ANDREW MARR:
Now apart from those opening ceremonies and closing ceremonies, 14,000 athletes, 10 million spectators, 30 different venues. When you consider the sheer scale of the Olympics, there were always going to be some glitches, but the problems with the private security firm G4S we were talking about a little while ago are a little bit more serious than that. There’s concern too about London’s transport system - all those millions of extra journeys - and about whether the Games are becoming a little bit too corporate. Well Jeremy Hunt is with me now. He’s responsible for culture, media and sport. Welcome - the lot.

JEREMY HUNT:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s start by asking about this G4S security problem because now we know that the government were talking to them for months and months and months about security, it does seem a little odd that it’s only so close to the Games that the full scale of the problem has become apparent.

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I will come to that, but can I just say I think Lang Lang got it absolutely right - this is going to be a fantastic moment for the country - and I think it’s important that we do keep these things in perspective. We of course have been monitoring the situation with G4S and their management told us right up until last week that everything was on track, and the moment that they didn’t, we put in place a contingency plan. But we’ve had that contingency plan for many months and we are just very lucky to have fantastic armed services who can come when we need them and they will do a brilliant job, as Ming Campbell said. And I just want to say this to the people who are going to be coming with their families to the Olympics. We’ll have 11,000 troops who are helping alongside trained G4S staff - and the ones we have I’m sure will be very good - to make this a very safe Olympics, and people should put their minds at rest. It’s going to be a wonderful summer and we will not compromise anything to make sure it’s a safe Olympics as well.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Without you know being too much of a dampener on it, nonetheless, I’m not sure whether it was the fact that ministers were not asking the right questions of G4S or whether you were simply getting back either lies or completely obfuscating replies from them. I mean were you pressing them properly because, after all, nothing is more important from the government’s point of view than the security side of it? G4S were given this vastly expensive contract and there have been endless meetings between the government and G4S. What was going wrong?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well we were asking the right questions and …

**ANDREW MARR:**
So you were press… pushing them toughly enough?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
… and we were being told that everything was on track. But we thought we must have a contingency plan in place just in case it isn’t, and the moment that we were told that they weren’t going to meet their targets, we activated that plan. But I just think there’s a danger … I mean we are talking about this hitch which we’ve sorted out, but there’s
a danger of forgetting the bigger picture, which is …

**ANDREW MARR:**
No I’m not … I will come onto the bigger picture, I absolutely promise. I just want to be clear about this. So what are your feelings, what are the government’s feelings about … You know it is a pretty vast mistake for a company to be so far out on the number of people it promises that it’s going to bring as trained security staff to an event like this. Are they ever going to get a contract again from this government? Are you angry with them? Do you think you’ve been lied to? What’s your reaction?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well I don’t think this is a moment for getting into the blame game. Actually G4S have been quite honourable. They put their hands up. Nick Buckles, the Chief Executive, has said you know they got it wrong. They’ve apologised, they’re going to cover all the costs. He’s apologised to the troops who are going to have to be drafted in at the last moment. And I think this is a moment for pulling together and it is an amazing project. And can I just make this point because I do think that some of the headlines have not reflected the reality of the Olympic project. I mean this is … The Olympic park, the village where the athletes are going to be arriving from tomorrow morning is the biggest construction project in Europe. That was completed on time and within budget, a triumph for the British construction industry. At a time when people are saying they’re fed up with yah-boo politics, this whole project has been a model of cross-party cooperation with Labour firing the starting gun and the coalition carrying the baton over the finishing line. And we’re going to have an incredible legacy - the transformation of East London. We’ve got I think half the schools in the country registered for the Olympic style school games, so there’s going to be a lot more Olympic sport in schools going forward. And there’s a lot we can be proud of and I think it’s just …

**ANDREW MARR:**
But you don’t feel any sense of anger or betrayal about the behaviour of G4S?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
I think it’s completely normal that you’re going to find some contractors on a project
of this size who aren’t able to deliver what they promise. And what you’ve got to do as a minister is make sure that you’ve got contingency plans in place so that the overall project is not at risk, and that’s what we’ve done.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay. And what about the … Are you happy with the quality of staff that have been selected - I mean all these stories about people who can’t speak English and so on being in charge of security?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well let’s be clear. To be selected, you have to pass a security industry qualification, which means that you have to speak English, and there is a process going on. And one of the reasons that we have bought in extra help from the armed forces is because we don’t want G4S to be pushing through people who shouldn’t be doing the job, and we know that the people they push through will be good because they’ve passed these qualifications; they’ve done a minimum of about five days training. And we’ve got these fantastic soldiers, sailors.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And, if necessary, there may be more coming from the armed services to fill the gap?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well we have contingency plans for all eventualities, but you know are very lucky in this country.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay.

**JEREMY HUNT:**
And I just say this one point. If your bag is being searched by a soldier as you go through to get into the Olympic Park, I hope people will say thank you because that person may well have come back from Afghanistan, may have come off their leave. They do a fantastic job for our country and we really are lucky to have them.
ANDREW MARR:
What about the transport questions. Do you think the tube’s going to be able to cope? Are you satisfied that the lanes, including from Heathrow, are going to work alright?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I’ve spoken to people on the front line at Heathrow this morning and people are getting through the immigration checks. It is busy. Over the next few weeks, we’re going to have the busiest period in Heathrow’s history, and the tube and the buses will also be busy; and I don’t think we want to pretend that it’s not going to take a bit longer to get around the centre of London when we host the biggest sporting event on the planet. But we want people to come to London. We want people to bring their families from Norwich and Chester and Plymouth and have a fantastic day out. Even if they don’t have Olympic tickets, we’re going to have these giant digital screens in Hyde Park and Victoria Park and many other places. And it’ll take a bit longer, but it’s going to be worth it.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So your message is come, your message is come?

JEREMY HUNT:
Come. It’s going to be fantastic fun. And you know if you’ve got children, you’re going to want them to be able to say that “I was there” in this fantastic summer where London had the huge honour of hosting this amazing sports event, and you’re going to want to have been part of it in one way or another. And so we really want to encourage people, as Lang, Lang said.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

JEREMY HUNT:
By the way, I thought that was a fantastic British moment when he said, “It’s actually very warm”, but he was wearing a scarf. (laughs)
ANDREW MARR:
Yes warm for where we are and where the jet stream is.

JEREMY HUNT:
(over) So prepare for all eventualities.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes, absolutely. I mean I suppose the other controversy has been … We had Mark Rylance on the show a week ago and he was saying he was not terribly happy about McDonald’s and some of the other big corporate names. You know we all understand that corporate sponsorship is part of the modern Olympic world. Nonetheless, some of these big brands, they’re not exactly healthy eating brands. They’re not perhaps sending the right message to all the schoolchildren who’ll be involved and you know watching the thing.

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I’d just a couple of points …

ANDREW MARR:
Do you have any uneasiness about it, I suppose?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I think I’d say a couple of points to that. First of all, the Olympics is far stricter than any other international sports event about branding. For example, there is no branding on the inside of any of the Olympic venues, which is a complete change to football, rugby, cricket, everything else we see …

ANDREW MARR:
Sure.

JEREMY HUNT:
… so they do take enormous trouble to make it as un-commercial as possible. But these sponsors, if you tot it up, they are paying for around half the cost of hosting the Olympics …
ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

JEREMY HUNT:
… and you know if they weren’t doing that, then we would have to be doing it as taxpayers. And I think we can’t have it both ways. I think we have to recognise that actually they’re doing …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Someone has to pay for it.

JEREMY HUNT:
… a great deal to ease the pain on us.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes. The first time we’ve had the chance to talk since the Leveson Inquiry evidence that you gave. I won’t go through all the detail, but, looking back, do you have any reflections on your relationship with the Murdoch team? Do you think you were perhaps a little bit naïve, you got too close to them?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I had some sympathy for this bid because I took responsibility for it, but this was a very, very exhaustive process, and when all the evidence came out, what became clear - and I gave evidence for I think five and a half hours - was that because I’d expressed those sympathies, I’d put in place a process where before every big decision I took, I sought independent advice from Ofcom and the Office of Fair Trading, and I followed that advice and I hope that has been able to reassure the public. Of course there are things you learn …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Did you squirm slightly when you saw all of those emails being made public and all those text messages and so on?
JEREMY HUNT:
Well I mean of course there are moments when things that you didn’t expect to be made public become public and you think that, but I think the important thing is the integrity of the decision making process and I think that people can be reassured that we did take independent advice. But I think also we’ve learnt a great deal about how to conduct these processes in the future and of course lessons will be learnt.

ANDREW MARR:
And have you learnt lessons that you will carry with you?

JEREMY HUNT:
Absolutely. And I think you know we are going to wait to see what Lord Justice Leveson says, but Sir Jeremy Heywood, the Cabinet Secretary, has already sent round new guidelines for how we conduct quasi-judicial situations. And I think more broadly politicians have learnt that we need to keep our distance from media proprietors. David Cameron has introduced for the first time a rule that says that all meetings with media proprietors and editors by ministers have to be published and I think …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

JEREMY HUNT:
… that transparency is probably the best way of making sure the public know what’s happening.

ANDREW MARR:
Now back at the time everyone was saying you’re going to be a dead duck; it’s all over for Jeremy Hunt and all the rest of it. You’ve survived thus far. Do you look forward to maintaining a cabinet career in the years ahead?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I very much hope so. I mean that’s obviously the decision of the Prime Minister, but I’ve got a lot of things that I’m very excited about - not least the Olympics …
ANDREW MARR:
Of course, of course.

JEREMY HUNT:
… which are going to be absolutely fantastic, and that’s really what I’m focusing on at the moment.

ANDREW MARR:
And you came into this whole imbroglio - that’s probably the wrong word, into the huge row, anyway - right at the beginning because you feared that if this bid didn’t go through Britain’s media industry would be harmed; that the whole kind of … you know the new range of company that Rupert Murdoch wanted to put together was essential to Britain’s media survival. Now the deal hasn’t gone through. He has pulled back in some respects to the United States. Does that mean that you are now worried about the condition of the media and the future of media businesses in Britain?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well first of all I’m very proud of our media industry. I think we have fantastically high quality television, some of the highest quality television in the world, and we have a very robust newspaper industry which plays a very important part in our democracy. But I’ve always wanted to make sure that they do modernise and recognise that we’re in the middle of a huge technology revolution, but, you know as far as the bid was concerned, I set those views aside because that was my view if you like as a Secretary of State responsible for the media industry and media policy, but when I was responsible for the bid itself, I was looking at something different.

ANDREW MARR:
And did you contemplate resignation? Did you think at any stage do you know what, I’m pretty close to the position where I’m going to have to go?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well you think about these things, but you know in the end I thought the most
important thing for the public was the integrity of the bid and the fact that I acted impartially and followed independent advice, and I thought it was very important that I stayed to make the case so that people understood that actually, under huge pressure, that the most important thing the government got right.

ANDREW MARR:
Did you feel that you were on the edge though? I mean that’s what everybody else thought. I just wondered what you felt right at the centre of it all?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well you know it’s quite an experience being at the centre, you know, of a media scrum. I mean that’s part of the territory in a democracy.

ANDREW MARR:
Turning to the coalition more generally, Lords reform as it was agreed in the coalition document - largely 80 per cent elected, 15 year terms, PR etcetera - are you yourself signed up to that?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I actually would go further. I would like to have a stronger House of Lords and I would go for a wholly elected House of Lords because I think that you know if you give it democratic legitimacy then it will be stronger and I think that would be a good thing for Parliament and for holding the Executive to account. But we came to a sensible agreement, which I wholeheartedly support.

ANDREW MARR:
So what’s your message to those Conservatives who voted against it on second reading?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well you know we need to make the case. I want a strong parliament. I happen to believe that a strong House of Lords is a good thing for the whole of parliament. And we talk about the primacy of the House of Commons. That’s because it’s the only chamber that’s elected. I think it would be a good thing, but we need to make that
ANDREW MARR:
Yuh. Do you think the government failed to whip strongly enough - failed to get its own people in line strongly enough?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I think they tried very hard, but you know there are issues that divide parties. I mean the NHS reforms were a very difficult issue for the Liberal Democrats and we went through those reforms, we made some changes to make it acceptable for people like Shirley Williams. And I hope that’s what we’ll do with Lords reform - find a way of going forward that satisfies their concerns.

ANDREW MARR:
You’ll have heard Ming Campbell say that it would be very difficult for the Liberal Democrats to go through the lobbies on the Boundary Commission changes if Lords reform cannot be delivered because of a Conservative split. If that happens, what’s the future for the coalition?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well what I actually heard Ming Campbell say was that he didn’t agree with tit-for-tat politics. And …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Ah, but he then went on to discuss the Boundary Commission.

JEREMY HUNT:
But I think the bigger point that he was making is that we are in a coalition. And the coalition recognises that we’re two different parties with two different political traditions, but we are coming together on this issue and many other issues in the national interest because when we face the economic crisis that we are facing at the moment across the whole of Europe, the country needs strong government. And that’s the shared values that underpin the coalition and I think that will continue.
ANDREW MARR:
Chances of making it through to the election arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well actually I’ve got no doubt that we will. And I just make this point. I mean the coalition hasn’t just come together because we need strong government at tough economic times. We’ve also got this very important belief that we need to tackle some of the non-economic issues that we face in a radical, brave way. And I think you make a choice as a government. You either say that you are going to govern for popularity, which is what the last government did, and you may stay ahead in the polls for a long time but you end up ducking a lot of the big issues. Or you say we’re going to take on these issues - the culture of failure in parts of our education system, the terrible waste of talent and people stuck on welfare rolls that Iain Duncan Smith is trying to tackle. These are deep-seated problems and we are determined to confront them. But that will mean that we have a tough patch and may well mean that we’re behind in the polls.

ANDREW MARR:
The BBC’s got a new Director General, George Entwistle. Message to him?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well everything I’ve heard about him suggests to me that this is someone who as a person is modest, is decent, but is passionately committed to excellence in programming, and I can’t think of anyone better to represent what the BBC stands for.

ANDREW MARR:
What do you think the BBC needs to do over the next few years to change further?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well you know there are tough economic times, so there’s obviously going to be costs that have to be cut and that’s an incredibly difficult process. There’s a big technology revolution which you know Mark Thompson was very successful at riding, but that will be a very big challenge. I think most of all though, the BBC has to remain true to its core values and I think it’s about finding something special and different that the BBC does in every area that it does, not always chasing ratings. I mean one fantastic
example of that: a month ago, I went to a Gustavo Dudamel concert in Raploch just outside Stirling. That was broadcast on BBC Four. It only had I think 330,000 viewers, but it was a fantastic thing for the BBC to do and it …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) The BBC should be doing. So a bit upmarket. Finally, there is going to be a reshuffle in the autumn. Do you want a different job then?

JEREMY HUNT:
I would love to stay where I am. I think there’s a lot to do with securing the Olympic legacy …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Do you expect to stay?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well you know one can’t expect anything and it’s the gift of the Prime Minister, but I absolutely love what I’m doing and I think the next couple of months will really show that.

ANDREW MARR:
Jeremy Hunt, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

JEREMY HUNT:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS