ANDREW MARR:
Now if the Russian plane returning from Sharm El Sheikh was downed by a bomb planted by ISIS, then we are under more direct threat from the terrorists than ever before. Would that change the mood at Westminster over air strikes on targets to Syria? I’m joined by the Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond on his way down to the cenotaph after this of course as well. Good morning to you, Foreign Secretary.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
First of all, what’s your instinct from everything you’ve seen about this downing of the plane? Is it a terrorist attack?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well on the basis of the information that’s available to us, we think it’s more likely than not that it was caused by an explosive device on board, and we’re now seeing others taking action – most importantly the Russians who of course are right in the heart of the investigation into the crash of their plane – taking similar action to us.
ANDREW MARR:
Now there’s of course a lot of British people still out there - apparently very angry, many of them. What’s your message? How long is it going to be before they all get back, do you think?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well, first of all, I’ve just spoken to our ambassador to Egypt who’s down in Sharm just as I came in here this morning.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Rather a tough time I thought in the airport from some people?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well obviously the media will always find a discontented person. What he’s telling me is that the mood in Sharm generally is calm. People understand what’s going on. They appreciate that their safety is being put above all other considerations and we are getting people out. Three thousand, three hundred out so far. By the end of today should be 5,000 people back home. Many people will want to stay and complete their holidays and then leave. We haven’t changed our advice with regard to the resort of Sharm El Sheikh itself. Those who want to come out early, the airlines will do their very best to accommodate them. But of course there is a constraint. We’ve imposed on the system a much higher level of security checking and the Egyptians have been very cooperative in making that happen, but we’re running up against the capacity limits of the airport given the additional measures that are being applied and that’s what’s causing the delay to some flights.

ANDREW MARR:
So how long before everybody who wants to get out now gets out, do you think?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well what we’re understanding is that at most people will experience a delay of two or three days (I think that’s what EasyJet have indicated) beyond their schedule travel date if they want to come out early. Other people will want to remain and complete their holidays.
ANDREW MARR:
Now if it was a bomb, if it was a bomb put on board at the airport, then presumably this changes our view of lots and lots of airports across the Middle East through parts of Turkey, through North Africa, great swathes of North Africa. Is the Foreign Office conducting a review of airport security in that part of the world?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well it’s the Department for Transport that has that responsibility and it is doing it and it has been doing it on an ongoing ...

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But it’s your advice, isn’t it?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
We set the travel advice, but the Department for Transport has a body of aviation security experts who constantly travel around airports. This isn’t a one-off. They’re doing it all the time – reviewing airport security, particularly in vulnerable airports. But if this turns out to be a device planted by an Isil operative or by somebody inspired by Isil, then clearly we will have to look again at the level of security we expect to see in airports in areas where Isil is active.

ANDREW MARR:
It’s hard to see how this could be done and keep those airports operating at the same kind of levels as they are now if everybody who works in an airport has to be screened and properly screened right across, I don’t know, a third of the world or so. It’s going to change the whole way we think about flying, it’s going to change whether people go on holidays, it’s going to change the economies of many countries.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well it will have an impact, but it’s absolutely doable. I mean we know that there are people in this country who would love to smuggle an explosive device onto aeroplanes, who would do it if it was possible. But because our airport security is what it is, we’ve been remarkably successful for over 25 years in ensuring that nobody is able to get an explosive advice onto a plane. What we’ve got to do is ensure
that airport security everywhere is at the level of the best and that airport security
reflects the local conditions. And where there is higher local threat …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Are those two things compatible?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
… where there’s a higher local threat level that will mean higher levels of security are
required. And that may mean additional costs, it may mean additional delays at
airports as people check in.

ANDREW MARR:
Because there’ll be a lot of people watching this who will be wanting to fly to the
Gulf, who will be wanting to fly to North Africa and to all sorts of parts of the Middle
East now asking themselves, is this any longer still safe?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
And that’s the point of our aviation security effort across the world. We rate airports
and we score them. If we believe an airport is unsafe, we would say so. We work with
local authorities who are almost always very keen to work with us. We support them
where they need support, we provide expert advice, we advise them on equipment that
they need to have. But it’s not just about equipment; it’s about training, it’s about
management and motivation of staff. That’s the key issue to keeping airports safe.

