SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Now allegations that the government has been making use of American spy surveillance to watch over British citizens’ internet activities have provoked a considerable backlash. One senior Labour MP described it as “the snooper’s charter through the back door.” Conservative MPs have also voiced their grave concerns and senior US intelligence figures are worried that any major revelations could be damaging to America’s relationship with the UK. The Foreign Secretary William Hague is the cabinet minister who oversees the UK’s eavesdropping centre GCHQ and he joins me now. Good morning.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Good morning.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Were you surprised by the revelations?
WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well I think I’ve been around long enough not to be surprised by any revelations about anything, but I think there are some things that people need to know about how we handle intelligence. I will give a statement to Parliament by the way tomorrow on this, and of course the Intelligence and Security Committee will be able to look at all the details about what happens on this or they’re fully entitled to look at all aspects of our intelligence gathering. But what people need to know is intelligence gathering in this country by the United Kingdom is governed by a very strong legal framework, so that we get the balance right between the liberties and privacy of people and the security of the country. And that provides not for trawling through people’s … the contents of people’s phone calls. It provides for intelligence gathering that is authorised, necessary, proportionate and targeted - targeted on what we really need to know. And of course we share a lot of information with the United States. That’s been the case since the Second World War - that the US and the UK have an exceptional intelligence sharing relationship - but if information arrives in the UK from the United States, it’s governed by our laws …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Okay …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… and GCHQ has been praised by the commissioners who look at these things, recently, for the highest standards of integrity and legal compliance.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Okay. Did you know about Prism though?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well I can’t ever confirm or deny in public what Britain knows about and what Britain doesn’t, for the obvious reasons. Once we start doing that on this or anything else, then the terrorists we’re trying to defeat, the foreign intelligence agencies we are competing with build up the picture of what we do. The Intelligence and Security Committee can look at all of that.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
But I mean it’s all over the papers today - all the allegations: where the information has come from, the companies that supposedly have been targeted. The Guardian has been running with the story for the last few days. Are you going to be able to tell the British public full-stop whether or not Prism exists and whether or not you have been getting information on British citizens from it?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
No. We can talk about the framework in which we do things and we can give people the assurances about how that works. We can’t possibly go into yes we exactly do this or we exactly do that. That, as I say, gives to people, the very people that we’re trying to keep this country safe from, the information they need to know about how they can get round what we do, how they could try to do that. But …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
But if Prism is being used, it looks like you are getting round the legal structures that are in place because you can get that information, you can get information from US internet companies but you have to apply for it. It looks like for maybe three years you have been getting information without legally applying for it.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well sometimes because when people look of course, when they get partial information about what is really a vast, complex picture, all sorts of things can look true or untrue. But it follows from what I was saying earlier about the very high standards of legal compliance of GCHQ and the very strong legal framework that this country has - that to me, as someone who knows GCHQ very well (and I authorise operations most days of the week by GCHQ, so I know how they work) the idea that in GCHQ people are sitting, working out how to circumvent a UK law with another agency in another country is fanciful, it is nonsense. And I think I can give people that assurance.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
But you do, as you say, have to authorise it. So if this has been going on, you would have to authorise it. You would know about it. David Davis, the former Shadow Home Secretary, says that it is highly likely that you and Theresa May knew this was
WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well ministers give authority to the actions of GCHQ and what GCHQ does has to be in line with those authorities. We can say that in general terms. But that’s also worth a word about, so that people understand the extent of the checks and balances in this system. Intelligence gathering operations by GCHQ or MI5 or MI6 come to me or the Home Secretary personally. It’s not something we delegate to a junior minister. We take our duties on that very seriously, both of us, as I’m sure did our predecessors in other governments. We spend hours on these things every week. It comes with very … every request comes with clear legal advice and the justification for any interception, for instance. Our decisions are then subject to continual review by an interception commissioner and our work is subject to the scrutiny by the cross-party intelligence and security.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
So let’s just be clear. So I mean we read that there was something like 197 requests for information from Prism. You would have authorised all those?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well, as I’ve explained, I can’t go into the exact details of how we work …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) But we can assume that you would because you say that you authorise.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… so I cannot possibly confirm or deny those things. But that legal framework is strong, that ministerial oversight is very strong. And the net effect of all of that, which I think people who will be concerned about these things having listened to the media and seen leaks of other things, the net effect is if you are a law abiding citizen of this country going about your business and your personal life, you have nothing to fear - nothing to fear about the British state or intelligence agencies listening to the contents of your phone calls or anything like that. Indeed you’ll never be aware of all the things those agencies are doing to stop your identity being stolen and to stop a
terrorist blowing you up tomorrow. But if you are a would-be terrorist or the centre of a criminal network or a foreign intelligence agency trying to spy on Britain, you should be worried because that is what we work on and we are on the whole quite good at it.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
It’s one thing to say to the British public look the threat level is so high, we need to carry out this kind of surveillance. We need to look at stuff on Facebook, we need to look at what’s on Google or Skype conversations. It’s another thing to do it covertly and not tell people at all.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Well there are of course good reasons. And first of all, I’m not, I can’t accept … Totally legitimate and understandable questions, but I can’t accept all the premises of the questions. But why do we not tell people how we go about, in detail, gathering intelligence? It’s because some thought goes in on the part of terrorist networks, criminal networks, intelligence agencies of other countries as to how they can communicate without GCHQ or the Secret Intelligence Service finding out about them. So if actually we could tell the whole world and the whole country how we do this business, I think people actually would be enormously reassured by it and they would see the law abiding citizen has nothing to worry about. But if we did that, it would defeat the objective. This is secret work, it is secret intelligence. It’s secret for a reason and a reason that is to do with protecting all the people of this country.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
You’re going to have a lot of unanswered questions though even if you do make a statement to the Commons tomorrow.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Well that’s in the nature of secret intelligence.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
Let’s move onto Syria. MPs are very keen, aren’t they, to have a vote before you make any decision on arming the rebels in Syria. Will they get that vote?
WILLIAM HAGUE:
First of all, we haven’t made any such decision. We’ve won the flexibility in the EU to make that decision at any time, but we haven’t made any such decision. That of course would be a very important decision and clearly a controversial one; people have strong views about this. So, yes, we’ve made clear this week that although there isn’t an established procedure for that, we’ve a good record in going to the House of Commons for a vote. There would be a vote one way or another. And just for the …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) Before the decision was made?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) And just for the … Well there isn’t an established procedure for it, but I can’t see any reason why it wouldn’t be before any such decision was implemented. And just for the sake of clarity, we wouldn’t use a parliamentary recess to say we can’t consult Parliament because it’s the middle of August, so MPs don’t have to be concerned about that. So that I hope is clear. But the main thing of course is the issue of what we do about Syria, and we are engaged in intensive diplomacy to try to get a Geneva peace conference together. But as things stand today, the world is failing the people of Syria who are being killed in tens of thousands, tortured and abused and driven from their homes, and we have failed so far to protect them or to resolve the problem.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) Okay, let me just … I want to talk to you about the Geneva talks in a second, but I just really want to confirm. You will give a vote to MPs before a decision is made. And if, let’s say, Parliament is in recess, would Parliament be recalled because obviously the events in Syria are worsening all the time?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
I think if we were making such a decision and it was very controversial, there would be a huge demand for the recall of Parliament, so …
SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) And it would happen?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… so I think I can be very reassuring to MPs about this subject. But that’s only … in a way that’s a procedural question. There’s a bigger foreign policy dilemma, ethical dilemma about what we do to help Syria. People have understandable concerns about the idea of sending arms to anybody in Syria and we’d all be very reluctant to do that. On the other hand, at the moment people are being killed in huge numbers while the world denies them the means to defend themselves.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
And one of the reasons you’ve been talking about arming the rebels is to get President Assad to the negotiating table, to get to a point where you can have negotiations with him. But I mean in a way it’s a flawed logic, isn’t it, because he knows Britain, France, America, you want him to go? What incentive is there going to be if you arm the rebels for him to come to a negotiation?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well you can argue these things either way of course. In whatever form, we do need more pressure on the Assad regime to come to the negotiating table and be realistic about the negotiations and to understand that they are never going to be able to undertake the total military conquest and subjection of their country by force; that that would leave a permanently unstable country and region and that they need to come to a political solution with the opp… a transitional government made up of regime and opposition. We also are doing hard work trying to make sure the opposition come into such negotiations.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Absolutely. But you look at President Assad now after last week, after the victory with the help of Hezbollah in Qusayr. He’s on the front foot really. He seems to have been emboldened by that.
