ANDREW MARR:  
Now then. When Labour left office in 2010, Jack Straw was one of only three people who had served continuously in cabinet throughout the party’s thirteen years in government under Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown. Appropriately his recent autobiography is subtitled *Memoirs of a Political Survivor*. When Labour returned to opposition, he had to relearn all sorts of skills like driving. He had got so used to having protection officers to do that for him. Well he’s been in the news again recently because of the controversy over the alleged rendition of detainees to face torture abroad on his watch. Jack Straw joins me now. Good morning.

JACK STRAW:  
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:  
Can we start talking about you know the terrible story that dominates the papers and the bulletins today?
JACK STRAW:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
When you came in as Home Secretary, there was this thing called the Snowdrop Petition which was basically pressing for even tighter controls on handguns, in particular, after the Dunblane massacre. And so I just wonder what your advice would be to the American politicians, including Obama, who are now confronted with a much more formidable gun lobby and wondering how to proceed?

JACK STRAW:
Well, look, the American situation is sadly completely different from ours because they have this love affair with guns. And notwithstanding of the fact that crime has gone down and murders have gone down in the US, the fear of crime has gone up and so people are arming themselves not just with hand pistols but with semi-automatic machine guns of the kinds that were used in this Sandy Hook massacre. So it is a very different circumstance. My advice however, for what it’s worth, is this. That there is no act of parliament, no act of congress that can guarantee there’ll never be a massacre. Even in Norway where they had very tight gun laws, you’ve had massacres; and we’ve had them here in Cumbria, if you remember, notwithstanding the fire arms legislation. However, the more you tighten the law, the more you reduce the risk, and there is no doubt at all that the Firearms Act, which I brought in in 1997, had quite a lot of controversy outside - people saying quite legitimately you’re taking away our right to use pistols, we’re not the criminals. However it settled down. It’s extremely difficult to get a licence for a pistol or for a rifle and I think people feel much happier about that and safer.

ANDREW MARR:
Do you see movement happening in the States or do you think it’s an impossibility given the National Rifle Association?

JACK STRAW:
I’m not putting any money on movement happening. I think sensible people want it to happen, but the National Rifle Association, which is this extraordinary gun lobby and
gun manufacturers lobby, controls politics in a number of states. And one of the other things we don’t understand about US politics is that because there is no limit whatever on the amount that outside organisations can spend on political advertising - none at all, no bans, they can buy commercials - that if you're a politician and you get involved in something controversial and an outside lobby - maybe the Israeli lobby, maybe the gun lobby - they will almost literally kill you politically. And that …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Though of course Obama doesn’t have to face re-election.

**JACK STRAW:**
Obama doesn’t, but he faces of course a congress which does. And you have this completely mad aspect of the American Constitution - elections every two years. I mean it’s one of the very few democracies where there’s election after election …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* It’s almost constant, yes.

**JACK STRAW:**
… and so it’s always constant.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay. Let me turn to another controversy which you’re very familiar with during your time as Home Secretary, which is arguments for the legalisation, decriminalisation of drugs.

**JACK STRAW:**
Yeah, yeah.

**ANDREW MARR:**
We’ve got MPs again calling for a major push and there’s possibly a royal commission. Have your views changed at all? You were always pretty hardline.

**JACK STRAW:**
Well my views about whether you should decriminalise it, particularly soft drugs, have not changed. However, you’ve got to think about this all the time. If you look at the evidence, very interesting piece the other day in the Independent from Mike Trace who was our so-called drug tsar, but a guy who really knows about this, saying - I paraphrase - that on the whole what we’ve done in the last fifteen years has been a relative success because, interestingly, don’t see much about this in the papers, drug use by all age groups in the population but particularly the younger people has gone down and we put loads of money into drug abusers who ended up in prison and that’s also helped there. However, I’m not so certain about my views that I think they should never be re-examined.

ANDREW MARR:
So possibly a big commission will look again at all of this?

JACK STRAW:
(over) You know and certainly I mean I don’t accept what Nick Clegg says that there’s been some kind of conspiracy of silence about this. I think that if you have a particular view - this is a really complicated, quite difficult area of public policy …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

JACK STRAW:
… then you ought to be ready to have it examined. So my view is yes if you could set up a royal commission that was going to do a pretty speedy job - that’s important, not take many, many years - and you get the decent people on it who would be able to sort of stand back and come to a view, then fine. I mean my worry let me say on this issue of decriminalisation is would it lead to an increase in consumption and, therefore, into abuse and harm?

ANDREW MARR:
Yes, yes.
Because I’m not sure if we were to start again with tobacco and somebody came along and said “I’ve found this wonderful product that makes you hazy …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yeah Walter Raleigh I think it was, yeah.

JACK STRAW:
Walter Raleigh came along now, I think we’d probably say hang on a second, we’d rather keep that banned.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. Let me turn to the other controversy that’s in the papers, which is the rendition one.

JACK STRAW:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
Now a Libyan dissident has been paid £2.2 million by the British government because he was rendered; he was taken (he says with MI6 help) and then tortured in Libya. And I know there’s another case still pending, which makes it difficult for you to comment. But you know you’re a reflective man, you’ve reflected a lot on the issues around the Iraq War and what you knew at the time. There is something very, very worrying, is there not, about our relationship with Gaddafi leading so quickly to people being sent back and tortured?

JACK STRAW:
Well, look, there’s a great deal I would like to say on this subject, a huge amount, and I will do at an appropriate stage. But I’m very sorry, Andrew, but for the very reasons you’ve already raised - there’s another, there are two cases here, one has been settled and one has not been settled and it’s in an active stage of proceedings - that I can’t say any more except to say, as I said in a statement I issued last Thursday, that I was always scrupulous in observing my duties under the law in respect of this and everything else. So that’s the position.
ANDREW MARR:
Can you go as far as to say that what happened to these two men was terrible?

JACK STRAW:
Well that’s to comment on the merits of the case and I understand your concern. Let me say I feel very frustrated about all this. I would love to say a very great deal about this and wider issues …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

JACK STRAW:
… and you’re quite right to say in my book I expatiate on all these other issues …

ANDREW MARR:
Around Iraq, yes.

JACK STRAW:
… including Iraq and Iran. And you may remember that on Iran, I think it was …

ANDREW MARR:
On this programme. You used the word “crackers” to …

JACK STRAW:
And “nuts”. And I’m un-apolog…

ANDREW MARR:
…. And “nuts” to attack Iran.

JACK STRAW:
Yes, a nuclear attack on Iran would be crackers.

ANDREW MARR:
On the wider rendition issue, however, all the CIA flights going through Britain - and there were lots of those - your critics say they find it very difficult to understand how you as Foreign Secretary with MI6 alongside you knew nothing about this at the time.

**JACK STRAW:**
Well I published … I don’t think there were lots of them. I mean I’m ready to be proved wrong on this and what the …

**ANDREW MARR:**
There were … A pretty large number have been recorded and discussed.

**JACK STRAW:**
What the government has promised is a re-establishment of the Gibson Inquiry, the judge led inquiry into renditions or alleged renditions. I’m very happy indeed to answer for my actions. But we did … When this …

**ANDREW MARR:**
And do you feel comfortable about that episode in your political life?

**JACK STRAW:**
Well I feel … As I said earlier, I was very scrupulous indeed about observing my legal duties. And when this worry came forward, we did the most thorough examination possible about whether renditions had taken place either through British air space, I mean here in the United Kingdom …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yes.

**JACK STRAW:**
… or in places like Diego Garcia. And with one exception, as I recall, which David Miliband brought out to the House of Commons in 2008, there were none. I mean there were two let me say transfers of prisoners which I agreed as Home Secretary, which could be classified as renditions, but that was all on the record. So am I comfortable? This was really a set of … The jobs I had were very difficult …
ANDREW MARR:
Yuh.

JACK STRAW:
… but I am comfortable about the decisions I made. I’m very happy too for them to
be examined.

ANDREW MARR:
Fine. You mentioned your book just now. One of the things in your book is the
agonising you went through about whether or not to basically join in a plot to remove
Gordon Brown …

JACK STRAW:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
… when he seemed to be failing as Prime Minister, and you said in the end you know,
like lots of people, you were prepared to wound but not to kill as it were.

JACK STRAW:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
You could have helped to change political history possibly had you … I still, having
read the book, don’t quite understand why you chose not to.

JACK STRAW:
Well I could have changed political history. The problem was that we didn’t know
how we were going to change political history. Of course Alistair Darling, Harriet and
the rest of us of course were deeply worried about what was happening inside the
Labour government and our hopes and aspirations and perfectly rational judgments
about Gordon weren’t quite working out as planned. The problem, however, if we’d
organised a coup, is that history might have …
ANDREW MARR:
Gone the other way.

JACK STRAW:
… gone the other way, and there could have been total chaos and a collapse of the Labour … So that was the worry.

ANDREW MARR:
That would have been the worry. Alright, for now thank you very much indeed, Jack Straw.

INTERVIEW ENDS