Andrew Marr: Diane Abbott, a lot of people watching this programme, after Manchester, thinking about who to vote for, look at you and look at Jeremy Corbyn and think, do you know what, we don’t completely trust you to be in charge of the security of this country, given what you have said in the past, some of the things you’ve done in the past. You can take a moment now to, as it were, talk to them and tell them why they’re wrong about you.

Diane Abbott: Well, first of all before we move on to the politics of it, I think it’s too soon to forget the victims. 22 people dead and also so many people, families and children who have seen things which will haunt them for many years.

Andrew Marr: Quite right. We have talked a lot about the victims.

Diane Abbott: I think it’s important to say that. In terms of why people should vote Labour in the forthcoming general election, they should vote Labour because we’ve put forward a manifesto which will be a transforming manifesto, which is talking about investment in the NHS and education and is also saying how we would fund it.

Andrew Marr: And I’m going to come on to that manifesto in some detail in a moment, but before we do I just want to ask about your own record, and people looking at you and saying, ‘I don’t trust Diane Abbott to be in charge of the Home Office.’

Diane Abbott: Well, first of all I think there’s something to be said for a Home Secretary who’s actually worked in the Home Office. I worked in the Home Office for nearly three years as a graduate trainee and I know how it works from the inside. I think there’s something to be said for a Home Secretary who as a very young woman worked and campaigned with diverse communities and
sees these issues not just from the point of view of bureaucrats but from the point of view of diverse communities. And there’s also something to be said for a Home Secretary who’s spent 30 years as a constituency MP and knows how these issues impact on ordinary people.

Andrew Marr: What about a Home Secretary who has in the past said that we should abolish MI5?
Diane Abbott: Well, I think you’ve got that from some –
Andrew Marr: Early Day Motion which you signed in 1989. I can read it back to you if you’d like me to. It called for ‘the abolition of “conspiratorial groups” like MI5 and Special Branch which are not accountable to the British people.’ Signed by Diane Abbott.
Diane Abbott: At that time I and a lot of people felt MI5 needed reforming. It has since been reformed and of course I would not call for its abolition now.

Andrew Marr: So that Diane Abbott statement has gone and you’re pro-MI5?
Diane Abbott: No, I’m saying that MI5 has gone, it’s been reformed, it’s a different MI5, and that’s why so many of us are able to support it now.

Andrew Marr: And you fully support it, because also in your career in the House of Commons you’ve voted again and again, around 30 times, against anti-terrorist legislation for different reasons?
Diane Abbott: What you have to remember is that on many of those occasions I and Jeremy Corbyn were going through the lobby with Tory MPs. Theresa May herself voted against the 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Bill. She voted against ID cards. And she voted against control orders without sufficient legal intervention. And my point is this: nobody votes against these things without a lot of thought, and the view of myself and Jeremy and most members of the Conservative Party, including David Davis at the
time, was this was counter-productive counter-terror legislation. And some of the positions we voted for were upheld in the courts.

Andrew Marr: Let me come onto your bit, you said, nobody votes against these kinds of things without a lot of thought. Shortly before 9/11 you voted against proscribing Al Qaeda as an organisation. That was a huge mistake on your part was it not?

Diane Abbott: Have you actually read the legislation we were voting on?

Andrew Marr: I have read the legislation and I’ve looked at the addendums as well.
Diane Abbott: And what the legislation called for was a whole list of –
Andrew Marr: Which I have here.
Diane Abbott: - organisations, some of which some people would argue were not terrorist organisations but dissident organisations. And to say that because I –
Andrew Marr: Which ones, because I’ve got the list here. Al Qaeda, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Armed Islamic Group, Harakat Mujahideen, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Group, Islamic Army of Aden, the Abu Nidal organisation, the Kurdistan Workers Party, which of these should not be proscribed?
Diane Abbott: Titles are one thing, but the reality of some of those groups were that they were dissidents in their country of origin, and that’s why some of us were not – had they taken Al Qaeda as one thing, that would have been something. But you know –

Andrew Marr: This is a group of really dangerous organisations from all around the world, many of whom have killed a lot of people. Lashkar-e-Taiba carried out the 2008 Mumbai attacks which killed more than 170 people. That was on the list. No list is
perfect but it was a pretty good list and you voted against proscribing those groups.

Diane Abbott: Because there were groups on that list which I deemed to be dissidents rather than terror organisations. You have to give people credit for thinking about how the vote. As I said to you earlier, we’re hearing about all this anti-terror legislation that Jeremy and I voted against, but we’re not hearing that the Tories voted against some of the self-same legislation, particularly control orders and detention without trial.

Andrew Marr: Well, there is the list. Which of those organisations do you think should not have been proscribed? Because you know, you voted against the whole lot being proscribed because presumably some of them you thought were okay. I’m just wondering which ones you think are okay.

Diane Abbott: It’s not that I thought they’re okay. I thought that they were dissident organisations.

Andrew Marr: You can have the list if you’d like.

Diane Abbott: No I don’t need it, Andrew. Because the point is at this point less than a week after those people died in Manchester we should be talking about how we go forward to make this country safe.

Andrew Marr: But to know how to go forward we have to look behind and look at people’s records, which is why I’ve been talking about you. Now, Jeremy Corbyn got into some trouble with Andrew Neil in his interview where he said he had not met the IRA, and he was then photographed with lots of people from the IRA during the course of his career. You yourself said that a defeat for the British state would be a great liberation, a great move forward at that period of time. Do you regret your support for the IRA back in the ’80s?

Diane Abbott: That particular quote you’re referring to comes from a now-defunct Left newspaper, and it has, as well as –

Andrew Marr: But you said it didn’t you?
Diane Abbott: - no, no, no, but what I’m saying to you is this: it was 34 years ago, I had a rather splendid afro at the time – I don’t have the same hairstyle and I don’t have the same views, and it’s 34 years on. The hairstyle has gone and some of the views have gone.

Andrew Marr: So you no longer – you regret the fact of what you said then about the IRA?
Diane Abbott: The hairstyle has gone, the views have gone. We’ve all moved on in 34 years. Haven’t you, Andrew?

Andrew Marr: We’ve all moved on. I was just wondering do you regret what you said about the IRA at the height of the bombing?
Diane Abbott: What specifically do you want me to regret?
Andrew Marr: I can read the quote for you. Basically what you said that a defeat of the IRA would be devasting for the British people and a defeat for the British state was a good thing, you said at the time when the IRA was attacking the British state. And you said that the reason for the violence was entirely caused by the British presence in Northern Ireland. I’m saying do you think those statements now are wrong?
Diane Abbott: It’s 34 years ago. I’ve moved on.

Andrew Marr: You’ve moved on. Alright. I’ve got the quote here finally, you said, ‘Ireland is our struggle, every defeat of the British state is a victory for all of us.’ A defeat in Northern Ireland, indeed, was the quote.
Diane Abbott: 34 years ago and I’ve moved on.

Andrew Marr: Okay. Within a few weeks you could be Home Secretary, and one of the things we know from Amber Rudd, that she spends two hours a day signing orders approving the surveillance of individual people. Would you be prepared to sit there now and do that?
Diane Abbott: Of course. If the evidence was presented to me. Remember, I was a Home Office civil servant, I know how these things work. So if the files were put in front of me, evidence put in front of me, of course I’ll sign orders for surveillance, that’s very much part of the job.

Andrew Marr: Okay, ‘let’s turn to another big issue of today which is encrypted services on Whatsapp and other mobile messaging devices. Do you oppose or support forcing those companies to reveal what they’re doing?
Diane Abbott: I think the problem with a lot of these companies, they’re American companies and they feel very strongly about the right to free speech and so on. But we do have to work with them to allow us to access some of these messages. There is an issue about end-to-end encryption. We have to work with them, and if they’re not willing to cooperate we do have to consider what further action we could take. But I would hope, given the tragedy in Manchester, that these companies would want to work with the British government.

Andrew Marr: Okay, let’s turn to something else, again I’m afraid reported in today’s papers, which is that as recently as 2010 you told a dinner party, ‘we shouldn’t put innocent people’s DNA on the database,’ – fair point – ‘and we shouldn’t even have guilty people on that database.’ Again, as somebody who’s going to be Home Secretary do you still support that statement?
Diane Abbott: What you have to remember is I’m also a constituency MP and I’ve had to deal with some very difficult cases with children, children, who have not actually been convicted of anything, who had their DNA on the database, and I had a huge struggle to get their DNA taken off. So yes, we do need to be careful about taking children’s DNA, children who’ve not been convicted of crime.
Andrew Marr: You didn’t use the word children there.
Diane Abbott: Yes, because I don’t know where that story comes from, but what was on my mind was a case I was dealing with at the time about a child whose DNA had been taken.

Andrew Marr: So can we be very, very clear, in terms of retaining a strong DNA national database are you in favour of that or against it?
Diane Abbott: I’m in favour of a DNA database. I’m not in favour of keeping the DNA of children who’ve committed no crime.

Andrew Marr: Only children. So anybody else who’s guilty of some crime, or has been found guilty of that, their DNA should be kept, you agree with that?
Diane Abbott: Yes, of course, yes, of course.

Andrew Marr: You do agree with that. Okay, well let’s move on.

One of your big announcements has been lots more officers including another thousand people for the security services. Now they are already increasing by a thousand after David Cameron’s government. Is this another thousand beyond that?
Diane Abbott: No, that thousand hasn’t been recruited, and what we’re saying is –

Andrew Marr: They’re doing it at the moment they say.
Diane Abbott: They say but they haven’t recruited them yet. So we are saying that we want to recruit 10,000 extra police officers, community police officers, because we think community policing is key. We want to recruit 3,000 extra fire fighters, 3,000 extra prison officers, a thousand, as you say, people in the security field, and 500 more border guards, because we think protecting our border is so important.

Andrew Marr: So you know the next question, how much extra are you going to spend on MI5?
Diane Abbott: Well, on MI5 we’re not spending extra because the government’s put the money aside. Altogether –

Andrew Marr: So this is not really a new announcement at all?
Diane Abbott: No, well, this is part of our community safety pledge card, and altogether the things we’re talking about, the 10,000 extra police officers – and remember, the reason that we’ve had to promise 10,000 extra police officers is that on Theresa May’s watch they are 20,000 police officers down. So the cost of the entire package, which is 10,000 extra police officers, 3,000 fire fighters, 3,000 prison officers -

Andrew Marr: Alright.

Diane Abbott: - a thousand security people and 500 border guards will be 470 million.

Andrew Marr: Got the number, well done. Thank you very much indeed. Now, in the Labour Party manifesto is says, ‘freedom of movement will end when we leave the European Union.’ No ifs, no buts. Are you in support of that policy?

Diane Abbott: Freedom of movement obviously ends when we leave the EU. We only have freedom of movement as part and parcel of being in the EU.

Andrew Marr: And a Labour government will end it?

Diane Abbott: If we leave the European Union, freedom of movement ends. What we should be talking about is the immigration measures we have when free movement ends. There’s no question that it ends.

Andrew Marr: Okay, it’s just that you have said, ‘ending free movement has become a synonym for anti-immigrant racism.’ Which suggests the Labour Party manifesto has got lots of anti-immigrant racism in it.

Diane Abbott: I don’t think you’re reading the manifesto properly. Of course I think that anti-immigrant rhetoric is toxic – and actually very bad for business. We are seeing the numbers of EU migrants going down at a time when we are 24,000 nurses short, so anti-immigrant rhetoric is unpleasant but also bad for the economy. But on freedom of movement, freedom of movement ends when we come out of the EU.
Andrew Marr: If you win the election and you become Home Secretary you will be the first black person in any one of the major four offices of state. It’ll be a huge change. Will you run the Home Office differently in terms of its attitude to racism, communities and so forth? Will we notice a step change having a black Home Secretary running the Home Office?

Diane Abbott: I’ll run the best Home Office that I can. I’ll draw on my experience having worked there, I’ll draw on my experience as an MP at the grass roots, but I will have the best Home Office that I can run, which will draw on some of the Home Office’s best traditions, and above all will keep this country safe.

(ends)