ANDREW MARR:
For much of his political career, the Foreign Secretary William Hague has been a leading opponent of the euro. As far back as 1998, he warned that the single currency would fail and there would be rioting on the streets. And so it has happened, and ahead of another crunch meeting for the Greeks, he joins me now. Welcome Foreign Secretary.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Thank you.

ANDREW MARR:
The Greeks should leave the euro. Democratically it is their only option - question mark.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
It’s not easy either way. I mean this was one of the problems in the creation of the euro that I was pointing to right back in 1998. You can make the argument either way if you are Greek and you can say let’s take control of our destiny now. On the other hand, it’s not straightforward to leave the euro. You know there is no legal provision
even for a country to leave the euro and stay in the European Union at the moment, and they don’t have the old currency sitting in the vaults ready to distribute. They’d have to be prepared to take action to stop euros leaving the country, maybe have border controls. You know it was built with no exits, the euro. So it’s not easy either way for them and what we need for our country is an end to the uncertainty.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But in terms of political principle, as a Democrat isn’t it wrong that a country like Greece is in the position, isn’t it wrong that a country like Ireland finds its budget discussed in the Bundestag before it’s discussed in the Dail?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well I think that’s something we would never want in this country. That’s a key reason why we should never join the euro. I’m absolutely clear about that. So I very strongly agree with that argument. But those countries chose to join the euro. They didn’t all consult their own people about it, of course, but …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Which is democratically dangerous.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… but their elected governments chose to join the euro. There are consequences to that, which is that it does require closer fiscal integration, it does require closer political integration. It can’t work without that. And it imposes, when Germany is in a currency like that, it imposes on the others Germanic discipline if they are going to be able to stay in it for the long-term.

ANDREW MARR:
You and the Foreign Office you know have plans for what to do if Greece does leave the euro and does default and all of that, and you must regard it as a likely outcome?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well we have to prepare for … In the Foreign Office, we prepare for things whether
they’re likely or not.

ANDREW MARR:

*(over)* Yeah, I’m asking you whether it’s a likely outcome.

WILLIAM HAGUE:

Well I’m not … I don’t think it would be helpful for me to say whether it’s likely or not likely. We want an end to the uncertainty. Yes we have prepared contingency plans if we need to help British nationals who are there in any way. We keep those up to date on a daily basis. But it’s now for the Eurozone and the Greeks to sort out what will happen. The best thing that Britain can do is make sure our own finances are in order and we are a safe haven relatively speaking for international ….

ANDREW MARR:

Yes.

WILLIAM HAGUE:

We are borrowing at a record low rate and we’ve given good advice to the Eurozone about what to do, inc… Some of which they’re now doing. The European Central Bank has been putting more liquidity into the banking system of Europe.

ANDREW MARR:

Sure. Okay, you’ve given some pretty high profile warnings about the future for the Middle East if Iran carries on with its nuclear ambitions. From the point of view of Israel, given what the Iranians have said about the future of the state of Israel, how could they possibly allow Iran to have nuclear weapons?

WILLIAM HAGUE:

Well none of us want Iran to have nuclear weapons.

ANDREW MARR:

*(over)* No, but I’m saying they can’t allow it to happen.
WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) I don’t think the wise thing at this moment is for Iran to launch a military attack … Israel to launch a military attack on Iran if that’s what you are asking.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s what I’m going to, yes.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
I think Israel, like everybody else in the world, should be giving a real chance to the approach we’ve adopted of very serious economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure and the readiness to negotiate with Iran …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) The Israelis …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) … and that’s what we now have to make a success of.

ANDREW MARR:
The Israelis have been clearly been talking at quite a serious level to the Americans about the possibility of some kind of strike. Have they been talking to you?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
No. If you mean do they say to us, “You know, here are our plans” …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) No, but they’re not softening you up for it.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) no, they do not do that. There is clearly… there’s some discussion in public from Israeli politicians from time to time about this and so they do discuss it with their friends and partners around the world. But we are not part of any planning to attack Iran.
ANDREW MARR:
So when Ehud Barak and people come over, they’re not saying to you, “By the way, we may have to do this?”

WILLIAM HAGUE:
No, they are not sharing any plans with us, they’re not asking us to join in any plans, we’re not calling for any military action against Iran. We don’t exclude … We don’t take any options off the table. We don’t know how the situation will develop. It would be unwise to do that. But our approach is 100 per cent diplomatically and economically focused to bring Iran successfully to the negotiating table.

ANDREW MARR:
So the problem with that approach at the moment is that it isn’t working, that the Iranians … Far from it working, they are boasting about how well they’re doing in enriching uranium and how fast they’re moving ahead. So the sanctions - I mean it may hurt a lot of ordinary Iranians trying to buy you know sugar and rice and so on, but it’s not affecting the regime.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well it will be affecting them in various ways. They have indicated in the last few days a readiness, a new readiness to negotiate. Now whether that is going to be on any meaningful basis, one has to be sceptical about …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah - sure, sure.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… but they will make bold statements about what they’re achieving if they are ready to negotiate. They won’t just do that because they’re confident. They will also do that if they’re not very confident about the future.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.
WILLIAM HAGUE:
What I’m trying to point out, what I was saying this weekend about the threat of a new Cold War, is it’s not in the interests of Iranians to pursue this programme. It’s not going to turn them into a great power.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But to be clear, your worry is that if the Iranians do achieve nuclear weapons - and you know as I keep saying, you know they’re heading towards that - then there will simply be an arms race around the region?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
Israel’s got weapons …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
… Saudi Arabia will probably want them and so on and so on.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yes either way they will either be attacked - you were asking whether Israel would attack them …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Either that will happen and there will be a war, or there would be a Cold War in which Iran for the long-term would be subject to these kinds of very intense economic sanctions and they would find that other nations in their region developed nuclear weapons, so they would be in a permanent standoff with those countries. Like the Cold War, but without many of the safeguards against accidents and
misunderstandings that we had in the Cold War.

ANDREW MARR:
So very dangerous. This all relates directly to the situation in Syria. Peter Oborne had a very interesting article in the Sunday Telegraph today arguing that we should not be desperate to see Assad removed because of the dangers of civil war, ethnic violence, al-Qaeda already coming into Syria with or without Iranian backing.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
I think the Assad regime has lost its credibility internationally and with its own people. We should want a political solution, a political transition in Syria, and that’s what the Arab League have put forward. And in my view any successful political solution in Syria does require the departure of Assad from office. I don’t think Syria can be stabilised with him still there, so I wouldn’t agree with saying we don’t want Assad to go. It is true it’s a very complex situation though with many sectarian differences in Syria, with many different opposition groupings. It is not as straightforward as Libya last year, even if you accept that Libya was straightforward …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well Libya’s not doing terribly well … yeah.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) … but you know what I mean. There there was a united opposition in control of part of the country. The effect of what we did in Libya on the neighbours was quite minimal. In fact it helped the situation of the neighbours.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yes but e…

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) Syria is different. It’s much more complex.

ANDREW MARR:
Even in the case of Libya things have not gone terribly well since then. I mean there’s a lot of violence and a lot of tension and so on even in that much easier case. What I’m asking about is how worried you are about what happens to Syria?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
I’m very worried. I’m worried that Syria is going to slide into a civil war and that our powers to do something about it are very constrained because, as everyone has seen, we’ve not been able to pass a resolution at the UN Security Council because of Russian and Chinese opposition to that. I think a great mistake on their part. Now we will do many other things. Okay we cannot intervene in the way we did in Libya for the reasons we’ve been discussing. We will do many other things and we will come together in Tunisia, dozens of nations. I will go to Tunisia on Friday to meet my colleagues from the Arab world, Europeans, Africans, United States, so that together we can tighten the economic and diplomatic stranglehold on the Assad regime. We will do that in a peaceful way. We will intensify our links with the opposition. We will pass new European sanctions on Syria, which we discussed with France on Friday. There is a lot we can do, but it is different from Libya.

ANDREW MARR:
And in particular you know there are plenty of people inside Syria that you would not want to see as part of you know a future regime, including Iranian backed people, including possibly elements of al-Qaeda already operating there.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well Iranian backed people will not be fighting the regime because the Iranians I think are very anxious to keep this regime.

ANDREW MARR:
Sure.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
But yes, are there many different types of opposition groupings in Syria or working outside Syria with some effect inside it?

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yes there are many different groups. It’s not as … there isn’t as clear an opposition structure as in Libya. We’d like to see them come together. We have asked them and advised them to come together and with a clear statement of their commitment to democracy, to the protection of minorities - including Christian minorities in Syria. That is the way for the opposition to go.

ANDREW MARR:
But if we … I mean clearly there’s not going to be any British military involvement, but if, for instance, people like the Qataris and so on decided to get involved in Syria, would you be supportive of that?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
They will make their own decisions about that.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
We will not … We have an arms embargo on Syria.

ANDREW MARR:
And just before we leave this part of the world, some stories over the last week about the Iranians backing terrorist groups who might target the West - including al-Qaeda type people - might even target the London Olympics? Is that something that you’re concerned about?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
I haven’t … We’ve no specific …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* Threat …
WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) … information about a threat to the Olympics from that source. Clearly Iran has been involved increasingly in illegal and potentially terrorist activity in other parts of the world. We saw the Iranian plot recently to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to Washington on American soil. It is alleged that they have been involved in what happened in the last week in New Delhi and in Georgia and in Bangkok. So I think Iran has increased in its willingness to contemplate utterly illegal activities in other parts of the world. This is part of the danger that Iran is currently presenting to the peace of the world.

ANDREW MARR:
Meanwhile I mean we saw some very brave reporting from Marie Colvin from Homs and the area around that in Syria.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
And these people are undergoing absolute hell at the moment.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
What can be done? Something has to be done to help them.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well it’s those things I was talking about earlier. We help in many direct ways. On Friday we announced that we are providing more humanitarian assistance - food rations for twenty thousand people, clean drinking water, medical supplies. We can help in that sort of way through international organisations that can get help in or to people who have fled Syria and are on the borders. So we can help in that way. And we will help by being part of what I hope will be this very strong international
coalition to increase the pressure on the Assad regime, increase the isolation of the Assad regime.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Now speaking of international coalitions, Somalia. You are bringing together a lot of people and, given you know the state of near anarchy in that part of the world and so on, a lot of other people will say what’s the point of bringing together countries from around the world; what can you possibly hope to achieve?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Yes well this is indeed our main drive really in the coming week, is on Somalia. We will host a major international conference on Thursday in London.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Just remind people why this is so important.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
It matters because Somalia has been the world’s most failed state for the last twenty years; also the scene of the world’s worst humanitarian catastrophe in the last year with perhaps a hundred thousand people starving to death; it is potentially a base for terrorist activities as well as pirate activities, which would be on an increased scale if we didn’t do something about it. And now there is a moment of opportunity because things have improved a little in Somalia. I was in Mogadishu three weeks ago. I saw that for myself. And Britain is in a position to bring the world together, to do the right things, get the right political process, improvements in the strength of the African union forces there, international agreements on countering terrorism and piracy. We can do all of that. And this is an example of how in foreign policy, while we are dealing with all these crises you’re asking me about, we’re not just reacting to events now; we are actually trying to solve problems before they get worse to save lives, to save ourselves having to intervene at a later stage. This is how our diplomacy is working.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Let me, if I may, ask you with another of your hats on as Deputy, a couple of
domestic questions. A lot of people look at what’s happening to the Health Bill and say this is no longer a battle worth fighting. Really you’ve expended so much political credit on this, what you’re going to get back just isn’t worth it.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well that depends on how it works in the long-term, and the health service has to be reformed to cope with all the pressures of an ageing population and using money effectively.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But this is no longer the bill to do it, is it?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well I think it is. Look what we’ve already achieved in the health service since the last election is there are four thousand more doctors and five a half thousand fewer administrators than before that. This bill helps us to make those administrative savings for the health service to run more efficiently. It’s part of saving four and a half billion pounds out of administration over the next few years.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Finally, if I could just do one very quick one. There’s been a lot of coverage of civil servants, top people in other departments positioning themselves for tax purposes as independent companies and avoiding tax, including in HMRC itself. I don’t know if you’ve got any people in that position in the Foreign Office, but as a politician how do you regard that kind of behaviour?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
I’m not very fond of that sort of behaviour. Sometimes people will have agreed their own arrangements and done it over a long time, and that’s their contractual arrangement, so of course they will have their legal rights to that.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But it’s not a good way to behave?
WILLIAM HAGUE:
People particularly at this time in the nation’s history, people should be paying their taxes fully. There’s no doubt about that.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright, thank you very much indeed Foreign Secretary.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS