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 advi-
sor, 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 si-
multaneous attacks. This might not be over.”

Against All Enemies is full of insider con-
sversations - 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 start-
ed 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 
足够的, 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 ex-
pose. 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 in-
adved 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 disturb-
ing 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 conversa-
tions 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 admin-
istration 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 Counter-
terrorism 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.”