

With Us or Without Us: extended interviews

Interviewer: Edward Stourton

Interviewee: HRH King Abdullah of Jordan

STOURTON: ..the day itself, do you remember how you heard what had happened and what you did.

KING ABDULLAH: Well actually we were flying from England that day, we were somewhat close to Nova Scotia when my brother came in and woke me up and said look, we've got a problem in the States, there's been either an explosion or an aircraft has flown into a building in New York, so I said well you know that's really unfortunate but I presume we keep going, not realising, any of us, what was actually taking place, and then I actually called home to speak to the American Ambassador to find out and he didn't know what was going on. My wife called me and said turn around, and I said it's just been an accident and she said no, you don't understand, an aircraft has flown into a building, it's a tremendous tragedy and obviously on, on the phone you don't get the full depth of the catastrophe, so I walked up to the cockpit and turned on BBC World Service and they had just then announced the second aircraft, and we suddenly realised that a catastrophe was taking place so we were going to be diverted to Canada and see what was going to happen and we realised that, with the tremendous tragedy unfolding in the United States, that nobody was going to be interested in seeing us during that time, so we turned around and flew back to Brize Norton, refuelled and got back to Jordan in the early hours.

STOURTON: What was your first political calculation of what it might mean? Were you one of those who feared there might be an immediate American response?

KING ABDULLAH: No, no I didn't, I mean I, having spent a lot of time in the States, obviously such a blow would, anger any society and America was deeply hurt from what had happened, but having known the President, I'm sure that he would have taken a calculated assessment of what was the problem. There were still too many questions when it first unfolded, and then the international community was getting worried about a clash of civilisations, and luckily again, leadership in the United States and in Europe understood what Osama bin Laden was all about and actually came very strongly forward to bring common sense to people's mind, and things unfolded in a manner that I thought much better than was expected, to be quite honest.

STOURTON: On the 24th of September, I think the Senate here passed a trade agreement with Jordan, which many people interpreted as an effort to bring Jordan within the coalition.

KING ABDULLAH: Yes but you've got to remember that this thing was signed with President Clinton almost seven or eight months before and it was somewhat amusing and a bit annoying at the same time, as we came to Washington to discuss the peace process and move the Israeli Palestinian situation, reading in the newspapers that you know we're going to give the FTA to Jordan because of 11th September, it had nothing to do with it. This was something that was initiated

between President Clinton and myself and fully endorsed and supported by President Bush.

STOURTON: When the bombing began on the 7th

bargain and as much as there may be criticisms of Arafat in the west, there's also

action, especially in light of the Israeli Palestinian situation, is not moving as forward

three years' time, Israel has peace for the Arab world, and we have a Palestinian state, and to side track us on other issues I think is very unfortunate and very irresponsible.