



Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror

[by Regan Morris]

With the recent release of the 9/11 Commission's report, we take a look back at the book that caused a great deal of controversy earlier this year by questioning President G.W. Bush's motives for war in Iraq. Is it worth the read?

The first chapter alone of Richard Clarke's *Against All Enemies* is worth the read. The former counterterrorism czar takes us inside the White House on Sept. 11 and tells the dramatic story of how a small group of White House officials dealt with the crisis - even amid threats that they would be the next target.

Clarke was three blocks away from the White House when the first plane hit the World Trade Center. Within minutes of the attack Condoleezza Rice, the national security advisor, put Clarke in charge of the crisis in the White House Situation Room. When Rice and Vice President Dick Cheney asked Clarke what he thought after the first tower fell, he said, "It's an al Qaeda attack and they like simultaneous attacks. This might not be over."

Against All Enemies is full of insider conversations - usually with Clarke cast as the ignored hero, warning both the Clinton and second Bush administration about al Qaeda.

It's no surprise that the Republican party has been howling in protest since the book came out. Clarke is the ultimate insider who started his federal career in 1973 under Nixon. But of all the presidents he worked for, he clearly favored the Clinton administration.

He describes how Clinton did much, but not enough, to go after al Qaeda and how the Bush administration was stuck in a Cold War mentality. One of the great failings of the Bush administration, in Clarke's view, is that Bush kept himself enclosed in a tight circle of advisors who failed to give him a full picture. Clarke also lauds Clinton's intellect

and ability to read the latest books while watching the news until the wee hours of the morning and says Bush doesn't read much and goes to bed at 10.

Clarke is clearly angry, but *Against All Enemies* is not your typical axe-grinding expose. Clarke knows too much - which makes the book a fascinating look into failures and successes of the intelligence communities and the various presidents he served.

Clarke left the White House because, he says, the current Bush administration invaded Iraq instead of focusing on destroying the real enemy: al Qaeda.

Aside from the brilliant first chapter, the most shocking parts of the book include details of how close the United States came to war with Iran in 1996. The most disturbing parts describe how marginal the current administration considered the threat of al Qaeda before Sept. 11 despite warnings from Clarke, the so-called terrorism czar, and CIA director George Tenet. He details conversations with top Bush administration officials "obsessed" with Iraq.

One quote from Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld's deputy at defense: "Well, I just don't understand why we are beginning by talking about this one man bin Laden... You give bin Laden too much credit. He could not do all these things like the 1993 attack on New York, not without a state sponsor."

Clarke was exasperated by the Bush administration from the start. After eight years of open links to Clinton and reasonable access

to the first President Bush, Clarke says it took months for an "urgent" meeting to brief the Cabinet on terrorism. He blames part of the problem on Rice's Cold War mentality and Bush's tight circle of advisors blocking access to others in the White House.

Rice and others said Clarke's group should focus only on "foreign policy" and not worry about terrorism in the United States.

After over three decades, Clarke left the government. In the epilogue to *Against All Enemies* he says members of the Counterterrorism Security Group "tried hard to stop the big al Qaeda attack" and that "I needed to tell you why I think we failed and why I think America is still failing to deal with the threat posed by terrorists distorting Islam."