

Rice testifies before 9/11 commission: more cover-up and lies

By Barry Grey
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Thursday's hearing of the national commission to investigate 9/11, which took testimony from Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, was a bipartisan exercise in cover-up and duplicity. It was all the more grotesque, occurring as it did against the backdrop of US war crimes in Fallujah and other Iraqi cities that have already taken thousands of civilian lives, and led to more deaths and injuries of American soldiers who have been fed a non-stop diet of lies by those in Washington who authored the colonial enterprise.

That Rice could claim, "Today, along with many allies, we are helping the people of Iraq and Afghanistan to build free societies...to spread the blessings of liberty and democracy as alternatives to instability and terror," without being challenged by a single member of the commission—Democratic or Republican—points to the real purpose of the commission. Its primary political task is to conceal from the American people the connection between the tragedy of September 11, 2001 and US imperialist policy in general, and the conspiracy hatched by the Bush administration to invade and occupy Iraq and seize its oil resources, in particular.

With the US government engaged in murderous actions that are inflaming public opinion throughout the Muslim and Arab world, Rice's contention that the "war on terror" is staunching the growth of Islamist terrorism and enhancing the safety and security of ordinary Americans would be laughable, were not its implications so catastrophic.

The real question before the commission is not some "intelligence failure" prior to 9/11, but to what extent the Bush administration and top-level figures in the intelligence and military establishment pursued a deliberate policy of allowing a hijacking to occur, in

order to create the pretext for implementing a pre-existing agenda of using military force to establish US imperialist hegemony in the oil-rich Persian Gulf and Caspian regions.

The evidence pointing to such a conspiracy is ample and well documented. It has been underscored by the testimony only two weeks ago of former White House counterterrorism chief Richard Clarke. While Clarke, himself a long-time Washington operative and hard-line advocate of US military action, did not accuse the Bush administration of deliberately facilitating a terrorist attack within the US, he did indict the government for failing to take serious steps to ward off an anticipated terrorist attack within the US, and stated before the commission on March 24: "By invading Iraq, the president of the United States has greatly undermined the war on terrorism."

Clarke virtually accused the Bush administration of using the events of 9/11 as a pretext for going to war against Iraq, despite the firm consensus within the US intelligence establishment that Iraq had no connection either to the terrorist attacks or to Al Qaeda. He speaks for a section of the political establishment that considers the Iraq war a strategic blunder that has inflamed the Muslim world and strengthened Al Qaeda.

But the connection between the 9/11 attacks and the Bush administration's agenda for an American takeover of Iraq was pushed into the background by the commission members in Thursday's hearing. That this was the result of a calculated political decision on the part of the five Republicans and five Democrats on the panel was underscored by the publication of an op-ed piece in Thursday's *Wall Street Journal* by Democratic commission member Bob Kerrey. The former US senator and current president of the New School University in New York used the piece to reiterate his

full support for the Iraq war, writing, “I believe this commission must try to provide a foundation for bipartisan agreement on what should be done in Iraq and the broader war against radical Islamists who use terror as a tactic to try to destroy our will.”

The commission, consisting of trusted defenders of American imperialism, is well aware of the massive and growing popular opposition to the Iraq war, as well as wide-spread disbelief in the official line that 9/11 was simply the result of a “failure of intelligence” and could not have been prevented. It is also acutely conscious of the existence of bitter divisions and conflicts within the ruling elite, not over the strategic goal of establishing US global hegemony, but over the means and methods employed by the Bush administration.

Its real mandate is not to pursue a serious investigation and tell the American people the truth, but rather to engineer a whitewash in the guise of an impartial probe and prevent the internal conflicts within the political elite from spiraling out of control. Hence the extraordinary efforts of the commission’s chairman and co-chairman, former Republican governor of New Jersey Thomas Kean and former chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Lee Hamilton, to enforce a tone of bipartisan civility and give Rice the kid-gloves treatment.

This despite the fact that the Bush administration for weeks refused to allow Rice to testify in public and under oath, and only relented when the political storm created by Clarke’s appearance and his newly published account of 9/11, *Against All Enemies*, made the administration’s open stonewalling politically untenable.

As the commission, the media and both parties are well aware, the Bush administration opposed the formation of the panel for months after September 11, and only agreed to authorize its formation when families of 9/11 victims raised a public outcry. Since the commission’s establishment, the White House has systematically worked to sabotage its work by withholding documents and resisting the appearance of top administration officials. Only this week it was revealed that the administration is continuing its obstructionist tactics, refusing to turn over 57 documents dealing with anti-terrorism efforts under the Clinton administration.

Nevertheless, on the eve of Rice’s appearance, Kean and Hamilton told the press that they had instructed the rest of the commission members to, according to the account in the *New York Times*, “avoid questions that suggested partisanship and that could undermine the public perceptions of the commission’s work.”

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