

THE REITH LECTURES

LECTURE 3: FREEDOM

REITH LECTURER: ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER

First broadcast on BBC Radio 4 at 9am on Tuesday 20 September 2011.

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EDWARD STOURTON: Welcome to the last of the 2011 BBC Reith Lectures. We are in the British Library in London, and this great engine of ideas is a fitting place to end what has been a truly remarkable Reith series.

The series is called Securing Freedom, and it began with two lectures by the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi which had to be smuggled out of Burma, underlining the realities behind what she had to say about dissent and the struggle for freedom and democracy.

Eliza Manningham-Buller, who closes the series today, has had the job of protecting the freedoms that people in democracies are lucky enough to enjoy - she was head of Britain's security service MI5. What she has already said about the war on terror, about torture and about Iraq has become a significant part of the public debate prompted by

the 10th anniversary of 9/11 which we have recently marked.

We look forward to equally provocative views on the broader foreign policy questions she plans to address today. Please welcome the BBC Reith Lecturer for 2011 Eliza Manningham-Buller.

(audience applause)

It's fair to say, Eliza Manningham-Buller, isn't it, that you are used to working in the shadows - at least discreetly - and yet by doing these lectures and by the things that you've said in the course of the lectures, you've put yourself very much in the spotlight. Are you comfortable there?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Well the last lecture was in Leeds, and I had a dream the night before where the cabinet secretary rang me on a mobile and said, "You mustn't give this lecture, Eliza". And I said, "Why not?" He said, "You'll be arrested and prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act." ***(laughter)*** And as I very carefully said nothing secret, I woke up in rather a sweat.

EDWARD STOURTON: Does Sir Gus O'Donnell know that he features in your dreams at all? (*audience laughter*)

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Well he doesn't and he never has before. (*audience laughter*)

EDWARD STOURTON: Just making that absolutely clear for the record. Are you aware also that you've become something of a star on Twitter?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Well the BBC was kind enough to give me a printout of Twitter. I don't have a Twitter account, although I've asked one of my grandchildren to sort me out one because I must move into the 21st century. And I read all the comments with pleasure, 'til one which said that I sounded like a Sat Nav. (*audience laughter*)

EDWARD STOURTON: Well I think for the sake of the audience, let me just share a couple of others. I mean firstly, clearly, dogs up and down the land are going un-walked because people are waiting in to hear your lecture. "Can't walk away from my radio" is one that's come to us. You're also described as "awesome" and as "a fierce

ruling diva”. *(laughs)* I’ll leave that thought with you. Let’s not keep your fans waiting. Eliza Manningham-Buller, let’s hear your lecture.

(audience applause)

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: In my first lecture I talked of terrorism, ten years on from 9/11, the fear it induced and its threat to our freedom. In my second I talked of the role of security intelligence in protecting our lives and our freedom. Now I want to consider the wider policy context. I do not do so as an expert in foreign or domestic policy, but as a retired security intelligence officer.

In this lecture I want to argue that states should, wherever possible, seek political solutions and reconciliation.

Secondly, that how a nation conducts its foreign policy has a direct bearing on its chances of success in the search for conciliation. And finally, I want to consider how our handling of risk, and the laws we pass to deal with it, can distort our response to the threat of terrorism.

In al-Qaeda we see a terrorist grouping with, in many ways, a medieval ideology, employing today’s technology to great advantage. It works in a thoroughly modern way,

virtual, amorphous, franchised and unbounded by geography. It has recruited people from all over the world. It understands the power of images, both in its campaign of terror and in its recruitment and proselytizing material. It skillfully exploits the instant communications and social networking of the IT age. I think it also understands some of the vulnerability of the West: its appetite for news, its short-termism, its instant judgments and the pressures on its governments to respond to terrorism and the limited options open to them.

When I joined the security service, there was no internet, international travel was expensive, there was less migration, borders were not generally porous and communications were usually by a fixed line telephone or a letter. I can remember special kettles being kept for steaming open letters. That will no longer suffice. The democratic state can no longer rely on its old tools to collect the intelligence it needs to protect itself. It will always wish to recruit human sources to provide inside information, but it also needs, subject to proper controls, oversight and legal safeguards, to try to redress the balance by using the latest powerful technologies to react quickly and to keep it one step ahead. The terrorist now has at his disposal tools which were once the sole

preserve of the state. He has more advanced means of conspiring, mobilising and causing death and damage. So what it is ethical, necessary and proportionate for the state to do in response cannot be set in stone.

I have known throughout my career that, however professional security and intelligence agencies working with the police may be, and whatever success they may have in preventing terrorist crimes, they can't stop everything. Similarly, however resourceful the terrorists may be, they will suffer attrition, betrayal, arrest and imprisonment as well as death.

Success for us will not be the absence of terror but less of it, with fewer deaths and a dwindling supply of new recruits. And that success is not likely to come from military effort or from security, intelligence and police work alone, but from long-term political and economic initiatives aimed at reducing the causes of terrorism and countering the extreme ideology in order to seek the peace and reconciliation that has been so striking in South Africa. Conciliation is never easy, sometimes impossible, but it's always worth trying. Security and intelligence work can play a valuable role in creating space for the political process which is central to that, but it cannot replace it.

So what might these political initiatives be? Some of the answers may be found in the Arab Spring. This year, triggered by the self-immolation of a Tunisian street trader, we've seen people in North Africa and the Middle East take to the streets - and sometimes to arms - in protest at the conditions under which they live. The list is long: Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Sudan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Yemen, Bahrain, Kuwait and of course Libya.

Conditions in these countries obviously vary but the protesters have one thing in common, simply stated by one of the leaders of the Syrian protesters: "We want what you have - freedom." They are protesting in many cases at venal dictators, at absolute monarchs, at lack of human rights, at lack of freedom and association. They also, of course, want jobs, houses and education, and some share of the material wealth, which, where it exists, is too often monopolised by their rulers. Their passion for freedom shines out, encouraged by the visibility offered by the internet and promoted by social networks. They are prepared to risk their lives for the freedom we enjoy.

The Arab Spring raises serious questions about al-

Qaeda's relevance. It has not been able to respond convincingly to the widespread demand for change, despite its adroit use of technology and the media. Al-Qaeda's version of the ideal Islamic government seems to have had little appeal.

The Arab Spring also conclusively shows the hollowness of the cynical comments I have too often heard, that people elsewhere do not want democracy, and with no tradition of it, would not know how to practise it. There were similar patronising comments made about the countries of Eastern Europe when the Soviet Empire broke up and the Berlin Wall came down. There is also, among some, an assumption that any government replacing a dictatorship will become corrupt and unstable, subject to malign influences. But the fact that democracy often has a tough birth means that we should offer support where that is practical.

Our foreign policy must never forget that desire for freedom. It must encourage it, both to meet the wishes of those who lack it and for our own long-term self-interest. Perhaps inevitably short-term interests will intrude. Every now and again, governments assert the need for an ethical foreign policy. That laudable aim usually bumps up

against the reality that many countries of the world are led by unscrupulous autocrats who use every means to hold on to power. They have little concern for the people they govern and often maintain power only by imprisoning their opponents and bribing their armed forces. Several of these countries are vital to our economic and security interests. Unfortunately there is no point talking only to our friends and allies. The world is a messy place and we need to engage with the people in power.

From my own perspective in the security service, I know that protecting British citizens would be impossible if we were restricted to talking to those whose values we share. I can remember plots to attack us, for example, with links to Indonesia, Somalia, the Philippines, Kenya, Algeria, Jordan, and, of course, most importantly, Pakistan. That list is not comprehensive. We cannot just talk to the Swiss however enjoyable and easy that might be.

So what then of the contentious rapprochement with Gaddafi in 2003? I do not think that it was wrong in principle. The prize was his abandonment of his programme for nuclear and chemical weapons. Gaddafi is the man, as I know from personal experience, who supplied explosives, arms and cash to the Provisional IRA,

indirectly causing the deaths of many of the victims of Irish terrorism, as well as being responsible himself for a whole series of atrocities. They included the murder of the London police officer Yvonne Fletcher and, notably, Lockerbie.

That small Scottish town was somewhere I lived for several weeks, as we and the police tried to piece together what had happened and start the search to find the culprits. The people of Lockerbie provided us with generous helpings of home-made food as we began the slow and painful investigation to understand why and how 270 people, mainly American students flying home for Christmas, had met their death, and to work towards a prosecution of those responsible. I can still see the ashen faces of young service personnel and police officers as they returned to the school, the temporary police headquarters, after long days searching for body parts and wreckage strewn over a vast area. Gaddafi's was a brutal regime and his own people suffered most of all.

Nevertheless in 2003 the Government made the difficult, but, I think, right decision to open talks. Had Gaddafi made progress with his nuclear and other programmes, he could still be in power today and threatening us. There are

clearly questions to be answered about the various relationships that developed afterwards and whether the UK supped with a sufficiently long spoon. I cannot say more. I expect the Gibson Inquiry will address these issues.

It is right to use all our diplomatic efforts to encourage dictators to grant their people freedom. For we can surely recognize that participation in government, the belief at least that you can have some say, however slight, in how you are governed, that people's lives can be improved and their rights protected, reduces the need for terrorism.

Look at Northern Ireland, where former terrorists are in government. We should welcome this, not damn it. Look at many of our former colonies, whose first leaders had been imprisoned by us for terrorism. Look at Mandela and the ANC which used terror tactics when it was in exile.

In Northern Ireland, the Provisional IRA decided - partly as a result of intelligence successes against them - that pursuing a parallel policy of terrorism and politics, the armalite and the ballot box, was out-dated and it dropped the gun. The gradual move from terrorism into government is a long-established pattern. As I said at the end of my

first lecture, I hope that the greater freedom which should flow from the Arab Spring will undermine the attraction of the al-Qaeda narrative. If you are able to engage in your own political process, you have less cause to attack what across the Arab world is often called the “Great Satan.”

Dialogue, not only with the dictators of the world but with the terrorists, is necessary. As Churchill said in the White House in 1954, “To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war”. Intelligence plays an important part and is of most value if working as part of a wider dialogue involving politics, diplomacy and economic process. My most relevant experience of this is the complex and prolonged talks in Northern Ireland. There are plenty of other examples, talking to Hezbollah, to Hamas.

Talking doesn't mean approval. It means an attempt to reduce the threat by addressing, if possible, its causes. It is a way of exploring peaceful options, of probing possibilities, of identifying whether there is room to manoeuvre, and what compromises, if any, may be reached, what political grievances can be acknowledged or even, in rare cases, accommodated. It is also the opportunity for governments to express their own positions. It requires courage by governments and a

willingness to embark on an uncertain and tricky course which may well prove fruitless.

Not all terrorists are evil although their acts are. Nor are they all pathologically violent. A few are but many are not and have their own rationale, not ours, for what they do. In 1994 it was clear that the Provisional IRA was ready to move to proper talks with the British government about the future of Northern Ireland, but, misguidedly, they wished to do so from what they saw as a position of strength. So shortly before talks were due to start, they dispatched to England a vast bomb concealed in the flat bed of a lorry. It was intercepted and defused, but had it exploded, say in the centre of London, it would have been politically impossible for the government to enter talks, and the peace process would have been further delayed. The Provisional IRA and its political wing, Sinn Fein, learned greater political sophistication through subsequent engagement.

And what about al-Qaeda? How might we talk to it? And do we even need to? It is not yet clear whether the death of Bin Laden has made the world a safer place and whether al-Qaeda has been permanently weakened. The Americans believe, and I obviously have no inside

knowledge, that he remained the substantive leader of a dispersed organisation, the spider at the middle of the web, and that his death will reduce the amount of al-Qaeda terrorism we see. I hope they may be right, but webs are resilient and I doubt that his death will be a fatal blow to the organisation he founded or to the ideology he helped to create.

So what is there to discuss, what to negotiate about, what to agree on? Would any concessions be feasible? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I very much hope that there are those in the West who are exploring them. We are, after all, talking to the Taliban and may make progress.

Al-Qaeda is not a disciplined organization with a clear structure. There will be those in al-Qaeda, or associated with its franchises, who are tired and disenchanted, for whom the violence has become sterile and sickening. Some, thwarted by lack of success, will be looking for a way out. There are already those prepared to help the West. Bearing in mind that we are judged by our deeds, we should also be capable of countering the credibility of the al-Qaeda narrative - that Islam is under attack from the West.

So we should try to reduce terrorism by talking to its advocates and practitioners and try to promote freedom through talking to dictators. But we should never forget who and what they are. We need to avoid helping dictators to survive. The West's record on that is poor. We have too often preferred the stability of the devil we know to the uncertainties of democracy. We cannot expect people round the world to fail to notice our hypocrisy if a gap exists between our professed support for freedom and our actions. People suffering from oppressive governments are bemused when the West talks of freedom and democracy while at the same time supporting regimes that deny them. Of course there may often be much going on behind the scenes and it's important to recognize the real value of quiet diplomacy and private pressure away from the glare of public criticism.

If we ourselves are to be free, and to feel secure in our freedom, it's important to keep a rational perspective on terrorist risk. Bin Laden must have known that 9/11 would make this especially difficult, for at least two reasons: the endless images of the horror, recycled and replayed round the clock by the 24 hour media, and the unrealistic view that society can become risk free. The world is full of risks

and dangers, only some of which can be reduced.

Why then, when we in this country know that, for example, hospital-acquired infections and road traffic accidents both kill many more than terrorism, do we react as we do? The threat of violent death is potent. It can create community tension, including irrational Islamophobia, and cause loss of confidence in government, as in Spain after the train bombings in Madrid in 2004. It also places on government the tough dilemma of providing an authoritative response without giving the terrorists the status they seek.

One of the fears since 9/11 is that it or something similar could happen again. And of course it still could, although I would hope that the substantial investment in security and intelligence in the last ten years has made it less likely. It nearly happened with the plot to bring down up to a dozen transatlantic aircraft in 2006. Had that occurred, the death toll would have been very high, the economic cost enormous and the long term effect frightening.

I mentioned in my second lecture that, while it was government's responsibility to do what it could to protect its citizens from threats, governments should never imply that they were able to do so fully. Politicians lose their way

if they become too apprehensive about how the media will react to terrorism when it happens. It is very difficult for governments to manage both economies that are shaken by terrorism and anxious public opinion. And there are no military or security options that are certain of success.

And not all security risks, such as that from a xenophobic, right-wing Norwegian who appears to have acted alone, can be anticipated and countered. Moreover, political and media pressure to “do something” in response to such events can lead to unnecessary, even counter-productive initiatives and new laws, which may offer false assurance that they will prevent the recurrence of the event which triggered them.

This is not a new phenomenon. When the security service was focused on Irish-related terrorism, it became used to being asked for suggestions for new legislation. There have been times when the service has argued strongly for legislation, for example for that governing its functions and its powers. But it has rarely argued for substantial counter-terrorist powers, believing the criminal law to be broadly adequate.

Certainly rushing to legislate in the wake of a terrorist

atrocities are often a mistake. It may be a well-intentioned mistake, designed to make us safer, but it would be better to reflect on the long term wisdom of what may look immediately appealing. Since 9/11 there has been a slew of counter-terrorist legislation, some of it helpful, some of it justified as exceptional, partly because of the “War on Terror” language. Quite rightly it has been scrutinized by parliament and the courts and some of it amended. Laws which involve reducing people’s rights can themselves frighten the public. “Should I be afraid,” the citizen asks, “if the government feels these measures are necessary?”

What terrorism does is frighten us through its random effect and deter us from behaving normally. But we compound the problem of terrorism if we use it as a reason to erode the freedom of us all. That is why I spoke out against the proposal to detain terrorists without charge for up to 42 days (90 had been originally proposed). We were to give up something of value, in effect the principle of habeas corpus, and for what? Some greater spurious security? We must recognise the limits of what any government can do and be deeply cautious of anything that leads to security being seen as the opposite of liberty rather than essential to it. Governments should aim to limit and reduce the threat of terrorism, encourage its causes to

be recognised and addressed, protect what it can, and be ready to react with calm when it happens, reasserting our belief in our freedoms and the rule of law.

And, as I hope I have made clear in this talk, governments need to practise a foreign policy that, while acknowledging the world as it is, tries to secure freedom for others - and to pursue a domestic policy that protects the liberties we value and which the terrorist tries to destroy.

(audience applause)

EDWARD STOURTON: Eliza Manningham-Buller, thank you very much indeed. If no-one else asks the question about the clever kettles that steamed open envelopes, I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to resist the temptation. But we've got an extremely high-powered audience here who I'm sure have got deeper questions on their minds, so let's throw this open to the audience and I'll take a question just there.

MAAJID NAWAZ: My name is Maajid Nawaz. I co-founded and currently run the Quilliam Foundation. My question is simply what is the relationship between human rights and security, and do you think there is a

relationship? How important is that relationship if there is one?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I do not see that liberty and freedom and security are polar opposites. I'm quite often asked to speak for one against the other. I refuse to do that. If you look at the European Convention of Human Rights, I think it's Article III, it's the right to liberty and security. They're different, but there's no liberty without security. And I think that my view on torture I think has been pretty widely reported - that it's never justified even if it might save lives.

EDWARD STOURTON: Lots of hands going up. I'm going to take a couple in the front row first. Yes?

JONATHAN POWELL: Jonathan Powell, a former negotiator on Northern Ireland and now working with an NGO doing conflict resolution elsewhere. Eliza, I totally agree with what you said about the need for governments to talk to al-Qaeda and to the Taliban, but are there any groups you wouldn't talk to such as the dissident IRA and are there any practical lessons you learnt from the way we handled negotiations in Northern Ireland?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I think there are because I think it's very difficult politically sometimes for governments to make the first move; and using intelligence services that are sort of deniable to make the first contacts or to reach out I think is an advantage that keeps the government as it were back from it until they can properly engage. I think that's quite a good precedent. Your first question was "were there any people you might not try to talk to?". Well there's quite obviously a number of people who'd refuse to talk to you. And I'm not naïve about al-Qaeda - I mean I don't see or hear it turning up at a conference table any time soon. I think there are components you could talk to. And I wouldn't exclude the dissidents. If we could talk to the dissident Republicans in Northern Ireland who are prolonging the conflict there when most of the citizens of Northern Ireland are very much enjoying the product of peace, I think we should do so.

EDWARD STOURTON: Can I in that context just ask you to parse a sentence in your lecture? You said "my most recent..."

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: (*over*) I was an English

teacher, but I ...

EDWARD STOURTON: (*over*) Well no, no no - you'll quickly see what I'm driving at. You said "my most relevant experience of this is the complex" - the ideas you've just been talking about - "is the complex and prolonged talks with Northern Ireland, but there are plenty of other examples - talking to Hezbollah, to Hamas." Do I take it from that, that MI5 has indeed been talking to Hamas at a time when our government has not?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: No, I haven't. Can I just remind you, I left office four and a half years ago, since when I haven't seen one classified bit of information except when preparing for the Chilcot Inquiry. I believe talks are going on and I'm not going to say more than that.

EDWARD STOURTON: Alright. Down here.

OLIVER McTERNAN: Oliver McTernan, director of Forward Thinking. What I'd like to know is what criteria would you use to distinguish what may be described as legitimate acts of resistance and illegitimate acts of terrorism?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I don't make those distinctions. I mean I've always tried to avoid in my career the long debate about freedom fighter versus terrorist because you go round in circles on it. You could go on forever worrying about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, thank you. My name is Robert Brown. I'm a lawyer. You referred to Irish terrorism. In the 70s and 80s people in Ireland regarded then as freedom fighters, as protestors, committed atrocities involving the murder of thousands of people. They have now been awarded amnesty as part of a reconciliation process. How is it that people that committed such atrocities can be given a complete amnesty, can now participate freely in any occupation or even in government, but protestors in this country - and I'm referring just for example to the student protests recently - people accused of throwing a couple of sticks at a policeman are now in prison for a year or two and they will never have an amnesty? What about an amnesty in this country for people who make mistakes?

EDWARD STOURTON: Alright, we've got the question.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Let's remind ourselves of the facts in Northern Ireland. Plenty of people were convicted of criminal offences and terrorist offences and served long sentences. Now as part of the peace process, many of them were released from prison. Now you might think that I, who had been part of (in very many cases) putting them behind bars in the first place for murder, might feel pretty disgusted by the fact that they were released, but it was part of the bigger, wider process. And if I can just say something more on Northern Ireland. I think there's lots of people who should be very much admired for what they work - the politicians, but also the political parties within Northern Ireland. If Ian Paisley, for example, had felt like you had and had not sat down with Martin McGuinness, we would still have terrorism in Northern Ireland. So compromises were made, but the prize was the greater peace that now prevails in the province, with the exception of some of the activity of the dissident groups.

EDWARD STOURTON: Can I just follow that up? It's not directly relevant to the question, but it's probably easier for you to feel comfortable about the fact that people you helped lock up are now at liberty than it is for the families of their victims, isn't it?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I'm sure that is true, and I wouldn't wish at all to minimise the awful suffering the victims go through. But I can remember the man whose name I can't remember, but I can remember his speech at Enniskillen, when his daughter was killed by a bomb and his extraordinary Christian forgiveness and charity. And I think that it obviously requires people to stomach quite a lot in some cases, but if you think about what the alternatives are - prolonged, continuing campaign of terror, which could not be sorted by military means.

EDWARD STOURTON: Can I, yes, take a question from here?

ANTHONY BEEVOR: Anthony Beevor, historian. You talked I think in a previous lecture about the danger of describing the "War on Terror". Would you also agree that the way that governments can tend to overreact by using misleading historical comparisons - particularly we saw, and in fact my blood almost froze when I heard the comparison between Pearl Harbour and 9/11, Blair comparing Saddam Hussein to Hitler just as Eden had compared Nasser to Hitler - do you think that this danger is now over of politicians and statesmen making these

false comparisons with the past because really, with the Arab Spring and everything else, that things have changed so much?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Of course the danger's not over - politicians have to be re-elected and they have to make speeches. But the "War on Terror" language, which I am uncomfortable with, I was surprised to see that Donald Rumsfeld shares my view and says that he tried to persuade George Bush not to use that language. So we have one thing in common. *(audience laughter)*

EDWARD STOURTON: I'm going to go to the other side of the room and take a couple of questions a bit further back. Yes?

KARLA ADAM: Hello, my name is Karla Adam. I'm with the Washington Post. Can I ask your thoughts on American policy in Yemen, which is effectively to contain al-Qaeda through drone strikes?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I was rather dreading somebody asking me the drone question. *(audience laughter)*

EDWARD STOURTON: It means it's a good question.

Well done.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Because actually before I retired, there was I think one ... There were very few drone strikes and they've obviously increased very considerably in the last few years, so my view of them is very much as it were as a reader of the media. I do think there are difficulties. I think one of them is obviously the collateral damage of a lot of other people being killed by them. However, there's clearly also the fact that a number of key terrorists have been taken out that way. So if I'm being really honest, I sway in what I think my view is on that particular technique, which the present President of the United States has deployed very extensively.

EDWARD STOURTON: Down here, yeah?

ANAS ALTIKRITI: Yes, thank you very much. My name's Anas Altikriti. I'm the chief executive of the Cordoba Foundation. I noted that whenever talking about the challenges and the threats on a security level, you didn't associate those threats or those challenges with Islam or Muslims particularly, but those are generic and they are possibly cross-border. But my question is about the Arab

Spring. Is there a scope for us to learn from what's happening? Are we in a mode to rethink how we assess in previous decades that particular region and those particular people?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Yes, well I think it's highly likely that my former friends in the Foreign Office and within government and outside government are doing exactly that because obviously it is teaching us a certain amount about what these people in these different countries want, which I think we should have known but which there was this presumption in many cases that they didn't want democracy.

EDWARD STOURTON: Yup?

NABILA RAMDANI: Nabila Ramdani, freelance journalist. Do you believe that the British military assisting popular revolutions in countries like Libya, do you think it ultimately increases the risk of terrorism ...

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: (*over*) No.

NABILA RAMDANI: ... against British interests.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I don't.

EDWARD STOURTON: That's clear. (*audience laughter*)

Do you want to tell us why?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Well I mean I think there's two things here and perhaps I should be a bit more ample in my answer. Our involvement in Iraq increased the risk of terror here. It's assumed that that was therefore automatically the wrong thing to do. You might wish as a government to take action in doing something because you thought it was the right thing to do, which would in the short-term increase the terrorist risk. That would not be your only criteria for making a decision. And I think all I'd say to add to that is I think decisions made by government are pretty tough sometimes. There are ministers in the audience and former ministers. You make decisions. I've watched ministers making decisions. They have to make a lot of them. As they make them, they hope that most of them are the right decisions. They will know that some of them won't be and they make them with the best means they can. Now Iraq I think was a mistake for a number of reasons. I don't think Libya necessarily was. I don't think it automatically leads to more terrorism. It did in Iraq.

EDWARD STOURTON: Since you mention ministers, I'm going to come to someone who knows what it's like to be one.

LORD WEST: Lord West, simple sailor. (*audience laughter*) In the Second World War, we had very, very draconian laws passed of course constraining the rights to the individual, but we were in a situation where there was an existential threat to the United Kingdom. The terrorist threat is very unpleasant and not very nice, but it's far from that at the moment. But if we had information that showed that these terrorists did have easy access to or had actually possession of an improvised nuclear device or let's say, for example, some particularly virulent, very nasty thing that we knew would have a terrible impact, do you believe that the standards of things like interrogation and the standards of legislation that passed should change, bearing in mind it's an existential threat to our entire nation, it's a very different thing?

EDWARD STOURTON: Despite having poked fun at yourself by calling yourself a simple sailor, you were of course the security minister in the last government, so you know whereof you speak. Yes, go ahead.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I hope that it wouldn't change the laws. I hope that we wouldn't resort to torture. It's obviously a hypothetical question. We didn't in the Second World War; I hope we wouldn't in those circumstances.

RIAZAT BUTT: My name's Riazat Butt and I work for the Guardian. When you're talking about having dialogue with people, and talking doesn't necessarily mean approval, where does Saudi Arabia figure in this because it has a very interesting approach to freedom and human rights?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: With dealing with people who don't have democracy, who don't have human rights, you want in small ways when you can to push them, encourage them. They may pay no attention to you. Why should they? But you have an obligation to describe these things and push them.

EDWARD STOURTON: *(to audience)* I'm going to take a question over there, but before we take it, I just want to ask you something. We've heard a lot from Eliza Manningham-Buller about the value of talking to terrorists. How many people in this room think that in principle that's a bad idea? Well I'd say you've probably been persuasive

because not a single hand has gone up. Oh one's gone up over there. Well I'm going to take a question just in the row in front of you and then I'll come to you and find out why you think that.

OSAMA HUSSEIN: My name's Osama Hussein. I'm an imam and an academic. I'd like to also thank you very much for your lecture. Regarding the difficulties in talking to al-Qaeda, over the last ten years it's become clear that hundreds of Westerners have been recruited into al-Qaeda and many have actually left that path and are working against it. And, for example, after 9/11 al-Qaeda tried to recruit me (I travelled to Saudi Arabia and talked to a couple of their people) and you'll be glad to know I said "no, I don't want to be a part of your work". But the point is al-Qaeda was at the time based in Afghanistan, but theologically and ideologically they were based clearly in Saudi Arabia and also in Pakistan and other places. Surely we have those channels now and we should be making use of those channels to talk to the clerics and the leaders who promote the al-Qaeda ideology because we have links with them here in the West?

EDWARD STOURTON: So just to be clear, your argument is talk to the people who proselytize the ideology rather

than talking to the leadership? Is that what you're suggesting?

OSAMA HUSSEIN: Well it seems to me we have not done enough of that - of talking to the theological leaders, including the ones here in the West.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I think that's a fair point, it's a fair point. To go back to Saudi Arabia, I mean they have a very interesting programme of attempting to rehabilitate former Jihadis, not by depriving them of their human rights but by the opposite actually - by religious education and so on - which is quite interesting.

EDWARD STOURTON: Can I, since we're talking about the question of talking to al-Qaeda, just raise one issue with you. A lot of people would say that there's a distinction between a group like al-Qaeda, which doesn't have a credible agenda, and a group like the IRA which does, or even actually the Taliban, which after all was once a government. It's very difficult to see how you would begin the conversation with al-Qaeda, isn't it?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: You're absolutely right. With Northern Ireland, we knew what the agenda was and

it was a question of whether you could move any way towards it. Whereas of course the declared aims of al-Qaeda, some of them simply are never going to be achieved and we would have strong objections to that sort of oppressive regime that they support. But I'm really ... I'm not suggesting we rush off and do this tomorrow. I am suggesting, and I hope and I wouldn't be surprised if it's happening, that people are thinking about which components, which franchises, which bits you could seek to cut off from the main body of the thing by talking to them.

EDWARD STOURTON: So you're not actually talking about a negotiation with a political objective in view?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: (*over*) Oh nothing ...

EDWARD STOURTON: (*over*) You're talking about trying to fragment the organisation if you like?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: (*over*) Talking, reaching the solution in Northern Ireland took thirty years. This isn't going to happen quickly or soon.

EDWARD STOURTON: Well let's hear from the

gentleman who's the brave soul who was the one who put up his hand and said he thought that talking to terrorists was, in principle, a bad idea.

JIM MOORE: Jim Moore. Actually your question was very much my point - is that I would find it very hard to actually think that you were talking to al-Qaeda for any reason other than to splinter off people, to disagree with al-Qaeda.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: What about their first aim - the removal of American bases from Saudi Arabia?

EDWARD STOURTON: That should be on the table, in your judgment?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I don't know. You could have it on the table.

EDWARD STOURTON: *(over/laughs)* But you raise it as if it should be.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Yes. I mean that is something that you surely could move on.

JIM MOORE: I just cannot fathom a discussion with the core folks in al-Qaeda on the basis of whatever their first ... maybe their first thing is you know what will we serve at the table when we talk?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I'm not imagining that anybody's going to talk to al-Zawahiri.

EDWARD STOURTON: But just for the record, we should understand from what you said that American bases on Arab soil, on Islamic soil, is something that you can conceive being a subject of genuine negotiation?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I would have thought so.

EDWARD STOURTON: Going to hear a question in the second row there. But before I do, do you mind if I just ask you the kettle question?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Yes.

EDWARD STOURTON: I mean it's just such an intriguing thought. What's special about these kettles?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: There's nothing special. They were very big. *(audience laughter)*

EDWARD STOURTON: And they sort of sat on the stove and ...?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: They just produced a lot of steam. *(audience laughter)*

EDWARD STOURTON: So a lot of letters had to be opened?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: In those days, yes.

EDWARD STOURTON: It's very childish of me. I apologise. Let's take a more serious question from down here.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: *(over)* But I didn't do it because it would have made my hair go frizzy. *(audience laughter)*

XENIA DORMANDY: Thank you. Xenia Dormandy from Chatham House. Back in 2004, Condi Rice gave a speech in Egypt where she said - and I'm paraphrasing - that "no

longer will America put security and stability ahead of freedoms and democracy”. It’s not the first time an American has said that, and I think she would agree with many of your statements, which are “you have to have a balance”. Back to the Saudi Arabia question, particularly from the American perspective - Saudi Arabia’s long been a good friend of the United States - where do you find that balance whereby, as you say, promoting, talking to (if it’s the Saudis or any other government) about freedom is sufficient while actually still supporting their stability for your own country? How do you find that balance and what kind of criteria would you use?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I don’t pretend that balance is easy to find. Obviously Saudi Arabia has been a good friend to the West. We rely on its oil. We shouldn’t allow that to make us blind to the nature of the government. My hope would be that when there’s a new generation of Saudi rulers, that persuasion, pressure from the West, there may be some greater freedom given to their people for their own self-interest. I mean let’s not forget where the 9/11 bombers came from. These were men who were largely from Saudi Arabia where they had no freedom. I would argue that the long-term security of Saudi Arabia involves giving greater freedom to the

citizenry, greater share in the material wealth, and leading to a much more stable system than is currently the case.

KIM HOWELLS: Kim Howells, a retired Foreign Office Minister. I may be wrong, but I think the last victim of terrorism in Britain was Mr Litvinenko. What do we do about the new forms of terrorism, which we know about already - some of them cyber terrorism aimed to destroy or do damage to parts of our economy - that are centred in countries like Russia and China? Doesn't this come right to the heart of your original premise about how foreign policy has to be abreast of these developments in the world and has to somehow try to accommodate them?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I don't think there's a simple answer. I mean there's a lot of work going on on cyber, and it's a difficult problem because we all want to have the easy access that information technology gives us. You know all politicians want their Blackberries. Greater efficiency and economy arrives from IT - sometimes - and that gives our enemies substantial opportunities to do a number of things. They can suck secrets out of British companies, of government departments - I mean there are thousands and thousands of attacks on the Pentagon every day - suck things out,

distort material that's already there or deny service. I know that a lot of work in government is going on on this.

EDWARD STOURTON: Can I, yes, take a question from here?

ALEXANDR KHOMENKO: Yes, thank you very much. Alexandr Khomenko of the Russian Embassy. (*audience laughter*) When you tried to analyse the threat of international terrorism, let's say ten years ago, did you try to draw lessons from European terrorism prior to the outbreak of the First World War?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: No.

ALEXANDR KHOMENKO: You didn't? Fine.

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: The First World War, you said?

ALEXANDR KHOMENKO: (*over*) Yes before the First World War, yes.

EDWARD STOURTON: (*over*) You're talking about anarchist bombers in St. Petersburg and so forth?

ALEXANDR KHOMENKO: Yes. And the second one is do you think that the threat of international terrorism coming from the Arab East is diminishing because of the Arab Spring - either through the participation in civil wars or participation in open democratic process?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I would hope that the answer to that second question is yes. Can I suggest that when you next have guests to the Lubyanka, you install a ladies cloakroom? (*audience laughter*)

EDWARD STOURTON: A priceless moment of international diplomacy. Let me just ...

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: I much enjoyed my visit there, but there was no Ladies.

EDWARD STOURTON: Can I just ask you a final question? I teased you a bit earlier on about the fact that you've become rather a star during these lectures. There was a half serious thought behind that. I think one of the things that people have been struck by during these lectures is that while these debates were going on inside government about Iraq, about the use of torture and so

forth, we on the outside had no sense of that debate and we've heard you express very strong views on these questions. If we had a system a bit more like the Americans, say, where the head of a service like yours, say like the CIA's - a very public figure, somebody who can participate in the public debate - do you think you might have been able to make some of these points in public when you were serving and might it have been a good thing if you could?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: Well I think I'm still too much in my bones a public servant - to believe it's the duty of public servants to give advice to ministers in private and to be discreet about what that advice has been. How else can ministers make these very difficult choices that they have to make on decisions? I did actually say in 2006 that I thought that our going ... I said in a public speech, with the permission of the Home Secretary, that I thought that the war in Iraq had increased the radicalisation of some young British Muslims. So I did say it when I was still in office. I mean whatever form of accountability happens with the agencies - if Parliament decides that you know my successor gives evidence in public, that's for Parliament to decide. But I suppose I would feel uncomfortable while I was in office displaying publicly if I had disagreed with

ministers at the time.

EDWARD STOURTON: You remain a good old-fashioned MI5 civil servant, spy?

ELIZA MANNINGHAM-BULLER: A good old-fashioned public servant, I think.

EDWARD STOURTON: Well there we must sadly end it. My apologies to those of you who wanted to ask questions and couldn't. Our thanks to all our guests and indeed to our host, the British Library, but above all our thanks to Eliza Manningham-Buller for a truly engrossing series of lectures that I suspect are going to be discussed long after we leave this hall. I'm Edward Stourton and the producers were Jim Frank and Mark Savage.

(audience applause)