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Maneuvering strategically in a political interview: analyzing and evaluating responses to an accusation of inconsistency

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Appendix

Example 1 (Jon Sopel – William Hague interview, November 12, 2006)

Jon Sopel:

Well I'm joined now by William Hague, the Shadow Foreign Secretary. Mr Hague, welcome to the Politics Show. Are you going to be backing the government this time round on a ninety day detention period for suspected terrorists.

William Hague:

Well, that would depend on the arguments that they bring forward. We voted against that before but that was because they couldn't actually site a single case in which a ninety day period was required, so Conservatives want to see strong laws against terrorism, that help us combat terrorism, but we don't want to see ineffective authoritarianism. There has to be a good argument for anything the government does.

Jon Sopel:

Aren't the arguments this time being made not by government ministers but by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, the Head of the Anti Terrorist Squad, Eliza Manningham Buller, the Head of MI5.

William Hague:

Well we should listen to all of their arguments, but simple assertions aren't sufficient for parliament and John Prescott was saying that there that it's because of Conservatives and Liberals that this proposal was defeated before, actually, it wouldn't have been defeated had they been able to persuade members of their own party that this was the right thing to do.

So there are a lot of things that need doing to combat terrorism. A proper border police force in this country, proper surveillance of terrorist suspects, a Minister in the Cabinet who pulls together the whole anti terrorism effort, there are a lot of things that need doing, but they all have to be justified.

Jon Sopel:

Do you think that something changed though this summer, over the alleged airline, terror bomb plot, whatever shorthand you want to do. I mean you know, Peter Clark gave that very interesting news conference afterwards where he said, we've found more than four hundred computers, two hundred mobile telephones and eight thousand items of removable storage media, such as memory sticks, CDs and DVDs.

So far from the computers alone, we have removed some six thousand giga bytes of data. It is an incredibly complex operation now, investigating somebody... and you know, they were really pushed against it over twenty eight days.

William Hague:

It's a huge operation and I think we do have to take heed of what Eliza Manningham Buller has said, there is clearly a major threat to the security of this country. But that's not the same as saying, let's just adopt every single idea that anybody has ever had for dealing with this. We have to adopt the most effective ideas. And so that's where you come back to the argument about the twenty eight day detention.

If people can show, if it can be shown, that it is necessary to extend that, then the Conservative Party will listen to that, but we do need better arguments than the Government were able to come up with last time and in the meantime they need to get on with the things that I've just been mentioning and that David Cameron was proposing in his article in the Sunday papers this morning.

Jon Sopel:

Sure. But it sounded almost like, you know better than Sir Ian Blair and Eliza Manningham Buller.

William Hague:

Well I don't think parliament can ever just take the orders as it were, take the instructions of people in the security services. You do have to weight that up but parliament in the end has to make the decision.

So as I say, if the government comes up with an argument that gives instances and cases in which a longer period of detention has been necessary, that would make a big difference to have Conservatives think about this, but we're not just going to give a blank cheque for the government to do anything it wants.

Jon Sopel:

And Labor say the big thing that you could do to help would be to support identity cards. It's fair to say that this is an issue that your party has rather flip flopped on isn't it.

William Hague:

Well it's... I think it's become clearer over time where we should stand on this, let's put it that way, because we've got the government adopting an identity card scheme, but one that is so bureaucratic and involves a vast data base and this is the government of serial

catastrophes when it comes to data bases as we all know, costing now, according to the London School of Economics, up to twenty billion pounds and we said that if some of that money was spent instead on an effective border police and strengthened surveillance of terrorist suspects, and strengthening special branch and things like that, we'd actually get a lot further.... (interjection)....having identity cards.

Jon Sopel:

Isn't that a detail of the legislation. I mean you supported identity cards back in December 2004, less than two years ago.

William Hague:

We supported, I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out. The details are not impressive and the grasp of detail and the ability to control the costs of the current government is so terrible, that it's not a scheme that we can support.

Jon Sopel:

Can we turn now from the war on terror to the war on Iraq and your area of responsibility. Should the policy change now towards Iraq?

William Hague:

It's, certainly there should be a reassessment going on because clearly Iraq at the moment, which could still tip either way, is tipping in the wrong direction. I think we have to concede that over the last few weeks and months. It's very important there is heavy British involvement in that reassessment, that it's not just an American process and certainly there are things that need doing better such as the tackling of corruption in Iraq, of the reconstruction in Iraq and of course we have to look at whether we can bring other countries in to help dealing with it.

Jon Sopel:

Yes, that's what I wanted to ask. Do you believe that it's time now to bring Syria and Iran in as part of the process to try and bring a stable peace to the region.

William Hague:

I think we have to make the most of our friendships and build on our friendships with the moderate Arab nations of the Middle East and remember that it's not just the Iraqs, we mustn't take our eye off the situation in Lebanon, situation in Gaza, they need to really push forward the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

We need those friendships with the moderate Arab nations. Syria and Iran are a more difficult proposition and of course it would be excellent if they could be involved at some stage in the future, in guaranteeing what happens in Iraq. It may be naïve to think that that could happen in the coming weeks and months.

Jon Sopel:

You talk about reassessment. What are the policy options, clearly up for, it's all up for debate in the United States following the mid-term elections.

William Hague:

And it should be all up for debate here. We mustn't be afraid of debating that.

Jon Sopel:

All options.

William Hague:

And I think, look well, the situation in Iraq should be up for debate here. People tend to see the choices on Iraq as do we pull the troops out quickly or do we pull them out slowly and actually, that is not the main issue. I mean we all want to see the troops come home when they can come home but we don't want to see a totally collapsing Iraq left behind. So what can be done internally to strengthen the security and the progress made in Iraq is very very important and all the options to help buttress that need to be debated openly, in the debates on this Queen's Speech.

Jon Sopel:

And a final question. The Register of Members Interests was published this week. It showed that your income has been slashed since returning to the front bench, from something like of, I don't know, the best part of a million quid the previous year to a paltry quarter of a million. I just wondered whether it's been worth it.

William Hague:

Money isn't everything, is it? We have to try and give this country an alternative government at the next election and I'm delighted to be part of the effort to try to do that.

Jon Sopel:

Okay, William Hague, thank you very much for being with us.

William Hague:

Thank you.

Example 2 (Jon Sopel – Yvette Cooper interview, July 15, 2007)

Jon Sopel:

Well the minister responsible for housing is Yvette Cooper and it was a sign of Gordon Brown's intent on this issue that she's one of the new faces round the Cabinet table. I spoke to her just before we came on air and asked her if Britain should follow Germany's example and build on more green field sites.

Yvette Cooper:

Well, we do need to build more homes because we need to help first time buyers and also people who are on council waiting lists and who need homes for the future, but we do think the priority should be around brown field land. We've already seen a big increase in the proportion of homes being built on brown field land, over the last ten years and we think that's important but ultimately, local councils need to decide what the best location is in their area.

Jon Sopel:

But you've had a review on this, the Barker Review, that looked at what the availability would be of brown field sites, came up with a figure of just under being able to create a million new homes, your estimate is that you need three and a half million new homes.

Yvette Cooper:

That's right. And the thing about brown field land is that it comes, it becomes available all the time because you have you know, maybe a factory that closes or maybe use that changes in a particular area, so brown field land does develop and change. But ultimately, it is for local councils to decide what is the best location in their area, and they have to look at all the areas you know, around the town, the town centre, in their communities, because they'll know best where these homes should best be built to meet their local needs.

Jon Sopel:

You keep saying brown field sites, but brown field sites are also our playing fields our parks, our gardens.

Yvette Cooper:

No. That's not right. Parks and playing fields have special protection and we have also given local councils greater powers to differentiate between different kinds of brown field land, so that they can introduce much stronger protections on perhaps garden land in an area, where they've got alternative sites available.

But the bottom line is, that people do need to identify where the homes should go. It's no good just saying, here's all the areas we're going to protect and oh, there's nothing left, you know, we're not going to build any homes anywhere. We need to build the homes but of course, we've got to protect the urban green spaces and make sure, that you know, those are the parks and the play areas for the children to play in as they grow.

Jon Sopel:

Because one of the things we saw in that film there, in Germany was that people that person saying, look, you can't just worry about fossilizing the countryside and keeping that beautiful and then just cramming everybody tight in to cities and towns. They've got to have quality of life too.

Yvette Cooper:

Well you've got to improve both the towns and cities but also rural areas. We've been working for example with the affordable rural housing commission on the need to build more affordable housing in rural areas because sometimes you get small villages and areas where they are in danger of becoming fossilized if they don't have small numbers of affordable homes and other homes being built in those communities too. So this is about you know, recognising the different character of different communities but every single community recognising that more homes do need to be built.

Jon Sopel:

You keep stressing that it's up to local councils, local councils to decide what is the best thing to do. What do you do with the local council who say, well frankly, we don't think we want to build that much.

Yvette Cooper:

Well we do have a serious problem with Conservative local councils in particular across the south east region in particular, but not just there, who are opposing increases in housing...the south east Regional Assembly indeed has been arguing for cuts in the level of house building over the next few years, which I just think it's bonkers, given the needs we have. But I think it's, you know, it's not on really for councils to simply turn their backs and say, well we don't want any new houses round here, build them somewhere else. Build them in another community, build them in another town.

Every town, every city, every community has first time buyers who can't get on the ladder, has sons and daughters who are still stuck living at home with their mum and dad because they just can't afford anywhere to live, that is not fair and every community needs to recognize its responsibility to do something about that.

Jon Sopel:

But you just said at the start, it's up to councils to decide. Councils could decide they don't want to build extra houses, then what are you going to do about it.

Yvette Cooper:

No, we're clear that the way that the regional planning process works and the way that local councils have to wait together, they will all have to accept their responsibility to deliver more homes. Where they have the flexibilities around where within their community the homes should be built, you know, what the best location is, whether they've got good brown fields available and what kinds of homes.

You know, they may need more family homes in their area to look at those sorts of issues as well. What they can't do is turn their backs on their responsibility to deliver more homes and interestingly, we had forty towns and cities come forward over the last twelve months to say, well we want to increase the level of homes in our area.

We want to do so very substantially and we want to work with the government to do so. We believe more towns and cities will come forward, you know with ideas like eco towns so you really improve the environmental standards of the new housing as well.

Jon Sopel:

You singled out Tory councils but I would suspect there are Liberal Democrat councils and maybe Labour councils as well, very mindful of the number of new houses...

Both together...

Yvette Cooper:

...There are certainly a few Lib Dem councils who are doing the same thing.

Jon Sopel:

Yeah, but what do the Tories say? it's actually not a question of it's not in my back yard it's a question of that if we're going to do this, we need to provide extra hospitals, extra schools, extra GP surgeries, space for building supermarkets so that you've got the whole infrastructure and government needs to help us with that.

Yvette Cooper:

Well we agree, we do need infrastructure, we are putting more investment in to infrastructure and we are looking at other ways to raise more from planning... I think it's a bit disingenuous for the Tories to say that when they're actually talking about cutting public investment, so they're really just calling for additional resources, simply as an excuse not to build the homes because across the board nationally, they want to both cut taxes and cut that spending as well.

Jon Sopel:

Now could I ask you about something which I'm sure is of huge interest to a lot of Labour councils. Gordon Brown spoke about the role of councils in supplying the additional housing and he said, to give a bigger role for local authorities than they've had before. What does that mean?

Yvette Cooper:

Well we think that there's a lot more that local councils could be doing to support more affordable housing in their areas, particularly using local council land both to support shared ownership housing and to support social housing, that does include council housing, it also includes working in partnership with Housing Associations, with private developers, we want mixed communities in these areas so you have different kinds of housing all along the same street, but we do think local councils have a stronger role to play.

Jon Sopel:

A lot more council housing.

Yvette Cooper:

Well, this is not about a return to the old sort of 50s council estates. I don't think that's the right approach and I don't think anybody would support that, where you have, you know, the council estate on one side of town, the executive estate on the other. This is about developing mixed communities and that means a lot more working in partnership, you know, with other organisations, be they housing associations or developers or others.

Jon Sopel:

You say that's not what people want. That's exactly what a lot of local Labour councillors would love to see. The ability to build...

Yvette Cooper:

No, I don't think that's right. What they want to see is mixed communities.

Jon Sopel:

So there's no desire, what happened during the Deputy Leadership campaign, when we had candidate after candidate talking about the need for more council housing.

Yvette Cooper:

Well of course, we need more social housing, we need more shared ownership housing and we need more private housing. We're completely clear about that. We need more of all of those three and we need councils to be playing a much stronger role than they are at the moment.

But what I don't think anybody is calling for is a return for the old traditional estates where you had a particular kind of housing, all of one kind of housing in area, and complete segregation between those different sort of estates. I don't think that is a good thing for local communities, I don't think it's what any town and city wants. What people want is for the housing to be mixed.

The housing to be you know, different kinds of homes along side each other, so you can't tell what kind of housing it is, when you walk along the street. That's why you need greater partnership working, but as part of that process, we do think that councils have a much stronger play, role to play, particularly using their land in the process.

Jon Sopel:

Sure, but you could have a block of flats that was built by a housing association and next to it maybe a big block of flats that's a council bloke.

Yvette Cooper:

Well you don't really want a single block of flats, a big block of flats that's only got one type of housing in it. What you want is within every block, within every development, along every street, to have a mix of different kinds of housing and that means working in partnership, so it does mean, you know, councils doing more but it means working with other organisations as well.

Jon Sopel:

And has, I've seen it reported that you're going to let councils borrow from the private sector so that they can build more. Is that right.

Yvette Cooper:

Well councils can already use their borrowing in order to do all sorts of investment in their area. There are certain difficulties around the way that the housing revenue account works and the way that technical rules work and we are looking at greater flexibility for councils. Of course it's got to be within proper responsible public borrowing frameworks, but we do want councils to play a stronger role.

Jon Sopel:

And in this vision, you say councils play a bigger role, I'm just trying to get the simple answer to the question, will there be a lot more council housing.

Yvette Cooper:

We do think councils should be able to build council housing, we also think that they should be able to work with housing associations, with private sector organisations, in partnership because that's what you really need. We want greater flexibility, but we want that partnership development.

Jon Sopel:

Yvette Cooper thank you very much indeed.

Example 3 (Jon Sopel – Alan Duncan interview, December 9, 2007)

Jon Sopel:

Well the opposition have had an energy policy of their own to unveil this week and I'm joined by Mr Hutton's Conservative opposite number, Alan Duncan. Alan Duncan, welcome to you and thank you for joining us on the Politics Show. I just want to pick up with - not where we left off on party funding, that's too big an issue. Let's just go on to the energy issue here. Do you support what John Hutton has said about the development of off-shore wind farms?

Alan Duncan:

I think broadly, I can agree with much if not most of what John Hutton has just said. We're an island nation, there's a lot of wind around, we should use that off-shore capacity for generating electricity which is clean and secure. So yes, I think it's inevitable and a good thing that there will be more off-shore wind.

Jon Sopel:

So this is a bi-partisan approach then.

Alan Duncan:

A lot of the energy policy actually is and I don't think it does anyone any good to pretend that there's a great ding-dong battle here. I mean there's a lot of over-lap and a lot of stuff. I mean I, I think David Cameron as we saw this week has been pioneering a lot of it. Certainly we've been emphasizing the renewable side of energy generation, earlier, and I would say more assertively than the Labour government, but there's a massive overlap which is good and I think in as much as people can invest, knowing that things are going to continue when I would say, there's a change in government, then that's the better.

Jon Sopel:

We heard Mr Hutton conceding that there was going - inevitably it was going to mean that electricity prices were going to go up a bit. You're happy to go to the electorate and say, vote Tory, for higher electricity prices.

Alan Duncan:

Well I think that some of the renewable options at the moment, certainly at the front end, are quite expensive but then they're there for a very long time and who knows what's going to happen to global energy markets. We've got nearly a hundred dollar oil and when we have a carbon price of course, what really matters is the differential between those generating methods, which are carbon free or very low carbon, and those that are not. So if we have a, in the future a more sophisticated and effective regime for penalizing carbon, that's good and one thing I am critical of the government of, is at the moment they penalize nuclear as if it produced carbon, which of course it doesn't.

Jon Sopel:

Just - is there a difference in energy policy. I mean I know you said that there's a lot, that there's no great big ding dong, but I mean we had David Cameron this week talking about micro-generation; people putting a little turbine on their own property and it seemed to be sort of a very bottom up sort of approach to energy policy, left to individuals, here we have the government saying well, actually, we've got a rather different approach, we want to build this huge infrastructure.

Alan Duncan:

Well I think we've got to do both and we really have to push for every conceivable renewable option that exists and what David was saying this week in our decentralized energy paper was you know, if we can change all of human behavior, by making people think about not only what they use but what they can create and stick in to the system, then we can change the whole nature of electricity generation. So you know little things like photovoltaics, a hospital perhaps having a turbine, bore holes which can perhaps do half of our houses energy needs, you know, things like that are really going to make a difference.

Jon Sopel:

And on nuclear, the government says that obviously has to be part of the mix. Are you on that page as well.

Alan Duncan:

Our policy is absolutely clear and it's again, very similar, we want approval for sites and designs. We want a proper carbon price, we want honesty about costs, with no subsidy. Get on with the decision to

do something with the waste, again, David Cameron said that this week, and I think the government has been a bit slow on working out what to do with nuclear waste. So then people can invest and I think probably they will.

Jon Sopel:

You were rather more skeptical the last time I spoke to you when you were on this programme – we can just have a listen to what you said last time.

‘we think that the nuclear power sector, should be there as a last resort in many respects. We want to explore every conceivable method of generating electricity before we go to nuclear’

Alan Duncan:

so fluent.

Jon Sopel:

Yes. But you were completely different, you were very skeptical there. It has to be the last option, now you’re saying, we’re on the same page as the government and yes, let’s get on with it.

Alan Duncan:

I think what’s important with nuclear is to explain the policy. I think it’s unhelpful to get hooked on two words and I think the policy as it has always been is exactly as I’ve just explained.

Jon Sopel:

So you are fine about nuclear. The other thing that John Hutton said which was quite interesting, was we can't be at the mercy, energy security was vital, we can't be at the mercy of another country that might cut off our supplies. Haven't you been off meeting the head of Gazprom recently.

Alan Duncan:

Er, ah. Er, yes. Since you ask, I, yes I went to Moscow a couple of weeks ago, a personal initiative really, I used to be in the energy sector myself. For one very good reason, which is that when there is a company in the world which is likely to provide a massive percentage of the world's gas, on which we are likely to become increasingly dependent, I think it's important that politicians at a senior level, know the people and can look them in the eye and can actually understand what they're trying to do with their company.

Jon Sopel:

And do you trust what he's doing. Trust what Gazprom are doing.

Alan Duncan:

They are very entangled with the Kremlin, so the structure is not a sort of private structure in the way that all of us I think would prefer, but I think it's important to understand that Gazprom does need to export gas in order to earn the currency to subsidize all the prices in the domestic economy of Russia, so there is a, there's a mutual interest there, for their exporting and selling outside Russia.

Jon Sopel:

Okay, Alan Duncan thank you very much for being with us.