ANDREW MARR:
What about this apparent missile that went towards a British plane over the Sinai
desert a few weeks ago. Why did we not hear about it at the time?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Oh, well I think it was a few months ago now. This is the Thomson flight incident?

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.
PHILIP HAMMOND:
Yeah, I mean I looked very carefully at that at the time. I’m pretty sure that was a red herring and we have a very good explanation of what actually happened. There was an Egyptian military exercise going on on the ground and I think I was satisfied, everybody in our system was satisfied at the end of that investigation that that was not an attempt on the plane, the plane was not in danger at any time.

ANDREW MARR:
Isil are of course able … they’ve accumulated quite a lot of ex-Iraqi military material - some American, and in due course - no doubt - some Russian as well. What do you feel about the possibility of this organisation having surface-to-air missiles and bringing down jets across the region?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well it’s not impossible, but we’ve seen no evidence yet that they do have this kind of equipment, and clearly airlines and aviation security organisations take into account the risks when they set guidance to airlines about minimum heights they should fly at and areas that they should avoid altogether.

ANDREW MARR:
Don’t we need a new strategy for Isil? We’re going … You’ve been talking about going to the House of Commons to get permission for bombing and one of the reasons that MPs are not supporting the government about this – another eight Tornadoes on the back of everything Americans are going to do, it’s not going to be a game changer - the former Vice Chief of the Defence Staff has said something very similar, this is not going to be a war-winning operation – and therefore MPs say well if there isn’t a war-winning strategy, why are we doing it? Don’t we need a war-winning strategy?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well, clearly we are part of a coalition of more than 60 nations and a decision we make on its own isn’t going to tip the balance in the campaign on the battlefield. To be successful against Isil, we have to destroy Isil in its heartland in Eastern Syria, and to do that effectively we have to get a political solution to the broader civil war in Syria. That process is now underway again with a meeting held in Vienna ten days
ago. We’re having another meeting in Vienna next Saturday to take that process forward. We have to get a ceasefire on the battlefield, we have to get a political dialogue going that involves the legitimate opposition groups in Syria, so that we can get all people who believe in a future for Syria working together against the terrorists in Isil.

**ANDREW MARR:**
This is really interesting because I was talking to Sir Nick Houghton, the CDS, and he thinks that this is a possible turning point in our relations with the Russians. They may look again at the transition from Assad in Syria and this may be the moment when Putin ceases to be our great enemy and becomes in some sense an ally.

**PHILIP HAMMOND:**
Well, on this particular issue, Syria and Isil, we see eye to eye with the Russians on lots of things. Our vision for a future Syria is broadly similar. The …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* Well, except for Assad presumably?

**PHILIP HAMMOND:**
Well except for A… I’ll come to that. The need to destroy Isil - the Russians completely agree with us. They’ve got a very large Muslim population in the Russian Federation. They are very alert to the risks of radicalisation. The one thing we disagree on, frankly, is the future of Bashar al-Assad where we and most of our allies and partners believe that he needs to go at a point in the transition process and the Russians at the moment are still staying no, he must be allowed to stand in a future election if he wishes to do so. I hope they’ll change their minds on that.

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* So we’re talking about a transition at some point in the future. It doesn’t sound as though we’re that far apart on that issue either.

**PHILIP HAMMOND:**
What would be perfect would be if Mr Assad was to wake up one morning and decide
he just didn’t want to do this job anymore …

ANDREW MARR:
Wouldn’t that be great, yes?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
… and he wouldn’t be standing in a future presidential election. The one person who has the power to persuade him that that is in his and his country’s best interest is President Putin and I hope that at some point in this process he’ll decide to do that.

ANDREW MARR:
After this disaster, is there any evidence at all the Russians are spending more time focused attacking Isil themselves rather than other enemies of Assad?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
No, and that’s the problem – we’ve got a fundamental difference of view. The Russians believe that the way to deal with Isil is first of all to strengthen the regime and then allow the regime to finish off Isil. We believe that so long that as Assad is still there, the opposition in Syria is going to be primarily focused on the Assad regime. You’re never going to get the opposition and the regime working together unless an exit for Assad has been guaranteed, so that we know he’s going at a certain point in time.

ANDREW MARR:
So that’s the crux of any talks …

PHILIP HAMMOND:
That is the crux.

ANDREW MARR:
… but those are going to happen?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Next Saturday.
ANDREW MARR:
Meanwhile, when it comes to this country, are plans for a vote in the House of Commons to allow the RAF to target Isis inside Syria, are they now off the table?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
No, not at all, we’re in exactly the same place. Despite the story that ran earlier last week, we’re in exactly the same place that we’ve been for months. When we think that it’s right to do so and when we’re confident that there’s a consensus in the House of Commons, we will go to the House of Commons and hold a debate and vote.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well, with respect there’s never going to be a consensus. The question is have you got enough Labour MPs to back you, that you’re pretty sure you can get that vote through?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
I mean look we are in a slightly different situation now. The Labour Party is a different organisation to that we faced before the summer. We need to understand where the Labour Party is on this. At the moment even its leader doesn’t always agree with its policies, so there’s a sort of exploration process here of understanding whether a majority of Labour MPs would in fact back this action. The way we’ve always worked in this country, with one notable exception – the 2013 vote on Syria strike …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) The Syrian subject, yes.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
… The way we’ve always worked, apart from that for hundreds of years, is that when it’s a question of putting British troops into, at military action, putting themselves in danger, we have always sought to work with a cross-party consensus. And whether we’ve been in government or in opposition, that has always been the Tory Party’s approach. And it, until 2013, was always the Labour Party’s approach and I hope we can get back to that position – that on the really big issues, we have consensus.
ANDREW MARR:
(over) But as soon as you think we have enough Labour votes to do this, you will do it?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
When we think it is the right thing to do and we have a consensus in the House of Commons …

ANDREW MARR:
Alright.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
... to get a majority, we will go back to Parliament.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright, let me move onto another subject entirely.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
Again in the papers, all over the papers is the Prime Minister’s much tougher sounding words about being prepared to lead Britain out of Europe if he doesn’t get what he wants. Now this week we’re supposed to see the letter going to Donald Tusk which sets out the government’s objectives. Can I ask, have you seen those objectives?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
I’ve seen the draft of the letter. We’ve been working on it, yes.

ANDREW MARR:
Marvellous. Will it include some detail because people are very, very interested in the detail of things that we’re asking for – above all this 4 year ban on in-work benefits for migrants coming in from the rest of the EU to this country?
PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well, what it’ll do is – and it’s what we were asked to do … We were asked by the president of the council specifically to write the letter in this format, drawing together our arguments and our asks. We’ve set them out before. We’ve set them out in speeches, in articles, but we have never yet collated them …

ANDREW MARR
(over) And this specific and crunchy, is it?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) … we’ve never yet collated them into a single document which sets out what it is Britain is seeking to change, why we are seeking that change, and to set out some parameters for that change. What it doesn’t do and what it won’t do at this stage is set out detailed specific legislative changes. That's for the negotiation. In many cases, there will be more than one way of delivering the change that Britain wants to see and it’ll be for a discussion with our neighbours in Europe about how best to do it.

ANDREW MARR:
So we won’t see details of, for instance, the in-work benefit proposals?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well, you will see us setting out a clear marker for what it is we need to achieve, what it is we have to get to. Now there could be different ways of doing that – combinations of use of domestic legislation and European legislation, changes to treaties or other ways of delivering legislative change. We don’t want to be excessively prescriptive at the beginning of a discussion because this letter …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Right, I understand that.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
… this letter is not the end of the process, it’s the beginning of the process.
ANDREW MARR:
But in domestic terms this particular issue has made headlines since 2014.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
It’s been something that was talked about a lot during the election campaign, before the election campaign and again after the election campaign …

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
… and lots of people are focusing on this as the sort of acid test as to whether the Prime Minister gets what he wants. So can I ask you whether you accept, as a lot of MPs seem to think now, that the proposal for a 4 year ban on in-work benefits would actually be illegal under EU law?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Under current EU law, it may not comply, but that’s why we … (Marr over/finaudible) Well we’re looking for changes, and some of the changes we’re looking for will require changes to the body of law - the treaties and the EU secondary legislation – that are currently in place. We wouldn’t be having to have a complex renegotiation if we didn’t require substantial changes in the law that governs the EU.

ANDREW MARR:
But you know this country well. Do you accept that if you don’t get big changes to stop the inward flow of EU workers, you will not be able to win a referendum?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
What I have said repeatedly – and it’s not just migration, there are several areas where we have to get substantive, irreversible, legally binding change in order to satisfy the British people. The British people will not be fobbed off with a set of cosmetic alterations to the way the EU works. This is about fundamental change in the
direction of travel of the European Union to make sure that it works for Britain and that it is an effective organisation for all the citizens of Europe, driving our prosperity and our competitiveness in the 21st century. And if we can’t do that, then we won’t be able to win a referendum.

ANDREW MARR:
And if you don’t get … if you don’t see fundamental, serious, irreversible change of the kind you’ve been talking about, the Prime Minister’s made clear that he would not be in favour of staying inside the EU. Is that also your view?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well, what the Prime Minister’s said – and I completely agree with this language – is if our partners snub us, if they turn a deaf ear to the very reasonable demands of the British people, demands that are in fact in the interests of all the people of the European Union, then we will have to think again about how to protect Britain’s interests in the future. We’re all clear that …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And in those circumstances …

PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) … Britain gains significant economic benefits from being in the European Union but the European Union has serious problems that need fixing and we have, during this process, we have to get those things fixed.

ANDREW MARR:
And is there a perfectly tolerable life for this country outside the EU if this doesn’t work?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well, there would be big challenges for Britain outside the European Union because many of our important trade and investment partners around the world see us primarily as a very user friendly gateway into the European Union. If you talk to Americans or Chinese or Arabic investors, they understand London, they like working
through Britain, they understand our legal system, but we are an entry point for them to the EU. If we weren’t in the EU, we would have to find a different way of promoting our economy. It’s not impossible, but it would be challenging.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So it’s not impossible, but it’s difficult. Okay. Now you sit in cabinet, you know all your colleagues very well. Is it really the case that things are so bad between the Chancellor and Iain Duncan Smith that we are on the verge of a cabinet resignation?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
I don’t think so.

ANDREW MARR:
You don’t think that Iain Duncan Smith is angry about attempts to go for universal credit to make up for the …?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Look, we all have robust discussions with the Chancellor. That’s the nature of the way government works. The role the Treasury exercises means that inevitably we have tough discussions …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) He very rarely comes with good news.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well, look the Chancellor has a really tough job to do, but the headline commitment that we made to the British people in the General Election earlier this year was to get Britain out of deficit and into surplus. That underpins everything else that we’re doing and our ability to deliver a better health service, better education, a better quality of life for people in this country, and we have to deliver on that.

ANDREW MARR:
Is cabinet and adviser level kind of solidarity on that particular issue sufficient at the
moment because we’re getting a lot of briefings from a lot of very, very angry people at the moment?

**PHILIP HAMMOND:**
Well, look of course people fight their corner and of course people seek to sway the agenda in one way or another, but I think every single one of my cabinet colleagues would agree that the number one task in front of us is eliminating the deficit and getting Britain’s economy on an even keel for the future.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Mr Hammond, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

**PHILIP HAMMOND:**
Thank you.

**ANDREW MARR:**
I’ll leave you to go to the cenotaph now.