



With Us or Without Us: extended interviews

Interviewer: Edward Stourton

Interviewee: Richard Haass, US Director of Policy Planning

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QUESTION: What do you remember about September 11th? How did you find out what had happened? What did you do?

AMBASSADOR HAASS: I was in Dublin at the Irish Foreign Ministry finishing up a lunch with senior officials there and about to go into a meeting with the Taoiseach with Bertie Ahern. Someone said, "Turn on the television." We did just that, then the phone rang for me and it was my office calling, and what we had was essentially the confluence of the two.. my office explaining what exactly was going on, what the initial reactions were.

I then went over to see the prime minister and it was rather impossible to go ahead with the meeting as intended. Suddenly, the state of play in the peace process in Northern Ireland didn't seem quite as central - no offence intended. We obviously talked about what had just happened, what it might mean. We did talk actually for a few minutes about Northern Ireland and then Prime Minister Ahern and I went out and did a press conference in which all the questions were devoted to September 11th, to the immediate events and so forth.

I then couldn't get anywhere. Like every other traveller I was stranded, essentially, so I proceeded to take the train to Belfast and did an evening and the next day's worth of diplomacy meetings with all the leaders of Northern Ireland. It was quite extraordinary going to a place, to a city – Belfast - that had been for a lot of Americans, Northern Ireland, Belfast, synonymous with terrorism. And suddenly, quite tragically, it was a lot safer there than it was in New York or Washington, which is not normally what one would expect.

I spent the day doing meetings with everybody there, flew ultimately to London, couldn't get back to the United States, so spent several days working out of our embassy in London, meeting with British officials and, like everybody else, pretty much working around the clock. But I was in Britain, for example, for the initial memorial events and didn't get back to the United States probably until about September 14th.

QUESTION: Before we go on, I can't help just picking you up on that point about being in Northern Ireland at that time. Did you pick up then on something that, I guess a week or so later, people started to talk about, which was whether this would change American attitudes to the IRA?

AMBASSADOR HAASS: I was asked a lot of questions about what this would mean, and the idea that people asked whether this would affect US thinking. All I could say at the time was it would underline our thinking that there was simply no place for terrorism, that we didn't care about what your cause was, there simply was no justification for acting in ways that would hurt innocent men, women and children. It strengthened my hand as an envoy and, indeed, that was the case.

Over the following days, weeks and months, we saw many people in the United States who up to that point had been so sympathetic to the cause of Irish nationalism that they

were often willing to look the other way. And the balance suddenly had changed. You had too many Irish Americans killed at the World Trade Center. It just caused a sea change in people's thinking.

And it's quite possible that that is not unrelated to the fact, for example, that we've seen two acts of arms decommissioning by the IRA since then, that simply the political environment in which diplomacy now is taking place was fund

Secondly, I thought Afghanistan had the potential to be a model in another way, which it showed [in] how we could all be afgfnDC.7(ly)6.34(,)1(wh0 -122.4850.0 Tc03 Tc10.0047 T3[(showtr

So early on we realized that it was important to persuade Pakistan and Iran that what we

that could then take over in places like Kabul and anything or anywhere else that was liberated.

But after weeks and weeks and weeks of effort trying to bring together meetings and get people to hop on airplanes and come visit, it simply wasn't working. At that point, the conversations between myself and Mr. Brahimi at the UN, and between also the secretary of state and the president and Kofi Annan... what we decided to do was to take matters more into our own hand. What became ultimately the meeting at Bonn was a recognition that the Afghans themselves would not be able to forge a meaningful opposition if we simply encouraged them and said: "You guys, you go figure out the details and let us know when you work it all out."

I would guess it was somewhere in late October, early November that we came to the conclusion that that behind-the-scene role was not going to be enough and we, together with the UN, had to be much more engaged - maybe more the word is "assertive" or "hands on" - in bringing about an Afghan opposition.

crisis because it was so successful, so quick. No? Do you think some people here might say we can do things on our own now?

AMBASSADOR HAASS: I think no doubt there are those who were saying we can do things on our own, but I think that probably exaggerates the reality. Yes, when it comes to fighting wars, we can do a great deal on our own. We have both the quality and the quantity of weaponry and skill on the part of our soldiers that's unmatched. But for any sizeable engagement, we still need bases in the area, we still need overflight rights. And then even in a place like Afghanistan, even if you can largely carry out the military phase of the crisis on your own, what about the post-military phase, the diplomacy, the economic reconstruction, the peacekeeping, which is British-led at the moment in Afghanistan?

So I think the lesson that somehow we have that the United States has enormous unilateral options is simply the wrong lesson to learn. I think it's actually just the opposite. Indeed, the wider effort against terrorism, that's clearly the lesson. If you look at the closing down of the financial networks that provide assets to terrorists, if you talk about efforts to slow or stop the spread of technology that could lead to weapons of mass destruction, the co-operation in law enforcement, intelligence, all of this is truly collective, it's truly multilateral. That's just pragmatic. Again this is true, by the way, not just in terrorism. I would suggest this is true of almost any transnational challenge. By definition, these are challenges that go across borders with impunity and there's no way the United States can deal with disease or drugs or terror or weapons of mass destruction by itself.

QUESTION: Just a couple more questions because it's fascinating stuff. This year, when the president made his comments about an "axis of ev

to have its backing. But at the end of the day, we were exercising our right of self-defence, the American right of self-defence. And there was, I think, extraordinary understanding that we had the right, and in many cases, I would say the international community felt we also had the need to do so, to underscore the point that this kind of terrorism could not simply be allowed to be carried out and then not answered resolutely.