JEREMY VINE:
Now three years ago delegates at the Labour conference were waiting to find out the result of an intensely fought campaign. David Miliband was favourite to replace Gordon Brown, but in the event younger brother Ed pipped him to the prize thanks to support from the big unions. Since then David Miliband has been biding his time on the back benches, but he’s now resigned from the Commons and is moving to New York next month to head up a big humanitarian charity, the International Rescue Committee. Last night he made a key speech about foreign affairs, reflecting on the experience of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He’s said little about quitting British politics so far, but this week he spoke frankly to Andrew Marr.

ANDREW MARR:
David Miliband, it’s been a long time since we’ve been talking together and I suspect it will be a long time before we talk like this again because this is the moment when you leave British politics and you move to the US. So my first question is: for how long?
DAVID MILIBAND:
Well I think it’s probably wise to get on with the new job, which starts the day after
Labour Day …

ANDREW MARR:
Right.

DAVID MILIBAND:
… in a few weeks time before I start contemplating my jobs after that. I think that it’s
nice to be on this set because I know you’ve been to hell and back, and although
viewers will be pleased to see me maybe - some of them - I think they’ll be even more
pleased to see you. And I certainly join them in that pleasure, so welcome back.

ANDREW MARR:
Well thank you for that. Your new organisation, International Rescue, won’t be
rescuing me *(Miliband laughs)* but you rescue refugees around the world.

DAVID MILIBAND:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
It’s a very important organisation. It’s got a very strange political history because it
was set up by kind of leftists from America in the 1930s, and you’ve got a family
connection to that period of course.

DAVID MILIBAND:
It was set up by Einstein. And it was set up as a charity by Einstein for people fleeing
the Nazis. Today it’s got 14,000 staff in 45 of the most god-awful places that are
really struggling around the world to provide a home for people, and so it’s a
charitable endeavour that goes into crisis zones to make a difference.

ANDREW MARR:
Set up by Einstein. You were always called the brains by people in the party …

DAVID MILIBAND:
(laughs) Not in that league.

ANDREW MARR:
… and it’s called International Rescue. The thunderbirds jokes are inevitable and you’ve heard them all before, I’m sure. But one thing that struck me looking up at International Rescue’s history is that in recent decades it’s been more and more associated with the policies of the State Department and indeed the CIA, and one of my questions is whether as boss of this organisation, you will feel that you have the complete freedom to do what you want or whether you will be in any sense a kind of proxy for American policy?

DAVID MILIBAND:
And I can absolutely guarantee you it is a proxy for nobody. I mean any conspiracy theories about the CIA - I don’t know who’s writing about that - are complete nonsense.

ANDREW MARR:
There’s an entire book on the subject, I think.

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well it’s not one that’s on the recommended reading list because this is an independent organisation. It’s a humanitarian, non-governmental organisation. It’s in Mali, it’s in Mogadishu, it’s in Syria running not guns or political ideology; it’s running medical supplies into the most desperately dangerous places. And it’s there for a simple reason: they need help. And this organisation is a charitable organisation from right down to its core.

ANDREW MARR:
Turning to your recent speech on international affairs, you’ve talked about two wars which have produced huge numbers of refugees of course - those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Talking about Iraq, you say that the balance of advantage is now strongly negative. Looking back on that war, it was a disaster. You don’t use the word ‘disaster’ but that’s pretty clearly the implication of what you say.
DAVID MILIBAND:
Well it’s true that Saddam’s gone, it’s true that the Kurds are safe, but on the other side there has been massive loss of life, massive refugee flows, massive destabilisation and there’s continuing violence. That’s absolutely true. Actually International Rescue Committee is in Iraq helping some of those …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

DAVID MILIBAND:
… refugees also in Afghanistan. And I think there are some profound lessons from both of those engagements - lessons about the centrality of political power sharing, of political settlement; lessons about the regional aspect to these conflicts; and lessons too about how mobile, what I call mobile Jihadism, changes the equation in some fundamental ways. And I think it’s important we learn those lessons and don’t draw the wrong lesson, which is it’s nothing to do with us.

ANDREW MARR:
Or, to put it in blunter terms, we were very good at kicking the door down but we didn’t have a big plan for what happened after that.

