



With Us or Without Us: extended interviews

Interviewer: Edward Stourton

Interviewee: Dore Gold, Israeli Government Spokesman

STOURTON: If I could begin with the day itself and ask you to recall how you found out what had happened and what your immediate reactions were?

GOLD: Well I was in the United States at the time, on a speaking engagement. And my wife, who had been in a taxi cab heading from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, heard about the first tower being hit at the World Trade Center called me, and then I, it was morning in America, put on ABC television and saw the second tower being hit by the second plane. And basically from that moment onward I did not move from my television for at least two days.

STOURTON: What did you do in terms of making contact with your government back home or getting in contact with the Americans at that stage?

GOLD: Well at that point I was in touch with my government. And there wasn't much I could really do, because basically all international aircraft transportation had been shut down, and there was no way I could get back to Israel.

STOURTON: There were initial reactions from the occupied territories, a certain number of Palestinian demonstrations, but not huge. And then Yasser Arafat publicly gave blood for the victims. What was your reaction to that?

GOLD: Well we had seen this kind of outpouring of identification with radical Islamic trends in the Palestinian controlled areas in the past. We remembered even before, at the time of Gulf War, the strong identification of the Palestinian street with Saddam Hussein. We remembered that being repeated when there were Anglo-American air strikes on Iraqi targets in the 1990s. And so this seemed to be more or less a repetition of the same thing, only somehow a little bit worse because of the ultra-radical nature of Osama bin Laden's doctrines and the whole al-Qaeda organisation.

STOURTON: And Yasser Arafat's gesture which seemed to suggest that the leadership at least were making a rather different kind of connection?

GOLD: Well it seemed to be a little bit of a "he doth protest too much". It was a kind of a PR move that didn't really impress very many people in Israel.

STOURTON: What was your initial calculation of the likely impact what had happened would have on events within Israel itself and in the occupied territories?

GOLD: Well first of all we didn't know the scale of the threat to the west. We could be talking about this instance alone, which was, by itself, quite dramatic. Or we could be talking about something far more widespread, sleeper cells that had been built up over 10 years in a variety of countries

belonging to the western alliance. With respect to Israel we had been following the whole bin Laden phenomenon for a number of years. And we realised that the central focus of bin Laden's attention was first and foremost in Afghanistan, and then later in conflicts around the Afghan area. In other words, the struggle over Kashmir between India and Pakistan, the struggle in Chechnya against the Russians, and the whole question of Israel and the Palestinians was at a low place on his set of priorities.

STOURTON: But there were people weren't there who thought that because war had been declared on terrorism Israel would therefore have a much freer hand, freer particularly of American pressure, in dealing with what it sees as terrorism from the Palestinians?

GOLD: Well it really goes both ways. And it's important to understand that. First, for years terrorism has been a problem for the entire western alliance, but there were always other priorities. So many times many of our friends in Europe or in the United States would put up with a certain degree of terrorism in order to achieve other aims. Whether it was containment of the Soviet Union, or whether it was the peace process. Throughout the 1990s the support of the Syrian regime of Hafez al-Assad for Hezbollah, Islamic jihad and for a dozen other terrorist organisations, was tolerated essentially because it was hoped that somehow also it would make peace with Israel. And now what had happened was that the war against terrorism would become the number one priority of the world. And I think that was enshrined when the UN Security Council passed a sweeping resolution under chapter seven of the UN charter against terrorism and against any country that harboured international terrorist organisations. So that would certainly indicate that the willingness of the international community to suffer, to excuse, to somehow understand terrorism by trying to look at its underlying causes would change. At the same time if the United States was going to pursue a coalition of stages against terrorism, trying to replicate the concept of the Gulf War, it could be that Israel would have to pay the price of the glue that would hold that coalition together. And that could put tremendous pressure on Israel to make concessions that it would regard as against its interests, in order that Saudi Arabia would open up its air bases to US aircraft and other Arab states would follow suit.

STOURTON: Well as soon, I think, as 13 September Colin Powell was trying to broker a meeting with Yasser Arafat. Did you take that as a sign the second of the interpretations you've just outlined was the more realistic one?

GOLD: Well again initially it seemed that the US was simply following the pattern that it had learned during the Gulf War, and was trying to put together that coalition. It was our assessment that the Arab states had their own problem with extensive western deployments in their territory that had nothing to do with Israel. There had been sensitivity in Saudi Arabia over the last number of years to the American military presence, which was expressed by Wahabbi clerics repeatedly. And again the Palestinian issues were not part of that. Nonetheless there were some in the United States who felt that the road to bases in the Middle East went through the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and therefore they did try to work with Yasser Arafat. But basically everyone found out there was nothing to work with.

STOURTON: On 26 September Jack Straw visited Israel amid a certain amount of controversy about his newspaper article and the use of the word Palestine. Can you describe that visit as you remember it?

GOLD: Well, I recall several things about Foreign Secretary's Straw's statements at the time. I recall references to the word Palestine which every so often you'll hear in statements made by western diplomats. But I think what was more disturbing was the statement which tried to explain away, or understand, the hatred that must have motivated that strike at New York at the World Trade Center and in the Pentagon in Washington. And as some western diplomats tried to understand the source of that hatred they tend to pin it on Israel or the support that the western alliance had provided with the state of Israel over the last number of decades. We, of course, had a different view. We analysed very carefully what was the source of the grievance of the people around bin Laden and his more passive supporters in the Arabian Peninsula. Their number one grievance was the large western presence in the Arabian Peninsula, including the US forces. Their second grievance was the whole war against Iraq. And the whole Palestinian issues were a distant third if you look at the statements made by bin Laden and his followers. Nonetheless there was a temptation in the west to blame all the hatred on Israel.

STOURTON: About a week later I think it was your prime minister made his speech in Prague, in which he more or less accused America of appeasement towards what he saw as terror, and of sacrificing Israel in the way you talked about a moment or two ago. Can I ask you what your part was in preparing that speech and why Prime Minister Sharon said what he said?

GOLD: Well it's important to really go over the language of Prime Minister Sharon at the time. He was drawing an analogy between the situation of Israel and the situation of Czechoslovakia in 1938, and the point was would the western alliance sacrifice a small ally to buy time or to buy some kind of temporary arrangement that would perhaps create greater stability in the short-term? But that ally would be sacrificed. In doing so he had no intention of drawing any analogies between; let's say Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and President Bush, although some people took his remarks to say that he was doing so. His point was that Israel should not be sacrificed. He was not dealing with who would be sacrificed and which countries were pushing in that direction.

STOURTON: But the fact that he said that suggests you felt that there was a real danger of that sacrifice being exacted by the United States. Is that right?

GOLD: Well I think there was a concern that there were forces in the American establishment, but in other countries as well, that first identified the source of the hatred of bin Laden and his supporters as being western support for Israel. And secondly, saw pressure against Israel as a means to create the kind of coalition they were trying to put together. Of course both analyses were wrong and I think the Prime Minister attempted to draw attention to that with his very strong remarks.

STOURTON: On I think it was 7th (7 October) the bombing began, on the eighth there were riots on the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority though didn't, pointedly didn't, condemn the American attack. What was your assessment at that stage of the implications of that crisis for yourselves and what was happening within Israel?

GOLD: Well again we were a little bit far-a-field. The focus of this campaign was really the whole complex of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia became suddenly more important. I think there was also an awareness within Israel that the United States did not get the base access that it chose or hoped to achieve in the Arabian Peninsula and was now opening a new strategic centre of American influence in some of the former Muslim republics of the ex-Soviet Union. And therefore it seemed that the US was adapting itself to the new international situation. It was able to pursue a military option against al-Qaeda without having to rely too heavily on the act of support from the Arab countries.

STOURTON: On the 15th Yasser Arafat was in Downing Street. Certainly among the Palestinians that we have talked to, there was a perception that Britain was perhaps slightly more Palestinian at that stage than the United States, and was pushing Washington to become more closely engaged in the Middle East. Do you think that's a fair assessment?

GOLD: Well there has always been, over many years, a difference of perception about Israel and the Arab states in Europe and in Washington. Britain is probably much closer to the American position and we have appreciated the help and advice we've received from Prime Minister Blair. But I think also the British foreign policy establishment has learned that Yasser Arafat could not, and would not, move away from his dedication to arms struggle. Moreover what the Palestinians were trying to do in that period, and what they continued doing for several months afterwards, was draw a distinction between terrorism, which they like everybody else vocally condemned, and what they called 'resistance to occupation', which they thought they could gain support for in the international community. Israel's argument was that Israel had no military government over the Palestinians when they started this campaign against us called the intifada back in September 2000, that indeed we had withdrawn our military government over the Palestinians, and they weren't under military occupation. And so basically we firmly disagree with their line of argumentation. But some did accept it.

