ANDREW MARR SHOW  
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MARIA EAGLE  
SHADOW DEFENCE SECRETARY  

AM: Leading what she says is an open-minded review is the Shadow Defence Secretary Maria Eagle, welcome to you. First of all can I ask how many times you have met Jeremy Corbyn one to one to discuss Trident?  
ME: I have a meeting in the diary, but I haven’t met him yet to discuss that aspect of our review.  
AM: Are you surprised by that?  
ME: I’m not – I’m pretty relaxed about it. We are in opposition for five years. This has got to be a serious, meaningful review, and we need to design it properly. He needs to get his feet under the table and then we’ll go ahead, design how we’re going to do the review and get on and do it. We were committed at the election to having a much more transparent public-facing discussion about our place in the world and about what our defence policy should be. It’s important we design that correctly before we set off on that path.  

AM: Now, you’re a supporter of the Trident nuclear deterrent. Have you heard anything in the Scottish Labour debate about it or in what Jeremy Corbyn supporters have said that has changed your mind or altered your view in any way?  
ME: Well, not at present. But I don’t think that’s surprising, Andrew, actually, because there are very important and respectable views held on both sides of this argument. And I don’t think that simply setting them out without going through the process of a review is likely to change anybody’s mind, which is why we’ve got to get this right. Now, I’m not concerned about this, I think that the review is going to be genuine, it’s going to be a serious piece of work. It has to be. The Labour Party has had
this policy of being pro – of having an independent nuclear deterrent, every Labour government has had that policy.

AM: You say it’s a serious piece of work, but in the end it’s a moral confrontation between two very, very different views of the world. You can’t do it on paper, you can’t do the numbers between a moral opposition to Trident and somebody who believes it’s the right thing.

ME: Well, look, some people take a moral view of this, others take a more practical view. We still have to devise how we would defend our nation and how we would meet our obligations to other nations with or without a nuclear deterrent. And so there is a lot of serious work that has to be done ahead of any decision about this. And at present of course the Labour Party does have a policy on this, it’s very clear, it was reiterated and reinforced at our conference in Brighton, and that is in favour of renewing the submarines that carry our nuclear deterrent.

AM: But you’re in this very strange position where you have a leader who has said very clearly that he would never, ever press the button. And Sir Nick Houghton, for instance, expressed the grave, grave concerns of the military. What’s the point in having a deterrent if everybody knows the new prime minister would never use it? It ceases to be a deterrent, it becomes purely a waste of money.

ME: Well, I think we have to explore these ideas of deterrence, because Jeremy’s certainly – he clearly –

AM: You’d have to convince him to change his mind, don’t you?

ME: Well, I think we have to have a process that sets out fully the arguments, whether deterrence is effective, whether it works. This requires evidence, it requires a lot of input from our party members, from those who are affected by these decisions, not least our defence industry workers who actually build the submarines and are going to be building the submarines up in Barrow. And I think that we can’t do that without a serious long-
term approach. It’s just taken the government a year almost to do their strategic defence and security review because Whitehall sta–

AM: You need time, I understand that.

ME: Whitehall started it in January, because we’re all committed to doing such a review. The idea that the defence team could do a review in much less time than that is for the birds really.

AM: So how do you respond to Sir Nick Houghton when he said he’d be gravely worried if this policy was translated into power?

ME: Well, I understand the point that he’s making and I think the – it’s a point that I made myself when Jeremy said what he said. I said that there are those who don’t believe that deterrence works, I’m not one of them, I think Jeremy’s point of view is about whether or not he believes in the effectiveness of deterrence.

Now, these are arguments that we can have within the process of our defence review, a space to be discussed, to be debated, to be argued out for conclusions to be come to – for us to come to conclusions in due course.

AM: Are you comfortable with the CDS involving himself in this debate?

ME: I think he has to answer questions from journalists such as yourself when he’s asked, and I’m completely comfortable with that. He clearly does believe that deterrence works. He’s said that in terms. So do I as it happens, and I don’t think there’s anything wrong with him expressing himself in those terms.

AM: So just coming back one more time, it has to be a long and serious review and everyone’s got to be open about it and make the arguments in front of the public and so forth. But at the end of that, if you have a leader who is completely committed to never pressing the button the whole thing is, in your words, for the birds isn’t it?

ME: Well, I think we have to go through that process and see what comes out of it.
AM: But in the end you have to persuade him that you’re right don’t you?
ME: Yes. And I have – I will be attempting to do that, we will base our decision on the review, on the outcomes of the review. The Labour Party has its policy making structures and we will feed our review into those structures and the great good sense of the Labour Party and its members and supporters will come to a conclusion in the end. Nobody really knows what that conclusion will be at this point.
AM: Could you be Secretary of State for Defence in a unilateralist Labour government?
ME: I am not a unilateral disarmer, nuclear disarmer, I don’t believe that that works. I think I would find it difficult. But we’re not there yet, we have a big process to go through and I think we should engage in that. We should engage the country in these discussions, because for too long, I think, Andrew, these decisions have been taken behind closed doors.
AM: I agree absolutely.
ME: Part of the reason why Jeremy got elected is on the back of this sense out there – it’s not just in the Labour Party, that people want a bigger say in decision making in this country on big important issues like this.
AM: And at the end of this long process, what then happens? Because the Labour Party has to come to a view. Is there going to be a sort of special conference, do you think that those new members should be part of that, or is it going to be fundamentally for parliamentarians?
ME: Well, it’ll be for our policy making processes. And that’s the National Policy Forum. Our reviews will feed into that, the National Policy Forum and the NEC are about to have an away-day about the policy making processes over the next year or two. So I can’t say precisely but it will feed into our processes and at the end we’ll have an answer.
AN: The other big issue we’ve been talking about today of course is Syria and the bombing of Syria. Now Philip Hammond is waiting there to see if he can persuade enough Labour MPs to support bombing in Syria to go back to the Commons for another vote on this. What’s going to happen in your view on the Labour side? ME: Well, I think it would help if the government came forward with proposals which they haven’t done yet. We’ve seen all this noise in the newspapers and briefings and denials about the fact that they’ve been trying to persuade Labour MPs. I’ve seen nothing of that. There have been some general briefings amongst backbench colleagues about the situation in Syria, but nobody has come forward with proposals. Now we have been very clear about this. We will treat with the utmost seriousness any proposal the government comes forward with on the situation in Syria, but they must tell us what the legal basis is; they must tell us what the aims and objectives are; what the – is hoped to be achieved by adding our planes into the 60 countries who are already there engaged in action in Syria, what’s the military advantage. And we must come up with a process through the United Nations to make sure that we can tackle the root cause of this problem which is of course the civil war in Syria.

AM: Simon Fisher, who is a young enthusiastic Socialist who’s been advising your Leader appears to have advised people in a particular constituency to vote for Class War rather than a Labour Party candidate and has been suspended by the NEC for that. Is suspension enough? Should he be fired for it? ME: Well as far as I’m aware his suspension is an administrative suspension whilst there’s an investigation that goes on. That is not unusual. It does not carry with it any suggestion that he’s guilty or not guilty. The NEC which is charged with doing these things – they have all the fun – they have to investigate and they will do that and at the end of that process they will make a decision about the future of Mr Fisher.
AM: I rechristened him Simon Fisher. He’s Andrew.
ME: He’s Andrew, he is indeed.
AM: Fisher or course he’s Andrew Fisher and he’s clearly an enthusiast. A lot of people around the new leadership come from, as it were, parts of the world to the left of the traditional Labour Party. Are you concerned there’s been too much of that already coming in?
ME: Well, I don’t think – I think it’s good that new people are joining the Labour Party. I mean for years we’ve talked about increasing our membership, 164 thousand new members. I think that’s important. I think we’re going to have a lot of debates that perhaps will go wider now than they have in the past 20 years, but if you’re confident of your argument, if you’re confident that politics matters – that the Labour Party matters – you welcome these things and I do.
AM: Maria Eagle, you have a fascinating few months ahead of you. Thank you very much indeed for joining us today.

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