



## extended interviews

Edward Stourton  
John Bolton, US Arms Control Negotiator

STOURTON: If we can, in fact, begin with your memories of the day itself. How you found out what had happened, and what you did.

BOLTON: We were in a meeting on checking ambassadors just before nine o'clock when we had the first word that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Centre and we kept on working because, I guess in my mind's eye, it was a Piper Cub or something like that. And then as we finished the meeting we heard the second plane had crashed into the other tower. It was obvious at that point this was no coincidence. So I ran back down the hall to my office and literally as I walked in the door one of my staff said a plane has crashed into the Pentagon. My window is right on the corner of the State Department and I looked outside and I could see the smoke and the flames coming up, so it was obvious the country was under attack. I ran down to the State Department operations centre, which is our communications room, and spent the rest of the day there. The Secretary of State was in Peru – he was coming back. We had an immediate all-day-long conference call over a secure video system with all relevant parts of the government to try and find out what had happened and begin to respond to it as best we could.

STOURTON: What was your first reaction, in terms of making a political or diplomatic calculation about what this might mean?

BOLTON: I think the first question, obviously, for all of us was who could have done it and speculation began to turn very quickly to terrorist groups, as it was not any kind of military attack, it was not launched by a known military power. It was planes being hijacked. So that narrowed the focus and I think those who are experts on the subject begin to think of al-Qaeda almost immediately. I think the question of what to do then turned to what steps to take about al-Qaeda and certainly the first issue there was what would happen with Pakistan because of the involvement of Pakistan in Afghan affairs through the support of the Taleban and the rest of it. And that really began to move very quickly with Richard Armitage's meeting the next day with the head of the Pakistani intelligence service.

STOURTON: And did you at any point in those very early days consider the possibility that Iraq might have been some way involved, or that this was an occasion on which some kind of action should be taken against Iraq? Because clearly that debate was going on within the Administration even, during that first week.

BOLTON: My first concern was that although the September 11 attacks were obviously tragic in and of themselves, the next step might be al-Qaeda or somebody else possessing a weapon of mass destruction, nuclear, biological or chemical. And that the next attack whether it was in the United States or somewhere else in the world, would involve such a weapon and concern about that and what our response would be. In terms of state sponsors, I think our speculation went to the entire list of state sponsors – Iraq being one possibility right from the start.

BOLTON: I had actually been scheduled the night of September 11<sup>th</sup> to fly to London for

outcome was the clear Uzbek desire to have the United States present, not just for the immediate needs of the Afghan operation, but over the long-term as well.

STOURTON: What was behind that, do you think?

BOLTON: I think that the Uzbeks felt that American, continuing American presence in central Asia would help the reinforcement of their independence from the former Soviet Union and would also be of assistance to them in their struggle against Islamic fundamentalism.

STOURTON: What sort of thing did you ask for but you didn't get?

BOLTON: Well in the immediate period of my visit what we wanted was landing, basing and access rights and all of those were successfully negotiated. Secretary Rumsfeld came a few weeks later and actually signed the formal agreement. I think that the subject of what the US military would be in a variety of the former Soviet central Asian republics is something that we still have under consideration, but what was interesting was the comparison of the Russian and Uzbek attitudes. I think a very significant step by President Putin was his decision to welcome an American presence in central Asia for the purposes of the struggle against terrorism. But the Uzbeks didn't think they needed permission from the Russians. They thought they were going to make that decision on their own. And they did.

STOURTON: I think you went back to Russia to talk to them immediately after that?

BOLTON: I flew from Uzbek to Russia because we wanted to have further consultations on the strategic issues – missile defence and offensive weapons – but also to tell them what I'd said to the Uzbeks about the basing of American forces. We didn't see any reason not to be transparent with the Russians – it was perfectly obvious what was going to happen and we felt it was important, especially given Pea4e 4o coB8 Uzbeks about sorie0.0007 T(t

which are flatly violating it. We are all at risk as long as there are states out there doing that.

STOURTON: You said, I think, at that time that you regarded Iraq's biological weapons programme as the next most important threat after al-Qaeda. Does that mean that in your mind you were already contemplating the possibility of a second front in the war on terrorism, which would be directed against Iraq?

BOLTON: The policy of the administration had long since been that regime change in Baghdad was what was necessary because of the continuing threat that Saddam Hussein posed to his neighbours and to us and our friends and allies and interest in the region. I think the question of direct Iraqi support for al-Qaeda was less important then and is less important now than the overall threat that Iraq poses.

STOURTON: But you say it had always been policy – the rhetoric went up a notch or two at the very least during that period didn't it?

BOLTON: I think our preparations also began to proceed and move ahead. We were working on two tracks: one was the regime change; the other was the reintroduction of UN weapons inspectors into Iraq. I think those who followed the prior UN inspection effort believed that where the UNSCOM inspectors were least successful was in the biological weapons area. In any event, almost at that point three years – now almost four years – have passed since UN inspectors were present so that there's no base line to judge, not only what the Iraqis are doing on biological weapons, but what capabilities they've acquired in the chemical, nuclear and ballistic missile areas as well.

STOURTON: While this was happening, you were at the same time continuing your negotiations over the big arms control treaty with Russia and I assume about the anti-ballistic missile treaty as well. To what extent was the atmosphere of those talks affected by the new feeling of co-operation with the Russians after September 11<sup>th</sup>?

BOLTON: Well we were really carrying on three separate conversations with the Russians at the same time: one on strategic defensive questions - the future of the ABM treaty, strategic offensive questions – dealing with what to do with the nuclear warhead and forces of both countries and the third was the area of non-proliferation and particularly Russian co-operation, for example, with the Iranian nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programme. The September 11 attacks added an important fourth dimension, which was counter-terrorism as well. But certainly all of these separate lines of conversation were affected by what we perceived to be the changed geo-strategic environment. For example, on the ballistic missile defence point, it became clear to us – even though it was very clear before – after September 11, having a defence against ballistic missile attack for the United States and its friends and allies was even more important than before, therefore the intensity and importance of the conversations with the Russians to get beyond the restraints of the ABM treaty became that much more important.

STOURTON: Do you think you would have got the big nuclear weapons treaty that you signed and the Moscow summit – the new relationship between Russia and Nato – do you think you would have got all those things without September 11<sup>th</sup>?

BOLTON: I think we would have achieved those results without September 11<sup>th</sup> – whether we would have achieved them in the time that we did or in the way that we did, I think is open to question. I think at the same time we were obviously responding to September 11<sup>th</sup> – we were trying to shape other significant forces in the world as well and I think that the relationship between the United States and Russia was changing before September 11<sup>th</sup>. I think it accelerated after September 11<sup>th</sup> – I think the co-operation and solidarity with us and the West as a whole that President Putin showed in

the immediate aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> was extremely important and it has continued to the present.

STOURTON: You got mixed up in a sort of transatlantic verbal spat with Chris Patten just

could withdraw terrorism – could renounce their links with terrorism – could basically get past that and that we would take that into account. That’s true for all states that are on our list of state sponsorship of terrorism and others that we may find out about. But it’s important that their conduct changed, not just their rhetoric.

STOURTON: What do you make of the – more broadly – lack of support or lack of enthusiasm for action against Iraq among America’s allies, particularly the Europeans?

BOLTON: I think it’s a question that we have to engage more effectively diplomatically on that. I think we have to perhaps explain better than we’ve done the risk of the threat that we face from Iraq and its campaigns to acquire weapons of mass destruction. We have 09(-io-4.9(t)4.2(h)4119t wye ttTJO -1