STOURTON: On, they use that phrase difference of perception. I think that was a phrase that you yourself used about your relations with the United States at about 24 October. Did you feel under a great deal of American pressure during that period?

GOLD: Well again it's hard to exactly recall the dateline of these developments. But again I would say there were those who, in Washington, felt that the establishment of a strong American-Arab coalition, as well as other regional states, was a prerequisite for a successful military campaign. But as the military campaign got underway the US establishment I think understood that it was able to reach a decisive outcome, even without this formal coalition existing. There was a world of difference between the Gulf War campaign that required a half a million troops in the Arabian Peninsular, and the campaign against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan that was based on special operations and air power.

STOURTON: What was your reaction to George Bush's speech at the UN when he talked about a Palestinian state?

GOLD: Well the Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, had already expressed a willingness to live down the road with a Palestinian state. Our big debate with the Palestinians, and with others who might support them, would be

over the question of where the borders would be drawn. We, for example, have always followed UN Security Council resolution 242, which never spoke about a full withdrawal, but recognised that Israel was a victim of aggression since '67, and therefore was entitled to secure and recognised boundaries. So the issue of borders was still open. There were other aspects of the powers of the Palestinian state. Would it have an army, would it be demilitarised? Who would have control of the airspace in that sensitive area of the West Bank? So while Israel could acquiesce to Palestinian statehood it had its own security requirements that certainly weren't the subject of President Bush's speech, but would certainly be raised by Israel down the road.

STOURTON: The fall of Kabul came on I think 12 November, much more quickly than other people, many people had expected. It sounds to me as if you believe that did lead to a reinterpretation in America of their need for Arab allies. The Palestinians certainly think that had an impact on the way they were regarded; they say the Americans stopped calling them as it were at that point, because they didn't need to bother with them any more. Is that the way you would perceive what happened?

GOLD: Well I think the United States still values its Arab allies in the Arab states, but it was clear that this war could be pursued with new American friends in Central Asia and with a very smart military strategy, based on special operations and air power. But I think the other important development was this, the bogeyman of the Arab street was unmasked, because basically everybody had spoken about in previous months that the Arab street was seething. And unless some kind of imposed settlement was put on Israel this boiling Arab street would eventually boil over. And essentially once the Americans had demonstrated the decisiveness of their military strength all was quiet in the capitals of the Arab world. And this concern about the Arab street suddenly disappeared in many western capitals.

STOURTON: In late November/early December there were those devastating suicide bombings. In January I think came the capture of the "Karine A" ship carrying arms. What impact did you find that those two sets of incidents had on the United States attitude?

GOLD: I think there was a fundamental understanding about what Israel was facing. I think it had become increasingly recognised that we were facing a common threat. That the suicide bomber, or suicide terrorist, had a motivation that perhaps crossed national boundaries from the eastern Mediterranean all the way to the heart of Afghanistan. And that the same motivation that brought 19 terrorists, fifteen of whom were of Saudi nationality, to attack American targets and kill themselves, perhaps was effecting the mentality of a young Hamas bomber who would go into an Israeli café, or an Israeli night club and kill many Israeli youths. That motivation seemed to be based on a kind of reinterpretation of Islam that had developed over the last number of decades. Perhaps its source was in the Arabian Peninsula with some of the Salafee movements that re-emphasised jihad as a high priority in Islam. That sought to actually implement an active jihad against all unbelievers - now including Christians and Jews. The kind of tolerance that we had known about from traditional Islamic history in the Ottoman Empire seemed to be erased with these groups. And they were not just a threat to Israel, the United States, or European capitals possibly in the future; they were also a threat

to many Arab regimes. So with a sense of perhaps a commonality of threat we could all talk about terrorism with a kind of common perception.

STOURTON: And that brought about a tangible change in American policy?

GOLD: Well I think it brought about an understanding that terrorism is intolerable. For years when there were other priorities in American foreign policy, such as I said before, containment, such as access to oil, such as general economic development in certain Arab countries, there was a willingness to look the other way and not really care if countries like Syria or Libya hosted international terrorists, unless they actually struck American citizens. But now, all of a sudden, eradicating terrorism became a priority in and of itself. A second development had to do with the tendency in the west many times to try and understand the underlying causes for terrorism. Many believe - for example from my experience over the last decade - that terrorism emanated from poverty. That people were desperate, had some sense of depravation, and therefore strapped dynamite to themselves and went into a crowded marketplace. The fact that 15 of the 19 terrorists who struck the United States were actually Saudis, and could have easily gotten aeroplane licences and flown G5s for Saudi princes, could have been well-off, perhaps indicated that this isn't a question of poverty, but a question of religious extremism that's gone astray.

