ANDREW MARR:  
One of the many dramas of the general election was the SNPs’ overwhelming victory in Scotland. That big contingent of nationalist MPs is now flexing its muscles at Westminster, frustrating the government over issues including fox-hunting and English Votes for English Laws. Among them is the SNP's former leader, Alex Salmond. When we met in Aberdeen, I asked him: does he accept the case for English MPs to make decisions about matters affecting only England, in principle?

ALEX SALMOND:  
In principle, yes, and in principle I'm in favour of an English Parliament, I'm in favour of an independent England. I mean a lot of folk say that the country would find it difficult to manage and would have trouble handling their own affairs, but I’m a great advocate of the ability of the people of England and their elected representatives to make decisions for themselves, but you must do it in such a way which is not unfair to other representatives.

ANDREW MARR:  
(over) Sure…
ALEX SALMOND:
And certainly the way the government have cooked it up is bordering on the ridiculous – as they seem to be recognising – which is why of course they’ve had to postpone it to the autumn as they try to get back to the drawing board and draw up something more sensible.

ANDREW MARR:
So what in the Alex Salmond world view would a successful English votes for English laws proposal look like inside a UK Parliament, not an English Parliament?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well if you were doing it, well I was going to say if you were doing it properly, you would have an English Parliament because you have to have some sort of symmetry between what’s happening in Northern Ireland, what’s happening in Wales, what’s happening in Scotland and what’s happening in England. There are four nations in these islands and, if you were to take the Prime Minister at his word and this was an equal partnership, then each of these nations would have equality with each other and that would mean an English Parliament.

ANDREW MARR:
So David Cameron is now trapped then? You know he can’t give you an English Parliament because that’s the … that’s independence.

ALEX SALMOND:

ANDREW MARR:
But he’s a unionist and it appears that for a unionist there is not an acceptable English votes for English laws compromise in your view?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well no that’s not true. I mean an English Parliament is not independent, so you can have an English Parliament within a federation.
ANDREW MARR:
(over) In a home rule.

ALEX SALMOND:
Yes in a home rule situation. Home rule all round as it was once called.

ANDREW MARR:
I’m interested in whether there could have been some kind of armistice between a unionist government in London and the SNP around home rule all round, but that has been removed from the table by the English votes for English laws proposal?

ALEX SALMOND:
A wise government would have not have provoked the situation of Scotland. They would have come to terms with it. Mind you, the history of the UK of course is littered with governments, you know from Dublin to Delhi, who haven’t conceded enough to restless nations.

ANDREW MARR:
And is that what you think’s going on now? Do you think, in the words of one of your MSP colleagues this week, that a second referendum is now inevitable?

ALEX SALMOND:
Oh I think a second independence referendum is inevitable. The question of course is not …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) The timing.

ALEX SALMOND:
… the inevitability. It’s the timing and that is very much in the hands of Nicola Sturgeon.

ANDREW MARR:
Is what you regard as mistreatment of the Scotland Bill and the EVEL question, is that a significantly substantial issue to provoke a second referendum? This is going to be the buzz of the SNP conference later this year, I’m sure.

ALEX SALMOND:
Well the first … the first, it is a sort of issue. I mean I can see three issues which are moving things towards a second referendum on a timescale yet to be determined. One is the refusal to deliver the vow. The vow was about home rule, devo to the max, “near federalism” – to quote Gordon Brown. That has not been delivered, as yet at least, in the Scotland Bill, so that’s an issue. The second issue is the one that’s been cast out quite a lot and that’s the European issue. If you had a situation of circumstance where Scotland voted to stay in the European Union, the referendum, that was dragged out in the votes of the people of England, then that would be a material change of circumstance. And the third thing emerging of course comes out from the Budget and the Welfare Bill …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Austerity.

ALEX SALMOND:
... which is, you know, austerity. Instead of getting devo to the max, we’re getting austerity to the max, and that divergent view of what’s right in social terms between Scotland and England is another issue which is moving things towards another referendum.

ANDREW MARR:
What the Conservatives would say is nonetheless under the new settlement, the Scottish Parliament is going to have control over 40 per cent of taxation policy, 60 per cent of spending, and therefore if the SNP wants to blunt at least the edge of austerity in Scotland you now, you will very soon have, the powers to do that. You can raise tax thresholds, you can raise tax rates in Scotland, and you can sort of, as it were, use that to subsidise welfare payments in Scotland.

ALEX SALMOND:
Okay can I explain why that’s not true? I mean firstly it’s not true about the 40 per cent. Why? Because that includes, for example, having half of VAT assigned to the Scottish Parliament. Now having half of the proceeds of a tax assigned to you, you can’t control the tax base or the rates. It’s not, it’s not …

**ANDREW MARR:**
But you can control income tax.

**ALEX SALMOND:**
No but it’s not financial control though. Even on income tax of course, it’s only partial. It’s the bands, but it’s not for example the …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* It’s quite a lot.

**ALEX SALMOND:**
*(over)* No, no …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* You could raise the top rate.

**ALEX SALMOND:**
Yes but it’s not, for example, a tax on … It’s tax on earnings as opposed to tax on dividends. The tax base is also still under the control of Westminster. So even on income tax, it’s a partial control. You know, people in Scotland, you know we’re not daft. We’ve actually seen through George Osborne’s clever wheeze of saying what we’ll do is we’ll chop a billion pounds off social support in Scotland, hitting some of the poorest, most vulnerable people in the country – you know hardworking, low paid families, people with disabilities – we’ll take a billion pounds off them, we’ll hand that over to the Scottish Parliament with no extra budget and we’ll say to you “make up that shortfall of a billion pounds”. You know that is not financial control. That is allowing, that is allowing …

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) But you could show am earnest of your sort of social instincts by raising taxes to blunt a bit of that.

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) Well … I’m just … I’m just coming to that. That is cutting people off at the knees and saying somebody else is going to take you to hospital. That is not … I mean we’ve kind of seen through that. That is not an alternative to having real control. And there’s a limit to what you can do out of other budgets or even raising what little taxation control you have in terms of compensating for something off a billion pounds. And that’s why we’ve been fighting austerity tooth and nail and that’s why we were so incredibly disappointed when the Labour Party sat on their hands as opposed to joining with us and six other political parties in opposing that Welfare Bill when it came before the House of Commons.

ANDREW MARR:
You mention the Labour Party. Given what the SNP’s been saying about austerity and so forth, is it absolutely the case that Jeremy Corbyn would be your ideal Leader of the Labour Party, the person that you could do business with?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well I’ve tried not to try and pick the leader of another political party - I mean that’s for the members and supporters of that political party to do - therefore I’ve expressed no preference as to who the Labour Leader will be. I’ve merely said that well, firstly, I think that Jeremy Corbyn’s a serious politician and I think this, you know, this treatment of him, is a demonisation – I’m quite familiar with it, incidentally – and that demonisation in the metropolitan press gives no idea as to, you know, the substance that he has in terms of his, I mean I’ve known him for many years. And that doesn’t mean I agree with him on everything, incidentally. It just means he’s a substantial politician. The one advantage with Jeremy Corbyn is that you would know where he stood on certain issues. I mean you’d know absolutely that you could cooperate as an opposition against the Welfare Bill. I would know absolutely that when the Trident renewal vote, you know the proposal to waste £100 billion on a new generation of nuclear weapons comes up, you’d know exactly you had a means of cooperation. One of the reasons why Jeremy Corbyn is …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) So he would allow a more effective opposition in the House of Commons in your view?

ALEX SALMOND:
For the same reason that he’s having such success within the Labour Party; that whether people or disagree with him, at least you’re absolutely certain of where he stands in the direction of leadership. That doesn’t mean I agree with Jeremy Corbyn’s politics across a range of things, but you’re asking a question of would it be possible to cooperate, and in terms of that question the answer’s yes.

ANDREW MARR:
You’ve been a longstanding supporter of the EU and Scotland’s place inside the EU. When you look at what’s happening to Greece and when you look at the way in essence German bankers are deciding austerity policies and imposing them on a sovereign country, do you have any qualms, any second thoughts, any shivers about that?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well qualms certainly. But not just German bankers. I mean let’s put responsibility where responsibility is due.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Finance ministers.

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) I was going to say German finance ministers and German chancellors.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

ALEX SALMOND:
And you know I’m a huge admirer of Angela Merkel - I think she’s been an
outstanding European politician over the last decade, obviously - but those admirers of the German Chancellor would have liked to have seen a bit more leadership in terms of pan European direction. Yeah I mean I think the treatment of Greece has been a setback for the European cause.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s move a little bit further away to the question of Syria, which the Prime Minister regards as an existential threat to this country and he clearly now wants new parliamentary authority for military action of a kind we haven’t seen yet. Do you think the SNP needs to be consulted before that happens and how would you vote in such a vote?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well parliament has to be consulted. The SNP haven’t been consulted to date. I mean I saw the Prime Minister say he was talking to opposition parties. Well I can say he hasn’t spoken to me, and I am the international spokesperson of the SNP. But parliament will have to be consulted and parliament will have to be persuaded, and I’ve heard nothing yet from the Prime Minister that would persuade me there’s an integrated strategy which would justify a bombing campaign. Syria is a four-way civil war at the present moment. It’s hideously complicated and saying it’s a four-way civil war actually is to underestimate the complexities. Very difficult indeed to know exactly who to bomb and what effectiveness it’s going to have. But the second area that makes me so suspicious of this, one of my parliamentary colleagues has a story in The Sunday Herald today - information from the Commons Library - he asked a question of the comparison of spending between the UK’s participation in the Libyan bombing two or three years back with what’s been spent on reconstruction or the attempt to reconstruct that country. The answer’s £320 million to participate in a bombing campaign and £25 million to try and help restore the country, which is one reason perhaps we have a failed state in Libya now; and if you’re looking for a country connection with the Tunisian atrocity affecting so many British citizens, then it’s with Libya, not Syria.

ANDREW MARR:
Before we finish, your old sparring partner Donald Trump is on the stump and doing
rather well in the United States. What would a Trump presidency mean, do you think?

ALEX SALMOND:
Certainly it would be a great boon for the 24 hour news cycle. Of that, there’s no question. I’m not going to interfere in American politics in the way that Donald Trump interferes in Scottish politics, except to say this. There’s a difference between name recognition and political support and it may be before long that Donald Trump will come to understand the difference.

ANDREW MARR:
Alex Salmond, thank you very much.