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INTERVIEW:

PHILIP HAMMOND, MP

FOREIGN SECRETARY

JULY 20th 2014

ANDREW MARR:

Now then it's hard to think of a more time consuming job in government at the moment than that of Foreign Secretary. To take over at the Foreign Office in the past week meant an in-try that was already overflowing – conflicts in Gaza, Syria, Iraq taking priority – and then on Friday came the news of the missile strike on the Malaysian airliner creating a new international crisis. The new man in the job, replacing William Hague, is the former Defence Secretary Philip Hammond. Welcome to you.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Thank you.

ANDREW MARR:

Let's start right off talking about the Malaysian disaster. Are you convinced as we sit here that this was a missile fired from the rebel held territories in the East of Ukraine?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well we can't be absolutely categoric. We haven't got the levels of evidence proof that would stand up in a courtroom yet, but all the evidence that is coming in is

pointing increasingly to that conclusion: a missile fired from rebel held territory, probably NSA 11. And the Russians have influence, if not direct control over these people. They have been supplying them, they have been supporting them, they have been providing them with succour. They cannot deny their responsibility for the acts that these people are carrying out.

ANDREW MARR:

The Sunday Times reported from Ukraine telephone transcripts suggesting that this missile launcher had been brought in from Russia, was used and then driven back into Russia across the border. Do you think that's got credibility? Do you believe those reports?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well it's another piece of the evidence. Not all of these bits of evidence are capable of being absolutely corroborated, but there are a growing number of strands of evidence which, looked at together in the round, lead the reasonable person to the unavoidable conclusion that this was a missile fired from rebel held territory, almost certainly a missile supplied by the Russians.

ANDREW MARR:

And does the reasonable person, a well-informed reasonable person believe that that could be fired by the rebels by themselves, or would they have had to have Russian technical help to hit that airliner?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well they would certainly had to have had at the very least training to use such a complex piece of equipment, but I think we can't conclude any further than that at this stage.

ANDREW MARR:

So this puts - so far as you're concerned, the Prime Minister's clearly concerned as well - this puts Vladimir Putin absolutely in the hair trigger sights of world opinion? This is his fault?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well the eyes of the world, as you said earlier, are on Vladimir Putin, and what we're seeing from the Russians is obfuscation and obstruction at the moment. The Russians will have probably more information about this incident than anyone. They're very close by. It's only a few miles from the Russian border. They've got lots of military presence ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) But they're saying nothing.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... in the area. They are saying nothing. What we need is full Russian cooperation. Any evidence that they control needs to be turned over to the international investigators. They must use their influence to allow international access to the site to secure the evidence and secure respect for the bodies and the possessions of the victims.

ANDREW MARR:

Most of the bodies have already been removed and it's pretty clear that an awful lot of the evidence has been removed surreptitiously or otherwise. This is a completely open site. It's far too late for a proper investigation on the ground into what happened. The evidence has already gone, hasn't it?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well I'm a bit more optimistic than that. I think there will have been a lot that's been captured photographically and I am told by the experts that there will be usable forensic evidence on much of this wreckage. Now clearly every day that goes by, it gets more difficult ...

ANDREW MARR:

Indeed.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... to piece together the picture. That's why we need urgent access ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Why is the site ... Sorry.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... and that I'm afraid is why those that don't want a proper investigation are obfuscating.

ANDREW MARR:

Why has the site not been secured by people with blue berets? We could have flown people and we could have secured the site and none of these problems would have happened. Day after day nothing has happened.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Because it has been impossible to get agreed access to the site by the parties who currently control it, and the only people ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) You mean you've got to negotiate with the separatist rebels?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Unless you want to fight your way in, you've got to negotiate with the people who control the site on the ground. But the point is this: there is one party in the world who clearly has the ability to snap his fingers and it would be done, and that's Vladimir Putin. And for all the fine words we're hearing from Moscow, it hasn't happened.

ANDREW MARR:

The Prime Minister writing today said there had to be action – “time for action, not words.” What does that actually mean?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

It'll mean further tightening up of the sanctions that we're applying. Russia likes to paint this as a battle between Russia and the West, Russia and the EU. Now the entire

international community is ranged against Russia. We have been very forward leaning in the argument around sanctions against Russia for its illegal annexation of Crimea, for its destabilisation of Ukraine. Some of our European allies have been less enthusiastic ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Germany you're talking about?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... and I hope that the shock of this incident will see them now more engaged, more willing to take the actions which are necessary to bring home to the Russians that when you do this kind of thing, it has consequences, and they are lasting consequences.

ANDREW MARR:

Do you think we're going to see sanctions imposed on Russia by countries in the Middle East, possibly including China and the Far East as well – in other words genuine global sanctions rather than just parts of the EU and America?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

I think we need to take this step by step. I think in terms of securing access to the crash site, ensuring a proper investigation, ensuring proper treatment of the bodies, I think there is a very broad international consensus around that. We are taking the lead with Australia in the UN Security Council in New York in trying to get a resolution passed. We will try and do that tomorrow. The Russians have been blocking today any statement coming out of the UN Security Council, but we'll do what we can tomorrow and I would expect a very wide degree of consensus for that. We will then on Tuesday, at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels, seek to get our European partners to agree to go further in terms of sanctions if Russia hasn't radically changed its position by then.

ANDREW MARR:

Have you had any sign at all that Angela Merkel has changed her view on this because she has been the big block?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

I will be speaking to my German counterpart this afternoon and I will be discussing with him precisely these issues.

ANDREW MARR:

Now beyond sanctions and what's going on at the UN, is there anything else the West should be doing, anything else that NATO should be doing? Should we be putting more troops into the borders of the Latvian and Lithuanian republics and into Poland and so forth? There's been all sorts of suggestions made.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well it's vital that we reassure the Eastern members of the NATO alliance that we stand behind the Article 5 (V) guarantee – the collective security guarantee. And, as you know, Britain has stepped up its support to that assurance effort. We've got typhoons flying Baltic air policing missions out of Lithuania; we're contributing troops to exercises in the Baltic States and Poland; we'll be taking part in naval exercises in the Baltic, and that will continue.

ANDREW MARR:

What about military support for Kiev?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

We have a very good military to military relationship with the Ukrainians. We've provided them with technical support and advice in the past and we will continue to provide them such support.

ANDREW MARR:

What I'm really asking is as a result of this, are we going to see more of those kinds of things or not?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Yeah, I think you can assume that Western countries, including Britain, will want to provide the legitimate government of the Ukraine with all the support that we

properly can without becoming involved ourselves directly militarily in what's going on.

ANDREW MARR:

And that's in addition to what we're doing at the moment, so more?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

It'll be continuing technical support and advice.

ANDREW MARR:

Alright, thanks. Let's turn to one of the other big things on your plate at the moment, which is the terrible conflict going on inside Gaza between Gaza and Israel. A lot of people will just simply look at the numbers of hundreds and hundreds of civilians dying in Gaza, hardly anybody dying in Israel, and say this a very, very one-sided kind of war. Whatever Hamas are doing under the ground with their tunnels, the victims are women and children. Are you making representations to the government of Israel? Are you worried about this at all?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well the victims are always civilians, unfortunately, and our hearts go out to the hundreds of victims of this conflict. And of course what the world is trying to do now, the international community, is to try to stop the bloodshed, re-impose a ceasefire and then find a longer term solution. We can't deal with Gaza by having a flare-up every two years – hundreds of people killed, another ceasefire which then breaks down 18 months, two years later. We have to get to the underlying causes. We have to reestablish the role of the Palestinian authority and the governance of Gaza and get some order out of this chaos. But I have ... To answer your question directly, I have spoken both to President Abbas yesterday evening and to the Israeli Foreign Minister. Israel has a right to defend itself against these rocket attacks coming from Gaza, but it must do so in a way that is proportionate and it must take all measures necessary to prevent unnecessary loss of civilian life.

ANDREW MARR:

Do you think that what is happening at the moment is proportionate?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Look, Hamas had an opportunity to stop the rocket attacks ...

ANDREW MARR:

That wasn't my question.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... and they didn't do so. And that's what needs to happen. Israel has a right to defend itself against these rocket attacks.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Absolutely. But do you think this is proportionate?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

(over) If this is stopped ... There will be no justification for any Israeli action at all if the rocket attacks are stopped. And what I want to happen now – and what I've told both the Israeli Foreign Minister and President Abbas last night – is for an immediate re-imposition of the ceasefire, something that the Egyptian Government is actively seeking to broker. President Abbas is in the Gulf at the moment seeking to negotiate through intermediaries with Hamas. We need an immediate re-imposition of a ceasefire and then we need proper discussion about dealing with the underlying grievances ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) One last, one last time ...

PHILIP HAMMOND:

(over) ... that make this area so unstable.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Is what is happening at the moment proportionate?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

I have asked the Israelis to use every effort they can to minimise the loss of civilian life. Now we will be looking very carefully at what is happening on the ground to make sure that it is proportionate, that civilian lives are being protected in a proper way. But Israel does have the right to protect itself and the best way to avoid Palestinian loss of life in Gaza is for Hamas to stop firing rockets from Gaza ...

ANDREW MARR:

Absolutely.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... and in those circumstances the world would not expect any kind of Israeli action against Gaza.

ANDREW MARR:

Right. Is your appointment as Foreign Secretary a victory for the eurosceptics in government and in the party? Is that how you see it?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well I think we're ... We're all in government in the same place on Europe. We all believe that the status quo is not an acceptable way to run Europe in the future. And we are not isolated - as some people wish to paint us as Little Englanders - alone believing this. Increasingly across the European Union people are realising that Europe needs reform. It needs reform to deal with the globalisation ...

ANDREW MARR:

Sure.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... the world economic situation. It needs reform to deal with the challenge of a Eurozone coexisting with the non-Eurozone countries in Europe, and it needs reform to deal with Britain's specific grievances.

ANDREW MARR:

Now the last time we talked about this, there was a certain Mr Michael Gove – you may remember him ...

PHILIP HAMMOND:

I do remember.

ANDREW MARR

... who said that on balance with an unreformed Europe, as it is at the moment, he would prefer to leave and that there's a perfectly acceptable life outside that we should be able to contemplate. He would like to see reform, but if there wasn't reform it's time to get out. And you said yes, I agree with that. Do you still agree with that?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well I agree that the status quo is simply not acceptable. The status quo is not in Britain's interest and we have to renegotiate.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And if that's what we've got, we have to get out? If it's that or nothing, get out?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Look, the way we're doing this – if we have a Conservative Government after the next election, there will be a referendum in 2017, so the British people will decide. What I can tell and have told my European colleagues is that if the offer by our European partners is nothing – no change, no negotiation – I am pretty clear what the answer of the British people in that referendum is going to be. There has ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And will you be standing with the British people if they say no?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

There has to be substantive renegotiation, substantive change in Europe that addresses the concerns that Britain has but also addresses the needs of Europe in a modern world, and then we'll put it to the British people and they will make a decision.

ANDREW MARR:

And if that doesn't happen, we should get out? I mean it's very clear. You are the Foreign Secretary of the British people. They have a right to know your own views on this.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

So my job now is to pursue that renegotiation – to prepare for it ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) I understand that.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... over the next nine, ten months ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) But if it fails ...

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... and then we will carry out the renegotiation. When we get to the end of that process and we can see what is on offer, what is on the table, we will then make our recommendation to the British people.

ANDREW MARR:

But to be absolutely clear, two years ago you thought that if we don't get good renegotiation we should leave and you would say so openly at the time. Have you changed your mind ...

PHILIP HAMMOND:

(over) No, I haven't changed my mind.

ANDREW MARR:

You haven't.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

If there is no change at all in the way Europe is governed, no change in the balance of

competences between the nation states and the European Union, no resolution of the challenge of how the Eurozone can succeed and coexist with the non-Eurozone - that is not a Europe that can work for Britain in the future, so there must be change, there must be renegotiation.

ANDREW MARR:

And in those circumstances, is there a healthy and prosperous future for Britain outside?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

That's the balancing decision that the British people will have to make. I have no doubt that Britain gains enormously from being inside the European single market, and what the British people will want to do is look at what is on offer by way of change in Europe, by way of reform and look at how far that takes us and balance the benefits ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) For how much longer ... I'm so sorry to jump in.

PHILIP HAMMOND:

... of being in with the benefits of being out.

ANDREW MARR:

For how much longer can you sit inside a coalition with Nick Clegg and others who vehemently disagree with virtually everything you have just said?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

I'm not sure that that's the case. The Liberal Democrats recognise that there needs to be reform of the European Union. They recognise that in order for the Eurozone to succeed, the institutional arrangements will have to change.

ANDREW MARR:

And what is the single biggest change that you think's essential? What is the one thing that you have to bring back from Brussels and say look, we've got this above all?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

Well there are two things. There has to be a repatriation of powers to the nation states, a recognition – and this is not just a British demand, it's a demand from other countries too – that what can be done at national level should be done at national level. We should only do things at European level where it is absolutely necessary to do them at European level. And, secondly, settling the relationship between the Eurozone and the non-Eurozone countries in a way that is fair to the non-Eurozone and protects its interests.

ANDREW MARR:

And getting out of the European Court of Human Rights?

PHILIP HAMMOND:

That's a separate agenda, but also very important to the British people.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay, thank you very much indeed for that.

INTERVIEW ENDS