ANDREW MARR:
A year today, the country called Great Britain may have disappeared from the maps forever. The man leading Scotland’s independence campaign, Alex Salmond, gave a barnstorming speech to the Scottish National Party yesterday, but he hasn’t convinced a majority of Scottish voters yet, and he joins me now. Mr Salmond, welcome.

ALEX SALMOND:
Thank you, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I ask, first of all, on the day after the referendum, if you get a yes vote, actually what happens. Do you have a team that goes to Westminster to negotiate and another team that negotiates with the EU? Do you know who’s going to be on that team and what the agenda’s going to be? Just talk us through the first 24 hours.

ALEX SALMOND:
Well the fair answer to your question is yes. There’ll be an 18 month period between a yes vote and the referendum and Scotland becoming an independent country in the spring of 2016 and, yes, there’ll be negotiations both with London and indeed with
the European Union. But, Andrew, can I just take issue with your introduction just for a second. The state that we currently live in is not Great Britain. It’s the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Britain won’t disappear as a geographical expression no more than Scandinavia disappears …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But as a national expression.

ALEX SALMOND:
… because Denmark, Norway and Sweden are independent countries. What will happen is that Scotland will be an independent country with the Queen head of state, and the rest of the United Kingdom will be an independent country with the Queen as its head of state in both countries. I hope …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But there won’t be Great Britain?

ALEX SALMOND:
… Westminster permitting, we’ll be members … No, the country is actually called the United Kingdom, Andrew. You don’t really want to exclude Northern Ireland from your analysis just now, do you?

ANDREW MARR:
Not particularly. But I was just saying for most people Great Britain is a familiar entity and it will go. That was the only point I was making. Can I move on, return to the negotia…

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) No, well I was making …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Can I return to the negotiations?

ALEX SALMOND:
… I was making the point you don’t change geography by changing where power lies.
England and Scotland will still be close neighbours, great buddies. The Queen will be head of state. And we’ll cooperate together in all sorts of things - including, I hope and believe, as members of the European Union.

ANDREW MARR:
But this is a matter of identity, otherwise what is it about? Can I return to the question of what happens in that negotiating period. What happens if you have a disagreement over something like, for instance, the deficit, the share of national deficit and so on to be taken and you in London can’t agree? Will there be some kind of international overseer, some court of appeal, some kind of George Mitchell figure who will come in and you can go to because there will be endless disagreements, I’m sure, over that period?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well there’s plenty of disagreements between London and Edinburgh at the present moment. What will happen is negotiations will take place as equal partners. We’ve put forward in the Fiscal Commission, which includes a couple of world famous Nobel Laureate economists, an exact formulation about how you do reconcile these things, how you coordinate fiscal policy, and that was a proposition we put forward. But you talk as if this has never been done before. Many, many countries have shared a currency in recent years, and indeed for many, many years, and that is possible to do. Scotland is in a stronger fiscal position just now than the rest of the United Kingdom and that’s to our advantage, but of course what happens to Scotland over a period of time will depend on the wisdom of our policies in terms of our taxation, our spending, in terms of how we grow the economy, and that’s the opportunity that’s presented by Scottish independence.

ANDREW MARR:
In your speech yesterday, it was very clear that your main message is that Scotland is essentially a social democratic country, England is essentially a more conservative country, and that is why independence is such an important thing. But wouldn’t you be able to get most of what you want in terms of welfare, taxation and so on with so-called devo max? And, therefore, do you think that you’re in a win-win situation - either you get full independence or you get something that feels quite close to full
independence?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well there would be an interesting argument if devo max, as you call it, was on offer. But of course it’s not on offer and Westminster parties have refused that. Indeed the current Westminster government even refused to have it on the ballot paper. So we’ve got a choice as to whether we become an independent country and take these matters into our own hands and govern ourselves in cooperation with our friends and neighbours, but by controlling our own finances. There are other matters where independence of course has a big advantage over devo max. I mean devo max would not allow you, for example, to remove nuclear weapons from Scotland; whereas an independent country has that sort of … has that sort of power. Earlier on, you said this was a question of identity, and of course identity’s very, very important to people. It’s also a question of where best Scotland should be governed from and where people trust the government of Scotland to be, and I think the majority of people in Scotland trust the government in Edinburgh, trust the Scottish government to operate in Scottish interests and a very small minority of people trust the United Kingdom government. Indeed we had polling evidence, as you probably know, just released by MORI in the last couple of days which shows that in dramatic fashion. And our task over the next year, of course, is to say look if it’s the Scottish government that’s trusted to deal with Scottish issues, then that’s where power should reside.

ANDREW MARR:
What happens to the submarines at Faslane? Are they- do you order them to sail south and do you know where they would sail to?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well they should be safely removed. The time period for the removal once Scotland becomes independent - and after of course people have elected their first government in an independent Scotland - but if it were to be an SNP government, then we would ask the submarines to be removed from Scotland as soon as was safely possible. And the emphasis obviously on the safety because nobody would want to compromise that in any way. But of course a country has the right to say we don’t want to …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) Of course, of course.

ALEX SALMOND:
… possess nuclear weapons - either our own or anyone else’s.

ANDREW MARR:
When you talk to defence ministers in London, they say oh well we might have some kind of leaseback arrangement a bit like the base in Cyprus. That is for the birds as far as you’re concerned, isn’t it?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well yes it is for the birds. I think the Ministry of Defence actually briefed quite recently - I know they did - that they were going to annexe Faslane, but that particular ridiculous scare story just lasted overnight before Downing Street tried to … well did dismiss it. So you know I think the reality is that if Scotland becomes an independent country, if they choose the SNP to be the government, then we would want to see Scotland as a non-nuclear country. Part of the NATO Alliance certainly, part of the defence structures, cooperating on defence, but cooperating from the basis of being …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) How soon can this be achieved?

ALEX SALMOND:
… a non-nuclear country.

ANDREW MARR:
How quickly could that happen, do you think?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well that’s … We’ve put forward a policy, Andrew, that as soon as could be safely organised. Now there are estimates which says that could be done in a relatively short period of time, but of course the reason we put forward a policy in the way we did was to allow that point of negotiation when the time comes.
ANDREW MARR:
Sticking with defence, can I ask you about, for instance, the Royal Navy? Does HMS Glasgow and HMS Edinburgh join a new Scottish Navy while HMS London, HMS Westminster stay with the English Navy? How does that division happen in practical terms and the same would apply to the RAF or the Army?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well of course negotiation over defence assets … And rather interestingly the recent paper from the Ministry of Defence that was released in the last week or so actually conceded for the first time that there would be a proper negotiation over defence assets because just as Scotland is entitled to a share of the assets of the former state, we’ll have to take into account the liabilities of the former state as well. But it’s interesting you should talk about surface ships. I mean one of our arguments in terms of defence policy is despite the fact that Scotland is very much a maritime nation, there’s no major surface ship stationed anywhere near Scotland at the present moment. I mean …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Would you envisage …

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) … the problem with defence policy in Scotland at the present moment is we have lots of things that we don’t need, like nuclear weapons; and the things that we do need, like major surface ships, are stationed somewhere in the south of England.

ANDREW MARR:
So would you envisage as it were a division of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force with some aircraft and some ships remaining in Scotland and some remaining in England? Is that how it would work? Or would you start again with a completely new defence force?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well it’s very likely there’d be assets which would be negotiated, which would go to
the Scottish Defence Force. But these things are done in coordination. Nothing surprising. It doesn’t mean that the Royal Navy doesn’t continue. It just means that some of the assets would be appropriate to go to the Scottish Defence Force and we’ll be outlining our detailed plans on that …

ANDREW MARR:
Sure.

ALEX SALMOND:
… very, very shortly indeed. But can I just point out to you, Andrew, that …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So to be clear … Sorry, to be clear we’d be talking about …

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) … you know Scotland right now has …

ANDREW MARR:
Sorry, I’m sorry. To be clear, we would be talking about two navies and two air forces?

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) I know Andrew … Well Scotland would have its own defence force. That defence force would act in cooperation with our friends and allies as part of the NATO Alliance, and one of these friends and allies would be our friends and neighbours in England. But of course when we come to Scotland becoming independent, then you rightly say some of the assets of the current defence forces would fall to the Scottish Defence Force - some of the assets that are appropriate. I was merely about to point out that after the extraordinary defence cuts which have fallen on Scotland over the last decade or so, Scotland has planned only to have one air force base left in Scotland and one naval base left in Scotland, so we’re starting from a very low position in terms of assets in Scotland at the present moment. But the Scottish Defence Force will have forces appropriate to a country of just over five million people as part of the NATO Alliance as many other countries defend
themselves adequately and properly; and, incidentally, without possessing weapons of mass destruction.

ANDREW MARR:
You talk about assets, but it’s the same with people, presumably? If I was an RAF pilot of Scottish origins, I would expect, presumably, to go back to Scotland and there would be a new flight based at Lossiemouth or wherever, but this would be a division of the Royal Air Force into two separate air forces? I just want to be clear about that.

ALEX SALMOND:
It would be a Scottish Defence Force, Andrew. But I mean you know, as I’m sure you do know, that there’s people in the forces at the present moment I think - and I’ll check this - but I think from twenty-three nationalities at the present moment.

ANDREW MARR:
Sure.

ALEX SALMOND:
Many people from a variety of nationalities - mostly commonwealth countries - who serve in the armed forces. And again in the defence paper, I think the point was made that people would have a choice as to which forces they wanted to serve in, but we’ll put forward a defence force appropriate for an independent country and that defence force will have a non-nuclear basis but it will be an adequate defence force to protect Scotland and to cooperate with our friends and allies.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I ask about the currency question, which you’ve dealt with in the past I know many times before, but it still seems to be the case that in the end it would be the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England on which you would have one minority voice who would dictate, for instance, inflation policy. Now the south of England has a very different economy to Scotland and, therefore, presumably you would have to put up with a fiscal policy, or a monetary policy rather, which was not necessarily in Scotland’s interests - at least for some of the time?
ALEX SALMOND:
Well that’s what happens at the present moment - I mean there are no Scottish representatives in the Monetary Policy Committee - but, as you’re well aware, the Bank of England operates monetary policy as an independent central bank in terms of its operation. Where control would lie in Scotland, where we don’t have it at the present moment, is control of taxation and spending. I think fiscal policy is the dominating issue in terms of making an economy grow successfully, and that is the control that would come to Scotland which we don’t have at the present moment. Our approach to monetary policy is what’s in the best interests of Scotland and indeed I think the best interests of England as well, and that’s to share a currency. And if I could just add, incidentally, a wee historical note. The Bank of England was actually founded by a Scot, as you probably know Andrew …

ANDREW MARR:
Indeed, indeed.

ALEX SALMOND:
… and the pound sterling doesn’t belong to George Osborne. It’s as much our currency. Certainly it’s more our currency than George Osborne’s currency, but it’s a shared currency between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Alright, okay. One last question, if I might - a vexed one. Will you promise, yes or no, to debate at some point with Alistair Darling who leads the No campaign, the Better Together campaign? I know you prefer to deal with David Cameron, but if that’s not available, will you debate with Alistair Darling?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well I said it in the speech yesterday. The first debate should be Prime Minister to First Minister. It’s very important because David Cameron’s trying to dictate the terms of this debate without actually debating himself. That’s not acceptable. Once we dispose of the Prime Minister, I’m quite certain I’ll debate with all and sundry.
ANDREW MARR:
Okay. That sounds a bit like a no, but thank you very much for now, Alex Salmond.

INTERVIEW ENDS