ANDREW MARR:  
It’s been a tumultuous week meanwhile for the Lib Dems, digesting their awful election results: Nick Clegg appearing tired and emotional in the true sense of those words to defend his leadership and then details seeping out of an alleged plot by Lord Oakeshott to fatally undermine him. Vince Cable on the other side of the world, in China, dragged into the mire. And to cap it all, the case of Lord Rennard and his behaviour towards women back in the headlines. How should Mr Clegg deal with all of this? I am joined by his most experienced and battle-hardened adviser, Lord Ashdown.

LORD ASHDOWN:  
(laughs) Paddy Ashdown to you, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:  
Paddy Ashdown.

LORD ASHDOWN:
Nice to be with you.

ANDREW MARR:
Lovely to be with you again. Now these were pretty awful results for the Lib-Dems. You have been an absolutely clear and steely defender of Nick Clegg’s leadership. So if the leadership’s not going to change, what should?

LORD ASHDOWN:
I think the party’s got to get out and start campaigning for the next election. That’s the one that we’ve been waiting for. Look, let me put it to you this way, Andrew. You know, we’ve come out of four years where we’ve been part of the Government of our country because we believed it was in the country’s interest to be part of that, provide a stable government. We have helped to get this country out of the deepest economic recession of recent times. We should be proud of that record. We never believed the mid-term elections were going to be easy for us; they were always going to be tough. Okay by a mark more tough than we expected …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

LORD ASHDOWN:
… but nobody expected any dividends of this. I have to say that what’s happened after those elections has made a bad situation worse. We now know that there has been a plot of deep malice to try and remove the leader. I’ve got a very clear message for the party and that is anything you do now which is not getting out on the street, campaigning in the context of the next General Election – which is where we can put our proposition about how we behaved in government behind a fine leader and I think a fine record – is a distraction and a dangerous distraction. Stop it now.

ANDREW MARR:
I want to come back to the plot in a moment, but first of all just going back to what the voters said because this was, after all, a European election. Your leader went on television with Nigel Farage and, according to the polls, lost those debates. When it comes to the European policy, are you still absolutely the party of in and the party
which is saying no to those people who want major reform in Europe and major changes to migration and major changes to our borders?

LORD ASHDOWN:
No, I think we’ve made it very clear that we are the party of in and we remain the party of in and I’m extremely proud that Nick Clegg is the first politician who’s had the courage for twenty years to fill a vacuum that no other politician dared to fill to argue the case for Europe. But he’s never said and I never say that Europe should be unreformed. We do need to make sure we reform Europe, most particularly to create some kind of democratic effective linkage between people and Europe, so no one’s saying we shouldn’t reform Europe. I think Europe now needs to concentrate on the things that matter, by the way, which are the single market – that’s where the jobs come from are going to be so important – but no-one’s saying it shouldn’t be reformed.

ANDREW MARR:
But I watched those debates very carefully and it seemed to me that Nigel Farage was talking about democracy and the lack of democratic accountability by the European elite …

LORD ASHDOWN:
Yeah, I think he’s got a point there.

ANDREW MARR:
… and Nick Clegg was talking about prosperity and less of that. So how do you address that democratic problem if you think he’s got a point?

LORD ASHDOWN:
Let me put it to you … I mean I don’t think it’s easy, but it has to be done. I think Europe is the greatest idea of our time. I think in a globalised world with an America now looking across the Pacific more than across the Atlantic, with a highly assertive and aggressive Russian president on our Eastern borders, with chaos in the Maghreb and the Arab world to our South, Europe pooling its sovereignty to work together to deliver to our citizens the security, the jobs, the clean environment, the crime free
streets – which can only be done if we work together on the international scene – is the greatest idea to come out of Europe of our time. But there is a problem which we have not yet solved and that is how do we create a European democratic polity? Now, we have to go on trying.

**ANDREW MARR:**
If your party had something to say about that in concrete terms, they would have done better, I might suggest, a week ago.

**LORD ASHDOWN:**
The truth is that we have stumbled to try and create that and we have to continue to try and create it. We have to continue to experiment. We haven’t got there. No-one’s got there yet. So creating that democratic linkage is vitally important, but the answer is not to throw out the baby with the bath water …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Right, okay.

**LORD ASHDOWN:**
… the answer is not because we haven’t created a perfect democratic linkage, we therefore get rid of Europe. I have to say that, you know, I cannot think of a more stupid answer to the global problems that are now confronting Europe than that we should retreat to the perfect sovereignty of corks floating around behind other people’s ocean liners. This is madness for Europe to return to individual countries in the face of the huge economic powers that are now growing up in the face of a world which is going to be more turbulent, more difficult and more dangerous than ever before.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Well talking about those borders, last week Theresa May said on this programme that they were looking at much tougher immigration measures, including the deportation of people who couldn’t get jobs here and so forth. Will the Liberal Democrats block that?
LORD ASHDOWN:
We’d like to see what the legislation is. But, look, let me say a number of things that need to be said. One is immigration is intensely valuable to Britain. I think the figures the other day from the Office of Budget Responsibility said every 250,000 immigrants increase our GDP by something like half a per cent. We’ve got 40,000 immigrant doctors – doctors – in the NHS. It wouldn’t work without that. We have benefited hugely from immigration in this country. If it is the case …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But in fact we have had also …

LORD ASHDOWN:
I’m trying to address the question.

ANDREW MARR:
Sorry, we’ve had four million people coming in over the last few years and that has radically changed the nature of many communities and many people feel very upset about that and uneasy about it.

LORD ASHDOWN:
Well I understand that, but then explain to me this question. Where has that happened most? Answer: London, which has benefited hugely from the fact that it’s an international city as a result. Where did UKIP do least well? London. So if it’s that amount of a problem, how is it that those who argue that the drawbridge … you know that there should be some isolationist policy have had least effect in that area of our country which is most multicultural, most multi-ethnic? Look, let me …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) The biggest thing the Conservatives want to do in response to these elections is bring in these new immigration measures and we’ve been told about them. I have to ask you again very clearly, do you think your party’s going to block those?

LORD ASHDOWN:
I should say unlikely, but let’s have a look.
ANDREW MARR:
Unlikely that you’ll block them?

LORD ASHDOWN:
I mean unlikely that we will not block them, unlikely that we will let those go through. But let’s have a look. I’m not prepared to say … I don’t know, I can’t condemn a series of legislation unless I see it. But let me put it to you this way. The thing that needs to be preserved – which is at the heart of Europe, at the heart of our prosperity that springs out of Europe, at the heart of the concept – is the free movement of goods and the free movement of people. I’m prepared to see any reform to the process of immigration within the European countries provided it does not threaten the free movement of people. If you want to bring in things which limit the access to welfare, well okay but it has to be agreed on a European level. I’ve just got to repeat to you, if this country in the face of the global challenges now parts company with our primary partners in Europe, we will have less influence in the world, we will have less ability to create jobs …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Alright let’s …

LORD ASHDOWN:
... we’ll have less crime free streets, we’ll have a less clean environment. All of those things I want the British citizen to have are better delivered through working with our friends in Europe.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s return to what you described as “a plot of deep malice”. A plot involves more than one person of course, doesn’t it?

LORD ASHDOWN:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah. How many people do you think were involved and how deep was it?

**LORD ASHDOWN:**
Oh I don’t know, I don’t know. I …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Vince? Was Vince Cable part of this plot, do you think?

**LORD ASHDOWN:**
Look he says not. Nick says he was, so let’s leave it at that. I mean we have to accept him at face value. Let me say this, however.

**ANDREW MARR:**
You promised, I think, to remove Matthew Oakeshott’s head and various other parts of his anatomy which I can’t describe on morning television (Ashdown laughs) and this isn’t show and tell, but do you wish you’d torn his balls off?

**LORD ASHDOWN:**
No, I didn’t say that. I said to him, “Matthew, you are famous for making difficult days of the party more difficult. If you do that again after May 23rd, I will first of all remove your head and then your testicles.” Now needless to say he dashed off … he dashed off to the press and said, “Oh Paddy Ashdown’s being nasty to me. He’s a member of the Special Forces. Maybe he can really do this.” I’d just say … He said, “I’m terribly shocked” and I think my answer to that is ah, diddums! The reality of it is he knows a metaphor when he sees it. He did do precisely what I thought he was going to do. I don’t have to do anything for Matthew Oakeshott because I think the party has done it for him. But I would say this.

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) But he has been very, very closely tied for many, many years to Vince Cable who was – surprise, surprise – out of the country when all of this happened and did have the results of all of this dodgy polling and so forth that’s caused so much trouble. Are you really saying you have no worries about Vince Cable’s role in this?
LORD ASHDOWN:
I would say one of the rules of politics is choose your Iagos carefully.

ANDREW MARR:
Choose your Iagos carefully. Alright. Let’s move on then to other politicians who’ve been badly behaved in the past. Your book about the Resistance in France is partly why you’re here and it’s an account of people who fought very bravely. They came out of the Maquis and attacked the Germans at D-Day and then they were betrayed, weren’t they?

LORD ASHDOWN:
I think they were abandoned more than betrayed in truth. I mean in many ways the book I’ve written – it’s taken me three and a half years and I’ve had to read, I don’t know, sixty books in French to write it – is the hidden story of D-Day. I mean we know the position of you know almost every soldier on the beaches of D-Day, almost every grain. Think Private Ryan. We know nothing about the French who were told to rise. At 10 o’clock on 5th June seventy years ago the BBC in London sent out 187 messages to Resistance movements right across the whole of France. They were all different, you know: ‘Les carottes sont cuites”, “Il a de l’eau dans le gaz.” But they all meant the same thing: D-Day is tomorrow, your liberation is at hand, rise and fight. Three days before D-Day, Eisenhower made the crucial decision. The original plan was to raise the French Resistance behind the Normandy beaches. He said, in the famous words of Foch, “Tout le monde à la bataille” – the whole of France had to rise. He knew that when he took that decision, he would not be able to protect the Resistance units in the South and they would be sacrificed. But he had to do it because he was nervous that unless he kept the Germans guessing about a simultaneous Southern invasion, he couldn’t succeed in Normandy. And these young men, I dedicate the book to the boy in the white shirt, who fought the Germans with Sten guns – sometimes in the shirt they had left home in only hours before – are quite as much casualties of D-Day, quite as much contributors to victory of D-Day as are the troops on the beaches.

ANDREW MARR:
It strikes me that this book is about two things with modern resonance: what happens
when a war becomes a civil war and is in the villages and towns that that war is being fought, which reminds me of Syria; and what happens when politicians far away make decisions about people …

**LORD ASHDOWN:**

*(over)* Dead right, dead right.

**ANDREW MARR:**

… a long, long way away. So there are modern resonances.

**LORD ASHDOWN:**

Absolutely. I mean when I was in the SBS, in the Special Forces, we used to have a phrase: big thumbs on little maps, that’s the way to kill the chaps. I think whenever you have politicians who do not properly understand the consequences for the soldier or the maquisard on the front line by the decisions they take, what you get is usually tragedy on a grand scale. And this was. A lot of young men gave their lives. Now I don’t say Eisenhower’s decision was wrong, but the story is full of betrayal, of treachery, of *folie de grandeur*, of bad decisions and bad understandings by French generals, and indeed by de Gaulle, and arguably perhaps even by Churchill. But the people who paid the price for that are the little man and the little boy in the white shirt who came up onto the plateau of the Vercors full of the … bursting with patriotism to help liberate his country …

**ANDREW MARR:**

And they were shot.

**LORD ASHDOWN:**

… and were sacrificed, were sacrificed.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Yes. Paddy Ashdown, thank you very much indeed for coming in to join us and good luck with a cruel victory.

**LORD ASHDOWN:**
Thank you very much.

ANDREW MARR:
Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS