



April 4, 2004

## Uneven Response Seen on Terror in Summer of 2001

By DAVID JOHNSTON and ERIC SCHMITT

**W**ASHINGTON, April 3 — On July 5, 2001, as threats of an impending terrorist attack against the United States were pouring into Washington, Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, and Andrew H. Card Jr., the president's chief of staff, directed the administration's counterterrorism office to assemble top officials from many of the country's domestic agencies for a meeting in the White House Situation Room.

Even though the warnings focused mostly on threats overseas, Ms. Rice and Mr. Card wanted the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Customs Service, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and other agencies put on alert inside the United States. Ms. Rice and Mr. Card did not attend the meeting, run by Richard A. Clarke, the White House counterterrorism coordinator. When the meeting broke up, several new security advisories were issued, including an F.A.A. bulletin warning of an increased risk of air hijackings intended to free terrorists imprisoned in the United States.

That meeting represented a peak moment in the Bush administration's efforts in the months before Sept. 11, 2001, to prevent a terrorist attack inside the United States. The issue of whether the meeting and the actions that preceded and followed it were a reasonable response to the gathering threat that summer now lies at the heart of the independent inquiry into the attacks. Ms. Rice will be questioned intensively about these matters when she appears in public on Thursday for the first time before the independent commission investigating the 2001 attacks, members of the commission said.

A review of the Bush administration's deliberations and actions in the summer of 2001, based on interviews with current and former officials and an examination of the preliminary findings of the commission, shows that the White House's impulse to deal more forcefully with terrorist threats within the United States peaked July 5 and then leveled off until Sept. 11.

The review shows that over that summer, with terror warnings mounting, the government's response was often scattered and inconsistent as the new administration struggled to develop a comprehensive strategy for combating Al Qaeda and other terror organizations.

The warnings during the summer were more dire and more specific than generally recognized. Descriptions of the threat were communicated repeatedly to the highest levels within the White House. In more than 40 briefings, Mr. Bush was told by George J. Tenet, the director of central intelligence, of threats involving Al Qaeda.

The review suggests that the government never collected in one place all the information that was flowing into Washington about Al Qaeda and its interest in using commercial aircraft to carry out attacks, and about extremist groups' interest in pilot training. A Congressional inquiry into intelligence activities before Sept. 11 found 12 reports over a seven-year period suggesting that terrorists might use

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## Framework of Clarke's Book Is Bolstered

By Walter Pincus and Dana Milbank  
 Washington Post Staff Writers  
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When Condoleezza Rice appears Thursday before the commission investigating the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, President Bush's national security adviser will have the administration's best opportunity to rebut her former aide's stinging critique of Bush's terrorism policy.

Since former White House counterterrorism chief Richard A. Clarke charged March 24 that the Bush White House reacted slowly to warnings of a terrorist attack, his former colleagues have poked holes in parts of his narration of the early months of 2001 and have found what they say is evidence that Clarke elevated his own importance in those events.

The most sweeping challenge to Clarke's account has come from two Bush allies, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) and Fred F. Fielding, a member of the investigative panel. They have suggested that sworn testimony Clarke gave in 2002 to a joint congressional committee that probed intelligence failures was at odds with his sworn testimony last month. Frist said Clarke may have "lied under oath to the United States Congress."

But the broad outline of Clarke's criticism has been corroborated by a number of other former officials, congressional and commission investigators, and by Bush's admission in the 2003 Bob Woodward book "Bush at War" that he "didn't feel that sense of urgency" about Osama bin Laden before the attacks occurred.

In addition, a review of dozens of declassified citations from Clarke's 2002 testimony provides no evidence of contradiction, and White House officials familiar with the testimony agree that any differences are matters of emphasis, not fact. Indeed, the declassified 838-page report of the 2002 congressional inquiry includes many passages that appear to bolster the arguments Clarke has made.

For example, Rice and others in the administration have said that they implemented much more aggressive policies than those of Clarke and President Bill Clinton. Rice said the Bush team developed "a comprehensive strategy that would not just roll back al Qaeda -- which had been the policy of the Clinton administration -- but we needed a strategy to eliminate al Qaeda."

But in 2002, Rice's deputy, Stephen J. Hadley, wrote to the joint committee that the new policy was exactly what Rice described as the old one. "The goal was to move beyond the policy of containment, criminal prosecution, and limited retaliation for specific attacks, toward attempting to 'roll back' al Qaeda."

The joint committee's declassified report, released last July, contains dozens of quotations and references to Clarke's testimony, and none appears to contradict the former White House

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## Questions for Dr. Rice

PETER BERGEN  
The New York Times

1. A search of all your public statements and writings reveals that you apparently mentioned Osama bin Laden only once and never mentioned Al Qaeda at all as a threat to the United States before 9/11. Why?
2. Both Bob Woodward's book "Bush at War" and Richard Clarke's "Against All Enemies" show that shortly after 9/11 there was considerable focus by the Bush cabinet on Iraq's possibly being the perpetrator of the attacks. Why was Iraq considered a suspect when there was no evidence that it was involved in any act of anti-American terrorism for a decade — other than a failed attempt to assassinate former President George H. W. Bush in 1993 — while there was overwhelming evidence that it was the Al Qaeda network that attacked the World Trade Center in 1993, tried to blow up Los Angeles International Airport in 1999, blew up American embassies in Africa in 1998 and attacked the destroyer Cole in Yemen in 2000? After all, the cabinet did not discuss the possibility that the attacks were the work of Iran, Libya or Syria, all countries that have a history of terrorism directed at Americans.
3. Mr. Clarke, the former White House counterterrorism director, has said that of the 100 or so meetings held by cabinet-level officials before 9/11 only one was about terrorism. Is this true? If so, was this emblematic of the Bush administration's posture on terrorism?
4. The Bush administration's position, and your own, has been that it would not have been possible to conceive that planes might be used as missiles against the United States. Yet during the 1996 Olympics countermeasures were taken for just that eventuality. How do you reconcile this discrepancy?
5. According to the interrogations of detainees held as suspected Al Qaeda operatives, the lack of response to the attack on the destroyer Cole made the group feel that it could act with impunity. Early in your administration Al Qaeda was identified as the principal suspect in that attack. In addition, Osama bin Laden released videotapes in January and June of 2001 more or less taking credit for his role in it. Why was there no response of any kind from your administration to the Cole attack, an act of war against the United States that killed 17 sailors and nearly sank one of the most advanced destroyers in the American fleet?
6. On Aug. 6, 2001, President Bush was briefed that members of Al Qaeda might plan to hijack a plane in order to secure the release of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, a spiritual leader of Al Qaeda jailed in the United States. Given what you now know of the importance of Sheik Rahman to Al Qaeda — as well as the fact that two of his sons played key roles in the group — how would you now characterize this piece of intelligence?
7. Why did you have no plan in place on 9/11 to immediately attack Al Qaeda and its Taliban allies? The United States government had repeatedly put the Taliban on notice that they would be held responsible for any attacks by Al Qaeda. By delaying the military response for a month, the Taliban and Al Qaeda had time to disperse, regroup and fight another day.
8. When you came into office some two dozen members of Al Qaeda, including several senior commanders of the group, had already been indicted. What plans did you have to bring these men to justice?
9. Why has there been no public apology or resignation by any Bush administration official over the most catastrophic intelligence and national security failure of the past five decades?

SCOTT ARMSTRONG  
The New York Times

1. In his statement on March 24 to the independent commission investigating the 9/11 attacks, George Tenet, the director of central intelligence, said, "In August 1996, bin Laden, in collaboration with radical Muslim clerics associated with his group, issued a religious edict or fatwa in which he proclaimed a 'declaration of war,' authorizing attacks against Western military targets on the Arabian Peninsula."

Two years ago, the joint Congressional committee looking into pre-9/11 intelligence made reference to the participation of Saudi clerics — salafi — in the preparation of additional fatwas issued by Osama bin Laden in 1998 in which he "declared war" against Americans. What's more, the director of the National Security Agency reportedly told a closed session of that committee that on Sept. 10, 2001, his agency intercepted messages by the 9/11 hijackers. The messages, which went untranslated until Sept. 12, were reportedly not to Osama bin Laden but to Saudi clerics.

Who, then, planned and executed the 9/11 attack beyond Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants? What have the intelligence agencies of the United States and other countries suggested were the reasons, motivations and objectives of these other groups? What has the United States government learned about the participation before and after 9/11 by these Saudi clerics? What has been done to halt their support of Mr. bin Laden and bring them to justice? What has been done to compel the Saudi government to take action against these forces?

2. Looking back on 9/11, were your priorities appropriate for the threat based on what you knew? Did you take the necessary precautions given your perception of the threat at the time? Press reports indicate that before 9/11, you believed that the use of ballistic missiles against United States was our most pressing national security vulnerability. What precautions were taken to ensure that Al Qaeda militants in Kashmir did not provoke a ballistic missile exchange between India and Pakistan?

3. Why was Iraq viewed by the president — and others — as a likely, if not the most likely, perpetrator of 9/11?

4. What was the accumulated evidence on Sept. 11 that Iraq was a direct and imminent threat to the United States? How much reliance did our government put on human sources, Iraqi defectors and former Iraqi officials for this intelligence? In retrospect, do you consider these sources to have been credible?

5. The stated purpose of invading Afghanistan was to remove the Taliban and deprive Al Qaeda of its primary sanctuary. There appears to be no evidence that Iraq, before 9/11, was a sanctuary for Osama bin Laden and his followers. Yet Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Yemen and several North African countries have served as havens for them and other anti-American terrorist groups. What steps did we take before or after 9/11 to deprive terrorists of these havens? Why do we not have more troops in Afghanistan today to thwart the continued and escalating attacks from the Taliban and Al Qaeda?

6. J. Cofer Black, the State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism, told Congress last week: "Iraq is currently serving as a focal point for foreign jihadist fighters, who are united in a common goal with former regime elements, criminals and more established foreign terrorist organization members to conduct attacks against coalition and Iraqi civilian targets. These jihadists view Iraq as a new training ground to build their extremist credentials and hone the skills of the terrorist."



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## Leaders of 9/11 Panel Say Attacks Were Probably Preventable

By PHILIP SHENON

**W**ASHINGTON, April 4 — The leaders of the independent commission investigating the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks agreed Sunday that evidence gathered by their panel showed the attacks could probably have been prevented.

Their remarks drew sharp disagreement from one of President Bush's closest political advisers, who insisted that the Bush and Clinton administrations had no opportunity to disrupt the Sept. 11 plot. They also offered a preview of the difficult questions likely to confront Condoleezza Rice when she testifies before the panel at a long-awaited public hearing this week.

In a joint television interview, the commission's chairman, Thomas H. Kean, a former Republican governor of New Jersey, and its vice chairman, Lee H. Hamilton, a former Democratic House member from Indiana, indicated that their final report this summer would find that the Sept. 11 attacks were preventable.

They also suggested that Ms. Rice, Mr. Bush's national security adviser, would be questioned aggressively on Thursday about why the administration had not taken more action against Al Qaeda before Sept. 11, and about discrepancies between her public statements and those of Richard A. Clarke, the president's former counterterrorism chief, who has accused the administration of largely ignoring terrorist threats in 2001.

"The whole story might have been different," Mr. Kean said on the NBC News program "Meet the Press," outlining a series of intelligence and law enforcement blunders in the months and years before the attacks.

"There are so many threads and so many things, individual things, that happened," he said. "If we had been able to put those people on the watch list of the airlines, the two who were in the country; again, if we'd stopped some of these people at the borders; if we had acted earlier on Al Qaeda when Al Qaeda was smaller and just getting started."

Mr. Kean also cited the "lack of coordination within the F.B.I." and the bureau's failures to grapple with the implications of the August 2001 arrest of Zacarias Moussaoui, a French citizen who was arrested while in flight school and was later linked to the terrorist cell that carried out the attacks.

Commission officials say current and former officials of the F.B.I., especially the former director Louis J. Freeh, and Attorney General John Ashcroft are expected to be harshly questioned by the 10-member panel at a hearing later this month about the Moussaoui case and other law enforcement failures before Sept. 11.

Mr. Hamilton, a former chairman of the House Intelligence and International Relations committees,



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## New to the Job, Rice Focused on More Traditional Fears

By DOUGLAS JEHL and DAVID E. SANGER

**W**ASHINGTON, April 4 — Condoleezza Rice was, perhaps, in the best position to galvanize the government to prevent terrorist attacks before Sept. 11, 2001. As national security adviser she sat at the nexus of the intelligence, foreign policy, defense and law enforcement agencies who shared responsibility for counterterrorism.

That is why, as the White House scrambles to defend against charges that President Bush and his advisers paid too little heed before Sept. 11 to potential for terror attacks on American soil, Ms. Rice finds herself at the center of the storm.

On Thursday, testifying publicly in front of the commission examining the attacks, she will be pressed to square her account of events — one of heightened alerts and the development of new policies to oust Al Qaeda and the Taliban — with accusations by Richard A. Clarke, who served under her as counterterrorism adviser, that the new administration paid far less attention to these threats than President Clinton's did. Her task seemed to become even more difficult on Sunday, when the leaders of the commission said that it was likely to conclude that the Sept. 11 attacks were preventable.

Senior White House aides concede that Mr. Bush has a huge amount riding on how Ms. Rice does. "She's the one who can make our most forceful case," one close colleague of Ms. Rice said this weekend. "They don't call her the Warrior Princess for nothing," a reference to the moniker her staff gave her after the Sept. 11 attacks.

But a review of the record, from testimony and interviews, suggests that Ms. Rice faces a daunting challenge because her own focus until Sept. 11 was usually fixed on matters other than terrorism, for reasons that had to do with her own background, her management style and the unusually close, personal nature of her relationship with Mr. Bush.

Coit Blacker, a longtime friend and colleague of Ms. Rice at Stanford who is now director of that university's Institute for International Studies, said any blind spots she had upon taking office in January 2001 might have been rooted in the fact that she emerged from a generation of scholars trained to focus on great-power politics, with terrorism seen as a troubling but subordinate element.

"It wasn't until after Sept. 11 that most of us realized that for the first time in human history," Mr. Blacker said, "a nonstate actor, a group of religious extremists at the very bottom of the international system, had the capability to inflict devastating damage on the very pinnacle of the international system."

Ms. Rice, who is 49, is widely recognized as one of the most poised and effective public advocates of the administration, and she won praise from Democrats and Republicans for her private testimony before the commission. Even so, as she prepares for her public testimony this week, friends have been

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## Rice to Face Questions on Clarke

9/11 Panel to Look For Contradictions

By Charles Lane  
 Washington Post Staff Writer  
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The chairman of the national commission investigating the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks outlined his strategy yesterday for questioning national security adviser Condoleezza Rice when she appears Thursday for public testimony.

Thomas H. Kean (R), the former governor of New Jersey, told NBC's "Meet the Press" that the commission would probe Rice for any contradictions between her recollections of the Bush administration's anti-terrorism policy-making process and those of former National Security Council counterterrorism aide Richard A. Clarke.

Rice will be before the committee for 2 1/2 hours, "as long a session as we've had with any witness," Kean said.

"We expect it to be very exciting," he said, "because we want to know so much. . . . We want to know what she heard and what she knew, and of course what differences there may be between her, Mr. Clarke and a number of other people we've heard."

Kean and Vice Chairman Lee H. Hamilton (D), a former congressman from Indiana, denied suggestions that the committee might go easy on Rice because the commission's executive director, Philip D. Zelikow, is close to her.

Zelikow served on the National Security Council staff with Rice during the first Bush administration and later wrote a book with her. In recent media reports, some family members of Sept. 11 victims have said that could taint the commission's deliberations.

But Kean said that neither he nor Hamilton had found "any evidence to indicate in any way that he's partial to anybody or anything. In fact, he's been much tougher, I think, than a lot of people would have liked him to be."

Kean said that the commission and the White House are "planning" to have a final report available to the public by July, but he acknowledged in response to questions from Tim Russert that he could not guarantee an early release date. The White House will vet the report to protect intelligence sources and methods, a process that could become time-consuming.

"This is one of the big remaining obstacles, for us to get the report declassified," said Hamilton, also appearing on "Meet the Press."

Hamilton insisted, however, that "we're not going to let them distort our report."

