ANDREW MARR:
Anyway last night the embattled President of the Ukraine offered his critics the Prime minister-ship and the Deputy Prime Minister-ship, but that hasn’t been enough to stave off the turmoil on the streets. Further afield Syria, continues to horrify and to blaze, Al-Qaeda is on the rampage in Iraq, and the Taliban say they will soon be back in Afghanistan, and there’s more killing on the streets of Egypt. What happened to our blithe hopes of a steady, more peaceful Europe and democratic revolution in the Arab world? William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, joins me now. A fairly large agenda there, Foreign Secretary. Let’s start with the Ukraine. This appears to have been a very big offer by the President, but it’s not enough. Are you concerned that the opposition is now being too hardline themselves in not accepting his offer?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well it is a big offer and it’s good that they’re talking, that the President is talking to the opposition leaders. We can’t decide and judge for them in detail what sort of consensus they should create in the Ukraine, but we can encourage them to do so. And we are in touch with the Government. I spoke to the Foreign Minister of Ukraine on Friday night to urge that restraint in the face of violence and that repressive laws about freedom of expression and civil society should be changed, should be repealed.
So we will keep encouraging both sides to talk to each other and encourage the Ukrainian Government in that sort of direction.

**ANDREW MARR:**
How worried are you that Ukraine is on a tipping point and heading towards complete breakdown and serious violence across the entire state?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
We are very worried about that. We should avoid saying things as foreign states that might make things worse, but of course we’re very worried about the situation in Ukraine. And I don’t think it need be seen as an east/west struggle. You know the fact is that if Ukraine entered into the agreements with the EU that we’ve put forward to have free trade with the European Union, that would benefit the people of Ukraine. It would also benefit the people of Russia. You know it would benefit that entire region, so we have to change the narrative about this.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And it seems to be yet another of those struggles where there aren’t simply good guys and bad guys. The protestors involved a lot of people from the so-called right faction, nothing to do with the Conservative Party but Ukrainian nationalists who are very anti-EU and some of their views are very extreme as well. So it’s not one of these things where we have a dog in the fight as it were.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
No, no. What we want to see is a stable democratic Ukraine working well with its neighbours, part of an increasingly economically prosperous region. Clearly plans for that have not gone well over the last few months, but if anything’s to be retrieved from this, it’s important that restrictive and repressive laws are now changed in a special session of the Ukraine in Parliament that will take place this week, and that the talks between government and opposition continue to some agreement.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Now you were at the Syrian talks. What’s the best that could come out of this now, do
you think?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well when I was asked on Wednesday how to judge success over the next week, I said just the talks still going on in a week would be some success. Now it’s good if what are described as confidence building measures can be adopted to get humanitarian relief into certain areas, to have prisoners released, but the real test of these talks is will the regime really engage this coming week on setting up a transitional government?

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
The opposition, to their great credit, came on Wednesday and in front of all of us said they accept a transitional governing body going into opposition and the regime together. Now this is where the solution can be found in Syria.

ANDREW MARR:
But there’s no possibility at the moment of Assad stepping down? That remains the biggest problem, presumably? Assad is very hard to ...

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) Well that is the regime’s position …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… and that is of course the biggest sticking point of all because nobody really rationally can imagine Syria ever being led again after this terrible oppression and murder and death of so many people by the same person.

ANDREW MARR:
Indeed. Now meanwhile there are several things that could be done in Syria. Save the Children has been prominent in calling for new corridors; two and a half million children in desperate circumstances in Syria. Is there any progress at all in humanitarian corridors to get them out, to get them to safety, get them some succour?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
There isn’t much progress. We are getting aid, including British aid, into all governorates, all fourteen areas of Syria, but there are particular areas that are besieged, where the … And you can see the depravity and cruelty of this regime - that they are denying access for medical supplies and food to their own people in besieged cities in Syria. So I hope that one of the byproducts of these talks might be progress on that. But we’re doing our utmost to help Save the Children do fantastic work out there and Britain is the second most generous country in the world when it comes to giving humanitarian aid to people inside and around Syria.

ANDREW MARR:
Talking of generosity, the Prime Minister opened the door, left it open (it seemed) in the House of Commons this week, last week, to the possibility of Syrian refugees being welcomed into this country. What’s your view about that? Is that a moral duty as well?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well he did open the door and the Home Secretary is working on that and will have more to say about that in the coming days. I think there is a case for particularly helping people who are particularly vulnerable. I think we …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Is that code … is that code for Christians or any particular group?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
No. Well that’s what the Home Secretary is working on - how we try to help people who actually might need to get away from that region altogether, who are particularly vulnerable to violence…
ANDREW MARR:
Because of their religious views, for instance?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well this is still being worked on …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay, alright.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… so we’ll have to let … The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary will discuss that further. But we’re looking at such a scheme. I do want to emphasise though that whatever we can do on that, our main efforts to help people will remain what we do out there… British aid is helping a third of a million people with food every day, a million with drinking water, a third of a million a month with medical consultations. And you can only do that out there in the region. That’s got to remain our main effort.

ANDREW MARR:
Meanwhile the police have expressed a lot of concern about British people who have gone out there to fight and say they’ll be arrested when they come home to check that they are not extremist Jihadists bringing terror to the streets of Britain. Are you yourself concerned about this possibility - the radicalisation of people in Syria bringing violence back to Europe in general and Britain in particular?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yes, this is why a conflict like this affects us: it affects our own national security. The longer it goes on, the greater these dangers are. That’s why promoting a political solution there is so important. But it is a serious danger. People need to know first of all they should not be travelling to Syria under any circumstances; and, secondly, that we are vigilant about this and that the Home Secretary has the power to remove the passport of someone who we think is going to do that, to cancel their leave to remain in this country of people who might go and come between Britain and Syria. So we are on the lookout for these people.
ANDREW MARR:
I described earlier on the rather bleak situation in Iraq and in Egypt and so forth. Has there been a period in my lifetime when British foreign policy has been as relatively impotent as it is at the moment? We don’t have our great allies that we used to. We are on the edge of Europe. We don’t seem to be … we’re cutting back our armed forces radically and fast. Do we really still count in the Middle East or anywhere else?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
We do count a lot and I certainly feel that in my daily work. You’re right to describe all the problems that exist, but we are not an impotent country. When you look at the work that’s going on to stabilise Yemen, which we are at the centre of, the assistance we’re giving to Libya, the recent agreement with Iran on the nuclear programme, now these are things which Britain is heavily involved in. So it’s true these are vast problems and we’re going through a particularly turbulent period in foreign affairs, but we should never think of ourselves as unable to influence them. We’re the sixth biggest economy in the world, the fourth biggest military budget in the world, and Britain still has big clout in the world.

ANDREW MARR:
Coming nearer to home, a big part of the Government’s pitch to Conservative minded voters was the promise of a referendum in 2017. That has now been stopped in the House of Lords effectively. It is a “dead parrot” as one of your MPs has described it.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well you can see the true colours of the Labour Party in this. They didn’t say they were against it, but they’ve done everything possible in the House of Lords to talk it out, to frustrate this bill. That doesn’t stop this as a Conservative proposition for the next General Election and the next Parliament. If David Cameron is Prime Minister after the next election, there will be a referendum. And you can see from the behaviour of the Labour Party that if he isn’t, there won’t be, and that will be one of the choices for people to make at the next General Election.

ANDREW MARR:
But a lot of your MPs were desperate for this piece of legislation to go through. They
really wanted it. They wanted to nail the Prime Minister and yourself to the wall on the promise of a referendum. Now it’s not there.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Well we’re totally committed to that in any case. We’re all very keen for this legislation to go through. The whole Conservative Party absolutely united on holding a referendum before the end of 2017, seeking a better deal for this country in Europe before we have a referendum. This will remain the Conservative policy. We will not be put off this by antics in the House of Lords or by the Labour Party. And there will be that straight choice, we now know, at the General Election: referendum with the Conservatives or no referendum without the Conservatives.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Alright, since we’re talking about domestic politics, were you at all concerned to see the opinion polls on Ed Balls’ new policy on the 50p tax rate very, very popular? I mean business may be against it, but the country is in favour.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
*over* Well I think you know if we trade opinion polls, I think economic confidence now in the government team and what George Osborne is doing is so much higher than in anything that Ed Balls is saying. And I think what he is doing unfortunately with this latest proposal is send out the wrong signal about Britain. You know I see as Foreign Secretary every day the rest of the world now seeing Britain with falling unemployment, with low inflation, with a real return of economic confidence, the long-term economic plan of this government is working. Ed Balls is sending the signal that if there’s a Labour Government, we go back to high taxing, high borrowing, high spending, and that is an anti-business, anti-job creation agenda.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**