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well we won the war, but didn’t win the peace would be another way of putting it. And I think that is central and in the end it is political power sharing that is essential to the legitimacy and accountability of any government.

ANDREW MARR:
When you were talking about Iraq at the time of the Labour leadership campaign in 2010, you were much more circumspect. If you’d been saying that kind of thing now, I might be talking to you as Labour Leader.

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well to be fair to you and to me, you had me on your programmes and I used very much the same language and the same argument. Actually my position has always
been that if we’d known then that there were no weapons of mass destruction …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) We wouldn’t have gone in?

DAVID MILIBAND:
… there wouldn’t have been a war. The peace was not won even though the war was won very fast. And I can remember both in this studio and from Pakistan where you did an interview with me going through exactly the same argument, and I don’t shy away from that. I was in the Government, I voted for it. I’m not running away from that, but I think it’s also important to be absolutely clear about the consequences.

ANDREW MARR:
So when you were very clearly very irritated at that time about people applauding your brother for attacking the war, was that a question of kind of personal honour - not wanting to dump on your former leader, Tony Blair, or what?

DAVID MILIBAND:
I don’t remember that. I mean leadership elections are obviously passionate affairs …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

DAVID MILIBAND:
… but the passion was about how do you rebuild the Labour Party as a fighting force that can govern the country. And it wasn’t actually a leadership election filled with irritation. It was actually extremely comradely among all the - even brotherly, you might say …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Up to a point, yes.

DAVID MILIBAND:
… among all those who were involved with it. So I think it’s important to be open about that. I continue to believe that the choice that countries like Britain face about how it engages in this much more complex world are fundamental to our economic and political future and we should have those arguments out.

ANDREW MARR:
Because moving onto the next war, the Afghan War, you are almost as pessimistic about that. You say that the possibility of a civil war breaking out is still hanging in the balance and the Afghans could face many more years of war ahead.

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well my frustration is real. I mean I … as Foreign Secretary, I was given the instruction by Gordon Brown to do everything I could to bring that war to a successful close. That was my mission. And the strategy that I had was to argue for a political settlement - advocating talks with the Taliban (secret and open) from the start of my tenure as Foreign Secretary, arguing for the regional settlement with Pakistan and others that’s so important. And the truth is it’s only the imminence of the withdrawal of NATO forces that has led to anything like the degree of commitment to that political solution, and so I think that anyone looking at Afghanistan now would say yes there’s an end date for NATO operations but there isn’t yet the clarity of end game, and that’s very serious.

ANDREW MARR:
So we’re leaving it in a terrible mess. To all those people looking back at that very, very bloody, seemingly endless war, which has cost Britain - never mind anywhere else - so much life and blood and treasure, was it worth it?

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well it’s certainly worth it if you are one of the Afghan schoolgirls who’s getting an education - seven million in school now, one million … less than one million before.

ANDREW MARR:
So we’ve had our fingers burned twice badly - in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Then we turn to Syria and you talk about “international paralysis” when it comes to Syria -
again a dreadful conflict becoming a civil war, huge numbers of people dying, and at the moment the Assad regime on the offensive successfully. But you suggest the time has already gone past when just putting in a few more arms would actually turn the tide.

DAVID MILIBAND:
I fear it’s too late. I really do. Because I was doing an interview with you 18 months ago saying look, the burden of proof is now on those who oppose intervention because you can see where this is going. Assad is strengthening, the opposition splintering. That’s happened. It’s become a regional proxy war. Now the debate about “arming the rebels” - I mean Douglas Alexander’s made this point well - it’s a bit beside the point because the one thing Syria is not short of …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Is guns, yeah.

DAVID MILIBAND:
(over) … is the right arms, it’s not short of guns. The real truth is neither side can win. That’s what a stalemate is. And the prospect is of a very long-term stalemate with the country divided, with sections of the country being training grounds for global Jihadism. That’s what the Head of British Counter-Terrorism has now said.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s turn to the other great crisis at the moment, which is Egypt. Now Tony Blair has defended the military coup on the grounds that millions and millions of Egyptians wanted a change of government. But to a lot of people, particularly around the Muslim Brotherhood and so on, it’s going to appear as if the West’s view is we’re in favour of democracy, we’re in favour of free elections until they produce a government we don’t like - in which case we’re happy to have the old guys back.

DAVID MILIBAND:
We can’t just have the old guys back. I mean it will be a disaster of really huge proportions if Egypt 2013 is added to Algeria 1992, Egypt 1954 as cases of the destruction of democratic government because, look, the people who are appealing to
the argument that the Arab world can’t have democracy is al-Qaeda. That’s what they say - don’t trust the ballot box. So I think we’ve got to be clear this was a coup; that the entry of Islamist parties, so-called political Islam, into the democratic process is a good thing, not a bad thing; that political prisoners need to be released and genuinely democratic politics restarted in Egypt now.

ANDREW MARR:
You would stand shoulder to shoulder in a sense with Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in this great tactical battle of the generals?

DAVID MILIBAND:
(over) Well I think that the real complexity of this is that they staged their own coup last November. They were elected at the beginning of last year. In November President Morsi suborned his own constitution. He put himself above the constitution. And that’s really what’s precipitated the total collapse of the Egyptian state - remember fifteen, twenty million people on the streets. Now I think the key now is whether or not the army fulfil their initial commitment, which was to restore democracy. Political prisoners need to be released …

ANDREW MARR:
Morsi should be released too presumably?

DAVID MILIBAND:
Look, you can’t have a situation where you’re locking up people who want to be involved in democratic politics, however incompetent they may have been.

ANDREW MARR:
Right. And the Muslim Brotherhood given full rights to come back into the process?

DAVID MILIBAND:
The martyrdom of the Muslim Brotherhood, the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood is their greatest recruiting sergeant. They don’t have to take responsibility for anything if they’re pushed underground. And I think it’s important
that we recognise that democracy is about nurturing the institutions of civil society, the free media, independent judiciary, and a constitution that does get defended …

ANDREW MARR: Yeah.

DAVID MILIBAND: … both from the Morsi’s of this world who suborned it in November, six months after his election, and from an army where there are worries that actually they’ve got a longer term plan for running the country.

ANDREW MARR: Now you’ve made a clear distinction between the job of politicians to try and shape policy and the job that you’re going into now, which is in a sense to try and bind the wounds and to clear up afterwards. You’re talking still like somebody who wants to shape policy. So I come back to you, right to my first question, which was actually how long are you going to be doing this job for, never mind another job in New York? I mean …

DAVID MILIBAND: Well the truth is …

ANDREW MARR: … have you got a set term …

DAVID MILIBAND: Absolu…

ANDREW MARR: … of office, so to speak?

DAVID MILIBAND: No it’s not a fixed term contract. The truth is I don’t know.
ANDREW MARR:
Right.

DAVID MILIBAND:
I’m very committed to this organisation, the International Rescue Committee. It’s a huge honour to have been appointed as the President and CEO. In terms of what I do afterwards, look if you over-calculate you miscalculate …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

DAVID MILIBAND:
… and I am not going to over-calculate. I am a hundred per cent committed to leading this organisation with real drive and vigour and energy and making sure we literally save as many lives as possible.

ANDREW MARR:
But you’re not saying this is David Miliband leaving Britain for good and moving to the States?

DAVID MILIBAND:
(over) Oh no, we’ll definitely come back to Britain. Look I’m not … we’re not taking out US citizenship. We’ve got roots here, family, you know wife, kids. We’re British.

ANDREW MARR:
And therefore similarly you’re not ruling out a return to British politics at some time because you can’t, you don’t know what’s around the corner?

DAVID MILIBAND:
No, but don’t over-calculate because then you miscalculate. Look the truth is I didn’t think I’d be in this position, but I am now. I’m excited, I’m engaged. Of course I’m sad to go, but I’m excited by the challenge that’s ahead. I feel like a lucky person given what I’ve been able to do, what I’ve been able to contribute.
ANDREW MARR:
Last time we talked, you talked about the hurt. Has the hurt healed, has it vanished? Do you …

DAVID MILIBAND:
Of course, but you know the …

ANDREW MARR:
It has gone, has it?

