ANDREW MARR:
Now, as we heard earlier, the death of Ariel Sharon is on the minds of many people in Israel today. Another major topic for reflection in Israel, however, is November’s agreement between Iran and the international community. This thaw in relations will see some sanctions eased in return for Tehran’s promises on limiting its development of nuclear capacity. The former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has just returned from Iran where he’s been talking to its leaders as part of the UK parliamentary mission, and he joins me now from his home in Oxfordshire. Good morning to you, Jack Straw.

JACK STRAW:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I ask about you’ve been into the lair of this country, which has been a kind of international pariah for so long. Do you believe that we in the West have got Iran right over the last few years or not?

JACK STRAW:
Well I’m not being funny, we’ve got it both right and wrong. We certainly had in the Ahmadinejad government, which governed Iran between 2005 and last year, a very hardline government, which was obdurate and pretty unwilling to bring itself into line with the requirements of the United Nations Security Council about its nuclear power and possibility of nuclear weapons activities. What is also the case, however, is that those hardliners who got elected in 2005 in many respects owe their election to the way in which the right wing of the Bush administration between 2001 and 2005 gratuitously and systematically undermined the moderate government of President Khatami, so that in the end the Iranian political elite turned round and said to Khatami effectively well what on earth are you getting back in return for trying to make concessions to the United States. And to give just one example of many, after 9/11 President Khatami not only reached out in words to the United States but also took a lot of actions which benefited the United States, especially in Afghanistan, and for that pretty courageous stand, he was slapped around the head when President Bush in his January 2002 state of the union speech bracketed, quite inappropriately, Iran with Iraq and North Korea as part of the axis of evil.

ANDREW MARR:
I vividly remember talking to you some years back about the possibility of a nuclear strike on Iran and you describing that as I think “nuts”. We read in the papers recently that the Bush administration wanted you removed as Foreign Secretary for that and other crimes. Were you surprised to read that?

JACK STRAW:
No, I wasn’t. I mean Tony Blair, let me say, has always said that wasn’t the reason why he invited me to take the short walk to the office of the Leader of the House of Commons. What however is the case is that he and I were increasingly in different places, both on Iran and also on the issue of Israel Palestine. And what was absolutely true is that part of the US administration, led by John Bolton, who was the Under Secretary in the State Department on this kind of area, were briefing against me, as Bolton briefed against me to The London Times; and I was determined that whatever the Bush administration did, the British government, the British parliament should not be asked to approve military action against Iran. And that was why on the radio, I said that it was inconceivable that we’d be involved in military action; and when you,
Andrew, put it to me - a report which I think came from Bolton - that the US was thinking about nuking Iran, I described it quite rightly as nuts. What’s interesting, by the way, is that at that time, which was 2003/2004, there were repeated claims in Israeli and right wing American press that Iran would be getting a nuclear weapon in the following six months, and ten, eleven years on, that hasn’t happened is my belief.

ANDREW MARR:
It still hasn’t happened.

JACK STRAW:
And let me say that it’s not just my belief that it hasn’t happened, but the US National Intelligence Estimate published in 2007 said that they judged - not me, they - judged that Iran had abandoned nuclear weapons aspirations in 2003.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I move onto the other big story of the day, which is the death of Ariel Sharon. Hero or villain in your view?

JACK STRAW:
A bit of both to each. There’s no great secret that we didn’t exactly appreciate each other despite, I suppose, our best efforts. But if you’ll excuse me, I think the funeral is taking place today and out of respect to those who did revere him, I’d rather not get drawn into too much controversy about him today.

ANDREW MARR:
I can understand that. Just returning to Iran for a moment. It remains a pretty brutal regime - it still hangs lots of people, it’s got a very, very poor human rights record - and the supreme leader Ayatollah Khameini was saying some blistering things again about the great Satan and the dangers of dealing with the West. Do you think there’s a danger of being conned in a sense by the liberal face of the current government?

JACK STRAW:
No, I don’t think there’s a danger of being conned. Look, there’s a decision to be made by the West about whether or not we want to move gradually and carefully to
much better relations with Iran or whether we want to move away from that. If we want a row with Iran, that is easy to arrange - to pick on those things which all of us find unacceptable. But if we do that, if we don’t get an agreement with Iran, what will happen is not that it will carry in your words being an “international pariah”, but that the whole sanctions regime will erode. Although China and Russia are part of the sanction regime, China is already cleaning up in terms of industrial activity and exports to Iran. Russia is entering into further agreements. You’ll see a great nervousness amongst many European exporters, particularly Germany and Italy, about whether these sanctions should continue. So don’t anybody believe that if we increasingly intensify our hard line against Iran this will help as it were to bring Iran in from the cold, and it certainly won’t help those people who suffer from human rights abuses in Iran.

**ANDREW MARR:**
I read a story this morning, I think in The Independent on Sunday, that there’s a huge dossier about war crimes being sent to the International Criminal Court, which could involve former colleagues of yours like Geoff Hoon and Adam Ingram as well as the former Head of the British Army. How do you react? Is this a serious threat do you think to them?

**JACK STRAW:**
Well I’ve not seen the dossier. It’s the first I knew about it when I too read about it I think in The Independent on Sunday. I’m slightly surprised about this because there’s been this huge investigation under Sir Peter Gibson, the interim report of which was published just before Christmas. And that was designed to look at all these allegations against the United Kingdom government and serving army and intelligence offices, and I don’t recall, from very careful study of that report, that any of these allegations were included. So I mean that’s my reaction to it and I can’t really make any further comment on it until I see the document.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Jack Straw, thank you very much from watery Oxfordshire. There’s a lot of people in your garden, I have to tell you, walking past the window, but thank you very much indeed for joining us.
**JACK STRAW:**
It’s not our garden, by the way. Sorry, just so people don’t get the wrong idea, this is the local hotel. It’s not our garden.

**ANDREW MARR:**
It’s the local hotel. I understand. Okay, thank you very much indeed.

**JACK STRAW:**
A very fine hotel. Thank you.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Nice fire as well. Thank you.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**