



With Us or Without Us: extended interviews

Interviewer: Edward Stourton

Interviewee: Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor

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STOURTON: The President came back that night and made the address to the nation. He made that very broad declaration on a war on terrorism that night, which surprised a lot of people. What was your advice to him about that?

RICE: We had talked earlier in a National Security Council meeting by video; the president was out at Offut Air Force Base in Nebraska, and we had talked about how to think about what had happened to us. And the president was very early on convinced that this was something that was global, that it was New York and Washington that had been hit, but that it could be anyplace. He believed, and we talked about the fact, that for America to declare a war on terrorism to protect itself was not something that was deserving of America's attention in quite this way; that we needed to be able to show and to let people know that, even on the night that we'd been attacked, that we believed this was global and this was something that we shared with other freedom-loving people. We talked about the one line that probably was the most important line, which was that if you harbour a terrorist, then you will share their fate. Because that was really the core of what journalists later called the "Bush Doctrine". Not just the terrorists, but that they're state sponsored, those who harboured them, those who were unwilling to go after them also had to be dealt with.

STOURTON: I've seen it reported that on the third day, when you saw the Guards playing the Star-Spangled Banner at Buckingham Palace, you found that a very moving moment. Is that right?

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already there, the Northern Alliance in particular. And after listening to this rather intensive briefing and discussion for a period of almost four hours, he said, "I want us all to have lunch, and then I want everyone to go and get some exercise and rest, and then I want you to come back at 4:30 p.m. and I want people to tell me what you think we ought to do". He came back, he listened, there was a lot of, really, a lot of agreement that it had to be global, that al-Qaeda was probably the initial target, that doing just air power had a lot of down sides. But I don't think one could say he was given four distinct options. He was, rather, given the best thinking of his war council. And he said, "I'll let you know". And he ended the meeting and he came back here and the next day he called me into his office up in the Residence and he said, "I know what I want to do". So that's how he conducted that meeting.

STOURTON: So by the time he got on his feet in front of the joint houses of Congress that week, the course of the next few months was pretty much set, was it?

RICE: Yes. It was clear by that time that one of the issues was would we give the Taleban an ultimatum? And so we decided, he decided that yes, he would give them an ultimatum. He had decided that he was going to set in motion planning for integrated operations between the Central Intelligence Agency and the military; that we were going to give the Taleban a clear chance, but if they were unwilling to respond - that is, to turn over al-Qaeda - that we were prepared to try and bring the Taleban down. Most of the really important strategic decisions had been made by the time he gave the 20 September address.

STOURTON: Were there times during the campaign itself, the military campaign that you began to doubt whether it was going to work?

RICE: Well, I would say that with the exception of the president, there was a time when everyone got a little impatient, because there was a lot of question as to when the Northern Alliance was actually going to move. And there was a little bit of a concern that winter was going to come on, and Afghanistan's a tough place to fight in the winter, and what would really have been achieved by that time, and would we have lost the initiative and the momentum if by, say, the first of December there had not been major advances? But as it turned out, none of that turned out to be a problem quite at all. And when the Taleban began to unravel, they unravelled with remarkable speed.

STOURTON: Nevertheless, thinking of Tora Bora and Osama himself escaping, what do you think went wrong there?

RICE: Well, I don't know if we know who did or did not escape at Tora Bora. Tora Bora was an effort to do what we've had to do a couple of other times, which is to take what was a significant pocket of al-Qaeda, a kind of attempt by them to regroup, and to make certain that they couldn't do it. If you think about it, they massed in a way that allowed us to make certain that they couldn't kind of regroup and launch a counter-offensive. And I think we all believe that in that sense, Tora Bora was quite a success. Since we don't really know who escaped or who didn't, I don't think we can assess that?

STOURTON: What's your instinct, though? Do you think

of that operation.

STOURTON: Do you think you've broken them for good?

RICE: I don't think that we believe this war is over against al-Qaeda. There are really still operations that we're conducting in Afghanistan, but we're doing it now with the support of a government that is committed to fighting terrorism on behalf of its people. That's a dramatic change. We also are doing it, fighting, in conjunction with a number of other governments around the world that might have become safe havens for the al-Qaeda, whether it's Yemen, or Georgia in the Pankisi Gorge, or the Philippines. And so the president, in that 20 September speech, said this was going to be a long war, because it took a long time for these organisations to dig in, and it's going to take a long time for them to dig out. Not everything will be done by military power. The law enforcement activities, joint law enforcement around the world; the intelligence net and blanket of an intelligence net that we now have; the cooperative efforts on the financial front to freeze and follow financial transactions - these are all extremely important elements of the war on terrorism. But it's going to take some time for it all to bear fruit.

STOURTON: And what do you say to those in the region - people like King Abdullah, who's been here - who say that actually, you're going to make things worse if you act against Iraq, that the country will disintegrate and there will be chaos in the region?

RICE: If the United States and its allies decide to take military action, there will be certain obligations that come with that, to the people of Iraq and to the people of the region, to bring stability to the region. It's rather hard to imagine a more miserable life for the Iraqi people than they currently have under Saddam Hussein. But we should

RICE: Of course it's up to the Palestinians to decide who they want to lead them. It is up to the Palestinians to understand, too, that there are consequences to leadership that is in bed with terrorists. It simply is not going to be possible to fulfill the aspirations of the Palestinian people if you have a leadership that is on the one hand saying that it wants to negotiate peace, and is on the other hand paying organizations that take responsibility for suicide bombings. The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade is a creature of the Palestinian Authority and Yasser Arafat, and it has literally taken responsibility for suicide bombers. How can it be that on the one hand this leadership says it wants to negotiate peace, and on the other hand it has an organisation that is engaging in suicide bombing? It's just not possible.

STOURTON: If you go back to that original "Bush Doctrine", the idea that those who harbour terrorists are as bad as the terrorists, and the idea of being with us or against

