ANDREW MARR:  
So now we know what Barack Obama thinks about the prospect of Scottish independence, but will the President’s view that the UK should stay strong and united have the slightest influence on voters in Scotland? With a hundred days to go tomorrow until the crucial vote, I’m joined now from Aberdeen by the First Minister Alex Salmond. Good morning and welcome, Mr Salmond.

ALEX SALMOND:  
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:  
Can I ask, first of all, about President Obama? Did you regard that as an undiplomatic intervention? It was certainly an unusual one from another head of state.

ALEX SALMOND:  
Well it was certainly surprising, Andrew, because America, the government had made it very clear that they were staying studiously neutral in the democratic referendum that’s taking place in Scotland. But then of course David Cameron’s been begging everybody internationally to say anything to help him in his travails at the present
moment. He’s right to be worried, incidentally; the latest Yes poll’s at 46 per cent. And so perhaps in the Richter scale of presidential interventions, this was pretty mild. I mean it’s a matter for the folks in Scotland. He hopes that the UK will be strong and united as an ally. Well if Scotland becomes independent then America will have two allies in these islands, not just one.

ANDREW MARR:
But one of them absolutely determined to get rid of nuclear submarines from Faslane. That’s presumably what’s worrying the Americans most?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well I heard Lord West. I mean he’s certainly exercised by it, but then Lord West believes that Trident submarines make the country more secure. I don’t. Indeed a number of his former colleagues share my view rather than his. But you know if the rest of the UK wants to retain a nuclear capability, then they can do so. I think it would be very unwise for them to do so, incidentally, but it wouldn’t be realistic to have nuclear weapons stationed in Scotland after Scottish independence. We’re not saying they have to be removed the day after – the white paper suggested the first term of the Scottish Parliament – but removed they should be.

ANDREW MARR:
You mentioned in a newspaper article this morning that the other … the unionist parties have all come up with different tax raising ideas for the Scottish Parliament. I’ve been talking to a lot of Yes campaigners over the last few weeks and there’s a general sense that this is an inevitable process; that even if the vote doesn’t go the way you hope, in September that Scotland is going to get more powers and more powers and eventually independence will come. Would you agree with that?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well I think the only guarantee of getting more powers is to vote Yes on September 18th. Anything else is in the grace and favour of the unionist parties. They’ve got form in these sort of things, Andrew. I mean you and I are both old enough to remember 1979 when not just Alec Douglas-Home but Margaret Thatcher actually indicated if Scots voted No, then there’d be a better deal coming along very shortly. In fact Scots
voted Yes. Narrowly we didn’t get devolution and what we got was 18 years of Margaret Thatcher’s government. So I think you know having had that experience, it would be very foolish to rely on promises from unionist parties. Far better to take the matter into our own hands on September 18th.

ANDREW MARR:
The political atmosphere in Scotland is of course completely different now than it was in ‘79. Do you think therefore in these new circumstances, the unionist parties are not telling the truth when they say they would give the Scottish Parliament new powers if there’s a No vote?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well I’m just saying that we shouldn’t rely on promises, pre-referendum promises by parties which are under pressure. They’re under pressure because we have that referendum date, because we have the ability on September 18th to take the decision for ourselves, and I think it would be wise for us to do so. I think there’s no doubt that you know the Scottish Parliament since 1999 has accumulated substantially more power and that’s been a good thing for Scotland, and I think you complete that process by having an independent parliament. You might actually argue that we’ve had a hundred-year process of devolution, of power being devolved to Scotland, and perhaps in the next hundred days we can complete that journey.

ANDREW MARR:
As I said, I’ve been talking to lots of people in Scotland and I find it completely impossible to guess what’s going to happen. We see all these polls. There are so many people saying I don’t know, keeping things to themselves. I was going to say do you think this is about … basically in the end it’s about ex-Labour voters in Central Scotland? That is the big battleground area?

ALEX SALMOND:
Oh I think there’s a number of issues which are going to decide the election. But you know rather than talk about individual categories of voters – and I think you’re right, I mean there’s a lot of people who’d normally vote Labour are going to vote Yes in the referendum and rightly so – but I think what will decide the matter is people’s
assessment of whether we can have a more prosperous economy but also a more equal society; that we can manage and marry or match resources, our human resources and talents together in Scotland in a better way than Westminster control allows us to do. If we win that argument, then we win the referendum.

ANDREW MARR:
One of the most vexed issues of course has been the currency. You say quite rightly that the Scots have got the power to decide their own future and their own referendum, but a poll this morning – I think in Scotland on Sunday – suggests that 68 per cent of English voters don’t want to go into a currency union with an independent Scotland. Don’t they also have the right to say no?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well that actually was an FT poll from yesterday, a Populus poll. And I think if you examine the question (laughs), then I’ve got great sympathy for the English people trying to answer that, Andrew - although it did actually have a majority of Scotland supporting keeping the pound after independence. We’re not actually asking for a change as far as the people of England are concerned. We’re saying let’s keep sterling, let’s keep the pound. We’re not asking them to move to a different currency just to keep the pound that we both have at the present moment. And the point we’re making, you know, it is Scotland’s pound as well as London’s pound. It is a shared currency and we think it’s perfectly reasonable to say that after independence, we can continue to share a currency. It’s been done before rather successfully before the euro …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I was going to say …

ALEX SALMOND:
It was done between Belgium and Luxembourg for about 80 years.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes well, nonetheless, a shared currency means each side has to agree, does it not?
ALEX SALMOND:
Yes, the point I’m making is that the people in the rest of the UK are not being asked to change their currency and I think the parliament would be well able to decide that. And the point we’ve been making about keeping the pound, of course, is not just well arguing it’s in the interest of Scotland. We’ve been outlining in the work of the Fiscal Commission why we think it’s in the joint interests of Scotland and indeed the rest of the UK.

ANDREW MARR:
Right, we’ve got a hundred days to go. We’ve had many interesting and enjoyable jousts over the period of this referendum and before that. Is this going to be your last hurrah? If you don’t win, will you have another referendum after that? Will you stay on?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well, Andrew, I thought you were going to say it was going to my last appearance on your programme. (laughs)

ANDREW MARR:
Certainly not!

ALEX SALMOND:
Oh no, there’ll be plenty of opportunities before September 18th.

ANDREW MARR:
Lucky Britain!

ALEX SALMOND:
Look, in any … whatever happens, I’ll continue to serve the people of Scotland in whatever capacity they choose for me to do so, but we’re anticipating a Yes vote on September 18th and the chance to take matters into our own hands and to take charge of our own destiny in Scotland.
ANDREW MARR:
But this is once in a generation. You won’t come back yourself leading another referendum campaign, question mark?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well I’ve said a number of times, Andrew, that my view is referendum and the constitution are once in a political generation. I mean that’s my assessment and that’s why it’s so important that, given this opportunity, which of course is really the first democratic consented opportunity in Scottish history to vote for independence. People keep talking about it’s the most important vote for three hundred years. This is the first vote, democratic vote on Scottish independence and, therefore, is a fantastic opportunity that we should grasp with both hands.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. Alex Salmond, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

INTERVIEW ENDS