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well the truth is that these things, you can never erase them from memory or history - it’s not right to pretend that - but you’re, we are brother … Not you and I. Ed and I are brothers for life. That’s not something that you … That’s something that you value and that you nurture whatever the difficulty of the circumstances.

ANDREW MARR:
And that relationship is healing a bit, do you think? Is it …

DAVID MILIBAND:
Of course.

ANDREW MARR:
It is.

DAVID MILIBAND:
And the important thing though is that we’ve got to never lead our lives by looking in the rear view mirror. That is a disaster for anybody because …

ANDREW MARR:
You crash.
DAVID MILIBAND:
… it eats you up, and you can’t afford to end up eating yourself up with that kind of struggle. You’ve got to try and say well yeah, you know there are the Murray’s of this world who win and there are the Djokovic’s who come second …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

DAVID MILIBAND:
… and you know you’ve got to be gracious when you don’t win.

ANDREW MARR:
I mean you’ve said that you struggled over this, it was a difficult one. Was there any point in the last couple of years where you came quite close to returning to frontline politics?

DAVID MILIBAND:
Not really, no, because everything I said was subject to such soap operatic interrogation that I felt I wasn’t able to do my job as a politician in the way that I wanted to. And the last thing I want to do is get in the way of Labour’s task. I’m Labour to my core. You know most people watching this programme are not tribal in their politics, they’re not sort of … they don’t have that party affiliation running through them in their DNA. I do. I’ve always argued the Labour Party has got to open out to those who are not part of our tribe, but myself - I’m Labour to my absolute core, and I never wanted people to be able to say oh you’re getting in the way of what Labour needs to do - and that was a frustration.

ANDREW MARR:
Well you’ve talked about the Labour Party a few times now, so let’s turn to … I think we agreed to do this interview months ago. We couldn’t have known then that we’d be talking in the middle of this great furore about Labour’s union links, but I wonder how …

DAVID MILIBAND:
You mean we’re going from the Middle East to Labour’s Arab Spring? Is that the sort of link? *(laughs)*

**ANDREW MARR:**
Who’s Hezbollah, who’s Hamas?

**DAVID MILIBAND:**
No, there’s no Hezbollah and Hamas in this organisation. Let’s not …

**ANDREW MARR:**
That’s a relief.

**DAVID MILIBAND:**
… let’s not go there.

**ANDREW MARR:**
It must feel slightly strange looking at what your brother has done, confronting the trade unions in this way; Tony Blair saying it’s a pivotal, historic changing point in the party - given how he won the election, given what you were saying about the trade union link two years ago. Now it’s your brother doing it. How do you feel about that?

**DAVID MILIBAND:**
Well it’s good obviously. I mean …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Were you surprised?

**DAVID MILIBAND:**
Well I think that the … I’ve had a sense that there was an inevitability about reform and I’ll tell you why. Around the world political parties, the old structures of the political parties are dying, and they have to renew themselves by opening up. By the way, just in brackets, that’s the way trade unions renew themselves as well. But in terms of political parties, the bolder they are, the more open they are, the more
successful they’re going to be because they’ve got to represent the whole of the country, more diverse societies, and they’ve got to look like more of the whole country. And so I think there’s an inevitability about the reforms that are coming through, and they’re going to be thorough going and they’re going to need to be thorough going because politics has to catch up.

ANDREW MARR:
You don’t have a wry smile in the shaving mirror when you hear your brother talking about “machine politics” and the trade union barons pulling the strings given what happened in 2010?

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well I mean I think that the … You said does it feel strange? It doesn’t feel strange, it feels good, and it puts Labour in a stronger position. Labour’s in a stronger position this week than it was last week. And I think there’s an inevitability about these reforms. They’re important, they’re urgent, they’re inevitable. They’re going to be thorough going.

ANDREW MARR:
One of the things your brother’s been saying recently is about MPs and outside earnings and so on, putting a real cap on how much MPs earn now. I know you were I think the highest paid MP …

DAVID MILIBAND:
(over) No, I wasn’t the highest paid MP actually. (laughs)

ANDREW MARR:
Well second or third. You were right up at the top of the league anyway. Do you think there’s a danger of putting people out of politics because of the salary levels, or do you think MPs are reasonably well paid?

