ANDREW MARR:

Now then, one of the huge events of course of the year ahead is going to be the celebration of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee. The big events happen in June, but it was sixty years ago tomorrow that the young Princess learned that her father had died and that she was now Queen. Unlike most democracies, Britain’s got no written constitution; the monarch’s wide-ranging powers rely on the fact that she rarely exercises them. But how pivotal is her role? I’ve spent much of the last two years studying the Queen in action and talking to many members of the Royal Family about exactly what she does. Here’s a very short clip from our first programme which airs tomorrow night.

CLIP: THE DIAMOND QUEEN

ANDREW MARR:

Well Sir John Major, like every Prime Minister, enjoyed private weekly sessions with the Queen, and he is with me now. Welcome Sir John.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
Good morning, Andrew.

**ANDREW MARR:**  
We were looking at that extraordinary Irish visit there. And of course the process began when you were Prime Minister, though Tony Blair picked it up and went further forward with it. How conscious were you when you were doing that, that this might be difficult for the Royal Family? They’d lost Lord Mountbatten, they’d seen these terrible scenes of carnage not very far from Buckingham Palace in the old days.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**  
Well of course when we began it in the early 1990s with Albert Reynolds, who was then the Irish Prime Minister, of course I discussed it with the Queen at our private meetings. I have no intention of telling you how it …

**ANDREW MARR:**  
No, no.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**  
… how it went, but of course the Queen was aware of what we were doing. And we had two objectives, both of which I think the Queen approved of. The first was to stop the slaughter that we were seeing in Northern Ireland, the indiscriminate murder that had gone on for far too long; and, secondly, to normalise relations between the United Kingdom and Ireland and North and South within Ireland. And I think the Queen approved of both of those. And the visit she made to Ireland, I think set the final seal on a relationship that has wholly changed in the last twenty years. Ireland are our nearest neighbour, they should be a close and enduring friend, and I think that is the circumstance we now have.

**ANDREW MARR:**  
One of the things that certainly I came across a lot was people talking about the Queen’s religious side of her character, and, therefore, forgiveness being absolutely central to what she is for.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**
The Queen’s a wise lady. She understands different views. She’s never been perturbed by people who’ve had different views to her. She understands them, she has her own clear view, so certainly she would have understood that point very well. And I think the fact she is Head of the Church in the United Kingdom, she would fully understand other people’s convictions in a different church. That wouldn’t phase her in the slightest.

**ANDREW MARR:**
So she understood and in fact she was encouraging those very, very difficult early talks with the IRA?

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**
I’ve no intention of telling you what was said privately. Let me simply say the Queen was fully informed …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yuh.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**
… and you have seen from the visit and what others have said how she feels about the outcome.

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* Yes, how she feels about it now. A lot of people are very interested about not what is said during those meetings, but are they really useful to prime ministers? David Cameron said that you know it was a chance during the week to really ask himself what he was up to in a sense because he was just in front of one person, you know.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**
They’re very useful. I mean where else can you talk to one person in total certainty …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yuh.
SIR JOHN MAJOR:
… that it’s entirely secret; that nobody is going to talk to anybody else about what is said? So they’re very free, they’re very frank, they’re very useful. And of course the Queen has been there for sixty years. Her first prime minister was Winston Churchill. Most of the present cabinet weren’t born when the Queen became monarch. So there’s very little she hasn’t seen and very little she doesn’t understand, and anyone who doesn’t listen to her view and consult her where necessary is missing a huge opportunity.

ANDREW MARR:
Well we’re allowed just a little clip of you with the Queen. I think you’ve just come back from Russia at this moment. Let’s look at that.

CLIP: ELIZABETH R

ANDREW MARR:
A nice little clip there. So these things are terribly important. You know she’s obviously very interested in her constitutional role, so that’s the Irish side. What about Scotland now because you know we’re at the edge of some difficult decisions about Scotland? I mean whatever happens, she will be Queen of Scots. I just wondered what you thought of Alex Salmond’s kind of comment that the United Kingdom would carry on because the union of crowns would carry on?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
Well I’ve no intention of mixing the Queen and politics and I think you know that.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) No, no.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
But I think I heard Alex Salmond say last week that whatever may happen in Scotland - and I have my clear views about what should …
ANDREW MARR:
Yuh.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
- that whoever may happen in Scotland, the Queen would remain Queen as far as the Scots are concerned, and I think that is absolutely the view of (I would imagine) the vast majority of Scots.

ANDREW MARR:
Unlike any other country, we have someone therefore at the apex of the system who’s been there for sixty years. Does she have a sort of reasonable recall of the previous crises, all the ups and downs? I mean she’s been through the Cold War, she’s seen all this you know …

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
Andrew, you don’t forget crises, believe you me.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah, yeah.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
You don’t forget crises and neither does the Queen.

ANDREW MARR:
Yuh.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
She remembers them very well. And in some cases within the Commonwealth … I mean she has this special affinity for the Commonwealth, and I think for two reasons. Firstly because King George VI, her father, to whom she was evidently very close indeed, was significant in setting up the Commonwealth in the first place. And, secondly, because she has grown up with the Commonwealth. When it began, it had eight members. It now has fifty-four. So she’s very close to it. And often when we
discussed, she would not only know something about the country in the Commonwealth we were talking about or the head of state, but their father or their mother.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yes.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**
And often there were occasions where background information was extremely useful.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yes. We saw Prince William in that quote, in that clip earlier on there, speaking very, very eloquently about the Queen and Ireland. He’s of course now down in the Falklands in his helicopter. But you’ve in some respects watched him grow up because you were involved when he was younger. Just give us your sense of how he is evolving in the role that he’s got now.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**
Oh I think if you travel abroad, you can see a different perspective and you can see that the Duke of Cambridge and the Duchess are becoming iconic around the world. I think they’re a tremendous bonus for the Royal Family at the present time and I think the way they have conducted themselves has been absolutely without fault, and I think most people can see that. And clearly his career is very important to him, as it is to Prince Harry. He’s carrying out extremely well and I think that’s what people admire and respect.

**ANDREW MARR:**
But for all those people who kind of perhaps rather glibly open the papers and say “Oh well, can we not have him as our next King?” …

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**
*(over)* No, no.

**ANDREW MARR:**
... as a constitutionalist explain why not.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**

*(over)* No, no. No constitutionally not. The Queen took an oath at the Coronation that she would remain as Queen for the rest of her life. When (hopefully many years hence) the Queen is no longer with us, Prince Charles will become King. There can be no question of skipping a generation. It simply isn’t going to happen. It’s a piece of newspaper sophistry from time to time. After the Queen will come Prince Charles. After Prince Charles will come Prince William. That is I think …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* That’s that.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**

... a matter that is settled and is beyond doubt.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Now tomorrow, I think, you are going to be launching a huge charitable project: the Diamond Jubilee Trust. Can you tell us a little bit about that? I don’t want to spoil your fire for it, but tell us a little bit about it and what you hope to achieve.

**SIR JOHN MAJOR:**

We’re establishing tomorrow the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust. It was agreed that it would be set up by all the Heads of Government at the Commonwealth at their recent meeting in Australia, and I’m greatly honoured to have been asked to chair it. The purpose of the trust is to raise money across the whole of the Commonwealth. I hope governments, companies, individuals will all contribute. We will raise this money just for a single year and then we will spend it on appropriate projects across the whole of the Commonwealth, including of course the United Kingdom; and we’ll enter I hope into partnerships with people, so that we can leverage, so we can increase the amount of money we have had donated, to use it for the sort of projects I think that most people would approve of.

**ANDREW MARR:**
So we’re talking about projects involving children and disadvantaged groups?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
Yes no detailed decisions have been taken, but that sort of project. And it will all be there specifically as a legacy to the Queen and her long reign and her long service to the Commonwealth. I don’t think people who haven’t seen her with the Commonwealth, heads of government, can possibly understand what it’s like. There’s a very good relationship. She is iconic to them. And she and the Duke of Edinburgh - and the Duke has been quite superb of course throughout her reign - she and the Duke of Edinburgh are enormously popular course throughout her reign - she and the Duke of Edinburgh are enormously popular across the Commonwealth; and it’s unsurprising that when there was a suggestion from the heads of government of a tribute that the Queen would like the sums raised to be dispersed across the Commonwealth, including - as I say - the United Kingdom.

ANDREW MARR:
Yuh, yuh. Of course the Falklands are part of the Commonwealth. Prince William down there at the moment and a huge amount of kind of jumping up and down and shouting in Buenos Aires.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
I think there’s bound to be a certain amount of shouting. I think that’s what it will amount to - shouting and no more.

ANDREW MARR:
And no more. Alright, for now thank you very much indeed, Sir John Major.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
My pleasure.

SOFA QUESTION

ANDREW MARR:
Sir John Major is still here and we’re going to talk a little bit just at the end about Syria because we’ve used enormously strong language at the United Nations
yesterday, as have the Americans, about the Russians and the Chinese. And I just wanted you know your perspective on actually what can happen because it seems that the international community is now badly stuck.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
I think there are two things that are happening. Certainly we’ve seen the enormous changes across the whole of the Middle East. The democratic genie is out of the bottle. I don’t think it’s going to stop at the borders of Syria. So I think this is an issue that is going to continue. I think two things are happening at the moment. First, we are moving perilously close to a full-scale civil war. Secondly, I think Syria is becoming a pariah state. And if I can add a third thought. I don’t think in these circumstances that the Assad regime will survive. How much damage it will do in the short-term, I can’t say. How long it will survive is unknown, but I don’t think it will be a credible government for all that much longer. It has no support, except no doubt for Iran and for China and for Russia. Beyond that no-one can possibly sanction what they’re doing.

ANDREW MARR:
And is there anything more do you think that a country like Britain can do you know to avoid the break-up and the fall of the regime - if that’s what’s going to be happen - being too bloody, being too disruptive - not least I suppose to Israel which is next door, of course?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:
Well I think there are several thoughts related to that. Firstly, I think those in China and Russia might search their consciences about their veto. They are effectively giving a green light to a pretty bad regime to murder people, and I think one needs to put it bluntly so they understand what they have done and so the world understands what they have done. As far as what other nations can do, it’s possible to apply sanctions through the European Union, it’s possible to apply sanctions through nation states, it’s possible to use diplomacy. I think all those measures should be used and used as a matter of urgency, and I don’t think the United Nations should leave this matter. If China and Russia have vetoed it once, let us see if they will at some stage veto it again as public pressure and international condemnation builds up.
ANDREW MARR:
Good final thought. Sir John Major, thank you very much indeed for joining us today.

INTERVIEW ENDS