

# **FACT CHECK: Condi Rice's 60 Minutes Interview, 3/28/04**

*National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice appeared on CBS's 60 Minutes in an effort to quell growing questions surrounding the Administration's inconsistent claims about its pre-9/11 actions. Not only did Rice refuse to take Richard Clarke's lead and admit responsibility for her role in the worst national security failure in American history, but she continued to make unsubstantiated and contradictory assertions:*

**RICE CLAIM:** "The administration took seriously the threat" of terrorism before 9/11.

**FACTS:** President Bush himself acknowledges that, despite repeated warnings of an imminent Al Qaeda attack, before 9/11 "I didn't feel the sense of urgency" about terrorism. Similarly, Newsweek reports that Bush's attitude was reflected throughout an Administration that was trying to "de-emphasize terrorism" as an overall priority. As proof, just two of the hundred national security meetings the Administration held during this period addressed the terrorist threat, and the White House refused to hold even one meeting of its highly-touted counterterrorism task force. Meanwhile, the Administration was actively trying to cut funding for counterterrorism, and "vetoed a request to divert \$800 million from missile defense into counterterrorism" despite a serious increase in terrorist chatter in the summer of 2001.

Source: "Bush At War" by Bob Woodward

Source: Newsweek & vetoed request - <http://foi.missouri.edu/terrorismfoi/whatwentwrong.html>

Source: Refusal to hold task force meeting - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A8734-2002Jan19?language=printer>

Source: Only two meetings out of 100 - <http://www.detnews.com/2002/politics/0207/01/politics-526326.htm>

**RICE CLAIM:** "I don't know what a sense of urgency any greater than the one we had would have caused us to do anything differently. I don't know how...we could have done more. I would like very much to know what more could have been done?"

**FACTS:** There are many more things that could have been done: first and foremost, the Administration could have desisted from de-emphasizing and cutting funding for counterterrorism in the months before 9/11. It could have held more meetings of top principals to get the directors of the CIA and FBI to share information, especially considering the major intelligence spike occurring in the summer of 2001. As 9/11 Commissioner Jamie Gorelick said on ABC this morning, the lack of focus and meetings meant agencies were not talking to each other, and key evidence was overlooked. For instance, with better focus and more urgency, the FBI's discovery of Islamic radicals training at flight schools might have raised red flags. Similarly, the fact that "months before Sept. 11, the CIA knew two of the al-Qaeda hijackers were in the United States" could have spurred a nationwide manhunt. But because there was no focus or urgency, "No nationwide manhunt was undertaken," said Gorelick. "The State Department watch list was not given to the FAA. If you brought people together, perhaps key connections could have been made."

Source: Slash counterterrorism funding - <http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/transcrime/articles/How%20Sept%2011%20Changed%20Goals%20of%20Justice%20Dept.htm>

Source: CIA knew 2 hijackers in the U.S. - <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2002/6/2/111044.shtml>

**RICE CLAIM:** "Nothing would be better from my point of view than to be able to testify, but there is an important principle involved here it is a longstanding principle that sitting national security advisors do not testify before the Congress."

**FACTS:** Republican Commission John F. Lehman, who served as Navy Secretary under President Reagan said on ABC this morning that "This is not testimony before a tribunal of the Congress...There are plenty of precedents for appearing in public and answering questions...There are plenty of precedents the White House could use if they wanted to do this." 9/11 Commissioner Jamie Gorelick agreed, saying "Our commission is sui generis...the Chairman has been appointed by the President. We are distinguishable from Congress." Rice's remarks on 60 Minutes that the principle is limited to "sitting national security advisers" is also a departure from her statements earlier this week, when she said the "principle" applied to all presidential advisers. She was forced to change this claim for 60 Minutes after 9/11 Commissioner Richard Ben-Veniste "cited examples of non-Cabinet presidential advisers who have testified publicly to Congress." Finally, the White House is reportedly moving to declassify congressional testimony then-White House adviser Richard Clarke gave in 2002. By declassifying this testimony, the White House is breaking the very same "principle" of barring White House adviser's testimony from being made public that Rice is using to avoid appearing publicly before the 9/11 commission.

Source: Quote from Tony Snow Show - [http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2004-03-23-911-rice-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2004-03-23-911-rice-usat_x.htm)

**RICE CLAIM:** "Iraq was put aside" immediately after 9/11.

**FACTS:** According to the Washington Post, "six days after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President Bush signed a 2-and-a-half-page document" that "directed the Pentagon to begin planning military options for an invasion of Iraq." This is corroborated by a CBS News, which reported on 9/4/02 that five hours after the 9/11 attacks, "Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was telling his aides to come up with plans for striking Iraq." In terms of resources, the Iraq decision had far-reaching effects on the efforts to hunt down Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. As the Boston Globe reported, "the Bush administration is continuing to shift highly specialized intelligence officers from the hunt for Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan to the Iraq crisis."

Source: September 17<sup>th</sup> directive - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A43909-2003Jan11?language=printer>

Source: Rumsfeld orders Iraq plan - <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/04/september11/main520830.shtml>

Source: Shifting special forces - <http://www.ihf.com/articles/106783.html>