

# Holdovers Held Up Security Strategy

Democratic partisans and Clinton holdovers such as Richard Clarke undermined the Bush team's crafting of a new national-security plan.

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

**W**hen former White House counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke fingered President George W. Bush for having "botched the response to 9/11," he and other critics left out a major point: Until just two months before the attack, nearly all the senior counterterrorism and intelligence officials on duty at the time were holdovers from the Clinton administration.

From the CIA to the Pentagon to the National Security Council (NSC), Clinton holdovers populated the Bush administration's intelligence and counterterrorism community. While maintaining a seasoned cadre of nonpolitical career professionals in senior national-security posts is considered crucial for any administration, former senior government officials say keeping too many can be damaging to a president when the toughest decisions must be made.

Clarke was the type of man any president would want on his team. Or so it seemed until his stunning denunciations of President Bush and his closest defense and security advisers in Clarke's newly released kiss-and-tell book. One of the longest-serving staffers ever employed on the NSC, Clarke criticizes the former Clinton administration and trashes the current Bush administration in his revenge tale, *Against All Enemies: Inside the White House's War on Terror*. Afloat on a Niagara of publicity, the book is No. 1 on the *Amazon.com* sales list.

In his numerous television and press interviews, as well as in testimony before a bipartisan panel investigating U.S. intelligence failures, Clarke is harsher against Bush and National Security Adviser Con-

doleezza Rice, who demoted him after 9/11, than ever he indicated even in his hostile book. And while Clarke appears to be a righteously angry but often credible accuser, many of his longtime friends are saying publicly that his anti-Bush diatribe has cost him his credibility.

The Clarke drama is a textbook case of why presidents should put their own people in the most sensitive decision-making positions and be choosy about hanging on to officials who served in the previous administration, a former senior NSC official who has served both Democratic and Republican administrations tells *INSIGHT*. This flaw in the way Rice staffed the NSC, friends of the president say, led to one of the weakest National Security Councils since the office was created at the dawn of the Cold War, with career foreign-service officers and other Clinton holdovers providing continuity with the past instead of supporting the new president's effort to craft policies consistent with his vision.

*INSIGHT* often has reported on Clinton-era officials and Republican defectors who have tied Bush's national-security strategy in knots since the beginning of his presidency [see "Blinded Vigilance," Oct. 15, 2001; "Clinton Undead Haunting Pentagon," June 17, 2002; and "Democrats Subvert War Intelligence," Jan. 6-19]. Indeed, this magazine reported on Sept. 7, 2001, just four days before the terrorist attacks, that Clinton holdovers continued

**Costly delay:** President Bush had asked for a plan to destroy al-Qaeda long before 9/11.

to run the U.S. intelligence community [see "Ground Down CIA Still in the Pit" at *INSIGHT online*] without needed reforms to deal with post-Cold War threats such as international terrorism [see sidebar, p. 19]. Days after the carnage, even the president's most bellicose critics in Congress, including Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Carl Levin (D-Mich.), were on CNN saying as publicly as they could that they were reconsidering their long-held positions that limited the fight against the terrorist enemy and piously alluding to the need to repeal a





**Sworn in:** Many of Clarke's friends are saying that his anti-Bush diatribe has cost him his credibility.

Making matters worse for the Pentagon leadership after 9/11 were the machinations of a network of senior Clinton political appointees who still held sensitive posts, including Peter F. Verga, Clinton's deputy undersecretary of defense for policy integration, which was a major intelligence post. Senior administration sources tell *INSIGHT* that Verga made himself useful to the Rumsfeld team but beavered to curry favor at the top, in part by "sniping and playing bureaucratic games" to make life difficult for the incoming defense policy team. Even today the divisive Verga holds a senior homeland-security post at the Defense Department.

Under Clinton, Clarke held a Cabinet-level post as "counterterrorism czar." His powerful position gave him wide-ranging authority to task the intelligence community to focus on specific terrorist threats, and to be the lead point man in developing counterterrorism policy for the president, advising the president and ensuring execution of the policy his way.

He remained in that post until after the counterterrorism failures of 9/11 — failures he told the 9/11 commission were his own — and apparently was kept unaware of an aggressive strategy that the president's still-forming national-security team was developing to destroy al-Qaeda and kill Osama bin Laden and his followers. According to NSC Deputy National Security Adviser Steve Hadley, Bush had asked for a strategy to destroy al-Qaeda in the earliest days of his presidency. For whatever reason, Clarke gave

post-Watergate executive order banning assassinations abroad.

At that point the president's own defense and security team was still taking shape. His top NSC special assistant for intelligence programs, Mary K. Sturtevant, had been on the job only eight weeks before the 9/11 attacks. For months, Sen. Levin personally had held up the confirmation hearings of Bush's appointees who were to design the U.S. antiterrorism strategy — Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith, Assistant Secretary of Defense

for International Security Programs J.D. Crouch and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Peter W. Rodman — refusing for apparently partisan purposes to allow them to take office until late July 2001. While Levin was holding up their appointments, the incoming Pentagon policy team had no legal or political authority to do their vital jobs — a fact that helps explain why it took eight months for the Bush administration to draw up a strategic operational plan to destroy al-Qaeda.

## ***INSIGHT* Warned of Intelligence Problem Four Days Before 9/11 Terrorist Attacks**

Four days before the 9/11 attack, on Sept. 7, 2001, this magazine ran a story on its Website titled "Ground Down CIA Still in the Pit." Excerpts follow:

"Why are Bill Clinton's political appointees still running the CIA? The question is nagging preparedness-minded supporters of President George W. Bush who are worried that the holdover intelligence community, like the rank upon rank of social-policy holdovers at the Pentagon, at best may be naïve and at worst poorly prepared to serve the country's needs in the 21st century. These are those, say critics, who were advanced to ever higher levels during the eight years in which Clinton politicized national security.

"While Donald Rumsfeld and his team are shaking up the Department of Defense (DoD) to ensure that U.S. warfight-

ing abilities are adapted to post-Cold War realities, almost nothing of the kind is being done in the intelligence community that keeps decisionmakers informed about international developments and threats. For some reason, Clinton holdovers continue to run the show. ...

"Current and former intelligence officers have described to *INSIGHT* a litany of unremedied problems within the CIA during the Deutch-Tenet years, including:

- bloated management staffs at the expense of solid analysts, linguists and officers in the field who can accurately and quickly collect and assess raw intelligence from world trouble spots;
- deteriorated human-intelligence capability that makes it almost impossible to penetrate key targets such as terrorist organizations and cripples U.S. efforts to

detect and prevent terrorist attacks such as the bombings that destroyed two U.S. embassies in Africa and a Navy warship in Yemen;

- a bureaucratic culture that penalizes intelligence personnel for thinking creatively;

- politicization of the CIA by controversial Clinton appointees who had served under [George] Tenet in the previous administration ...

- major flaws in quality control of intelligence coming in from the field, with an inordinate reliance on information from security services of other countries ...

- no serious penalties for high-level security lapses, including Tenet's predecessor and former boss, [John] Deutch, who for years e-mailed highly classified documents from his office through America Online to his house;

- a reported high-level CIA coverup on Tenet's watch of Deutch's alleged wrongdoing."

— JMW

## Clarke Allegations Undermine the U.S. War Effort

Clarke's book, *Against All Enemies*, is generating headlines around the world that diminish U.S. standing in the middle of the global war on terrorism. The Arabic-language satellite station Al-Jazeera reports that the book "paints a picture of a Bush White House almost impervious to security concerns prior to 11 September and overeager to pin the blame on Iraq after." Sample headlines follow.

**Sydney Morning Herald** (Australia): "Bush Has Made Us Less Safe, Says Counter-terrorism Expert"

**The Statesman** (India): "Obsessed With Iraq, Bush 'Ignored' Terror Threat"

**The Times of India**: "Bush Bullied His Way Into Iraq War"

**Daily Times** (Pakistan): "Al-Qaeda Was Ignored Until 9/11"

**Al-Jazeera** (Qatar): "Bush 'Ignored' Terror Threats"

**Channel News Asia** (Singapore): "Former Adviser Insists Bush Did 'Terrible Job' Fighting Terror"

**El Pals** (Spain): "Bush Adviser Accuses Him of Ignoring Al-Qaeda Threat"

**China Post** (Taiwan): "Bush Ignored Al-Qaeda Threat"

**Khaleej Times** (United Arab Emirates): "Ex-Adviser Says Bush Ignored Terror Threats"

**Daily Telegraph** (United Kingdom): "Ex-Aide Says Bush Ignored Warnings About Al-Qa'eda"

**Financial Times** (United Kingdom): "Bush 'Ignored Terror Signs Before 9/11'"

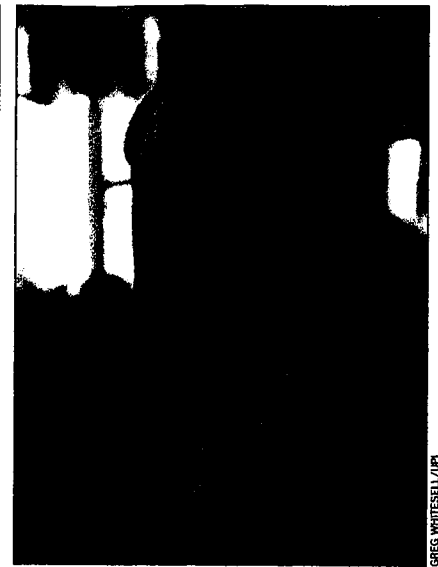
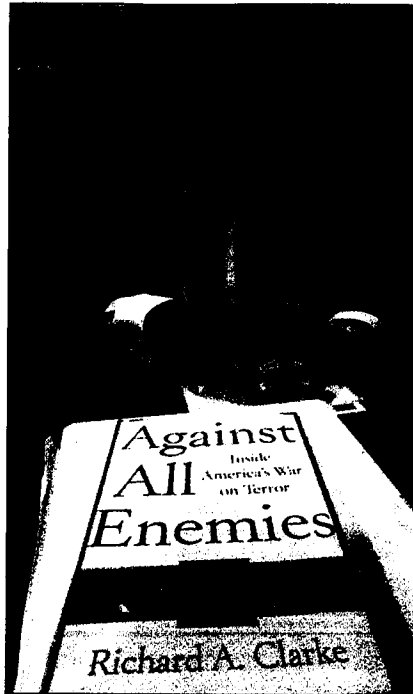
**The Independent** (United Kingdom): "Bush Ignored the Al-Qa'ida Threat Before 11 September"

**World Socialist**: "Former Terrorism Aide Charges Bush Manufactured Case For Iraq War"

— JMW

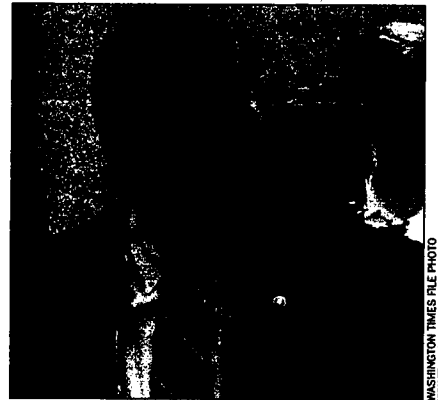
no indication in his book or his recent public comments that he knew of such a plan, and indeed alleged the opposite. Vice President Richard Cheney told reporters that the failed Clarke "wasn't in the loop, frankly, on a lot of this stuff."

Cheney's comment is consistent with previous news reports, which administration officials confirm, that the White House national-security process is unusually compartmented, so that even senior NSC officials would not necessarily know of secret strategic planning.



### Running interference?

Clinton holdovers Beers (above) and Verga (below) held sensitive posts for the Bush team; Clarke's payoff is selling books.



Much of the reason, administration sources say, is because of the many Clinton holdovers in the top ranks of government who were from the start working to kill plans they didn't like by leaking them to left-wing media.

In October 2001, Rice demoted Clarke to a staff rank on the NSC and put him in charge of cybersecurity. Bush passed him over for an appointment as deputy secretary of the newly created Department of Homeland Security, according to White House spokesman Scott McClellan, whereupon the bristling Clarke began to boycott regular NSC meetings that Rice chaired. There was talk in the NSC of Clarke quitting just as his self-described "best friend," NSC Senior Director for Combating Terrorism Rand Beers, was readying to leave to become coordinator of national-security and homeland-security issues for Kerry's presidential campaign in early 2003. After leaving the NSC, Clarke and Beers became adjunct lecturers at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, coteaching a course called "Post-Cold War Security: Terrorism, Security and Failed States," according to a Harvard Website.

Some of those who have worked with Clarke have expressed surprise at his sudden vitriolic attacks. Rice and others on the NSC insist that Clarke never made known his present grievances on fighting al-Qaeda or preparations for the battle with Iraq while he was in the White House, or even afterward during the early weeks of the Iraq fighting, when Rice and Clarke met for lunch. The White House has released Clarke's January

2003 resignation letter, which expressed no dissatisfaction or concern about the president's policies.

"I really don't know what Richard Clarke's motivations are," Rice told CNN, "but I'll tell you this: 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." Rice went further in an op-ed for the *Washington Post*, noting that, contrary to what he is saying now, Clarke never presented her with a plan to go after al-Qaeda. "In response to my request for a presidential initiative, the counterterrorism team, which we had held over from the Clinton administration, suggested several ideas, some of which had been around since 1998 but had not been adopted. No al-Qaeda plan was turned over to the new administration," she emphasized.

One of the most controversial points of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54

## HOLDOVERS HELD UP SECURITY PLAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

Clarke's book is his allegation that after 9/11, "The president dragged me into a room with a couple of other people, shut the door, and said, 'I want you to find whether Iraq did this.' Now he never said, 'Make it up.' But the entire conversation left me in absolutely no doubt that George Bush wanted me to come back with a report that said, 'Iraq did this.' He came back at me and said, 'Iraq! Saddam! Find out if there's a connection,' and in a very intimidating way."

The White House says it has no record of Clarke and Bush being together at that time. Clarke produced his former deputy, Roger Cressey, as a witness, to verify that the conversation did indeed occur. But Cressey, when questioned by the *New York Times*, "backed off Mr. Clarke's suggestion that the president's tone was intimidating." Another unnamed witness said the same, according to the *Times*.

"He's a very dedicated public servant, he's very credible, but he's selling books," said John Lehman, a member of the 9/11 commission, in talking to MSNBC the day before Clarke testified. The next day during the hearing, Lehman was disturbed that Clarke, whom he says he has admired for years, was destroying his credibility. "You've got a real credibility problem," Lehman told Clarke during the testimony. "Because of my real, genuine, long-term admiration for you," he said, "I hope you'll resolve that credibility problem, because I'd hate to see you become totally shoved to one side during a presidential campaign as an active partisan selling a book."

Is Clarke trashing President Bush for partisan reasons? He says he isn't. He implies he voted Republican in 2000. But what about the years since? According to Federal Election Commission (FEC) records, Clarke has been giving his money to Democratic friends — not Republicans — running for national office.

In 2002, while still on the Bush NSC, Clarke gave the legal maximum limit of \$2,000 to a Democratic candidate for Congress, Steve Andreasen, who tried to unseat Republican Rep. Gil Gutknecht of Minnesota. Andreasen had been director for defense policy and arms control on the Clinton NSC. In making his donations of \$1,000 on July 22 and another \$1,000 on Nov. 7, 2002, Clarke listed his occupation as "U.S. Government/Civil Servant," according to FEC records indexed with the Center for Responsive Politics.

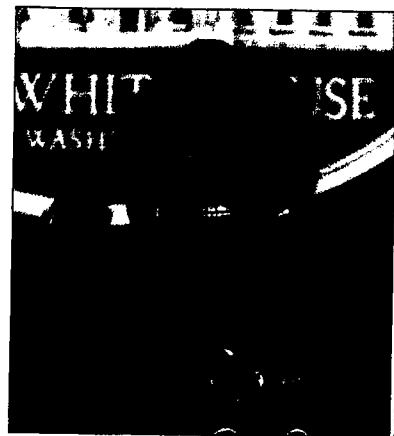
Clarke maxed out again in the 2004 election cycle, donating \$2,000 to another Clinton White House veteran, Jamie Metzl, who is running as a Demo-

## Condoleezza Rice Sets Record Straight

The following is from National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice's op-ed published in the March 22 *Washington Post*:

"We judged that the collection of ideas presented to us were insufficient for the strategy President Bush sought. The president wanted more than a laundry list of ideas simply to contain al-Qaeda or 'roll back' the threat. Once in office, we quickly began crafting a comprehensive new strategy to 'eliminate' the al-Qaeda network. The president wanted more than occasional, retaliatory cruise missile strikes. He told me he was 'tired of swatting flies.'

"Through the spring and summer of 2001, the national-security team developed a strategy to eliminate al-Qaeda — which was expected to take years. Our strategy marshaled all elements of national power to take down the network, not just respond to individual attacks with law-enforcement measures. Our plan called for military options to attack al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership, ground forces and other targets — taking the fight to the enemy where he lived. It focused on the crucial link between al-Qaeda and the Taliban. We would attempt to compel the Taliban to stop giving al-Qaeda sanctuary — and if it refused, we would have sufficient military options to remove the Taliban regime. The strategy



focused on the key role of Pakistan in this effort and the need to get Pakistan to drop its support of the Taliban. This became the first major foreign-policy strategy document of the Bush administration — not Iraq, not the ABM Treaty, but eliminating al-Qaeda.

"Before Sept. 11, we closely monitored threats to our nation. President Bush revived the practice of meeting with the director of the CIA every day — meetings that I attended. And I personally met with George Tenet regularly and frequently reviewed aspects of the counterterror effort. ...

"We now know that the real threat had been in the United States since at least 1999. The plot to attack New York and Washington had been hatching for nearly two years."

— JMW

## Clarke's Impressive Background

According to his biographical profile at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, where he is an adjunct lecturer, Richard Clarke is one of the longest-serving members of the National Security Council.

Clarke "held the titles of Special Assistant to the President for Global Affairs; National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism; and Special Adviser to the President for Cyber Security. Prior to his White House years, Clarke served for 19 years in the Pentagon, the Intelligence

Community, and the State Department. During the Reagan Administration, he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence. During the Bush (41) Administration, he was Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs and coordinated diplomatic efforts to support the 1990-1991 Gulf War and the subsequent security arrangements."

The biography makes no mention of his eight years of service in the Clinton administration.

— JMW

crat for Congress from Missouri. Metzl was a staffer on the Clinton NSC and worked for Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) as deputy staff director of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. With that donation, made on Sept. 15, 2003, after his resignation from the Bush NSC, Clarke listed his occupation as "Self Employed/Consultant."

FEC records show that Clarke reported no political contributions when he worked in the Clinton administration in the electoral cycles of the 1990s and 2000, when he said he was a Republican.

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