AM: I’m joined now by the French Ambassador to the UK, Madame Sylvie Bermann. Ambassador, it doesn’t seem very long since we were talking in the wake of Charlie Hebdo and here we are again. I suppose the first question is whether this is another Charlie moment. In other words, there was a huge outpouring of grief, everyone expressed solidarity and shock, but then in a sense the world returned to normal, not much seemed to happen as a result of that. Or is this more of a 9/11 moment, when the world changes? Which is it, do you think?

SB: Well, first Andrew, thank you for inviting me today, and I would like also to thank the British government, British citizens, for demonstrations of solidarity. You know, that the Queen wrote to the President, Prime Minister to our President and there’s all sorts of signs of sympathy which is very important to us. Well, I think this is totally different from Charlie Hebdo attacks. This time this is more like 9/11. This is an act of war. Those attacks have been coordinated, planned, organised from outside, from Isis.

AM: Your president also used the phrase, ‘an act of war,’ and of course under article 5 of the NATO charter an attack on one NATO country is an attack on all NATO countries. Do you think that the charter can now be invoked so that other countries will stand shoulder to shoulder with France against Isil?

SB: Well, I don’t know if there’s going to be a NATO reaction, but it’s also something which is very different from events that we knew of before, since it’s a terrorist organisation. You know that we don’t use the word even Isis, because we think it’s neither an Islam based government, neither a state, it’s a terrorist group.
AM: You say daesh.

SB: We say daesh, yes.

AM: Daesh. Well, let’s talk about daesh then. Because the question is if this is an act of war how do we respond? Are we going to go to war on daesh in a new way?

SB: Well, what we’re already doing is striking daesh, and we’re striking them not because of any ideology but we’re striking them because they’re killers. Because they’re planning killings in our countries and especially in France, and that’s what’s happening this time. So that’s the reason why we decided to strike them and the Americans do also.

AM: Another thing your president said was that France’s borders would have to be closed. And I wondered what that actually means. Does that mean if people are driving cars from Belgium or Switzerland into France they will now be stopped and be checked? And I wonder what it means for British people, for instance, going across to Europe, going through the tunnel.

SB: Well, I think it is not closed in fact. But people are checked. And I think –

AM: So it’s border checks.

SB: Yes, it’s border checks, because that’s important for security.

AM: Is this the end, do you think, of borderless Europe?

SB: Sorry?

AM: Is this the end of borderless Europe? If people can bring weapons in from the Balkans and drive across Europe from one
end to the other, a lot of people will think we have to change the way we do things.

SB: Well, what is obvious is that we have to strengthen our external borders and there’s a lot to be done, including by the European Union, Frontex, and that’s also the reason why we want to have those hotspots properly working and doing the screening of people.

AM: Daesh put out this swaggering and offensive statement last night, but in it they said that France was the leader of the crusader states. So do you think there is some aspect of this which – because France was taking such an aggressive line in Syria, that Paris became a target?

SB: Well, I think – I don’t agree with the word crusade, of course, and it’s just it’s true this is – yes, but that’s their word and this their fanaticism, and – but it’s really a war, just again, because they’re planning to kill us, and that’s the reason why we are intervening. They know that the US does also, but it’s more difficult because it’s very far away from them.

AM: Absolutely. Is there a concern in France at the moment about security failures? Because as we were hearing from Emily, one of the people involved was known to the French security forces as a dangerous man, and we then have this strange thing where they Germans picked up a car full of Kalashnikovs and other weapons and so forth on its way to Paris and apparently did not inform the French authorities.

SB: Well, I think we have reinforced our security since Charlie Hebdo, and you know, we deployed seven thousand troops, but of course you can’t have 100 per cent surveillance, and so we have to increase that of course. We deployed three thousand extra men and also what is important is intelligence sharing with other
countries and in particular with the UK. And it’s very important and all our ministers involved are in close contact. But you know we already prevented a lot of attacks but it can’t be 100 per cent unfortunately.

(ends)