

CLAIM vs. FACT: Administration Officials Respond to Richard Clarke Interview

In the wake of Richard Clarke's well-supported assertions that the Bush Administration neglected counterterrorism in the face of repeated terror warnings before 9/11, the Bush Administration has launched a frantic misinformation campaign – often contradicting itself in the process.

CLAIM #1: “Richard Clarke had plenty of opportunities to tell us in the administration that he thought the war on terrorism was moving in the wrong direction and he chose not to.” - National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, 3/22/04

FACT: Clarke sent a memo to Rice principals on 1/24/01 marked “urgent” asking for a Cabinet-level meeting to deal with an impending Al Qaeda attack. The White House acknowledges this, but says “principals did not need to have a formal meeting to discuss the threat.” No meeting occurred until one week before 9/11. - White House Press Release, [3/21/04](#)

CLAIM #2: “The president returned to the White House and called me in and said, I've learned from George Tenet that there is no evidence of a link between Saddam Hussein and 9/11.” - National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, 3/22/04

FACT: If this is true, then why did the President and Vice President repeatedly claim Saddam Hussein was directly connected to 9/11? President Bush sent a letter to Congress on 3/19/03 saying that the Iraq war was permitted specifically under legislation that authorized force against “nations, organizations, or persons who planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11.” Similarly, Vice President Cheney said on [9/14/03](#) that “It is not surprising that people make that connection” between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks, and said “we don't know” if there is a connection.

CLAIM #3: “[Clarke] was moved out of the counterterrorism business over to the cybersecurity side of things.” - Vice President Dick Cheney on Rush Limbaugh, [3/22/04](#)

FACT: “Dick Clarke continued, in the Bush Administration, to be the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and the President's principle counterterrorism expert. He was expected to organize and attend all meetings of Principals and Deputies on terrorism. And he did.” - White House Press Release, [3/21/04](#)

CLAIM #4: “In June and July when the threat spikes were so high...we were at battle stations...The fact of the matter is [that] the administration focused on this before 9/11.” – National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, 3/22/04

FACT: “Documents indicate that before Sept. 11, Ashcroft did not give terrorism top billing in his strategic plans for the Justice Department, which includes the FBI. A draft of Ashcroft's ‘Strategic Plan’ from Aug. 9, 2001, does not put fighting terrorism as one of the department's seven goals, ranking it as a sub-goal beneath gun violence and drugs. By contrast, in April 2000, Ashcroft's predecessor, Janet Reno, called terrorism ‘the most challenging threat in the criminal justice area.’” - Washington Post, [3/22/04](#)

CLAIM #5: “The president launched an aggressive response after 9/11.” – National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, 3/22/04

FACT: “In the early days after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the Bush White House cut by nearly two-thirds an emergency request for counterterrorism funds by the FBI, an internal administration budget document shows. The papers show that Ashcroft ranked counterterrorism efforts as a lower priority than his predecessor did, and that he resisted FBI requests for more counterterrorism funding before and immediately after the attacks.” – Washington Post, [3/22/04](#)

CLAIM #6: “Well, [Clarke] wasn't in the loop, frankly, on a lot of this stuff...” - Vice President Dick Cheney, [3/22/04](#)

FACT: “The Government's interagency counterterrorism crisis management forum (the Counterterrorism Security Group, or “CSG”) chaired by Dick Clarke met regularly, often daily, during the high threat period.” - White House Press Release, [3/21/04](#)

CLAIM #7: “[Bush] wanted a far more effective policy for trying to deal with [terrorism], and that process was in motion throughout the spring.” - Vice President Dick Cheney on Rush Limbaugh, [3/22/04](#)

FACT: “Bush said [in May of 2001] that Cheney would direct a government-wide review on managing the consequences of a domestic attack, and ‘I will periodically chair a meeting of the National Security Council to review these efforts.’ Neither Cheney's review nor Bush's took place.” By comparison, Cheney in 2001 formally convened his Energy Task Force at least 10 separate times, meeting at least 6 times with Enron energy executives. - Washington Post, [1/20/02](#), GAO Report, [8/22/03](#), AP, 1/8/02

CLAIM #8: All the chatter [before 9/11] was of an attack, a potential al Qaeda attack overseas. – Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, 3/22/04

FACT: Page 204 of the Joint Congressional Inquiry into 9/11 noted that “In May 2001, the intelligence community obtained a report that Bin Laden supporters were planning to infiltrate the United States” to “carry out a terrorist operation using high explosives.” The report “was included in an intelligence report for senior government officials in August [2001].” In the same month, the Pentagon “acquired and shared with other elements of the Intelligence Community information suggesting that seven persons associated with Bin Laden had departed various locations for Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.” [Joint Congressional Report, [12/02](#)]