



With Us or Without Us: extended interviews

Interviewer: Edward Stourton

Interviewee: Chris Patten, EU Commissioner for External Relations

PATTEN: I was in my office having a series of meetings and one of my private office came rushing in saying "Turn on the television, something terrible is happening". I turned it on and it was just after the first crash into the twin towers with people saying, what an extraordinary accident but can it have really been an accident, how could the pilot not have missed? Then as we were still debating that in a sort of frenzied huddle the second hit took place and then it was rubble and smoke and death and speculation of the extent of the calamity.

STOURTON: What did you do?

PATTEN: The first thing we did was to check on our own security in the European Commission, to check that we could get people out of buildings rapidly, to check that there were proper checks on doors, to remind people of the need to check for parcel bombs and letter bombs and then we had, pretty early on, a meeting to discuss what we should do first. And that moved in the next few days into some pretty rapid decision-making about the work we needed to do in order to give Europe's efforts to deal with terrorism more shape and more urgency.

STOURTON: Pretty quickly it became clear that there was a crisis that was beyond terrorism. It was going to influence all sorts of things. What sort of review would you give to the way the EU institutions reacted in those first days?

PATTEN: I think it went pretty well, I think particularly on the justice and home affairs side, the decisions that were taken about the common arrest warrant, about definitions of terrorism, the way debates which had ambled on for a year or so were put into fast forward, I think that went pretty well. There was an urgent meeting of the general affairs council, there was an urgent meeting of the foreign ministers of the European Union. There was an urgent meeting of heads of government which gave some shape and impulse to those decisions and then it was decided pretty rapidly that - after President Musharraf had made it clear that he was on the same side in the fight against terrorism as the rest of us - it was decided that the then Foreign Minister who was in the chair in the council,

reaction, we might wake up and find a cruise missile had been leashed off somewhere?

PATTEN: Not really. We had pretty early discussions with Colin Powell and we all knew that Colin Powell had been one of the decisive influences in the Gulf War in assembling patiently a coalition of the willing against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait so I think we were pretty confident about the way that the administration would handle things. I think there was some wild talk but that was principally by commentators not by the administration.

STOURTON: Just tell me. I assume that you are talking about your Washington trip on I think it 20 September, you went over with the Prime Minister, is that right?

PATTEN: We went over with the, not with the Prime Minister we went over with, can I hold on a minute I'm just remembering...

On the 20 September we went over to see Colin Powell. We went, Solana and a couple of foreign ministers and myself, really to give the Americans a very clear read-out on what we were doing, on how we wanted to cooperate with judicial and police cooperation with them, the sharing of intelligence and so on. It was very much to keep them in the picture about the efforts that we were making as part of our campaign and it of course came just before our regional visit to Pakistan and Iran and elsewhere.

STOURTON: And to make a point about what

States so it had some effect I think in enabling them to keep up economic confidence even when it was taking a pounding.

STOURTON: What was the subtext, if you like, to that diplomatic activity? Were you helping with America's diplomacy or were you trying to show that the EU had a diplomatic weight of its own, in what I suppose is the gravest crisis to blow up since the kind of ambitions that the EU has for diplomatic relations?

PATTEN: I don't see us being involved in a sort of World Cup, in an endless competition, with the United States. We have the same objectives and we were using our own authority, our own power if you like, to work in parallel and in close cooperation with the US. So I think both in Pakistan and perhaps more particularly in Iran we were doing that. We see eye to eye on a great deal more with the United States than we disagree about and I think that doesn't mean we are always acting in the same way but I think very often acting in parallel and when we do it is much better for the

that the imbalance between

some time during the Clinton years. We had disagreements with the administration about the International Criminal Court, anti-personnel land mines and other issues but I think that even while opinion polls show that support for international cooperation outside the beltway in Washington is pretty well what it has always been, and even though one knows that Colin Powell has an 86% approval rating and he is well known to be in favour of multi-lateralist, multilateral solutions whenever possible, there is

don't belong to that school of thought, that you can never say anything critical about your friends. I think there is a difference between being a candid critic and being spiteful and unhelpful. I think there is a difference between diplomacy, hard engagement and supine poodle-like behaviour and I think that it is much more sensible with everybody to say not entirely in public what you say in private but say at least a bit of what you say in the one in the other.

STOURTON: With your aid and development hat on, do you think that the war on terrorism has in more general terms skewed the international agenda, that there is more attention to fighting war than dealing with the fundamental problems?

PATTEN: Well look, I think that the war on terrorism is a reminder of the interconnections of foreign and security policy, the new agenda of foreign and security policy and so much else. First of all I don't think that a political cause justifies terrorist atrocities. But I do think iri s-0.019pl-0.4(wfa11(d

that they could close an eye to the use of the terrorist threat as an adjunct to diplomacy in Kashmir and I think it was extremely important that the world disabused any people in Pakistan who thought of that dangerous notion.