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9/11 and the Nature of Intelligence Collection and Analysis

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Abstract: This article discusses Condoleeza Rice's April 8, 2004 testimony before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (US). The author focuses on the nature of intelligence collection and analysis, and their goal - to find actionable intelligence in response to terrorist acts.

Condoleeza Rice's testimony on April 8, 2004 before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (US) is extraordinary in its assertions concerning the nature of intelligence collection and analysis. Rice's assertions suggested that actionable intelligence—that intelligence necessary to take responsive action—required specifics as to the who, what, where, how, when, and, perhaps, even the why of a threat to the US.

Yet, rarely will such specifics be available antecedent to the actualization of threat. Instead, threat information coupled with vulnerabilities to potential targets yields a risk assessment that can merit action—with that action based on reason, logic, empirical data, authoritative dictates, faith, and intuition. To wait for the Rice contention on actionable intelligence to be actualized is to facilitate the probability of success for adversarial operations.

It is even fair to state that Ms Rice's assertions do not reflect her true belief but instead form a political stance to deflect aspersions on her chain of command. However, to guess wrongly on incomplete and ambiguous information can be forgiven. To not guess or to believe that there is nothing about which guessing might be an issue cannot be. Deconstructing Ms. Rice's assertions might indicate that in the Administration of which she is part, acts of omission pale on some blame game before acts of commission. Or that omission qualifies as the best act in the face of incompleteness and ambiguity.

The political as opposed to True Believer perspective is enhanced by other aspects of her testimony wherein she stated that there was actionable intelligence and that everything was being done in response to it. To have it both ways may work politically. Whether such political discourse works as a deterrent to terrorism, as the converse to terrorism, or as an inert rhetorical device is an empirical question that will be answered soon enough. (Denno, D.W. (2003). A mind to blame: New views on involuntary acts. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 21, 601-618; Kunreuther, H. (2002). Risk Analysis and Risk Management in an Uncertain World. *Risk Analysis*, 22, 655-664; Luecken, L. J., Tartaro, J., & Appelhans, B. Strategic Coping Responses and Attentional Biases. *Cognitive Therapy & Research*, 28, 23-37; Tulloch, M.L. (2003). Combining classificatory and discursive methods: Consistency and variability in responses to the threat of crime. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 461-476.) (Keywords: Political Discourse, Terrorism, Threat Assessment)