ANDREW MARR:
Now of course the most important factor at the Olympics, like any major event these days, is going to have to be security. Protecting the venues by land, water and air will be a huge task. Recently we’ve seen sites allocated for missile launches and 13,000 military personnel are going to be on duty. So how confident can we be that London 2012 will be safe? Well joining me to talk about that and much else is the Defence Secretary Philip Hammond. Welcome.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I just start off … We’ve heard a lot about these missile sites around London and so on. What actually happens if there is a plane coming across that is not responding to air traffic control that people are worried about, the military are worried about, we have missiles to take it down. Who actually takes that decision? What happens then?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well, first of all, let me say we have a well rehearsed plan for dealing with rogue aircraft 24/7 as part of our standing air defence arrangements in the UK. During the Olympics, there will be a prohibited zone around the game centres in London, and the additional resources that we’re deploying are because the small size of that zone means that the decision making time will be significantly reduced. So the whole process of identifying …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Will be quick?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) … a rogue aircraft and dealing with it becomes much more time compressed.

ANDREW MARR:
And whose duty is it to say yes, shoot that down? Is it yours?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well ultimately the Prime Minister. There’s a group of ministers who train and rehearse the procedures for dealing with rogue aircraft, so we have a group of people who are able to do that. I’m not going to tell you who they are for obvious reasons, but there is a well rehearsed and well practiced routine for dealing with any such events.

ANDREW MARR:
Are you concerned at all - I mean this is meant to be a celebratory event …

PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) Of course.

ANDREW MARR:
… that everybody enjoys, and yet these are still tough times - that it’s going to feel too much like a sort of ring of steel around the Olympic site?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
No, absolutely not. All games since the Atlanta games have had a significant military security presence around them. I’m afraid that’s the nature of an event that’s going to attract such a massive world audience. We did a big live exercise with the military over last weekend and through part of this preceding week. The idea now is that the military will fade into the background. We don’t want to dominate these games, we want it to be a festival of sport and of culture, but the military will be there and we want people to know that the military are there in the background to provide ultimate reassurance.

ANDREW MARR:
And can I ask whether this very, very elaborate operation is in response to a specific threat, something that you are worried about, or whether it’s a general kind of it’s a dangerous world, we’d better be careful?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
It’s exactly the latter.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) The latter. There’s no specific …

PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) I’m pleased to say there is no specific threat to the games.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. Can I just turn to another area of military controversy at the moment, which is the absolute u-turn that the government has done on the fighter jets that are going to go on the new aircraft. David Cameron and the Conservatives in general roundly mocked the Labour Party for having completely the wrong … they’d taken the wrong decision, they’d got the wrong plane; silly fools, we’re going to put it right. Now not only are you going to go back to the Labour Party version of the plane, if I can put it that way. You’re spending an enormous amount of money reversing policy. Huge embarrassment.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well the facts have changed around the carrier project …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) In what way, may I ask?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
…and we’ve changed our mind about what the right decision is. And by the way, just to go back to the very beginning, of course the bizarre decision that the Labour Party took was to buy 65,000-tonne carriers and not order them with cats and traps. You normally operate vertical take-off aircraft from a carrier about a third of that size. So that’s the big historically unanswered question: why on earth did Labour do that? Our job, given that the carriers are now being built, our job is to make the best possible military use of them without busting the budget.

ANDREW MARR:
But you’ve changed policy. You’re saying we’re going to take these planes; actually no, we’re going to go back to these planes. Can you explain roughly speaking …

PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) What’s changed?

ANDREW MARR:
… how much extra money that’s going to cost the country?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well I said on Thursday we’ve spent about £40 million, £39/40 million on design work, on fitting the cats and traps to the carriers which now won’t happen. There may be up to another £10 million of exit costs around that project. And fitting the ski ramps onto the decks of the carriers could cost about another £50 million. So we’re talking …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So about 100 million?
PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) … about £100 million …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s a lot of money.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) … in total on a £10 billion project.

ANDREW MARR:
You’ve said that in terms of the cuts and the austerity it’s now over, it’s finished as far as the armed forces are concerned. But you also suggest that it’s finished as far as the civil service is concerned, the state bureaucracy, which if so will alarm quite a lot of Conservatives.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well let’s be clear what I’ve said and what was correctly reported in the Sunday Times. That the announcements we’ve already made about reductions in manpower are as far as we need to go to balance the budget, so there are still further reductions in the size of the army to get down to the 82,000 that we’ve announced, and there will be further tranches of civil service redundancy to get the civil service down to the size that we have announced. The question I was answering was are you going to have to do another round after this …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yes, in the future.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
(over) … and the answer is no.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
We’ve announced the size of the MoD and the size of the army that will be sustainable for the future.

ANDREW MARR:  
We’ve heard some bad news this morning about army deaths in Afghanistan. What can you tell us about that?

PHILIP HAMMOND:  
Well it’s still very early days and, as always with these incidents, the information that comes in at first is often quite confused and I would send out my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the airmen and the guardsmen who were killed. What appears to have happened is that an Afghan police officer opened fire on a mentoring team, a support team working with the Afghan police, and one of the assailants was killed (we think) by other Afghan police officers; one escaped.

ANDREW MARR:  
Which if so goes directly to the criticism that many people are making of this war, which is we keep being told that our forces are doing good there, they’re preparing Afghanistan for a secure, independent future, and you know again and again the people that we are supposed to be training - some of them turn round and attack us, which leads people to think well you know what is this sacrifice for?

PHILIP HAMMOND:  
The sacrifice is for our own national security. Afghanistan was a piece of ungoverned space from which international terrorists were launching attacks on our society and the societies of our allies.

ANDREW MARR:  
You don’t think in five years time it will be again?  
PHILIP HAMMOND:  
Well that is the mission we’re embarked upon: making sure that the insurgency is controlled; that the Afghan government, the Afghan security forces are able to control the country once ISAF ends its combat role in 2014. But just to put this into context. The British forces work alongside Afghan forces every day with thousands and
thousands of contacts with them every day. This is a country that has an insurgency going on in it and sadly occasionally these events occur. We don’t yet know what the motive was. We don’t yet know whether this was an insurgent who’d infiltrated the police or whether it was a policeman who simply had a grievance of some kind. Remember this is a society where people traditionally settle grievances by violence.

ANDREW MARR:
They do. Let’s turn to this society where we have a bit less of that. There’s a big argument obviously going on at the moment about the direction of the government and whether the government is spending enough time just focusing on growth and the economy and the bread and butter issues that matter to voters. When it comes to for instance gay marriage, is that something the government should be focusing on; or, to be frank, is that something that should just be dropped so that you can get on with the rest of your business?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well I think the answer is in the middle. Clearly it’s not the number one priority. If you stop people in the street and ask them what their concerns are, they will talk to you about jobs and economic growth; they’ll talk to you about the level of the wages they’re earning, wanting to see real growth in wages again; they’ll talk about rising prices; they’ll talk about crime; they’ll talk about immigration. And I think the government has to …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So should you press on with a legislation on gay marriage or not?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well there is no legislation in the Queen’s speech. There’s a consultation going on and we should look at and listen to what people are saying in response to that consultation.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Pace them slowly.
PHILIP HAMMOND:
But I think the government has got to show over the next couple of years that it is focused on the things that matter to people in this country. Not just the short-term things, but the long-term things as well: the reform of our education system; changing the welfare system, which is like turning round a super tanker; changing the welfare system so that work always pays and people have an incentive to work. These are things that will affect the long-term competitiveness of this country and, thus, the long-term prosperity of our people.

ANDREW MARR:
Does reform of the House of Lords matter to the people in the street?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well if you ask people in the street about the principle that the people who govern them should be elected by them, I’m sure that almost everybody would agree with that principle. If you ask them whether it is the most important thing on their agenda, once again I’m sure they will tell you that it’s not. And if you ask them whether we should sacrifice legislation to deal with immigration, crime, to strengthen families, to support growth in the economy, if we should sacrifice that legislation in order to force through very controversial constitutional legislation, I’m pretty sure most people would say focus on the things that really matter to us in our everyday lives.

ANDREW MARR:
And so to be clear, legislation on gay marriage and a great argument about the future of the House of Lords are things that in your view should be in the pending tray if even there? They certainly should not be at the centre of the table?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well no, let’s be clear. Legislation on the House of Lords is in the Queen’s speech. It will be introduced and it will proceed. The question will be to what extent the government should be prepared to clear the decks of everything else …

ANDREW MARR:
Sure, sure.
PHILIP HAMMOND:
… in order to possibly deal with a lengthy and very complex war of attrition over this particular piece of legislation. And I think the public would expect us to take a balanced view.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
If we can get it through easily, fine, but don’t throw all the valuable things that they would be concerned about out just to try and focus on this one issue.

ANDREW MARR:
You have a new opposite number in Paris. You’ve got this recently elected socialist government who want to get their troops out of Afghanistan pretty fast. What’s your … A) have you got any concerns about that; and B) what’s your message?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Well the concern is always that the ISAF countries, the NATO countries went into Afghanistan together and we always said we would come out together, and it’s quite important for alliance cohesion that we have a properly structured exit. On the other hand, it is clear that in parts of Afghanistan the security situation is already such that it is possible for ISAF troops to withdraw from a fighting role. And the area the French occupy in their support to the Afghans is a relatively quiet area …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So it can be done, you think?

PHILIP HAMMOND:
It probably will be possible for the French to withdraw their troops over a sensible period of time without any huge damage to the ISAF effort.

ANDREW MARR:
Philip Hammond, thank you very much indeed for coming in to talk to us.

PHILIP HAMMOND:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS