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J'Accuse for the Bush Administration: A Review of Richard A. Clarke's *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror*

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BOOK REVIEW

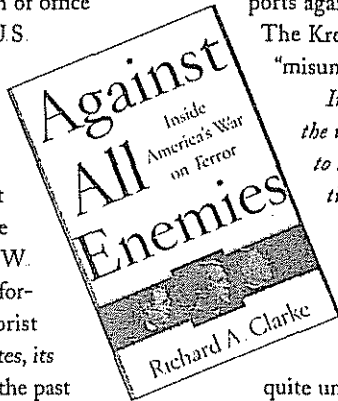
J'accuse for the Bush Administration

A Review of Richard A. Clarke's *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (2004)

Taking Richard Clarke literally, President George Bush is an enemy of the United States. The title and the preface of his best-selling account of America's struggle with terrorism refer to the oath of office sworn by officers of the U.S.

government to "support and defend the constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic." The enemies at issue are al Qaeda and the administration of George W. Bush. Clarke charges the former with numerous terrorist attacks on the United States, its friends and interests over the past decade. He charges the latter with failing to protect the nation against al Qaeda attacks, instead undertaking unnecessary war "to test personal theories or expiate personal guilt or revenge." He further accuses the administration of conspiring to use future terrorist attacks as a pretext for "further assaults on our rights and civil liberties." *Much like Emile Zola's "J'accuse" letter, what follows is a detailed affidavit in support of a complaint alleging high crimes and misdemeanors*

Notwithstanding the drama of these allegations, the most exciting section of the book is a first-hand account of Richard Clarke's September 11, 2001. As Chair of the White House's Counterterrorism Support Group, Clarke led the crisis response on that awful morning. With Vice President Dick Cheney relaying the orders, Clarke had the Executive Mansion evacuated and the president removed to a secure location. Some 4,400 civil aircraft were grounded, and NORAD (see Programs of Note, page 35) was ordered to shoot down those planes that failed to comply. Even before the first tower collapsed, the government obtained evidence that the hijackers were members of al Qaeda. Fearing a wider attack, Mayor Rudy Giuliani ordered the evacuation of Manhattan south of Canal



Street, and Clarke ordered the evacuation of landmarks and federal buildings across the country. The Coast Guard and then the Navy moved ships to defend the nation's major ports against the use of tankers as weapons. The Kremlin was also notified to forestall "misunderstanding and miscalculation."

In the face of mass murder, chaos, and the unknown, some special people manage to maintain their poise and work effectively. Clarke is one of those rare individuals. That is not to say everything remained cool, calm or collected in the White House throughout that terrible day. Clarke referred to the Vice President with a term

quite unsuitable for a dignified law review to republish except in articles analyzing freedom of expression. Clarke's language when inquiring how known al Qaeda operands were permitted to board the planes is similarly unprintable. Clarke's salty prose gives his narrative an additional veneer of verisimilitude. This is important because the book's content is not otherwise all that news. Virtually all the important information had already been made public prior to its publication. The notability of *Against All Enemies* stems not for the information it contains but for the credibility of its author – the person uniquely qualified to present the "real story" of America's war on terrorism.

While unique, Richard Clarke represents a type. He has dedicated his career to the technical work required for protecting his country. Over the course of three decades, he rose steadily but unremarkably through the ranks, owing to his zealous dedication to the mechanics of national security. Along the way, he managed portfolios ranging from nuclear weapons to intelligence, rising to the rank of assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs under President G. H. W. Bush. Having served two Republican presidents with distinction, he was appointed the first National Coordinator for Security,

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Infrastructure Protection and Counterterrorism by Bill Clinton. While G. W. Bush continued Clarke in that key position, he downgraded it to the sub-cabinet level Deputies Committee – a portentous signal about the importance the new president attached to terrorism prior to September 11, 2001. For half a year, Clarke worked to convene a Cabinet level meeting to address the

al Qaeda threat, a meeting that finally took place on September 4. Clarke implies that the Administration's relative neglect of the al Qaeda threat prior to 9/11 determined in great part what followed in Iraq and on the home front.

Clarke's most sensational claim is that the President immediately sought to link the attacks of September 11 to Saddam Hussein. Even before the dust had settled, President Bush grabbed Clarke to order him to "go back over everything, everything. See if Saddam did this. See if he's linked in any way." Defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz voiced similar sentiments in the effort to build a case for invading Iraq – an item at or near the top of their agenda long before September 11. Working with the Secretary of State and his Deputy to nip this misguided plan in the bud, Clarke vented "Having been attacked by al Qaeda, for us now to go bombing Iraq in response would be like invading Mexico after the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor." Indeed. Following the release of this book and Clarke's televised testimony before the 9/11 Commission, the Administration attempted to refute his claims. With apparent confirmation from such insider sources as those reflected in Bob Woodward's *Plan of Attack*, however, these efforts have waned.

Clarke clearly laments the fact that the President chose to attack Iraq rather than pursuing al Qaeda with single-minded determination. Clarke declaims also the President's stingy approach to homeland security, a concept he accepted only when forced upon him. In light of the failure to find WMD, the on-going turmoil in Iraq and the increased incidence of terrorist attacks around the world, his complaint continues to gain cogency.

Surprisingly, Clarke believes that "any leader whom one can imagine as President on September 11 would have declared a 'war on terrorism.'" To the contrary, even President Reagan's Navy Secretary John Lehman, a member of the 9/11 Commission, has recently observed, "Our enemy is not terrorism. Our enemy is violent, Islamic fundamentalism." As with the military campaign to depose the Ba'athist regime, many responsible analysts believe the "war on terrorism" is a tragic detour from the path to defeating al Qaeda and its allies. Members of a non-state network planned

and launched the attacks committing grave crimes against individuals, the United States and against humanity. In response, the President declared war against terrorism not on the network responsible for the attacks. Imagine that Winston Churchill had stood before Parliament in the dark days of 1940 and declared "War on Blitzkrieg." At a time when the nation faces truly significant threats, why invite a piling on by declaring war on every group that could possibly be said to employ terrorist tactics? This includes scores of groups and thousands of individuals who had not previously borne a grudge against the United States.

Instead of war in Iraq, Clarke's sweeping concluding chapter advocates expending national treasure on the fight to eliminate al Qaeda and its allies, stabilizing Afghanistan against a resurgence of the Taliban, and increasing America's own resilience to future attacks. At the same time, he expands on his concerns that John Ashcroft's mismanagement of civil liberties issues has undercut the willingness of "Americans to trust their government." In a widely overlooked passage, Clarke intriguingly concludes, "Thus, those of us who most cherish America's civil liberties should be in the forefront of advocacy for effective, appropriate security measures with meaningful oversight and review mechanisms, such as a Civil Liberties and Security Board."

Against all Enemies will likely serve as an important source for historians. The first hand accounts of the battles – bureaucratic and otherwise – waged against al Qaeda are supplemented by work by journalists (most notably Woodward), the 9/11 Commission, and eventually by additional memoirs. That said, I suspect that the debates of future historians have already been framed. "Either you're with us or you're against us." Publication of Clarke's book along with his highly public testimony before the 9/11 Commission launched the broader public debate. Several months later, with the widespread release of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the tide appears to be turning; polls indicate that for the first time a majority of the country believe that the conquest of Iraq was a mistake. This debate will continue long after the war has ended.

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