AM: 50 people killed in London so far this year in stabbings, and it's not just London, is it? I mean, across the country knife crime up, I think, 21 per cent, all sorts of violence up across the country. Are we facing some kind of public safety crisis in Britain?

SJ: Well, I mean, first of all so many personal tragedies there, young lives lost, young people that won’t reach their potential, and it’s absolutely right that we focus on this both nationally and at a local level. It’s worth recording that crime overall has fallen significantly over the last decade.

AM: I want to stick to the stabbings.

SJ: But I agree with your main point that we have seen a rise in the last few years of serious violent crime. I think people often put forward one single cause, there isn’t one single cause, it is a complex issue so it will require action on many fronts. That means dealing with the root causes. Of course it means dealing with having early intervention, and that’s something the Home Secretary will talk to tomorrow when she unveils the government’s new serious violence strategy.

AM: Something very grave is happening in this country. Let’s just look at the figures that we’ve got. So this is across England and Wales. Murder up 17 per cent compared with last year. Knife crime up 21 per cent, and gun crime up 20 per cent. This looks like, to many people, a genuine crisis.

SJ: Of course some of that would be down to better reporting, but of course there is a real increase. That does not explain the whole issue, the recording. There is a real problem here and especially
over the last three or four years. We have seen a significant
decline before then and now we’re seeing a rise. So the question
is, for government here, what are we doing about it? So the
Home Secretary will announce this – first of all, let me go through
if I may because there are many complex issues here. First of all,
the Home Secretary tomorrow will announce a new Serious
Violence Strategy that will focus on the root causes, and also on
early intervention. But also there’s a role to play for law
enforcement, and that’s what we’re announcing today. And this is
just the thing that will make a big difference, with a new Serious
Weapons Bill.

AM: Just explain exactly what this new law is going to mean.

SJ: Well, it’s a Serious Weapons Bill we want to bring forward very
quickly, within a few weeks, and if we get cross-party support I
think it could become law very quickly. It will make it illegal for
anyone to possess acid in a public place without good cause. It
will make it illegal for under-18 year olds to buy acid. It will also
deal with some of the issues around knife crime, so it will make it
illegal for anyone to order online a knife and have it delivered to a
residential address. And it will also make illegal the possession, in
private, certain weapons such as the so-called knuckledusters and
the zombie knives and these kinds of weapons that have been
used.

AM: I mean, the problem with this to a certain extent is every
single kitchen in the country, or less, has a lethal knife
somewhere in it, so there’s no shortage of knives in this country.

SJ: Well, this is about making our country safer, making our
streets safer and taking action. There’s no reason why anyone
who has a kitchen or not needs a zombie knife or knuckleduster.
And also some action against corrosive substances. We’ve seen a
rise in acid attacks.
AM: All this is great, but can you tell us, roughly speaking, how many fewer police there are in England and Wales now compared with when you took office in 2010?

SJ: Well, there’s about 15 per cent fewer police officers, but that’s also – the point you’re trying to make there, and that was made earlier in your earlier interview, it doesn’t hold up against the fact – if you go back, go back a decade, serious violent crime was a lot, lot higher than it is today, but so were the police numbers. So for anyone to suggest that this is caused by police numbers, it is not backed up by the facts.

AM: Nevertheless, there are fewer police on the streets and that must have something – in a commonsense way that must have something to do with it. I’m not an expert, nor are you.

SJ: But the evidence doesn’t suggest that. But that said, we recognise there are pressures on police, of course there are, there are all sorts of pressures, that’s why from 2015 we’ve protected police budgets. There’s a settlement for police funding in which you have the right –

AM: You cut a thousand police last year.

SJ: We provide the funding and so local police then make decisions how best to use that funding, but we’re increasing police funding by some £450 million in the current year and the settlement for the Met Police for example, which by the way has more police per head than any other police force in the country –

AM: It needs them, it needs them.
SJ: Almost a quarter of the police in the country they’re getting a £2.5 billion settlement and they’ve got over £200 million reserves. So I don’t think –

AM: but this idea that it’s got nothing to do with police cuts for year after year after year. As I say I’m not an expert but Ian Blair, the former Met Commissioner, certainly is an expert. Let me read you what he said on the radio this week. He said: ‘If you take 20 per cent of the Met’s money away, something gives and the thing that’s given is neighbourhood policing.’ And that’s true. You go around London, you go around most of the country you don’t see police on the streets and that must have something to do with the ease with which gangs are able to gather on street corners in rival areas and attack each other. Must do.

SJ: Well, we have to go by – look at the facts. The facts are that we had much higher numbers of police ten years ago and much higher numbers of violent crime.

AM: Not higher numbers.

SJ; We did, we did. Go back 10 years and the numbers were far higher. Overall criminal offences they’ve come down from something like 19 million a year, recorded offences in 1995 to something like just over five million last year. It’s the lowest number on record since those records began.

AM: All of those figures I agree with that but I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about the violent offences on the streets. Cressida Dick, the current head of the Met says we’re stretched, we are stretched, we are stretched. She’s not kind of crying wolf is she?

SJ: And that’s why we’re listening to Cressida Dick. She’s doing a good job and that’s why you need to listen to the professionals
and that’s why the Metropolitan Police are getting an increase in their settlement, access to more funding. But she’s also talking about police power. So earlier you talked about stop and search. One of the things we’re also announcing today is we’re going to consult on extending the powers of stop and search so that if there’s someone – the police believe someone’s in possession of acid with no good use in public, then they will be able to stop and search.

AM: But it’s still going to be the case the police have to think that a crime will be committed before they’re allowed to stop and search or are you changing –

SJ: Of course they need to.

AM: are you going to change that so that they can stop and –

SJ: No, of course they need to act in the law and in the past what –

AM: Are you changing the guidelines in any way for police on stop and search?

SJ: We haven’t changed the guidelines in any way since 2010. What we’ve done, the law that cover stop and search haven’t changed. We’ve had voluntary agreements –

AM: Because some people think it’s too difficult for the police to stop and search. Cressida Dick says that they’re being kind of slightly intimated by political correctness. That when they see people coming down the street towards them that in the old days they would have stopped and searched, they no longer do and that allows kids to go out carrying knives, not being as scared as they might have been that they’ll be caught.
SJ: When Theresa May was Home Secretary what she wanted to do was rightly make sure that when stop and search powers are used that they are used within the law. If you take 2013, just one example, one year, police inspectors they found – the Independent Expression Service found that 27% of stop and searches were doing illegally. The police like everyone else, need to act within the law and if they believe the powers need to change then they will rightly talk to government and as we’ve shown today we will listen and if we need to extend those powers that’s exactly what we will do.

AM: Boris Johnson has called the Leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, ‘the Kremlin’s useful fool,’ this morning. Do you think that’s suitable language for the Foreign Secretary to use at a time of national crisis when it comes to our relationship with Russia?

SJ: Well there’s no doubt when it comes up against this issue with Russia that we’re having, this very serious issue that Jeremy Corbyn has let the British people down. There’s no question about that. But this is a much bigger issue than any one individual. I mean let’s look at the facts. There’s been an attempted assassination on British streets with an illegal chemical weapon that we know is manufactured in Russia. That’s what we know. And it is –

AM: The fact that Sergei Skripal is now apparently able to talk, is that a very important moment in this investigation? Will these change things now we’re able to talk to the Skripals?

SJ: Well, first of all I obviously welcome the fact that he’s better, his daughter is better. I think it will be an important moment if he can give more detail on what he believes has happened, but that’s for the police investigation. But one thing we are absolutely clear on, there’s been a lot of talk about this this week and there’s been
a lot of misinformation and lies from the Russian government again and again, we’re absolutely clear there’s no other plausible explanation than Russia being responsible for the attempted assassination on British soil.

AM: Why are we not allowing the niece, Victoria Skripal to come to this country and why are we not giving the Russians access to Yulia and Sergei Skripal?

SJ: The Russians have every right to ask for access to any Russian citizen –

AM: But we’re saying no at the moment.

SJ: - but it’s up to that citizen to decide if they want to meet the Russian authorities and you know I wouldn’t be surprised if the Skripals don’t want to meet the Russian authorities.

AM: And the cousin, why is she not being allowed to come here?

SJ: Well let the cousin make an application and we’ll consider it.

Ends