

BBC REITH LECTURES 2011: SECURING FREEDOM

BARONESS ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER

LECTURE ONE: TERROR

First broadcast on BBC Radio 4 at 0900hrs, Tuesday 6 September 2011.

Explore over 60 years of Reith Lectures by downloading the Reith Lectures Archive podcasts and lecture transcripts via the BBC Radio 4 website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/reithlectures>

SUE LAWLEY: Hello and welcome to the Radio Theatre in Broadcasting House, London, to the second series of this year's Reith Lectures. They're called *Securing Freedom*. In the first part, broadcast in June, we heard from Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese opposition leader, about her fight to see democracy created in her oppressed homeland.

Today, in the month that sees the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, we're on territory more worryingly familiar to most of us. The world has changed a lot since the World Trade Centre in New York collapsed in the face of their suicidal onslaught. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the killing of Osama Bin Laden seem to suggest that we are locked in a never ending struggle between freedom and terror. The West may enjoy democratic values that the people of Burma can only envy, but how does it protect them from those who would do anything to

destroy them?

How do we balance our belief in human freedom with the need to defend ourselves against those who believe the use of terror can be justified?

To try to answer these questions and describe how countries such as Britain endeavour to secure *their* freedom, we're going to hear three lectures from a former Director General of the British security service, MI5.

In her first lecture she will take us back to that terrible day in September 2001, explore its impact and assess its lasting significance. Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome Eliza Manningham-Buller.

(audience applause)

Eliza, just a few personal questions before we begin. Just tell me while the rest of our generation were plotting to become a trainee manager with Marks and Spencer or get into publishing, were you plotting to get into spying generally?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Not at all. I was plotting to find a job, and I was fortunate enough to meet somebody, I'm ashamed to say at a drinks party, who suggested that I go to the Ministry of Defence for an interview. And it went on from there.

SUE LAWLEY: But you knew what he meant in that moment? It was the tap on...

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: *(over)* No, I didn't at all.

SUE LAWLEY: Didn't you?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: No. I was curious to find out what it was, but I certainly didn't know that it was a security intelligence organisation.

SUE LAWLEY: But what qualities would they have spotted in you that made them think she'll do for us, and indeed she may go right to the top?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I'm sure they didn't think that. In those days if you joined as a woman - which of course I did *(laughter)* - you had a very clear career path. There were a whole lot of things you were not thought suitable to do.

I didn't realise this to begin with, and when I did, I and a lot of other women officers were extremely cross about it and fought to be allowed to do all the jobs available. But I can't really answer your question, Sue, because I think they were looking for docile people at that stage who did sensible work in backrooms. They certainly wouldn't have dreamed of having a woman head of service at that stage.

SUE LAWLEY: But, as I understand it, you were known *not* to be docile. You were known to be formidable, not to suffer fools gladly.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: That's what the media say. You'd have to ask my colleagues what I was like.

SUE LAWLEY: I think your school report told me you 'enjoy telling people what to do', it said.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: To be fair, Sue, that was a report when I was five (*laughter*) which my mother, as parents do, kept and gave me, and it actually said: 'Elizabeth' - which is what my parents called me - 'is trying hard' - so give me some credit - 'not to tell everybody what to do all of the time.' (*laughter*)

SUE LAWLEY: How very subtle.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: So I was trying to be tactful.

SUE LAWLEY: Well you're going to tell us a lot about what to do and what not to do, I suspect, this evening. I'm sure we're going to learn a lot more about how MI5 works from you. Let me invite you to take to the podium and present your first lecture, which is called Terror. Ladies and Gentlemen, Eliza Manningham-Buller. (*audience applause*)

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: On the day of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, I was working in my office as usual. I was deputy head of the British Security Service, responsible for its intelligence operations. I came out of the room and my staff were standing, watching the television in silence. It was difficult quite to take in what we were seeing. But we quickly recognized that this was terrorism and came to the immediate conclusion that Al Qaida was responsible. I don't think we stopped to eat but we certainly spent the rest of the day checking past intelligence, directing the collection of more intelligence and preparing briefings and papers for government.

The next day, I flew to Washington to talk to our American colleagues about what had happened and to offer support. With me were the head of the Secret Intelligence Service, more usually known as MI6, and the head of GCHQ, our signals intelligence agency. American airspace was closed and the officer in charge of the RAF station at Brize Norton was reluctant to let us take off, but the Prime Minister had agreed with the President that we should go. We landed at Andrews Air Force base and drove in convoy to CIA headquarters.

We found our American friends from the CIA, the FBI and NSA, the American signals intelligence agency, angry, shocked and tired but also resilient and determined. They had had no sleep. Casualty numbers were, as yet, unavailable: there were fears of an even higher death toll than was, in fact, the case. We were all haunted by images, the attack planes full of passengers, the slashes in the sides of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre, collapsing floors, the raging fires, people jumping to their deaths to escape them, pedestrians shrouded in dust, and emerging tales of loss and also of heroism.

In our sobering talks with the Americans we focused on al-Qaeda, having no doubt of its responsibility for the atrocities. Bin Laden had made it clear that he wished to kill Americans and their allies, and before 9/11 substantial intelligence effort was directed against him and his group. While the actual attacks were a shock, we had been concerned all summer by intelligence of developing al-Qaeda plans. And the attacks shared characteristics which were familiar to us, coordinated suicide attacks designed to cause maximum casualties, carefully planned and executed without warning. We discussed how intelligence could be developed to provide more extensive insights to al-Qaeda to try to prevent further attacks.

Obviously the United States has many more intelligence resources than the UK, but they welcomed our offer of support. And, of course, after 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland, we had greater experience of terrorism on our own soil.

After the talks, we went back to the British Embassy. We were all in a reflective mood and talked late into the night in the garden about what had happened and what the next steps might be. We discussed whether the United States would take direct military action in Afghanistan where al-Qaeda was based. What were the security implications for our own citizens? And we mulled on the various options open to the US Government and, more widely, to other Western governments. I recall that one of those present argued that the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians needed to be revived, an explicit recognition that the West needed to re-address the open sore in the Middle East that could well have contributed to these events. Those present agreed. It was important, even at this early stage, following a monstrous crime, to consider all possible ways of reducing the likelihood of further attacks.

Despite talk of military action, there was one thing we all agreed on: terrorism is resolved through politics and economics not through arms and intelligence, however important a role these play.

And I call it a crime, not an act of war. Terrorism is a violent tool used for political reasons to bring pressure on governments by creating fear in the populace. In the same way, I have never thought it helpful to refer to a "war" on terror, any more than to a war on drugs. For one thing that legitimises the terrorists as warriors; for another thing terrorism is a technique, not a state. Moreover terrorism will continue in some form whatever the outcome, if there is one, of such a "war". For me what happened was a crime and needs to be thought of as such. What made it different from earlier attacks was its scale and audacity, not its nature.

I understand that the United States, with its long tradition of offering sanctuary to the "huddled masses" under the towering figure of the Statue of Liberty and its belief, sometimes surprising to a European, of its land being a safe refuge, saw 9/11 as a declaration of war, on its own soil, to which a military response was necessary and appropriate.

But actually 9/11 was the next episode in al-Qaeda's targeting of the United States and her allies, explicitly stated by Bin Laden as his intention, and already demonstrated, for example, in the attacks on the US Embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi in 1998 and on the USS Cole in the Yemen in 2000.

My colleagues and I, and our friends round the world, had often tried to second guess what terrorist groups might do next. Sometimes we were steered by intelligence, and were able to take precautions. But we also tried to think laterally about what we, if motivated by the convictions of a terrorist, might do to inflict major damage on a nation and to instil fear among its citizens. Terrorist groups learn and change.

The Provisional IRA had moved from killing and maiming drinkers in crowded Birmingham pubs to its more sophisticated attacks on the City of London, designed to drive away foreign investment and hurt the UK economically. I think what shocked us all on 9/11 was the realisation that these events changed the world. That, if terrorists could successfully mount such attacks within the United States, anything was possible.

Bin Laden must have expected that these murderous

attacks would force a reaction that would make it easier for him to persuade others of his argument that Islam was under attack from the West. It suited his agenda for Muslims to be viewed with suspicion. In addition to mass casualties, Bin Laden sought an economic impact through driving up security costs and disrupting normal life.

Our imaginations, spurred by these events and by intelligence, took rein on what else al-Qaeda might do. The prospect of chemical, bacteriological or radiological terrorism looked more likely. Bin Laden had said in 1998 that acquiring chemical or nuclear weapons to defend Muslims was a "religious duty" and that was a very real concern in the years afterwards. We knew, and know now, how fragile our security can be. The extreme stories of fiction and film no longer seemed so fantastic although much of what we argued and worried about has not happened, not least because of the efforts internationally of security and intelligence agencies and the police.

Was it an attack on freedom itself as some have asserted? I think the answer is complex. Aung San Suu Kyi talked of the right to live "free from fear". She was speaking in the context of living under a cruel and capricious military junta, and we all hope that her patient

opposition to it will succeed. But there are also threats to our freedoms in the democracies of the West. We expect to live largely free from fear, at least the fear of being blown to bits when going about our daily lives. So there was an attack on that freedom. We were all alarmed.

I remember, for example how, for months, I looked up whenever I heard a plane overhead and wondered if it was on course and being flown by bona fide pilots. There are a few Muslims who argue that democracy, the right to elect a secular government, does not accord with Islamic principles. A bit of history here. Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, was disgusted by what he thought was the immorality and materialism of the United States when he lived there as a student shortly after the Second World War. That view influenced his disciple, Swahili, now the leader of al-Qaeda. Both could be said to have disliked the freedom of American citizens to live as they wish within the law.

It is perhaps worth noting that the modern Muslim Brotherhood does not subscribe to those non-democratic views and actually condemned 9/11.

But I still find it difficult to accept that the terror attacks were on "freedom" or democracy as some have claimed.

The young men who committed the crime came from countries without democratic rights and freedoms, with no liberty to express their views in open debate, no easy way of changing their rulers, no opportunity for choice and well aware that the West often supported those autocratic rulers. For them, as for many others, an external enemy was, I believe, a unifying way of addressing some of their own frustrations.

Of course some recruits for al-Qaeda have enjoyed the freedom of living in the West, the right to vote, to speak out, to engage in political debate. They have in many cases received subsidised further education, free health care and lived with considerable material possessions. They have enjoyed human rights and freedom under the law. So what unites them with the unenfranchised and unfree end of the terrorist spectrum? It is the view, exemplified by the Palestinians' plight, but not only that, that the West has exploited and occupied Muslim lands – oil - often supported dictators, and killed its citizens. The Crusades are not forgotten. And we believe that it was the arrival of American bases in the holy lands of Saudi Arabia, that first motivated Osama Bin Laden to attack the West, especially the USA, and to launch a global jihad. Indeed the three stated aims of al-Qaeda are to remove

the United States and its allies from the Arab lands, to depose apostate rulers and to restore the Islamic form of government known as the caliphate.

It would, though, be wrong to suggest that all terrorists belonging to al-Qaeda, or its affiliates, or merely inspired by it, share an identical motivation. But a single narrative compelling to some, seems to prevail, namely that it is the duty of good Muslims to wage jihad against the West, to avenge their Palestinian co-religionists, and more recently those in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as elsewhere.

If you watch the chilling video wills made by the British 7/7 bombers, or those convicted in London for the ambitious plot of 2006 to destroy a series of transatlantic aircraft, to mark the fifth anniversary of 9/11, it is clear that their perception of revenge is the main motive. I also think that, for some, including some third generation Britons, the prospect of engagement with al-Qaeda followers offers them a sense of identity and a focus which they mistakenly think is noble in a society they may find alien. I am convinced that many are not driven by the al-Qaeda ideology but by the attraction of belonging to a group, doing something exciting which gives a purpose to their lives. Loyalty to the group then becomes the main

motivation. And, of course, those committed to the cause are unscrupulous about exploiting and grooming young and vulnerable people for terrorist acts.

When we flew back to the United Kingdom, two days after 9/11, up the eastern seaboard of the United States, the smoke from the fires in New York was clearly visible. We felt alone in the skies above America. On the long flight home we discussed the likelihood of further attacks and what could be done to prevent them, and how the United States and the rest of the world would react. The sympathy with what America had suffered was profound and widespread and most nations expressed it and offered solidarity and support.

What was clear is that there had been a graphic and appalling illustration of what a few determined individuals could achieve to bring terror not only to North America but also beyond. America felt vulnerable. We all did.

Airline bookings dropped, capital cities were avoided, holidays cancelled. Peace of mind was broken, albeit temporarily. For the United Kingdom and my service, what followed was a time of great anxiety and tension, as floods of information reached us.

Was a copy-cat attack to be launched on Canary Wharf? How should the government deal with an incoming passenger aircraft known to be under terrorist control, or, worse in terms of decision making, suspected of so being? Where would al-Qaeda hit next? What defences could we strengthen? What could we do to reduce apprehension and to encourage our citizens to continue their lives, as far as possible free from fear? What could we anticipate? Which of the flood of leads should we pursue? Which put to one side?

That presented us with tough choices. We could not pursue everything yet knew that what we neglected could develop into a potent threat. Research was in hand to revisit old leads and to reinterpret old information in the light of these new events.

But, looking back, I think that those of us working in intelligence and security were privileged. We had a clear task and we were extremely focused. We did not share that feeling of impotence which, in addition to fear, terrorism can bring to people. We knew what we all had to do, to strengthen our intelligence effort to try to anticipate and preempt the terrorists.

My concern was that staff would exhaust themselves, so

driven was everyone by their understanding of the immediacy of the threat.

One of the first things we did was to convene in London a meeting of heads, or their representatives, of European security services, all well known to us, and close colleagues. A senior US intelligence official travelled to London to brief us and our European friends on the discoveries from the investigation. This meeting, while unusual given its horrific backdrop, was not unique. Security and intelligence services regularly meet to exchange views, share concerns and work together.

The Americans, whose intelligence collection efforts dwarf most others, are generous. Sharing intelligence is not always straightforward because of differing approaches and legal frameworks, but at that meeting we were all among friends whom we trusted. Most of those present had had their own experiences of terrorism, and later had further manifestations of al-Qaeda related terror to deal with.

We, for example, in the United Kingdom had had to deal with Palestinian, Syrian, Libyan, Moroccan and Algerian terrorists, to name but a few. Our most significant experience was, of course, with terrorism stemming from

Ireland.

That had preoccupied us for years. Some of the things we learned are relevant to thinking about the very different threat from al-Qaeda. One is the belief that the divisions in Northern Ireland society, manifested in terrorism, could not be solved militarily. Nor could intelligence and police work, however successful in preventing attacks and informing government, resolve those divisions, although that work could buy time for a political process. Intelligence was critical in helping ministers manage that process, the aim of which was to reach long term political resolutions with those who had prosecuted the terrorist campaign. But it took many years and extraordinary commitment by politicians, especially the Prime Minister, Tony Blair and the Irish Taoiseach, Bertie Aherne, to reach that point. And peace only came, at least largely peace, when the two ends of the political spectrum, Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist party, reached agreement.

In the garden of the British Embassy in Washington on the day after 9/11, we discussed the near certainty of a war in Afghanistan to destroy the al-Qaeda bases there and drive out the terrorists and their sponsors, the Taliban. We all saw that as necessary. And in Afghanistan

documents and rudimentary laboratories were discovered showing the terrorists' keen interest in fulfilling Bin Laden's stricture to acquire and use nuclear material.

What I think none of us anticipated at that stage was that the unity of purpose directed at preventing further success by al-Qaeda would be tested by the decision of the United States, supported by the UK and others, after the rout of the Taliban in Afghanistan, to invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein certainly allowed no freedom. His human rights record was atrocious, his prisons torture chambers. He was a ruthless dictator and the world is better off without him. But neither he nor his regime had anything to do with 9/11 and despite an extensive search for links, none but the most trivial and insignificant was found. Indeed, for the secular Saddam Hussein, al-Qaeda represented a challenge to his authority.

The invasion of Iraq polarised international opinion. Many doubted its legality. Incidentally, my own father, Attorney-General at the time of Suez, warned the British Government then that its attack on Egypt was illegal in international law.

War was declared on a rogue state, an easier target than

an elusive terrorist group based mainly, at that stage, in the difficult terrain of the Afghan-Pakistan border, and, in my view, whatever the merits of putting an end to Saddam Hussein, the war was also a distraction from the pursuit of al-Qaeda. It increased the terrorist threat by convincing more people that Osama Bin Laden's claim that Islam was under attack was correct. It provided an arena for the jihad for which he had called, so that many of his supporters, including British citizens, travelled to Iraq to attack western forces. It also showed very clearly that foreign and domestic policy are intertwined - actions overseas have an impact at home. And our involvement in Iraq spurred some young British Muslims to turn to terror.

9/11 was a cruel crime on a vast scale. It propelled Bin Laden and his supporters into the consciousness of the whole world. It altered our perception of what terrorism could achieve. It led to the recruitment of like-minded terrorists across the globe from Spain to Indonesia, from Kenya to Canada, from Pakistan to the Netherlands. It led to massive expenditure by the West as it sought to defend itself. And what now? Eighteen months ago, I predicted that the so-called "war on terror" would not be won but that the threat would mutate and might moderate.

I note that the threat level in the United Kingdom and to British interests abroad was lowered earlier in the summer. It is probably too soon to be able to judge with any confidence the effect of Bin Laden's death. But I do not expect terrorism as a tool, often used by states in earlier decades, now used largely by groups, to disappear. And I very much doubt that my former colleagues are relaxed about the continuing threat from al-Qaeda and its sympathisers.

But the Northern Ireland example, so utterly different as it is, and even with the recent worrying upsurge in dissident terrorist activity, should encourage us to hope that peace between hostile factions is possible. Who could have thought - I certainly didn't - that we would see Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness, Chief Minister and Deputy Minister respectively, laughing together on a sofa while promoting trade in North America?

And maybe, just maybe the death of Bin Laden, the excitement of the Arab Spring, the possibility of a new and more enlightened generation of Muslim leaders, may mean that we see less al-Qaeda related terrorism. The investment in intelligence and its successes, of which more in my next lecture, the attrition the terrorists have

suffered, the changing politics of the Middle East all give some cause for optimism. I am also encouraged that most people refuse to give the victory to the terrorists either by being intimidated or by supporting the diminution of our civil liberties. Ten years on from 9/11, the fear that afflicted us then has faded - although it has certainly not disappeared.

(audience applause)

SUE LAWLEY: Eliza Manningham-Buller, thank you very much indeed for that. Now we have with us here in the Radio Theatre in Broadcasting House an invited audience made up of experts and interested parties from various walks: politicians, writers, activists, key figures in the Muslim community and members of the intelligence and security services too. Now who will ask the first question? Can I ... Here we are.

PETER HENNESSEY: Thank you, Sue. Peter Hennessy, Queen Mary University of London, cross-bench peer in the House of Lords. Thank you, Eliza. That was a terrific survey. Can I ask you though a general question, a question about the intelligence officer's craft. If a new recruit to your old service, MI5, said, "Tell me, please distil the essence of your craft", what would you tell him or her?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I think it's a curiosity in discovering what the truth of a situation is, by seeking through clear legal methods to discover the intentions of people who do us harm. I worked with people who were motivated by the determination to try and protect the citizens of this country from attack. And the sort of people were very varied. I don't think you can produce a stereotype person. You obviously expect objectivity, regard for the law, integrity, a degree of intelligence, analytical ability. I'm not pretending I had all those qualities, but that's what you ideally look for.

SUE LAWLEY: We're going to come to the front row here, and I see Shami Chakrabarti, Director of Liberty. Yes, Shami?

SHAMI CHAKRABARTI: I agree with you that the twin towers atrocity was a crime; not the start of a war, but a crime. Can I take it that you agree with me that the way that we respond to crimes, heinous crimes as well as common crimes, is within the rule of law, not outside it?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: The democracies of the West believe in the rule of law and we should prosecute these crimes within proper law.

SUE LAWLEY: And you said during the course of your lecture that you disliked intensely the phrase “war on terror”. Did you ever say that? Did you ever hear George Bush say it in person and did you say to him, “I just don’t think that’s a very good idea”?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I said I didn’t use it myself and I didn’t like it.

SUE LAWLEY: You’ve made it very clear you deeply disapproved of it.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I only met the President once, and that was at a banquet at Buckingham Palace. That wasn’t the moment to tell him what I thought about that. *(laughter)*

SUE LAWLEY: Did you ever transmit down the line that you thought it was a really bad idea to talk about war on terror?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Certainly within the British Government. But you know it’s the Americans’ decision to call it that. I think we hope that we didn’t call it that in this country. That was my wish.

SUE LAWLEY: *(over)* But do you feel it led to an overreaction in the wake of 9/11?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I think that that's quite a difficult question because we can all remember what it was like. It almost felt that you couldn't overreact at that stage. I think since that time we've seen it in better perspective, but it's hard to be judgemental when such an atrocity happens on your soil.

SUE LAWLEY: Gentleman there.

ROBERT FOX: Robert Fox, Evening Standard and the Centre for Defence Studies at King's College. There was a very big media narrative for action following very much the war on terror agenda. But for that, could you, for example, have afforded to have done almost nothing militarily and waited for al-Qaeda to show its hand and make its next move?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I was not suggesting that we should do nothing militarily. I actually supported the war in Afghanistan. I think it's genuinely very hard for political leaders to do nothing when faced by public opinion and an event like that. You couldn't possibly have expected the American Government to do nothing. They

were bound to do something. Of course they were.

SUE LAWLEY: I'm going to try and move us on, if I may, to an area that you talked about, which is home-grown British terrorism, and I know we've got Hanif Qadir in the audience who's actively involved in advising in the prevention of violent extremism. I think he knows young Muslims who've their heads have been attempted to be turned.

HANIF QADIR: Thank you very much. Some of my opinions that I had about yourself and the services, you've quite eloquently removed those negative perceptions that I had, so thank you very much for that. I work very closely with young people who are either vulnerable to terrorist recruitment or have been recruited and have served time in prison.

If we came across a potential Mohammed Sidique Khan who was preparing to attack UK interests, but with our experience we felt that we could change this person's perception and stop him from doing that - we're not allowed to intervene in that because it's a matter of pursuit - wouldn't it be right for us to intervene if we can save, one, him from attacking the UK; but number two, gather information about him and his network; and,

number three, to save him from going to prison for a very long time?

SUE LAWLEY: We should say that Mohammed Sidique Khan was the leader of the 7/7 bombers.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: You believe that if you discovered this person, your obligation would be to report them to the authorities and that would be it?

HANIF QADIR: Absolutely, yes.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I don't see why the two are exclusive. I mean you might wish to alert authorities to the potential of this young man, but obviously it's in everybody's interests that he's deterred from the route he's on, so I can't believe that anybody would wish to stop you doing that. It seems to me to be an admirable thing to do.

SUE LAWLEY: I'm going to take a question just there.

IAN McEWAN: Ian McEwan. I'm a novelist. To what extent were there tensions between British and American intelligence services as your kinds of views - as I assume they did - flowed across the Atlantic?

How did that work in the special relationship or in the relationship?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: The relationship between different nations, whether on diplomatic channels or intelligence channels, starts from a position that we often have different views to each other. That's understood. Not everybody in the West thinks the same. I might have different views with my French colleague. The American relationship is special to the degree that the Americans have much more intelligence and substance than anybody else, but my American friends would not necessarily expect to agree with me or vice-versa. That is not necessary to cooperate on intelligence terms.

SUE LAWLEY: I've got a question that's been handed in, but I'm sure he'd prefer to ask it in person, from Tony Brenton, former British Ambassador to Moscow.

TONY BRENTON: I was actually in Washington on 9/11 and in charge of the embassy through the Iraq War. You will recall that at the time the intelligence agencies were unanimous that Saddam Hussein was developing weapons of mass destruction. This was a failure, but that was the case. And not just as it were the friendly intelligence agencies. The Russians, the French, the

Germans were equally convinced. If Saddam had been getting close to acquiring weapons of mass destruction, given the mess that we had seen could be made with perfectly conventional weapons, might we not have been right to take the action that we took?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: There are plenty of countries who are developing weapons of mass destruction who we do not attack. Your question is hypothetical. I mean there wouldn't have been the criticism that there has been if those weapons had been found.

TONY BRENTON: *(over)* But they weren't.

SUE LAWLEY: *(over)* But would it have been the right thing to do is really the thrust of the question, isn't it?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Well it is the thrust of it. I mean it's the whole question about when you decide to intervene and when you don't. I understand why we went into Iraq. There was a view that it was no longer tolerable to put up with people who might at some stage threaten us through their acquisition of weapons in the light of what had happened. What I objected to was the suggestion that this had anything to do with 9/11, and actually that it

distracted us from the focus on the perpetrators of 9/11.

SUE LAWLEY: We've spoken a lot about America and we've got an American over there. Let me hear from him. Your name, sir?

CHARLIE WOLF: Yes, Charlie Wolf. I'm an American political commentator and broadcaster based here in London. As there has been a bit of a narrative concerning Iraq as being a diversion, if I may just very briefly rebut by saying that I think the American position was that it was taking the battle from American soil and occupied it on our own terms in Iraq.

SUE LAWLEY: Let me just have a quick response on that: they set the agenda, so it was worth doing; it wasn't a distraction.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: *(over)* Could I just clarify what I think you're saying. Are you saying that to attract into Iraq al-Qaeda and deal with them there, that that was a war aim?

CHARLIE WOLF: That was one of the things that was accomplished. It did set the battle to where we decided. Instead of waiting for the next attack in the United States

and going on al-Qaeda or others' terms, America was able to then set its terms as to where it wanted to fight.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Gentlemen there with his hand up.

PETER TAYLOR: Peter Taylor, BBC. Eliza, you quite rightly drew the lessons from Ireland that we were able to reach an accommodation initially because we engaged with the enemy, we talked to the IRA via your service and your sister service. Al-Qaeda is a very different organisation. To whom do you talk in al-Qaeda and what do you talk about?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Those are obviously key questions. I don't know the answers to them. What I think is that I hope - I don't know - that thinking about the answers to those questions is something that is currently happening. But to say that you're never going to speak to them or never going to try to, I think that's foolish.

PETER TAYLOR: You've made it quite clear that there are certain areas of their agenda like Western American presence in Muslim lands, the Palestinian question. Those kind of issues, I would have thought, do offer some possibility for discussion?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I mean we're obviously a great deal away from anything that you could call a negotiation, even if that were possible, but to think about these questions and to make efforts to try and have those conversations must be a starter.

SUE LAWLEY: Are we safer today than we were ten years ago?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I hope so, but we're never fully safe. You cannot predict exactly what's going to happen next week or prevent it. That's a very uncomfortable position to be in if you're a politician or if you're an intelligence officer. Many is the time I've gone to bed knowing that we've known a bit about a terrorist attack, but not enough to preempt it, not enough to be able to take precautions; knowing something was coming but not knowing when or where. And I hope we're safer, but it's a dangerous world.

SUE LAWLEY: There we have to leave it. Next week we'll be in Leeds where Lady Manningham-Buller will be discussing the need for a security service and analysing its role and its scope. For now my thanks to you, the audience, and to our Reith Lecturer: Eliza Manningham-Buller. From the Radio Theatre, goodbye.

(audience applause)

END