WILLIAM HAGUE:
The regime has gained ground on the ground, again at the cost of huge loss of life and the indiscriminate use of violence against the civilian population. They have gained ground. That makes the Geneva conference harder to bring about and to make a success. It makes it less likely that the regime will make enough concessions in such negotiations and it makes it harder to get the opposition to come to the negotiations. So the way the position on the ground is changing in Syria at the moment isn’t helping us bring about a political and diplomatic …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
(over) Do you think those talks in Geneva will happen at all or have you given up on them?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well we’re working on that. We’re in intensive discussions with the US and of course with Russia and the UN about this, but they're not coming together in the next couple of weeks and I find that worrying and depressing.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Now I read you had some rather glamorous company on your doorstep last week in London. Is this true? Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt turned up at your house? Is that correct?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well they did. I work closely with Angelina, as you know, on preventing sexual violence in conflict, on which we are making good progress. The G8 have signed a historic declaration. I’m taking this to the UN Security Council later this month. I think we have a chance of changing the whole global attitude to the use of rape as a weapon of war, which has often been a rather taboo subject. And she is a great part of this campaign because I can bring you know all the work of the UK and the role of a British foreign secretary to it, but I can’t bring the same degree of global attention to the issue.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
I thought you were going to say glamour. (laughs)

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well that as well. I can’t bring that to it in the way she can and so it makes a good combination.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Yeah. I mean I suppose the issue is going to be … I mean the G8 nations have pledged to halt sexual violence in war, haven’t they, but the issue is how you translate that on the ground as always, isn’t it?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yes, yes. Well that require… I’m now trying to get as many countries as possible to support a new international protocol on the investigation and prosecution of these crimes, and I’ve set up a team, a seventy strong team of experts who can be deployed into different countries to gather the evidence and make sure the prosecutions take place. So we are doing that work on the ground and I think it is about … It’s a subject people have avoided for decades and oh this sort of thing just happens in war. But we do have rules about war - you know that we don’t use chemical weapons, civilised nations don’t do so; we have the Geneva Convention - that we do not abuse and torture prisoners. There are certain conventions in war and one of them should be that the systematic use of rape to degrade populations, to humiliate them, to make peace building afterwards harder should be something the entire civilised world rejects and does something about when it happens, and that’s what Angelina Jolie and I are working hard on.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
I must just ask you about the story in the Mail on Sunday today, the Tory MP Andrew Bridgen formally asking for a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister. What do you make of that?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well not very much really. I mean this government is achieving a great deal, in my
view, that would be ruined by a Labour Government and we’re trying to rescue this country from the brink of bankruptcy that it was taken to. We’re able to do that because we’ve got a great prime minister. I work with him every day and he is someone who does a fantastic job for this country.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
*(over)* The worrying thing is though …

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
*(over)* Everybody should be supporting him, getting on with it.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
The poll today, Lord Ashcroft’s poll today, which is saying for the first time he is less popular than the party, it shows in his poll.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Well I don’t think we can be influenced, we shouldn’t be influenced too much by polls that go up and down every day. You know no politician who’s achieved anything would ever have managed it if they went into despair every time there was an adverse opinion poll. Are we doing the right things? Are we now creating jobs in this country? Are we laying the foundations for economic recovery? Are we bringing down the deficit, reforming the welfare system? Yes we are and the best thing we can do in this government is make sure we really finish those things and do those things …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
*(over)* And it doesn’t …

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
… and not be bothered about polls, stray comments by backbenchers.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
*(over)* What about lobbying? I mean lobbying, the story today in The Sunday Times - those kind of stories do not help you at all, do they?
WILLIAM HAGUE:
They don’t. I don’t want to comment on that because I see the MP concerned disputes that, so we will all have to find out the truth. But no those things don’t. What we’ve seen over the last week is very bad for Parliament and the reputation of politics. Where people have gone wrong, it has to be dealt with thoroughly and decisively, and it will be.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Foreign Secretary, William Hague, thank you very much for joining me.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS