JEREMY VINE:
Now the hostage crisis in Algeria was brought to an end yesterday, but further loss of life has been confirmed. The Prime Minister told reporters this morning that three British nationals have died. A further three are feared to have died and a British resident was also killed. And I’m joined now to talk further by the Foreign Secretary, William Hague. Good afternoon. So you have some precision now about the numbers on the British side?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well the numbers have got clearer of course with the end of the military operations there, the numbers that the Prime Minister gave. There are three British nationals who have died and three who we fear, three who we believe to have died, in addition to one person who’s not a British national but was resident in the United Kingdom. There were twenty-two other British nationals caught up in this terrible ordeal. They are now back in the United Kingdom, I’m pleased to say. We brought them back and BP brought others back on chartered flights during the night. So they are being reunited with their loved ones. So apart from the people who have died, everybody is
now accounted for, apart from those six people plus one UK residents who we think have died or fear have died.

**JEREMY VINE:**
There are conflicting accounts in the papers today of whether those who died in the last 24, 48 hours were killed before the final assault and triggered the final assault or whether they were killed during it. Do you know?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
We don’t know that yet and of course there will be an important process of debriefing people who have been hostages. But it is very important, first of all, that they’re reunited with their families. There’ll be further discussions for us to have with the Algerians. Certainly the Algerians believed that the lives of the hostages were always in imminent danger, that the terrorists for instance were planning to blow up the entire installation - that is what the Algerian Foreign Minister told me yesterday on the telephone - so this is one of the reasons why they acted as they did. Of course there is controversy and there is speculation about that, but I think the full picture will take some time to emerge.

**JEREMY VINE:**
One of the papers today upsettingly has the word ‘executed’. Now I don’t know if you have … That is presumably speculation that they were not killed in a battle, that they were deliberately killed? We don’t know. Is that right?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
It is speculation. Of course we don’t know. Again I hope and believe that picture will become clearer, but we don’t know that definitively. That sort of thing is quite likely to have happened.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Quite likely?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Well I think from the nature of the terrorists involved, the nature of the captivity they imposed on the hostages. And of course the Algerian forces, although sometimes criticised, will have taken every care they could to save a life - to save the lives of the hostages. That whatever people think about them and whatever has been said about the Algerian military, they are experienced. They in the 1990s fought a very long, bloody battle against an insurgency, and so you are looking here at very experienced, very powerful in their own country armed forces.

JEREMY VINE:
But of course that raises the question about whether they went in too hard because in a situation like that, that can be a mistake as well?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
It can and all of these facts… As we know ourselves from the very difficult decisions about when to launch hostage rescues - and we’ve been faced with these decisions on a smaller scale several times over the last few years - sometimes we’ve got a hostage out alive and sometimes sadly not. You have to balance all of these things: how imminent is the threat to life, what are the chances of a successful operation, what are the chances of negotiation if you don’t launch a military operation? So the Algerian authorities will have had to bear all of that in mind. They didn’t consult us, as the Prime Minister made clear, or any other country so far as we’re aware.

JEREMY VINE:
And you’re disappointed about that?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well of course we would have liked to have been consulted, but they decided as a sovereign country that this was something on their soil that they would deal with and that they needed to deal with urgently. And I think, therefore, it’s important not to jump into criticising them from what we know at the moment and of course we need to continue to work with them over the coming days - not only to learn more about what happened and to learn lessons together about dealing with any future such incidents, but also we’re working with them on the identifica… this very important process of the identification and repatriation of the bodies of those British nationals
killed.

**JEREMY VINE:**
You say it’s their sovereign soil, and of course that’s understood, but it is to some extent our citizens involved and, therefore, you might have expected to be brought in. And also I wonder whether looking at it, you think well were they too worried about the actual plant being destroyed, for example? That might be a consideration you wouldn’t have wanted them to have?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Well all these are legitimate questions. We have talked to them a great… We’ve been talking to them every day. The Prime Minister has had many conversations with the Prime Minister of Algeria. They’ve been very responsive to the need for constant discussion, but they didn’t consult anybody else before launching their operation. But, as I say, they will have … they’ve had to weigh … These situations are extraordinarily difficult. They’ve had to weigh all of those factors that I have just described. So we have to remember these are people who’ve also lost their nationals, who’ve suffered a terrorist attack on their soil, and the people who are responsible for what has happened are the cold-blooded murderers who are the terrorists for which there is no political justification of any kind. And, therefore, we should also show our clear sympathy and solidarity with the people of Algeria and the government of Algeria at such a very difficult time.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Let’s talk further then about the threat because it’s not just Algeria, is it? In the last two weeks there’s been an awful lot of coverage of al-Qaeda in Mali.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
That is right and there are links between groups in many different countries. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, this goes across several countries. In the case of Northern Mali, an insurgency that to some extent is aligned with or has been allied with elements of al-Qaeda, has been able to gain control of the north of that country, threaten the centre of the country. That is why France intervened militarily and why we have helped them with transport aircraft. They’ve been right to do so. This has
been an emerging problem for some time. There are deep problems across the Sahel region of Africa, including humanitarian problems - problems of people getting enough food or any economic activity. And so for some time we’ve been working on this. We’re helping hundreds of thousands of people with humanitarian aid, we’ve increased our counterterrorism work with countries in that region, we’re working with France and the United Nations and others to try to bring political stability there.

**JEREMY VINE:**
But with that situation ongoing - and it obviously hasn’t sprung up in the last two weeks or anything like that - if you’re a British national and you’re working in an oil/gas installation in the Sahara, in any of those countries, you are in danger, aren’t you?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Well it depends where you are. And of course …

**JEREMY VINE:**
Algeria, Mali, you name it.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Yes and there are places in that region where we already advise against all travel. And of course after the French intervention in Mali, we called for … we advised in our travel advice additional vigilance - vast areas of the Sahara where we advised against all but essential.

**JEREMY VINE:**
This wasn’t one of them, by the way - the Algeria area. The place where that gas plant was, was not an area where you were saying don’t go.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Not saying don’t go at all, but we have in the whole region advised additional vigilance. Of course there was no specific intelligence about this specific attack, so we couldn’t warn people about that. But is it a difficult and dangerous area? Yes it is. Do we look to the nations of that region to protect our nationals, to police their
borders effectively and so on? Yes of course we do, bearing in mind that these are vast and often unmarked borders in one of the most inhospitable regions of the world.

**JEREMY VINE:**
So you wouldn’t widen your advice at this point to say British workers in the Sahara, don’t go? Or don’t go without milit…

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
(over) Well, as I say, it depends. The advice is there. For instance, our travel advice already states against all but essential travel to within 450 kilometres of the borders of Mali or 100 kilometres of the borders of Mauritania if you’re in Algeria. So the advice is quite specific and we will keep that up to date, of course, based on all the information that we have.

**JEREMY VINE:**
And what about direct action by the British, by this country against al-Qaeda in this area? Now in Mali we are behind the French rather than alongside them, aren’t we?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Yes we are, yes we are, and of course we will work with other nations across the region. And it’s working with the countries of that region to address not only any military situation but to make political progress, to try to separate from al-Qaeda other people who are very discontented with their position in the world and with their situation but are not the sort of murderers who we have seen launching this attack. So that is very important too and delivering the humanitarian assistance. We can make progress in these situations, but we have to do it urgently. Last year we held a conference on Somalia, if you look at the other end of Africa, which has also had huge problems with insurgency, with famine, with a failed state in Somalia. Since the London conference on Somalia in February, we’ve got a legitimate government in Somalia, progress made by African forces against an al-Qaeda associated insurgency, a reduction in pirate attacks. Now we have to make this sort of progress in the West of Africa, but without going through twenty years of being a failed state that Somalia …

**JEREMY VINE:**
When you have con…

WILLIAM HAGUE:
This has got to be our objective.

JEREMY VINE:
You obviously have conversations with the French, with Hillary Clinton in the USA. Is it still very much about operating through those African forces rather than going in directly?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
The primary way of operating has to be through the countries of the region. That is the only way to enjoy the greatest possible legitimacy to bring about a political solution. Obviously there are disadvantages to putting countri… forces from another continent on African soil. The French have had to do what they have done and we absolutely support them doing it. This was an emergency with the insurgency starting to threaten the capital of Mali itself. But our primary way of working has to be with the forces and with the political leaders of the countries of that region, so that the people and leaders of that region own the solution.

JEREMY VINE:
Do you think people will be worried though about this gradually sucking Britain in directly?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well I think people would support the approach that I’ve just laid out. Clearly in the case of Mali, we’ve not sent British combat troops. We will take part in training, in the EU military training mission that was decided on last week to help the African forces in the region, we’re helping the French. So that is how we’re going about it. And very much directed at supporting a political process as well. I can’t really stress that strongly enough. There isn’t a military solution to all the problems of the Sahel. There is a complex mixture of political and economic solutions and we have to work at that with the United Nations, with France and with the countries of the region.
JEREMY VINE:
Let me move to the EU speech that was going to happen and didn’t. It’s been on schedule for a while. It keeps not happening. When is it happening, this Prime Minister … the Prime Minister’s EU speech?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
It will happen this week. It would have happened on Friday, but I think everybody understands that in these circumstances it was necessary to postpone the speech. The Prime Minister’s been very, very focused on the situation we’ve just been describing. So it will happen in the coming week. We’ll make an announcement about exactly when and where tomorrow.

JEREMY VINE:
And is this your party running scared of the guy we had on earlier, Nigel Farage?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
No, it’s about doing what is best in the interests of this country and of course also about democracy in this country. And the Prime Minister and I have said last year that we want to get a better relationship with the European Union. There are changes we want in that relationship. That we also need to see how the changes in the Eurozone are affecting the European Union - how that affects this country and the relationship of the countries of the EU together. But that when we have done those things, there is a strong case for fresh consent in this country, for the people of this country having their say.

JEREMY VINE:
Which is an in-out referendum, as discussed earlier?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well wait for the speech. There’s not …

JEREMY VINE:
*(over)* It’s all leaked. It’s over all the papers.
WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well no, but you will have to see the speech in its entirety really to get the full context of it. But it is about those things. It’s about the interests of this country, about making a success of membership of the European Union but also with democratic consent for that in its modern form, in the best form that we can bring about.

JEREMY VINE:
I remember watching you in the 2001 General Election, ten days to save the pound and all that. I’m assuming you’ll vote out, will you?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well again the Prime Minister will make clear our whole approach - his approach, which is of course the same as my approach to this and that I’ve just described. We want to succeed in the European Union. We want an outward looking EU to succeed in the world and for the United Kingdom to succeed in that. But we have to recognise that the European Union has changed a lot since the referendum of 1975 and that there have been not only great achievements to the EU’s name but some things that have gone badly wrong such as the euro. I was quite right in 2001 to argue that we shouldn’t join the euro, and we must never join the euro.

JEREMY VINE:
So the message to the EU is it must change or the UK may leave? That’s the fundamental message?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well the EU must change. It is having to change in many ways because of the Eurozone crisis. There are ways in which we want it to change as well that will make it better for the UK but will also make it better for the other nations of Europe. So the Prime Minister will set out the case for that in his speech and how we should go about seeking democratic consent for that, and I think that will be the right way forward in the interests of this country.

JEREMY VINE:
William Hague, Foreign Secretary, thank you …
WILLIAM HAGUE:
Thank you.

JEREMY VINE:
… very much indeed.

INTERVIEW ENDS