STOURTON: What was your reaction to the "Axis of Evil" remark in George Bush's address to Congress in January?

GOLD: Well, Israel had long felt that terrorist organisations do co-operate with one another. They're not isolated phenomenon working on their own. We had already seen for years that Lebanon had become a hub of international terrorism, where different groups meet. Even prior to the 11 September attack we knew that the Iranians had deployed their revolutionary guards in Lebanon with rockets with ranges of between 30, 50 and 70 kilometres, aimed at Israel, under Iranian commanded control. We knew that under this umbrella in Lebanon Hezbollah was operating against Israel and could conceivably strike at any target around the world. We knew that the Palestinian organisations of Islamic jihad, Hamas, PFLP, DFLP, all had an organisational capacity there. And therefore the Prime Minister spoke about a consortium of international terrorism that threatened us. Now when the "Axis of Evil" speech was articulated it seemed to be a line of policy that reflected the reality on the ground in terms of international terrorist co-operation. We had seen Iran trying to penetrate and become, work with the Palestinian organisations. We had known about a Tanzim leader in the Gaza Strip who was a liaison to Hezbollah. We had known that Arafat had sent envoys to Iraq, particularly Fuad Shoubaki, the mastermind of the "Karine A" weapons ship had visited Iraq on two separate occasions and was trying to buy arms. So we saw the axis of evil concept in our own intelligence reading about what was happening in the Middle East.

STOURTON: At the end of March the Arab league met and agreed the Saudi peace plan that had been put forward, which you rejected. Without going in too much detail into the arguments about why you took that view of it, was your rejection of it and the fact that you felt confident about that a mark of the fact that you realised that things had changed in the way you've just described, that the Americans were more, as you put it, understanding of your position?

GOLD: Well I think what happened was the Saudis initiated, for their own reasons, a kind of diplomatic activism that we hadn't seen in many years. In America the Saudis were hurting, their large involvement in these attacks on the United States in terms of Saudi nationals, the fact that a good proportion of the al-Qaeda terrorists that were imprisoned in Cuba, in Guantanamo Bay, were Saudi nationals, reinforced a negative image of Saudi Arabia in the US. There were many articles in the American press about Wahabbism as the source of this extremism, that had perhaps given birth to the Osama bin Laden world view, and so in that context the Saudis came up with a peace initiative which we were very sceptical about. And we saw this mostly as an effort to draw the stage lights away from Saudi Arabia as a state in which terrorism was growing, to Saudi Arabia as the peacemaker. Secondly, when we saw the actual initiative unfold, the centrepiece of the Saudi initiative which was really revolutionary and new, was the report that the Saudis were willing to support normalisation between Israel and the Arab world. Normalisation for us didn't just mean doing business deals in Riyadh, what it meant was an irreversible peace, the kind of intimate, interaction, or intercourse of societies that you see between France and Germany, that make a reversal to hostile relations unthinkable. The Saudis use the word in Arabic 'tatbion', which is normalisation. By the time you get to the Beirut summit that revolutionary word 'tatbion' just dropped out, and instead was replaced with an expression in diplomacy which really means a cold peace, and that's normal relations.

STOURTON: Things changed again in April. George Bush called for an end to incursions into the West Bank and Gaza. You had Colin Powell's visit to the region and a lot of people have interpreted that activity as evidence that the Bush administration had actually reversed the kind of position that you described a moment or two ago. That they realised that actually to deal with Iraq they did have to re-engage with the Middle East. Do you think that's a correct interpretation?

GOLD: Well I think they were hopeful that again if the coalition could not be formed with respect to counter-terrorism perhaps it could be formed against the much more specific threat of Iraq. And perhaps some, and I'm not saying this was the overall decision of US policymakers, suggested that progress and Arab-Israeli peacemaking was again a necessary prerequisite for forming a coalition against Saddam Hussein. The only problem with that is that in order for the peace process to move forward you need a reliable partner. And there was overwhelming intelligence evidence that we had gathered, that we had shared with the Americans and with our other friends in the NATO alliance as well, that Yasser Arafat was backing this terrorism. That he was either financing it, turning a blind eye to the terrorism of his fundamentalist opponents, Hamas and Islamic jihad, and promoting terrorism and organisations loyal to his Fatah Guard Force 17. With that being the situation on the ground and with Arafat refusing to accept either the proposals of George Tenet from mid-2001 that were still on the table, or even the modified Tenet proposals of General Zinni, there was nothing for the Americans really to work with.

STOURTON: Is it fair to describe American policies as a sort of S-shape, that the beginning of the crisis perhaps putting rather more pressure on you and trying to engage very directly in the problems of the Middle East then pulling back a bit after the fall of Kabul when, as you say, people began to think that they could do this kind of thing on their own? And then re-

engaging when it became apparent that they couldn't and they needed Arab support if they were going to deal with Iraq?

GOLD: Well you know again I think the policies also respond to regional opportunities. There were many who were initially impressed with the Saudi initiative as reported in the Op-Ed column of Tom Friedman and perhaps amplified in the editorial pages of the New York Times. But then in time it was seen that there may be less there than meets the eye. If there is an opportunity to break through with Arab-Israeli diplomacy any American administration would feel that it was its responsibility to try and explore that opportunity, and try and see if there was a chance to advance. But what happens is the best of intentions in Washington bump up against the hard rocks of Middle Eastern reality. There wasn't much of a Saudi initiative there when you sifted away all the language. And you had Yasser Arafat as the primary Palestinian partner, who still believed he could get away with his ideological commitment to arms struggle in a post-11 September environment.

STOURTON: I'll just ask you about a couple of specific meetings and events. In, I think, early April you were in Germany talking to officials about arms sales. The accounts of that meeting in the press afterwards made it sound as if it was pretty frosty. Can you tell me what happened?

GOLD: Well I had gone to Germany when we had just uncovered documentation which tied Arafat directly to terrorism. I should say something about that documentation. We had found first of all an invoice on stationery belonging to the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade in which there was a request of payment to Fuad Shoubaki, the chief financial officer of Yasser Arafat. That request for payment included payment for explosives, detailing how many explosives they planned to use every week. So here was a terrorist organisation, the Al Aqsa Martyr Brigade, asking for payment from the chief financial officer of Yasser Arafat. But if somebody had said to us, well maybe Arafat didn't know about it, maybe this was a rogue operation, we then found a document in which Arafat is asked to authorise payment of \$1000 per terrorist to three Tanzim members. Marwan Baghouti says please pay the fighters \$1000 apiece, and he writes it in Arabic, and then Yasser Arafat signs the document saying, no only \$350 apiece. So we had Arafat's signature, in Arabic, authorising payment to individuals who we knew engaged in terrorism. I brought that evidence to Germany. Initially some people were questioning whether the documents were authentic, because they were so alarming and so disturbing and the initial Palestinian response was to say fabrication. The response I made in Germany, in a press conference in Berlin, but also in meetings with members of the Bundestag and the Foreign Ministry, was that these documents were produced by Israeli military intelligence. We don't compromise or we would never put at risk our reputation with other intelligence agencies around the world, whether it's the CIA or British intelligence, by fabricating documents. These are authentic. Anyone can send their military attaches from their embassies to see the original in our intelligence headquarters in Tel Aviv. And I think the arguments were ultimately persuasive. I know one member of the Bundestag who chaired a committee on EU affairs was so disturbed by the documents that he wrote a letter to Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer questioning German support for EU policy and that letter appeared on the front page of the Frankfurter Algemeiner. So the documents and the presentation that was made by myself at the Aspen Institute in Germany, did have a dent and at

least raised a debate in the German public about the whole question of the sincerity of Arafat and the PLO with respect to peace.

STOURTON: But they did ban arms sales to you, didn't they?

GOLD: Well there was a separate process going on in Germany, from an earlier stage of the intifada, in which several German firms preferred not to complete the sale of certain components that are necessary in the manufacture of our tanks. Foreign Minister Joschka Fisher later committed himself to our political leadership that they, the German Government, would work to try and remove that ban.

STOURTON: Can you also describe the meeting between Ariel Sharon and George Bush at the end of May in Washington?

GOLD: Well frankly I think Prime Minister Sharon rightly limited the access to the meetings with the President. They were very intimate meetings. There were four eyes. Sometimes he would have an American official in the room, such as Secretary of State Colin Powell, or Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor. But even in their presence the President and the Prime Minister sort of pulled to the side. These were very sensitive discussions and therefore we did not have the usual participation of note-takers and advisors.

STOURTON: But can you tell me, presumably you were apprised of the contents of the meetings afterwards, can you give me...

GOLD: Well some aspects came out, but many aspects the Prime Minister keeps close to his chest and rightfully so.

STOURTON: Iraq is still there as an issue, although it doesn't seem that it's going to be addressed immediately. What impact do you think it will have in the Middle East if the Americans do as they appear to be threatening earlier in the year, not just take action against Iraq, but actually try and change the regime?

GOLD: Well Iraq is a country of tremendous strategic weight in the Middle East. I want to remind you that when Iraq was defeated in 1991 that helped create the pre-conditions to the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference. Suddenly the Syrians felt that it was better to make peace than to rely on Saddam Hussein's strategic power. Jordanians felt relieved, the Egyptians could resume their regional leadership, so the whole constellation of the Middle East changed as a result of that. Saddam Hussein has cleverly used the last 10 years to cheat with respect to UN resolutions, on arms control resolution 687, and he continues to develop weapons of mass destruction. Since he has indeed used these weapons, particularly chemical weapons, against his own Kurdish population, his being armed with this capability is an immediate danger to other countries of the area. Were he to be addressed by an international coalition or a US led coalition, and were his power to be removed to use these weapons, it would probably improve general security in the Middle East, and perhaps even shift the region back into the direction of peacemaking and away from the direction it's been in until recently.

STOURTON: You really think it could have because a lot of people, as you know in the Arab world particularly, predicted that consequences would be quite the reverse, that the Arab street as you described it earlier on really would

rise up if America changed a regime in the Arab world? But you take a much more sanguine view?

GOLD: Well I think people respond to a new reality after it occurs. I think to try and build a coalition to do that is very difficult. I think there is sensitivity to the whole Iraqi question, and many Arabs in Arab countries draw attention to the plight of the Iraqi people. The only problem is that the chief culprit in denying the Iraqi people their economic growth and a better future is Saddam Hussein himself. And so perhaps if as a consequence of military operations he was to lose power, the Middle East I think would be much more relieved and the Arab street would be as well.

STOURTON: And finally if I can just ask you to give me your interpretation of the state of the policy debates in Washington at the moment? There do seem to be two schools of thought, those who argue that the Middle East, that your problem is best left to you. And those who are beginning to say, we can only really deal with terrorism if we do deal with what's happening in Israel and in the occupied territories. Which school do you think is winning in the debate in Washington at the moment and will prevail in the end?

GOLD: Well it's very hard to say, except there are certain precedents of success and precedents of failure. The last time an American administration tried to come forward with a complete Middle East plan was the Clinton administration at Camp David. And it continued to back it and in fact publicly announced it in December, after it put it forward privately in the middle of 2000. And the plan failed because the fundamental gaps between the parties were too wide, they were unbridgeable. And therefore when you go into a diplomatic dispute with a plan when there are unbridgeable differences you are bound to fail. And no administration wants to repeat the failure of the Clinton team again, particularly the Bush administration. Second of all there is a precedent in terms of Middle Eastern power politics. And that is we were able to start a peace process at Madrid in the fall of 1991, because the security situation changed first, because first and foremost Iraq had been defeated. Second of all the Soviet Union was crumbling and no longer able to meddle in the affairs of the Middle East, selling weapons and whispering in the ears of Arab leaders to initiate war against Israel, as they had done in 1967. And then finally of course Iran hadn't yet recovered from its eight year war with Iraq and wasn't prepared to fill the vacuum left by the defeated Saddam Hussein. And with the constellation in the balance of power we were able to start a peace process. To try and reverse that and do peacemaking before you eradicate terrorism and change the security situation would be reversing the order of Madrid, and as American diplomats were repeatedly trying to address the Yasser Arafat finding that order just simply doesn't work.

STOURTON: So Iraq first, Israel and the Palestinians second?

GOLD: Well I think the security of the Middle East first. Whether the United States ultimately decides to deal with the Iraqi issue with a full military option is an American decision, and we're not here to recommend to the Americans what they're going to do with their troops. But clearly what's necessary is to maintain the war on terrorism. To make it clear to the entire international community that there is no grievance, there is no sense of denial or depravation that can possibly justify taking young Palestinians, filling their mind with hatred, and sending them into crowded Israeli cafés

and malls to murder innocent people. If that fundamental international principle becomes accepted throughout the international community and if that fundamental international principle is defended by the countries that back freedom and democracy, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, and the rest of the European Alliance, then I believe we can move the Middle East away from the trends that it has followed over the last number of years to stability, to peace, and to greater personal freedom.