So in terms of which party best understand that the real challenge in this election …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But I’m ask…

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
… is a plan that works for working families, it’s not the Scottish National Party, it’s the Labour Party.

ANDREW MARR:
I’m asking you whether, as the Labour Party, if she came to you and said, “This is what we want. We want new home rule powers, we want a new austerity deal”, would you be in the process of negotiating that or not?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Listen I’m in the business of a majority Labour government. Because …

ANDREW MARR:
I know, but it’s crucial that people understand whether you would talk to the SNP or not.
DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Yes it’s crucial for journalists, it’s crucial for commentators.

ANDREW MARR:
I think it’s crucial for voters.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
For Labour politicians, what I think is expected of them is that we work hard to deliver the majority Labour government that can deliver the changes not just that I believe Scotland needs but I believe the whole of the United Kingdom needs.

ANDREW MARR:
The Conservatives, as you know, are putting up posters all over the place – Ed Miliband alongside Alex Salmond saying this is the nightmare possibility, and Sinn Fein. Voters are going to want to know is that a real possibility or not? I mean if, for instance, Nicola Sturgeon comes to you and says, “We demand the end of Trident”, would Labour talk to her about that?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well as a prospective foreign secretary in an incoming Labour government, the responsibility of defending this country is not something that is the subject of simply trading away interests one way or the other. Let her play that game. My responsibility is to work to deliver a Labour government, and the responsibility of a Labour government would be to keep this country safe.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay you’ve been very clear on Trident, but on the other issues I think a lot of people watching may think okay it’s not clear. It’s quite possible that if Labour didn’t get all the way to a full majority, they would indeed talk to the SNP …

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
(over) But listen, Andrew …
ANDREW MARR:
… and they could come with some (fudge government) and therefore the Conservative accusation ‘vote Ed Miliband, get SNP as well’ is accurate?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Oh and that’s why this conversation suits David Cameron and Nicola Sturgeon. Let me explain why.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well it wouldn’t if you gave me a clear answer.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Let me explain why. Because the fact is every one less Labour MP in Scotland makes it more likely not that you get a Labour government but that you actually have the largest party in the House of Commons being David Cameron’s led Conservative Party. So actually if you want change in Scotland, my message is clear: the safest, securest vote is a vote for the Labour Party because otherwise you risk David Cameron getting back into Downing Street. His last best hope is now to split the centre left vote in the United Kingdom and that’s why I’m simply not going to play that game.

ANDREW MARR:
Well Nicola Sturgeon is very, very clear that she wants a deal with you and you are not saying that she can’t have a deal with you. And that …

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
(over) But that’s got much more to do with her campaign than with government. The fact is she’s trying to persuade Labour voters to vote SNP to get a Labour government.

ANDREW MARR:
And doing very well.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
My message is vote Labour to get a Labour government.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And doing very well. I mean if you look at the polls in Scotland, it’s terrible for your party at the moment. You could lose your own seat.

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**
Sure the polls are tough, but the fact is after the referendum there were a very significant constituency in Scotland who want change. I share that appetite for change. In the coming election in May, the way that we can secure that change is not to split the centre left vote but to deliver the maximum number of Labour MPs and thereby make sure that we have a progressive government, not a government led by David Cameron or a government of David Cameron and indeed Nigel Farage.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Jim Murphy says that from now on, because it’s in effect a zombie parliament, Scottish Labour MPs should get out of Westminster, go back to their constituencies and campaign like fury to be re-elected. Do you agree with him?

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**
Well I’m actually on a plane back to Scotland at half-past eleven this morning. Yes.

**ANDREW MARR:**
You do agree with him, okay. Okay moving on to some of the other big issues. You mentioned Trident just now. Vladimir Putin is much in the news at the moment. Those jets seemed to come closer to the UK immediately after the Litvinenko accusations were made. Do you regard Putin now as a rogue and dangerous figure in world affairs?

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**
Well I certainly think Ukraine represented a fundamental and significant geopolitical moment. Of course the RAF needs to continue to be vigilant in relation to the particular mission that you described. But his actions are born of weakness. The fact is a combination of Western sanctions and the falling oil price means that he is at the
moment a spoiling power rather than a credible rival to the West, but we need to be vigilant, determined and united in confronting that threat.

ANDREW MARR:
And keep Trident as a result?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well, as I say, our position on Trident’s very clear and I’m not changing it.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay one final point I must ask you. Again a hellish day for your leader in the newspapers. You know who these people are. What’s your message to all of those Labour politicians who are helping your enemies in the media?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Honestly, Andrew, it is rubbish. It tells you much more about the agenda of the newspapers than it tells you about the agenda of Ed Miliband or of the Labour Party. I’ll tell you what’s going on. We’re going on and we’re going onto victory.

ANDREW MARR:
Douglas Alexander, thank you very much indeed.

ENDS