

## 9/11 Commission Testimony Reveals Bush Administration Lacked Focus on Terrorism Prior to Attacks

By Melvin A. Goodman | April 12, 2004

Condoleezza Rice's testimony to the 9/11 commission supports Richard Clarke's charges to the commission that the Bush administration reduced the urgency of the problem of counter-terrorism—and that the invasion of Iraq marked a major diversion from the “war against terrorism.” Rice has opened a new line of questioning for the commissioners with her false claim that the Bush administration is responsible for the “greatest reorganization of government” since President Harry Truman's National Security Act of 1947.

Rice's testimony confirms that there were 33 meetings of high-level members of the Bush administration in 2001 before there was any meeting on the problem of counter-terrorism. She noted that Vice President Cheney was told in May 2001 to supervise the role of domestic agencies in the campaign against terrorism but Cheney formed no task force and held no meetings. Rice claimed that the FBI, the FAA, and the Department of Transportation were given explicit orders in the summer of 2001 to step up security activities in their respective areas, but the directors of these agencies recall no communication from Rice regarding an increased security threat. This fact is particularly important because the national security adviser is charged not only with making sure that all policy-relevant information is put in front of the president, but monitoring the performance of all security agencies in carrying orders from the White House.

This information is supported by testimony from key government officials who have told the commission in private that the Bush administration seemed to give a lower priority to counter-terrorism than the Clinton administration. The deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the undersecretary of state have made similar claims to the commission. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, moreover,

did not appoint an assistant secretary for counter-terrorism until after the attacks on 9/11.

Rice unwittingly confirmed that the war in Iraq will undermine key elements of the war against terrorism. She proclaimed to the commission that the Clinton administration lacked a strategic policy toward terrorism. “America's al Qaeda policy wasn't working because our Afghanistan policy wasn't working. And our Afghanistan policy wasn't working because our Pakistan policy wasn't working.” In the wake of the invasion of Iraq, al Qaeda forces are returning to Afghanistan and taking up positions in Iraq; Taliban forces are returning to Afghanistan in large numbers; Pakistan is providing less support to U.S. forces in Pakistan because of U.S. bombing of key Shiite cities, even mosques, in Iraq.

Rice's claim of government reorganization, let alone the “greatest reorganization” in more than 55 years is simply untrue. In fact, the lesson of 9/11 was the need to create a central repository for all domestic and international intelligence information on terrorism. The Department of Homeland Security was supposed to have such an office, but CIA director George Tenet and FBI director Robert Mueller importuned the Bush administration not to give such a responsibility to DHS in order to protect their own bureaucracies. Thus, the collection and analysis of relevant information is still in the same hands at the agencies responsible for the intelligence failure of



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9/11. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Finally, there is the sad issue of dereliction of duty on the part of the Bush administration, particularly the president and his national security adviser. When the Clinton administration received increased indicators in late 1999 about terrorist attacks during the Millennium celebrations, these intelligence indicators were shared with the public so that you and I could make our own decisions about personal safety. The Bush administration received a greater number of warnings from April to June 2001 about the likelihood of terrorist attacks, but kept that information to key members of the government, enabling Attorney General John Ashcroft to make a decision to stop flying on commercial aircraft and Secretary of State Colin Powell to warn members of the foreign service to be careful in making travel plans. It is fair to ask if so many men and women would have stayed in the

second tower of the World Trade Center after the attack against the first tower, if it were known throughout that summer that there were increased indicators of a terrorist attack inside the United State as well as FBI warnings of imminent hijacking attempts and infiltration of terrorists with explosives from Canada. Many of the deaths of 9/11 could have easily been prevented.

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*Melvin A. Goodman is senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and co-author of Bush League Diplomacy: How the Neoconservatives are Putting the World at Risk (Prometheus Books, March 2004).*

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Writer: Melvin A. Goodman  
Editor: John Gershman, IRC  
Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC

