

Former FBI translator says Rice lied about government knowledge of terrorist threats

What did Bush and Rice know of the September 11 plot?

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At one point during the week dominated by Richard Clarke's book and testimony, President Bush declared in seeming exasperation, "The facts are these. George Tenet briefed me on a regular basis about the terrorist threats to the United States of America. And had my administration had any information that terrorists were going to attack New York City on September the 11th, we would have acted."

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld repeated this declaration almost word for word in his testimony before the 9/11 commission. He said, "I know of no intelligence during the roughly six-plus months leading up to September 11 that indicated terrorists intended to hijack commercial airlines and fly them into the Pentagon or the World Trade Center."

This curiously legalistic phrasing raises a number of questions: Did the administration have information that terrorists were going to attack some other city, or attack New York on a different day? Were they told of a different method of attack than hijacking commercial airliners, or were they told of the hijacking plot, but not that the planes would be used as weapons?

Rice was widely quoted in 2002 declaring that no one in the Bush administration could have imagined that airplanes would be hijacked and used as missiles to destroy buildings. In a private communication to the 9/11 commission, she has now retracted that assertion, after widespread publicity about CIA and National Security Council studies going back to 1995-96 on the danger of airplanes being used as weapons.

Rice apparently reversed herself again by writing in an op-ed column for the *Washington Post* on March 23, "Despite what some have suggested, we received no intelligence that terrorists were preparing to attack the

homeland using airplanes as missiles."

Now an eyewitness has come forward to testify that specific warnings about Al Qaeda plans to use airplanes as weapons were given to senior US officials during the months preceding the September 11 attacks.

In an interview with the British daily newspaper the *Independent*, published April 2, a former translator for the FBI with top-security clearance said she has testified about such warnings at a closed session of the 9/11 commission.

Sibel Edmonds, a 33-year-old Turkish-American who is fluent in Turkish, Farsi (Persian) and Azerbaijani, was hired on September 13, 2001, by the FBI to translate documents and transcribe wiretapped conversations. She had access to information "circulating within the FBI in the spring and summer of 2001 suggesting that an attack using aircraft was just months away and the terrorists were in place," according to the *Independent* report.

The newspaper quoted Edmonds saying: "I gave [the commission] details of specific investigation files, the specific dates, specific target information, specific managers in charge of the investigation. I gave them everything so that they could go back and follow up. This is not hearsay. These are things that are documented. These things can be established very easily."

Edmonds called the statement by Rice that there was no such information "an outrageous lie."

Edmonds says she testified before the commission in Washington on February 11. According to the *Independent*, the Bush administration has obtained a gag order against her, citing the "state secrets privilege."



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