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Terrorist Attacks

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INTERVIEW OF DR. CONDOLEEZZA RICE
BY BOB WOODWARD

(on deep background)

Office of the National Security Advisor

6:40 P.M. EDT

Q I understand there's some concern about me doing --

DR. RICE: Tell me what you have in mind.

Q I am doing a book, a history of this, and the President's first year. I was doing the tax cut -- (laughter) -- a footnote, now, in the book. And I also write for the paper. But this is strictly for the book, as I said. When I talked to the Vice President last week, he didn't want to talk for the book and I asked him some things for the paper and I quoted him generally. And if you have something I can use for the paper, that's fine; but I really want the serious, on-the-run history.

DR. RICE: Right. Why don't we consider it -- let's do it for the book and --

Q It's on deep background. I'm going to use things, check things. But I will not say where. You know, we probably could spend all evening on --

DR. RICE: Look, I think this can be an important history. I want to help you get it right, so we can do this tonight. If you need to come back, we'll do it again.

Q I'd like to come back again and again and again.

DR. RICE: Yes, again and again and again. Right, that's fine.

Q And we probably could spend the whole evening on September 11th. And what I would really love to get your recollection of how it evolved, what you saw, what you did, what you felt, just the emotions and the actions of that day.

DR. RICE: Sure. Well, I was standing right here at my desk, getting ready to go down to the senior staff meeting, to my

NSC staff meeting. And my executive assistant, Tony Crawford, came in and he said, a plane crashed into the World Trade Center.

And I thought, that's odd, that's a strange accident. I said, what kind of plane, Tony? And he said, twin engine, they think. And I had in mind, twin engine, small plane of some kind. And I said, I better call the President -- the President was in Florida. And it was an oddity. Often I travel with him, or Steve Hadley travels with him, when he travels domestically. But we decided not to that day. And Deborah Lower, who runs the Situation Room -- a Captain in the Navy -- was with him.

So I got a hold of Deborah, she got the President. I said, Mr. President, a plane crashed into the World Trade Center. And he said, that's a strange accident. I said, I'll let you know if I know anything more. And right about then Tony said, they think it was a commercial plane. And I said, they think it was a commercial plane. And that's all I knew.

So I went downstairs and I started my staff meeting. And usually, I just kind of go around the table and see what each of the senior directors have. And I got to about the third person and Tony came in and he handed me a piece of paper, it said, a second plane has crashed into the World Trade Center. This was probably about 9:10 a.m. or so.

And I said, it's a terrorist incident. Immediately, terrorist incident.

Q You thought terrorist?

DR. RICE: Immediately-- Immediately. I think I kind of stopped mid-sentence with whomever I was talking to, and I got -- Anna was in the staff meeting and I just -- so I got up and I said, find Dick Clark, who is the counter-terrorism guy. And I went into the Situation Room and I started to have them phone Rumsfeld and Tenet. And my first thought was to have an NSC principals meeting as quickly as possible here at the White House.

As I was doing that -- and Powell was in Peru, but I thought he was in Colombia. I knew he was going to Colombia and Peru. And I thought, oh, my God, if he's in Colombia, what a terrible thing that could be. So I had somebody trying to find Powell, somebody finding Rumsfeld. And right about then I turned around and the plane had crashed into the Pentagon.

Q Who told you that?

DR. RICE: I saw it on TV. I turned around -- I was in the Sit Room and all the duty officers were -- phones were ringing, things were pretty -- they were going pretty intensely down there. And I just saw it. And at that point I said, tell the

*Call to
Notes -
1st Tower 44*

*Sit Room
when 77
hits*

Secretaries to stay where they are, to go to a secure facility where they are.

Frank Miller, who does defense for me, had come down immediately. And we had a line to the President in Florida and he said, I'm coming back. And Frank said, are you sure you want him to come back. And I thought about it for a second and we said, you know, Mr. President, you should just hold.

And about that time, somebody took me by the arm and said, you have to get to the secure facility, the Vice President is already there. So I left the Sit Room. And I can tell you, I don't really remember getting from the Sit Room to getting to the secure facility, it's just kind of a blur.

Q This is the thing down --

DR. RICE: Down, right. So I got to the secure facility and the first thing I did was to pick up a telephone and call my aunt and uncle in Birmingham. And I said, tell everybody I'm all right, and I hung up. It just -- I knew that things were hitting Washington and family is very important to me, and I knew there was going to be panic when they saw what was happening. So I got down there and the Vice President said, we can't bring the President back. And I said, yes, sir, I think that's right.

Q Did he give a reason at that point? Had there been --

DR. RICE: Because the sense was Washington was under attack. There had been one other thing. There was a false report of a car bomb at the State Department --

Q That had made television.

DR. RICE: -- that had made television. About the time that I saw the Pentagon, this report came on about the -- so I can hardly describe the sense that everything is kind of happening and you don't quite know what's next.

And so the first thing that the Vice President did was to establish a line to the President. And the President was right there in the room, because the line -- he was flying, but Air Force One has very good COMs. And so we were sort of checking with him every -- the Vice President was, kind of every few minutes he was checking with the President.

The next thing that I did, anyway, when I got down there was that I called again to see where Powell was -- I still hadn't heard from Powell. And somebody told me he was in Peru, he was at a meeting -- and then felt more relaxed about that.

And Steve Hadley called -- I had asked Steve Hadley to call the State Department and tell Rich Armitage to get out a cable that said the United States government is up and running, it's

*1st thing is
line to
Powell: he
was flying
time
what's up?*

not been decapitated. I had a lot of nuclear war training in my career, a lot of games taught, simulations, continuity of government --

When?

Q Continuity of government as has Cheney.

DR. RICE: Right. And it was sort of the first thing that occurred to me was make sure the rest of the world knows that the United States government is --

Q Is that a cable to --

DR. RICE: All posts.

Q -- our embassies to tell the local governments?

DR. RICE: Right. Exactly. Immediate cable to all posts that says, go tell whomever you can find, the U.S. government is up and running.

About that time, a call came in from the Russians. And what had happened was that when we changed the defense condition -- Don Rumsfeld had asked the Vice President to tell the President that he wanted to change the defense condition.

Q Down to DEFCON One or --

DR. RICE: No, One is war. So I think we went from --

Q It's normally at Five.

DR. RICE: -- Five. Yes, and StrikeCOM is normally at Four, and I think we went to Four and Three. So Don did that and changed defense condition, which alerts the Russians. We have a system now by which -- since the accidental -- the Treaty to Prevent Military Accidents, there is actually an alert to the Russians.

And so the Russians called right away. And Putin got me on the phone -- he wanted to talk to the President, the President was flying, we couldn't quite hook them up, and so he talked to me and he said, we are standing down an exercise that we have underway just so there is no confusion. And it was interesting, that was a little bit emotional for me. I don't know quite why, but it was.

Putin

Q Gesture of support.

DR. RICE: Yes, a gesture of support.

Q And you said, what?

DR. RICE: And I said, thank you.

Q He speaks English?

DR. RICE: No, he spoke in Russian. This was through a translator. Although, I speak Russian, so I could understand him. But I always work through a translator.

I talked to the Minister of Defense, to Sergei Ivanov, as well. And they were talking about how this is really terrible, we need to call the President. And I said, he'll be at a place that he can return the call soon, but he's not able to do it right now.

So the next couple of hours were really working with Norm ^{Mineta} Mineta to try to locate the tail numbers that were still not reporting.

Q And there were two up, essentially, or that seemed to be maybe in the air.

DR. RICE: In the air, although, there were 22 that couldn't -- I think it was 22 that couldn't actually be firmly accounted for. There were two that looked troubling, but there were, like, 22 that were maybe off-course or nobody knew where they were. FAA was landing these planes -- it was a remarkable feat, in fact, how well they got everything safely to ground. We learned later the Canadians were taking planes; planes were actually landing on minimal strips for their size. They did a fantastic job of getting these planes down.

But there were 22 planes that were not really accounted for. And trying to match tail numbers, and finding tail numbers that were erroneous. That's what I remember about the next couple of hours. Mineta had asked -- the Vice President asked the President, should he ground all civil aviation. And the President said, yes, ground all civil aviation.

Q And how did the Vice President make this recommendation about go on to Louisiana and -- this thing that apparently was going around, there was some threat to the President.

DR. RICE: Right. What happened was, as I said, the minute I got to the -- the Vice President said he didn't think we should bring the President back. But a few minutes later, one of the communicators told us -- I think we were standing together -- that there had been a named threat against Air Force One. And at that point the question was, where could you take the President. And there were several candidates. One was Barksdale.

Q It was the named threat, that somehow they got the call sign, or something like that, of Air Force One?

DR. RICE: Right. Right. Somebody had said there was a threat --

22
planes
not
accounted
for

President decided to
ground all
civil
aviation

Threat to
Pres --
one of the
communicators
told
us "

Q Against Magnet Four or something like that?

DR. RICE: Exactly. That's right. We later learned that it was probably somebody in the communications channel that had actually used the code name, not whoever had called in. So it's now not clear whether there really ever was a threat against Air Force One. But I can tell you --

Q If you think there is, you have to act.

DR. RICE: -- if you think there is, you have to act. And especially in a circumstance like that, information is just flooding in and you're trying to sort for fidelity, but you're also trying to react to the most potentially damaging. And that, that there was a threat against Air Force One was pretty realistic under the circumstances, very realistic under the circumstances. -

Q So what happened next, then?

DR. RICE: So we were matching tail numbers and I remember saying to somebody, we need a log, we need to log what's happening here. Because you have probably 20 people trying to do things, and just making sure that everything is getting done is really important; making sure that you know what you've done is really important. tail #s
log

There was then a lot of back and -- well, the Vice President was trying to work with the President to kind of decide where he was going to go, because there was -- Barksdale was one possibility, Offutt was a possibility, Cheyenne Mountain was a possibility. And they took him first to Barksdale, and the question then was how to get a statement out. And there was very strong view held, particularly by the President himself, I think rightly, that he had to be the first -- he had to make the first statement.

Q To make his statement.

DR. RICE: But he was airborne, so you had to wait until he got to a place, and that's why they took him to a near location, so that he could make a statement. So Mary Matalin and Karen Hughes and Lynne Cheney were kind of working on the statement, and asking -- we were kind of talking about, well, what were the most important things for the President to say.

Q And this included "this will not stand," or a version of it?

DR. RICE: Something like that.

Q Yes, it was from the old --

DR. RICE: I actually never saw the final statement. I went off to do other things. But that was what we were focused on next.

Q What was the most important thing that happened next, now, in terms of important decisions somebody had to make about how to deal with this? - And what it meant -- I guess was it the video conference from Offutt?

DR. RICE: Now, the video conference came a little bit later. The President and the Vice President had had to talk about what to do because they had the CAP up. The first thing that Rumsfeld got up was the CAP. And then, the question was, what would you do if you had a plane that didn't respond. And I know the President really well, and I kept trying to imagine what that decision was like for him. He made it decisively; told the Vice President, you have to give them the authority to fire if it doesn't respond. I think that was probably the hardest and most important decision.

First thing Rumsfeld got was the CAP

How the O was what to do if no response

Q Was there a number of chances you would give the plane to respond or something like that, or was it just --

DR. RICE: I was not involved at that point. Rumsfeld worked out rules of engagement, which the President then approved. I don't know how many times the plane was given a chance to respond.

Q Someone said three.

ROE for shot down - 3 chances?

DR. RICE: Possibly. I don't know.

Q Then what happened next that was important? I mean, obviously -- anything about that decision? I mean, that's -- as Cheney said in, I guess, the Russert interview, that was the toughest decision the President made. Was there an expectation also that that might have to be, that there were planes up that had been in the hands of hijackers?

DR. RICE: Oh, yes. In fact, we did not know for a while whether the Pennsylvania plane had crashed, or whether we'd had to bring it down. And that was awful. You know, later on, learned that they'd struggled it to the ground. But, sure. Because putting the two together, you had now rules of engagement that you would bring down a plane that wasn't responding. You had Norm Mineta saying, okay, we're down to 20, we're down to 18, we're down to -- as they reported in and got to the ground.

There was some confusion about a plane that had supposedly left Madrid and was off-course, headed for Dulles, that turned out to be an erroneous report. I mean, there were several erroneous reports of planes that were squawking and were off-course.

Q So, then, what happened -- I'm kind of -- what happened next, because I want a narrative of what happened that first day.

DR. RICE: After -- the next thing that I remember -- and I hope I'm getting the events in sequence, because it was pretty -- it's a situation -- I think I'm getting them in sequence. Once a statement was made and we had established the President was going to Offutt, I got busy establishing a National Security Council meeting, or arranged for a National Security Council meeting.

I said to the President, do you want to have a National Security Council meeting when you come back, or do you want to do it from Offutt? He said, I want to do it as soon as I'm in a place that I can do it. So, when he got to Offutt, we got the National Security Council together. Armitage sat in for Powell; Powell was still trying to get back from Peru. And the President immediately said, this -- somebody's declared war on America. This is an attack on America, and we're at war. And what struck me is that he --

WAR

Q This is in the video conference?

DR. RICE: This is in the video conference. He said, we are going to have the support of the world. Already, he thought of it as a kind of international issue. So the two things that really stuck with me about that video conference is that, one, that he characterized it not as a terrorist attack, but as a war, and that he characterized it as global in nature.

And then, most of the NSC was taken up with issues about the air traffic, and where did we have CAPs up, and what did we know about the damage in New York. And at that point, we knew almost nothing about the condition in New York or at the Pentagon. Don knew more about the Pentagon because he was there.

The President was very concerned to find out what was happening on the rescue -- the FEMA Director was off at an exercise, Joe was off at an exercise, so we had a kind of deputy FEMA director sitting in to try to figure out what was going on in New York. And I remember being struck that the missing pieces of information, actually, were what was going on in New York; we didn't have very good information about that.

Q In that first video conference, did it come up, who did this?

DR. RICE: In the first video conference, the assumption that everybody kind of shared was that it was global terrorists. I don't think, Bob -- and I would be willing to go back and check this for you -- I don't believe anybody said this is likely al Qaeda. I don't think so.

NO AQ
Ret in
1st Video
Cont

Q In the first video conference.

DR. RICE: In the first video conference. By nighttime, yes.

Q By nighttime, yes. They were saying 95 percent that it's bin Laden and al Qaeda.

DR. RICE: Right, right. By the time they were putting together the President's remarks for the Oval, that had come together.

But there's something to understand here. We had, in the late summer, been working on counterterrorism and working on al Qaeda, and working on trying to get serious about going after al Qaeda. And so, the principals and the President had a base of knowledge about this organization that probably three months earlier we wouldn't have had, because we'd been through this drill of how were we going to deal with al Qaeda. It was a major threat. We knew that they had done the embassy bombings, suspected they had done the Cole. We'd been through a summer where there was a lot of noise in the system.

Q There really was, wasn't there?

DR. RICE: Yes.

Q I mean, by some accounts, Tenet was really kind of almost running around saying, it's going to happen, it's going --

DR. RICE: George was very concerned that the nets were up and there was a lot of chatter.

Q It looked like it would be abroad.

DR. RICE: It looked like it was abroad. And, in fact, what we did was to button up abroad pretty effectively. There was a lot of chatter around the Genoa G8, and so there had been a lot of security precautions taken around that. G8

Q Wasn't there a warning about they were going to go after the President also?

DR. RICE: Yes, yes. There were a couple. And one very serious one. And so we had done a lot abroad. One of the things that struck me is that the protocols for what you do abroad are pretty clear --

Q They're used to it.

DR. RICE: Exactly. So the only point I'm making is that everybody was kind of on the same page about al Qaeda, having come out of this review that had been done.

Q Was there an action plan pending then from that review?

DR. RICE: Yes.

Q If there had been no September 11th, it would have --

DR. RICE: There was an action plan that probably would have been dated September 10th. *Action Plans dated 9/10*

Q Is that right? Dated September 10th. A PPD, or a finding or --

DR. RICE: No, no. It was a directive that would have --

Q How come it didn't --

DR. RICE: September 11th happened.

Q I see. But it would have been dated the 10th?

DR. RICE: Yes. I mean, it would have probably gone -- it would have gone to the President, and he would have --

Q I see. I see.

DR. RICE: Yes, it's a little eerie, actually.

Q That's really --

DR. RICE: So people were working the problem, and so there was a common basic knowledge about al Qaeda.

Q Then what else happened in that video conference? Remember anything anybody else said?

DR. RICE: The video conference was only -- no, as I said, it was a combination of -- well, the President said, I want to be ready to make a statement when I come back, so I want that worked while I'm getting back there. I'm going to get back there as fast as I possibly can. He was getting a lot of advice to not come back that night. By the time he got on the video conference, he decided he was coming back that night.

Q And the reason not to come back was still threats?

DR. RICE: I think people were still worried.

Q Because someone said -- and this, again, is for the history -- that there was a direct threat on the White House and the "Ministry of Foreign Affairs," as it was kind of picked up, meaning the State Department.

DR. RICE: -- the State Department --

Q -- but that that's what somebody used.

DR. RICE: Yes. Because there was -- again, there was chatter that there had been a hit on the White House, assuming, then, that that had been a target that people expected to have been hit.

Q I see. Which seemed to be -- and then there was something about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

DR. RICE: Yes, because -- that's the State Department, clearly.

Q Yes, right.

DR. RICE: But again --

Q That was a target.

DR. RICE: That was a target. And since we don't really know how many of these didn't ever actually happen --

Q What's your best surmise now? Was there a fifth plane, a sixth plane?

DR. RICE: I suspect there might have been a fifth plane -- yes.

Q So, anything else at the video conference?

DR. RICE: No. The video conference ended, and it was probably mid-afternoon at that point. And we went back to worrying about what was happening with the air traffic, what was happening on borders. Calls were starting to come in from around the world by that time. And people started really preparing for what the President was going to say that night.

There was never any doubt that -- and there was a little back-and-forth of, should he do the NSC meeting first and then do the speech, but we wanted to give Powell a chance to get back; he wasn't quite back yet.

And so, when he got back -- oh, there's another part of this which, of course, was what was going on with the Congress. And the -- because it was another obvious target. And so, the Vice President -- actually, the President had asked the Vice President to call the leadership. And so, he talked -- they talked to the leadership. Mrs. Bush was actually on the Hill. And it was a question of what should you do about the Congress at that point, because as I said, it was an obvious target, too. So that was another set of of issues that people were trying to deal with at the time.

Q And then in his speech that night, the President didn't say we were at war. I remember hearing from people he was going to say it, and he didn't. And then he did the next day or --

DR. RICE: He did it the next day, yes. It wasn't a conscious decision not to say it. What he wanted to do was just to express -- the most important thing that he wanted to express was that somebody would pay. And there was -- Karen Hughes, I can remember, asking what would he need to say in this. And we talked about he would need to reassure the American people and so forth, but also, that it was important that he made clear that it wasn't just the terrorists, but those who harbored them.

Q When was the first time you saw him physically when he came back, and what did you say and what did he say?

DR. RICE: I went out to meet him at the South Lawn. And I just said, the NSC is -- I said, the NSC is scheduled for 9 p.m. That's what I said. And he said, that's fine, okay.

Q There was no, kind of, oh my God, we've --

DR. RICE: No, it was kind of non-verbal. We looked at each other for a second, and what it occurred to me to say is, the NSC is scheduled for 9 p.m. And then we walked down together, and got down. And he said, I should go right to the Oval. And I said, no, they want you to go to the secure facility. And he said, why? And I said, well, everybody's there, the Vice-President's there, Andy's there. I guess Andy was him -- at least the Vice President. And I said, and Mrs. Bush is coming there, too. And so we went down into the secure facility.

He must have stopped someplace along the way, because I got there and he wasn't there yet. But then Laura came in, and then he came in. And everybody kind of looked at each other. You know, there were a few hugs, kind of -- and then we started working on what he was going to say.

Q And then he said -- and then what important happened at the NSC meeting that night, in terms of decision-making?

DR. RICE: There really weren't any decisions taken that night. It was a review of what had happened, with now everybody in the room, face to face. And the President called a meeting for the next morning. And that's -- it was really just a review. And it was a large group, because by that time, Allbaugh was back, and Mineta was there, and it was -- the Attorney General was there. It was a large group. It wasn't just the NSC. It was the expanded NSC.

Q Now, to kind of jump way ahead, if you were to say, this is the most difficult, the hardest decision that he had to make in this whole period, from September 11th to now, the 24th of October, can you isolate one or two -- I mean, obviously, there are dozens, but --

DR. RICE: I think the rules of engagement on -- the CAP, on civilian aircraft, was very, very difficult. But again, he was decisive about it. I'm probably -- what do you call that -- transference, a little bit of transference, because I can't imagine having to make that decision. But he thought about it; he made it.

Q And Cheney said, he -- he, Cheney -- recommended; said, you kind of have to.

DR. RICE: No. He said, Mr. President, what do you -- here are your choices. What do you want to do?

Q What were the choices?

DR. RICE: You know, you can have them call back, and that won't get it done, because of the time. You can try to force it down. But your basic decision is, if you can't force it down, what do you do? And what do you want to do? Do you want to tell them to engage? And I do not believe that Cheney said, "I recommend." The President said, I've given the order to bring it down, if necessary.

Q And someone said the next day, Cheney said to the President, do you want me to set up kind of a process of reviewing everything, and then we'll report to you? The President said, I'll chair the meetings. What happened there, and when was it? The next morning?

DR. RICE: It was the next day. We had the NSC meeting. Again, it was a pretty big NSC meeting, because -- expanded NSC -- because we still had on Wednesday, we still had a process by which we were doing both the domestic stuff and the foreign policy in the same meeting. And I remember thinking to myself, it was a little unwieldy, because you had so much to try to do.

Q Too many people in the room.

DR. RICE: And I just -- I thought that first meeting didn't work very well, because there was just kind of too much to do. So I understand that the Vice President said, I could convene this group and we could report to you, and then somebody could convene that group, or I could convene a domestic group, and they could report to you. I think that was the context.

And the President said, no, I'll chair. And what we did at that point though, was to break it up, and begin to have a traditional NSC, and then to have the domestic folks come in for a while, and then go to a traditional NSC, so we could start to wrap our arms around the issues.

Q What was then the next most difficult decision in this whole period of September and October, that shows here you have

to make a choice. Like deciding to initiate military action on the 7th, I would suspect would be --

DR. RICE: I think that was kind of a natural outgrowth. Somebody asked me if the President ever considered that there might not be a military action. Never. It was always a question of where in the campaign, what part would it play, what would be its target. But the President, I think knew from the very beginning that military action was going to be a part of this. He so much as said so that first day.

Q He did? In what forum?

DR. RICE: In the NSC, when he started saying, we have to start thinking about what we're going to do, militarily; what we're going to do, diplomatically. Now, the fact is that the diplomatic piece by Thursday -- by Wednesday morning was already underway. NATO had decided that it wanted to try to invoke Article 5. I mean, things were moving. And Powell had started to kind of manage that and push that piece forward. But the President, I think, never even considered that he wouldn't at some point use military force.

Q Was there ever considered the possibility of negotiating with the Taliban?

DR. RICE: No.

Q Was it ever kind of, maybe we should --

DR. RICE: No. I think that this is part of --

Q Send Jim Baker or somebody?

DR. RICE: No. I think this is partly because there had been -- this was a group that everybody knew pretty well already, and that you were going to negotiate with the Taliban sort of never occurred to anybody. That they might split, or that they might decide to hand him over, maybe. But the President was pretty clear really early on that there were going to be really strict conditions, and they'd either be met or they wouldn't be met.

I want to go back to the difficult decisions, though. A decision that he had to make was that first night, whether to say we'll go after the terrorists, or we'll go after those who harbor them, because --

Q It is the Bush doctrine.

DR. RICE: It is the Bush doctrine. That's actually a huge decision, because everybody always talked about state-sponsored terrorists and state-sponsored terrorism. But to actually say, we're going to hold -- and I think the language says, we will not

treat differently or we will not differentiate between those who did it and those who harbor them. That was a big decision.

Q How was that made? Was there a discussion of it? Were there points of view? You don't have to say that right now --

DR. RICE: There were no contrary points of view that that was important to say. Whether it was important to say then, in the first statement, or whether that's what we did as a part of rolling it out -- I don't think there were particularly contrary views, but I remember saying to him, you can say it now, or you have -- you'll have other opportunities to say it. But he said -- I think he said, what do you think? And I said, frankly, I think you should say it now. And he said, so do I. He said, we've got to get it out there now.

Q Your reasoning being --

DR. RICE: That the first words matter more than almost anything else.

Q But in a sense, you were declaring a much broader war.

DR. RICE: That's right. That's right. That's right. We'd had a little bit of a discussion of that, after all, again, as a part of this review of al Qaeda and their relationship to the Taliban. And by that time, I think the assumption was that it was al Qaeda.

Q It was more than an assumption, wasn't it?

DR. RICE: Yes.

Q It was really kind of --

DR. RICE: Yes. Well, when you started to put two and two together, the chatter -- yes, by then, it was more than an assumption.

Q What other -- what about the decisions to take military action and the timing of why October 7th, and the -- apparently there was incorporated in this the notion of low collateral damage was the standard in the attack, and they'd have to come back to him for high collateral damage, which I guess is still the case.

DR. RICE: Well, yes, but going back, there were other important pieces along here, which is that after -- he decided on Friday, I guess Friday morning -- no, Thursday morning, that he wanted to take his NSC principals to Camp David, for an extended discussion of what we faced.

What struck me about it was that the President never -- you never had a sense that he was hurried about it, or that it had to

happen today. It was all very measured, and taking his time to work through the elements. And I think when foreign visitors have come in here, they've said that served us very, very well, because the kind of caricature that America was going to start firing off cruise missiles on September 12th suddenly bit the dust.

So he went -- we had the memorial service that Friday morning. I think that was a really important watershed, kind of for everybody.

Q The memorial service?

DR. RICE: The memorial service.

Q And his comments were so brief.

DR. RICE: But driving down Massachusetts -- up Massachusetts Avenue, the people out that had flags --

Q Were you with him, or were you --

DR. RICE: I was with Andy in the control car. And the flags up, and the Russian bells were ringing. It was a very emotional morning. And the service was very emotional. The President, I remember thinking when Don did the Lord's Prayer, God, I hope he can make it through this.

There had been a Cabinet meeting that morning, and he'd said, this is going to be tough to make it through, because America's hurting, and this is going to be tough. And so the woman does the Lord's Prayer, and I'm thinking, how can anybody make it through the speech? And he stood up, and he was very composed, and he made this great speech.

Q There's a title in that, "a time of our choosing."

DR. RICE: Yes. Yes. There really is.

Q Who wrote that?

DR. RICE: Mike Gerson and Karen Hughes wrote it --

Q The same team.

DR. RICE: Yes, the same team. And they're a great team.

So we go through and I remember thinking, why aren't we singing "The National Anthem" at the end? And when we started "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which I had not heard in 20 years, you could feel everybody kind of stiffen and this sort of sense of resolve. There really was this sort of transition from sorrow to kind of resoluteness.

So the President went off to New York, and he said, you go to Camp David, to me. And the Vice President, Powell, Rumsfeld and I went to Camp David and had dinner the night before.

Q On Friday?

DR. RICE: On Friday.

Q What happened there at that dinner?

DR. RICE: Well, first of all, we ate buffalo, which was delicious. And then we sat around and we talked about kind of what we were facing and how to try to frame it up the next day so that you could really make use of that time. What kinds of decisions had to be taken. What kinds of issues had to be engaged or joined.

Q If I'd been there taking notes then, it's the Vice President, yourself, Powell and Rumsfeld.

DR. RICE: Right.

Q Kind of the key elements of this -- the four pillars. What would have been the significant conversation and discussion and points of view, or where are we? I mean, there is a moment of major significance.

DR. RICE: Length of struggle. And some concern that there might be impatience to do something quickly. I remember, you know, these three Gulf War veterans talking about the long buildup to the Gulf War and the 100-day bombing campaign, and then the ground war, and a kind of realization by everybody that this was not going to work that way. This was going to be different.

Q It was a 40-some day, whatever, bombing campaign --

DR. RICE: Right --

Q -- and a 100-hour ground campaign.

DR. RICE: Right, 100-hour war -- that's right. Exactly -- 40-day, right, and 100-hour. And kind of listening to that and thinking, everybody kind of coming to the realization that wasn't going to be what this is like, this is going to be very hard.

I remember Don, in particular -- interestingly, for a Secretary of Defense -- saying, you know, it's really important to feature the other elements of this. And that's been very much a part of what he's counseled all along, that this is not just a military element, this is --

Q Now, I understand, when he was asked, what can you do now, he said, not much.

DR. RICE: That's right. Not much that's effective.

Q Pardon?

DR. RICE: Not much that's effective.

Q Yes, that's effective, which is -- in other words, we can make some fireworks, but we haven't got --

DR. RICE: I mean, there was talk about not just throwing in a few cruise missiles, not trying to make it look good for TV. But it was at that level. It wasn't sort of specific policy recommendations, it was more kind of framing.

Q What was Cheney's position, and what was the focus of his --

DR. RICE: It was -- everybody was saying pretty much the same things. I don't remember -- I don't think Cheney had a specific --

Q Do you know what was on Powell's mind?

DR. RICE: On Powell's mind was a lot -- the fact that we had gotten extraordinary support and --

Q People were at our doorstep, yes.

DR. RICE: People were at our doorstep, and how were we going to really solidify that and bring it to fruition.

There was talk back and forth about how hard it is to manage a coalition. This was a coalition that was different than the Gulf War coalition. But it was at that level. It wasn't sort of specific policy.

Q And then the President came back that night, late.

DR. RICE: The President came back that night, late, and --

Q Did you see him then?

DR. RICE: I did not see him that night. I talked to him by phone that night, and he asked if there's anything he ought to know. And I said, there's really not much new.

Q And on that Friday night, it's pretty clear it's bin Laden and al Qaeda at that point?

DR. RICE: Yes, yes.

Q Was there discussion then of, okay, if we're going to have this broad war on terrorism, we have to go to Iraq and Colombia and --

DR. RICE: No, not yet. Although, again, because we had a database about al Qaeda, everybody knew it was worldwide. I think it wasn't until the intelligence briefing the next morning by George that we actually knew it was 60 countries. I mean, that was news to people. But that it was widespread -- I mean, we'd been dealing with it in the Philippines because of the kidnappings of those people. So we knew that this organization was worldwide.

Q So the meeting Saturday morning -- because this was a very long discussion, I understand.

DR. RICE: Yes, yes.

Q Tell me about that in a real, kind of, strategic --

DR. RICE: It was really a strategic -- this was strategic. This --

Q And who was there and how --

DR. RICE: Powell, Rumsfeld, the Vice President, George Tenet, Andy Card, myself, Paul Wolfowitz was there. Rich Armitage had decided to stay back because this was really heavy coalition-building time. Steve Hadley, Scooter Libby.

Q And then what was the discussion? Take me through that as much -- because, as I understand it, it's really kind of -- this is, we're making the policy. -

DR. RICE: Well, it started out with an intelligence brief from George. And he talked about what al Qaeda was, what we knew, how -- kind of, why do we know what we know, and why do we know who this is. And so there was a fairly extensive intelligence brief.

Colin reviewed where we were with various players, internationally. I remember he reviewed what had happened in the U.N., did we want more to happen in the U.N. right now? Everybody agreed we didn't actually want more in the U.N. right now because we didn't actually have anything -- we didn't know what we wanted to do, so let's wait.

There had been a lot of discussion -- I'm sorry, John Ashcroft was there, too. And Bob Mueller, the FBI Director. Again, there was a kind of review of where we were at home. But we were very focused on understanding the region. Most of this morning, that morning, was -- we talked about the kind of financial campaign; that piece had been done.

Q O'Neill wasn't there?

DR. RICE: I don't think he was. I think we'd already gotten that underway at one of the earlier meetings.

The financial piece was underway. The diplomatic piece was underway. And everybody was starting to think what kind of military options would we have. But that necessitated a really thorough look at the region. And I remember that we had a big map out in front of us, and everybody looking at Afghanistan and thinking, Afghanistan, it's just -- Afghanistan, great. Because not a place that brings up a lot of confidence in people.

And then starting to put the pieces in place -- what did this mean for the Central Asians? What would it mean for the Russians? The kind of instability in the region. And then a lot of focus on Pakistan, that you couldn't do any of this without Pakistan, and that this was going to be extremely difficult for Musharraf and for Pakistan.

And it was probably out of that meeting -- I know, out of that discussion that you got a lot of focus on how could you strengthen the relationship with Musharraf and with Pakistan.

Q And not make too many heavy requests of him that he could not --

DR. RICE: That's right. I think -- because it started out with, we need Pakistan to do this, we need Pakistan to do that, we need Pakistan to do this. And then a sense, well --

Q It was the Vice President, or somebody saying --

DR. RICE: The Vice President.

Q Yes -- saying, now, wait a minute. We have to be very gentle.

DR. RICE: That's right. Because -- because this is a region that if Pakistan goes bad, you have unleashed a whole other set of demons.

I remember spending a lot of time on understanding kind of how the Taliban had risen, the links between the Taliban and al Qaeda, was it possible to think about a Taliban that might turn on al Qaeda, or were al Qaeda and the Taliban really one.

Q Conclusion being?

DR. RICE: The conclusion at that time being, well, probably hard to imagine the Taliban turning on al Qaeda, but maybe worth a try.

We had a lot of discussion at that level, a lot of facts getting on the table. People talking through the difficulties of the region. And then the President -- people kept coming in and saying, when do you want lunch? He finally said, 12:45 p.m. -- you know, just leave -- 12:45 p.m. And he said, okay, we're going to go have lunch, and then I want everybody to take a couple of hours and go exercise and go rest, and just get away for a minute. And then I want everybody back here at 4:00 p.m. and I want us to start -- I want to hear what you think we ought to do.

There was discussion of how broad should it be, how much could you bite off at once. But the big Iraq today kind of thing -- by that meeting, people were very -- by the end of that Camp David meeting, I think there was consensus that you had phases to this and we're going to concentrate on al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Q And that the first phase was going to be Afghanistan, al Qaeda, bin Laden.

DR. RICE: Right, right. There was also agreement that you wanted to have other phases. Not necessarily Iraq, but other phases; that this wasn't going to be a war on al Qaeda and the Taliban, this was a war on terrorism.

Q And was the term "first phase" used as --

DR. RICE: I think "initial phase" might have even been used.

Q "Initial phase." And that was pretty clearly decided.

DR. RICE: Well, it was discussed. What happened was that the President then went around and said to everybody, tell me what you think. And so people sort of -- and there really -- Bob, it wasn't a lot of disagreement by then. There were different emphases --

Q But Paul was on this -- a little bit of his --

DR. RICE: Well, the President actually asked his principals. He asked his principals. He didn't ask his deputies, he asked his principals.

At the end of the going-around, he said, thanks very much, I'm going to go think about it. And then we all went off and -- Rumsfeld and Powell left. I believe the Vice President did, too. And we stayed and we had dinner and --

Q Who?

DR. RICE: I did, and Andy, and Steve Hadley. But we --

Q And Tenet, or --

DR. RICE: No, Tenet, I think -- Tenet stayed, yes, Tenet stayed. But there were families there, so it was a social evening. It wasn't -- there was not much more work that night.

And then the next morning, the next day, we came back to Washington. And the President said, come in for a minute, I want to talk to you. And he said, I think I know what I want to do. And so he talked while I --

Q And this was in the Oval Office?

DR. RICE: No, this was in his office upstairs in the Treaty Room. And I made notes of what he wanted to do. He wanted to destroy al Qaeda; he wanted to -- the Taliban was to be told in no uncertain terms that they had to turn over al Qaeda or they would suffer the same fate. He wanted to -- he directed the Secretary of Defense to do some thing for military planning, for that eventuality. So there was a kind of road map.

And I put that together and I put it into a memo for the principals, which the President, the next morning, used to --

Q Monday or Tuesday?

DR. RICE: Monday morning. Monday morning.

Q Used -- and the memo, how long?

DR. RICE: It was one page. One page of steps that he wanted taken.

Q How many steps altogether?

DR. RICE: Twelve, something like that. Eleven or twelve. Because it was also homeland security, things like that.

After the Monday morning meeting, people went off to --

Q This is an NSC-called, war cabinet meeting?

DR. RICE: Right, right. And at that point, it was interesting, we did have a discussion -- the President and I had a discussion, how did he think about the structure now. Because normally, the principals would meet and bring things up to the NSC. And he decided he wanted to have the NSC meet every day. Not the principals, the NSC, which means he chaired every day. And we're still doing that now.

So -- because the normal process is the deputies through the principals, through the NSC. And he decided he wanted to chair the NSC every day.

There were a couple days of kind of putting all that in play, getting briefings. It was -- actually, Don reaffirmed that he didn't yet have anything. The President was very patient --

Q Was Rumsfeld able to say then, but by a certain date, we will, or --

DR. RICE: He said, we'll start working, basically.

Q Because I had heard October 10th as a date that was floated around.

DR. RICE: There really wasn't a date that was key.

What we did was -- it was about that time that Karen -- I think the President told her that he'd like to consider making a speech to the nation. They started thinking about, well, maybe the Congress, or should he do it from the Oval again, or so forth. But he really, early on, had in mind that he was going to use this as an opportunity to lay a foundation. And the interesting thing is that that memo or that set of policies got translated into the speech. So the speech became the public manifestation of what he told the NSC. That's where you got al Qaeda is -- so when people have asked me, well, were there debates about what would go in the speech, no.

Q It was just a matter of taking that memo --

DR. RICE: It was a matter of taking the policy -- now, who he would thank and what people would show up, and all that, that was all being -- but the guts of it, the policy was decided at that NSC. So there wasn't any debate left about who else were you going after, or anything like that. That was all done by that Monday.

Q And the Iraq issue -- is it clear to say when -- really on that Saturday, he'd settled that we're going to do the initial phase --

DR. RICE: I know by that Sunday, he'd settled, because that's when he told me. I don't -- I really do not know what he thought leaving that room on Saturday, because he kept his own counsel, and he went off and he thought about it.

Q Did he talk to Cheney or other people, individually?

DR. RICE: I think he went off and he thought about it.

And then, the speech -- this all got articulated in the speech, the ultimatum to the Taliban and all of that got communicated in his speech.

Q A very strong speech. Very strong speech.

DR. RICE: Very strong, powerful speech.

Q I shouldn't overstay my welcome.

DR. RICE: Well, the speech is a good place to sort of stop. Because once the speech was out there and the public articulation of the policy was out there -- I don't want to leave you with the impression, Bob, that Iraq fell off the apple cart. I mean, the President has said many, many times, Iraq is a problem. It was a problem before September 11th, it's a problem after September 11th. We want to see whether or not, in fact, there is a connection.

Q And it's not there yet, is it, in terms of evidence?

DR. RICE: Well, look, I think that you don't have to link Iraq to September 11th to say Iraq is a threat to American interests and security. If we were doing any kind of normal investigation, like the Cole, for instance, we wouldn't yet be drawing conclusions about who was involved. It took -- what -- a year to do the Cole. It took almost two years to do the embassy bombings. So this is on a fast track. But trying to draw connections a month and a half after just isn't possible. That work is still going on.

Non-Responsive Material

Non-Responsive Material

Q You have a wonderful narrative sense -- you do, really. I would expect you to.

DR. RICE: Well, thank you.

Q It's a very clear picture of the process, obviously to be refined more. But I really appreciate it. And I'll be back to get some of the memories of that now, because if we're in this for years, you'll say --

DR. RICE: When was that again?

Q - October 2001?

DR. RICE: That's right. It already seems like a long time.

Q What's the hardest part of your job?

DR. RICE: Hardest part of my job? Keeping all the balls in the air. I am really glad to see Tom Ridge come, because for a while -- and I can tell you -- dealing with the Taliban and Afghanistan, the Russians and the upcoming Putin meeting, and the anthrax cases in Florida was -- it is a full-time job to worry about protecting the United States.

Q Oh, listen, if you do that and nothing else, that's a big achievement.

DR. RICE: A big achievement. But the hardest part is --

Q It's scary. I've dug into some of that stuff and I just -- too much out there.

DR. RICE: But the best part of my job is that this is a great team. It's a wonderful group of people. And everybody is very focused, but nobody panics about anything. I think it's partly because they're veterans.

Q That's critical.

DR. RICE: All right. Thank you.

END

7:50 P.M. EDT