DAVID MILIBAND:
I think people … I think actually people go into politics because … They don’t go in for the money; they go in because of what they believe in. And that’s true on the
Labour side, it’s true on the Tory side, it’s true on the Lib-Dem side, it’s true on the minor parties.

ANDREW MARR:
But also you think of those public sector workers reading about MPs such as yourself and many others earning more from one speech than they’ll earn in a year. You can see why people are put off politics, think everyone’s in it for themselves.

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well I actually think that what engages people in politics is the prospect that it can change their lives. What they actually want to know in my experience, what my constituents want to know is am I fighting for them, have I got ideas that can improve their life, and am I absolutely committed to making sure that they come first? And I think that’s what people want from their politicians.

ANDREW MARR:
What’s the future, do you think, for the Labour Party and for parties of the centre left? Do you think that they have to become mass membership parties even if the mass is much smaller than it might have been ten years ago? Have they cut the links with the trade unions completely?

DAVID MILIBAND:
Well they’ve certainly got to become mass membership parties. That doesn’t mean cutting things. It means bringing people in and it means forging relationships with individual trade unions. But let me tell you this about the way I’ve seen the Labour Party over thirty years. When I came into the Labour Party, there was a choice between the sectarian and unelectable left and an unappealing right. And what’s happened over my thirty years is that the new majority in the Labour Party, which is willing to say we’re pro-Europe (because that was a traditional right wing position) we’re pro-public sector reform (that was a traditional left wing position) - we are the new majority in the party, and that fills me with optimism about the future of the party. That’s the new majority that will actually support Ed’s reforms. It’s the new majority that will be ready to take tough decisions in local government, which they’re doing. It’s the new majority that in the end is the right place for left of centre parties to be because it’s right that we’re idealistic, but we don’t become dogmatic. And
that’s why the success that we had in the 90s and the 2000s was because we had a way of thinking that was in tune with the modern world. That is the absolute key.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Looking at the opinion polls and stuff at the moment, it seems that we may be into another period of coalition government with whoever - I’m not saying whether it be left or right. But do you think that the age of big single party majority government in this country is coming to an end?

**DAVID MILIBAND:**
Well I don’t take the conventional wisdom on this. I actually think the conventional assumption that we’re bound to get a coalition is wrong. I actually think that in the end the British people will take a view and I think that is a great prize for Labour. The danger is it could be a great prize for the Tories as well. So I think there’s a bit too much mathematics going on in the way people are looking at the polls. But remember the polls are meaningless at this stage because they start with the question: how would you vote if there was an election tomorrow? There isn’t an election tomorrow. People will come to a judgement about the future of the country in two years time and I would say it’s all to play for. It’s open. And I don’t think anyone on either side should be banking on the fact that it’s bound to be a coalition. I don’t see it that way.

**ANDREW MARR:**
So by leaving British politics, you end the soap opera of brother against brother. Do you think the soap opera of Brownites and Blairites is over as well?

**DAVID MILIBAND:**
Yes and this is about how we forge a politics that is post-Blair, post-Brown. That’s what this is all about. And you know all the energy goes into making sure it’s backing government because a day in government is worth a thousand in opposition.

**ANDREW MARR:**
I think we’ve already had a call from Mr Roy Hattersley complaining about your unappealing right comment, but apart from that we understand where you’re going.
DAVID MILIBAND:
But, look, the machine politics of the right was unappealing …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

DAVID MILIBAND:
… and that’s why it turned a lot of people off and we ended up with a sectarianism of
the left that had too much power in the Eighties. That’s what’s not going to come
back.

ANDREW MARR:
So you’re going to have a mass membership party. It’s going to carry on reforming,
it’s going to change under your brother. It’s possible that you could be back as part of
that at some point in the future. You can’t rule that out?

DAVID MILIBAND:
Shock horror, Miliband says he’s not ruling out anything. I mean honestly we’re way
beyond that. This is a world filled with massive opportunity and massive problems.
That’s what people want to talk about.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. David Miliband, thank you very much for joining us.

DAVID MILIBAND:
Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS