

Pentagon Attack

Interview with Victoria Clarke
July 2, 2002

Cameron: This interview with Victoria Clarke, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, is taking place in her office in the Pentagon on July 2, 2002. The interviewers are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Rebecca Cameron.

By September 11 you had been in this job just a few months.

Clarke: I started on May 22nd, so it was about four months.

Cameron: When you came on, or shortly thereafter, were you briefed about possible terrorist attacks on the Pentagon itself and how those might be handled?

Clarke: No.

Cameron: Were you aware of any plans for a lesser crisis or evacuation?

Clarke: I was very informally briefed on general evacuation plans, response to crises, those sorts of things. One time in the summer Dr. Cambone and I were in the National Military Command Center (NMCC) for a meeting or something like that. He and I were a bit early and I wondered what all the systems were for. Dr. Cambone showed me the work stations and told me that, in the event of a crisis, people would be handling it and running the operation from there. So I got an informal briefing at the time as to what the procedures would be in terms of keeping the place operating and functioning in time of crisis.

Cameron: Where is the NMCC?

Clarke: It is in the middle of the Building on the third floor, pretty much in the center of the Pentagon.

Cameron: Did you have an idea about your particular responsibilities in case of a crisis?

Clarke: I knew what my responsibilities would be, and I had thought through in my head what, in case of any kind of crisis, whether at the Pentagon, here in town, or overseas, would be the kinds of things that I would be trying to do from that center.

Cameron: What would those be?

Clarke: Getting information. What do people know, what does the public know, what do our interagency counterparts know, what should they know, working with my peers here and with the Secretary and the leadership on what the truth of our situation might be and what we wanted to communicate to the American people and to our interagency colleagues or overseas. Ascertaining ground truth is what we always try to do and then, based on that information, make a recommendation on what we want to communicate and how we ought to communicate beyond the Pentagon.

Goldberg: Did you have any kind of disaster plan for the office?

Clarke: Probably a month and a half before 9/11, I had been talking to my staff here about some of the organizational challenges that we had, what we were trying to do in terms of structuring this office and how it should run. One thing I focussed on was what to do with the media in case of an emergency or military action overseas. Would we want to deploy the national media pool, a formal structure, and how would we do that. I had asked people to look through those things, and in my morning senior staff meetings I said we needed to look at how we would handle a crisis. But we had not gotten around to doing it.

Goldberg: Did you ever discuss anything, before you came into office, with your predecessor?

Clarke: I talked to every one of the living predecessors.

Goldberg: That's remarkable.

Clarke: I also met with three or four of them. I asked them what I needed to know, what lessons they learned—the hard way, the easy way—what advice they had for me, what things needed to be changed. I talked to them extensively. The subject of a crisis, certainly of an attack on the Pentagon, never came up.

Goldberg: Most Secretaries have not consulted their predecessors.

Clarke: It was the very first thing I did. And we stay in touch. About two months ago, we had eight or nine of them here for lunch. The Secretary came down, and Bill Greener, Sr. from the first Rumsfeld administration was here, and we had a great time. I regularly talk with Pete Williams, Ken Bacon and Jerry Friedheim—an amazing person—about what they think about this and that. It's very helpful.

Goldberg: It sounds very sensible.

Cameron: What is the national media pool?

Clarke: It was formed in cooperation/collaboration with the Pentagon Office of Public Affairs and representatives of the major news media in the country. It was in recognition that there would be certain circumstances in times of conflict, either an ongoing war or *ad hoc* conflict, in which unilateral coverage by the media, the ability of the media to get someplace on their own, would not be there. There might be geographical or safety circumstances where the media cannot cover things unilaterally. The Pentagon recognizes a real responsibility and need for our news media to cover the

men and women in uniform, so we agreed on a process by which, in those circumstances, we would facilitate deployment of a national media pool of ten or twelve representative members of the media—TV, newspapers, photographers, etc. With public affairs escorts and military transport we would get them to locations and facilitate their coverage and getting the products back, whether beaming television signals or print stories or wire stories or whatever. We would maintain that operation and make the media coverage happen for a period of time until unilateral coverage was possible.

Cameron: Would DoD people go out in the field as journalists themselves, or would they rely on information from our military?

Clarke: We do both. We don't do a good enough job, in my opinion, of providing news and information back to our channels, whether it is our internal means of communication like Armed Forces Radio and Television, Stars and Stripes, or some other vehicle by which we communicate to our own people. We don't do enough of it. The DoD national media pool is the solely recognized national media outlet. But it is quite a process, a very elaborate structure. The media outlets who want to be in the DoD national media pool and receive the products have to live up to all sorts of requirements and agree to certain responsibilities and ground rules and agree to be trained periodically. There is a quarterly rotation system. Each quarter there are ten or twelve different media outlets represented in the pool. We can call them up in the middle of the night and tell them to be at Andrews in two hours. Every quarter a different set of media is on notice that they are in the DoD national media pool.

Goldberg: There are so many reporting channels to this Building from all over the world, an enormous amount of information flowing in all the time.

Cameron: On September 11, where were you, what did you do, whom did you talk to, how did you spend your day?

Clarke: My normal day starts about 6:30 a.m. At 8:15 every morning around this table here in my office I have a meeting with my senior people, with representatives from the Joint Staff, and occasionally someone from the services. We quickly walk through what will happen that day and who needs to do what. It was a Tuesday, so we were to have a briefing later that day. It was the second week that I was actually briefing, not having started until after the first few months. One of the best pieces of advice my predecessors gave me was, despite enormous pressure to get into the briefing room right away, not to start briefing until I had my feet on the ground.

Cameron: I believe September 4th was your first briefing.

Clarke: That could have been it. On September 11 we were going around the table with our usual morning operations update. We had begun to discuss the issues to be briefed that day. We were actually focused on something to do with Macedonia; we had small operations going on there. It was Operation Amber Fox, and Admiral Quigley was sitting right here, and he said, "It doesn't matter what you say about it, because that's the news today." Everyone watches these TVs, and when I turned around I saw the first images after the first plane had hit the World Trade Center. We turned up the volume and somebody at the New York TV station was talking to a traffic reporter in the area. There were saying it was a plane of some kind, maybe a traffic plane or a commuter plane that was lost.

I went to my desk and called Larry Di Rita, the special assistant, and asked him if he was watching. He was, and they had given the Secretary a note, because he was

having breakfast with members of Congress. We didn't know exactly what happened, but we knew right away that something really bad had happened. In the course of this conversation we watched as the second plane came in. I went up to Larry Di Rita's office, which is down the hall from the Secretary, and said, "It's kind of a big deal here." He and I discussed what had to be done right away in terms of the Secretary. He and I went in to see the Secretary about the kinds of things he needed to do in response to this. By the time I'd gotten to Larry's office we knew it was clearly a terrorist attack of some kind. Larry and I started talking about the calls to make right away.

We went in to talk to the Secretary, who was at his stand-up desk, as he always is. In hindsight, we were saying, "Here's what's going on, and what we know. The command center is going to start getting spun up." He said something like, "Well, let's take a look at my schedule, maybe we will have to move something." Larry said, in effect, "Everything is coming off your schedule, this is your schedule today." This goes to show how rock-solid the Secretary is about so many things. He knew it was bad, and I'm sure he had figured out what was going on, but he was thinking that certain things needed to be on his schedule. He said something about getting his CIA brief, which he gets every morning, and indicated he would see us in the command center a bit later.

We went to the command center, and the people I remember being there were Steve Cambone, Jim Haynes, Di Rita and myself, and some others. The screens were up, the television, and beginning to be set up were what became an ongoing series of videoconferences throughout the day. A lot of people were calling, trying to get more information. After a bit we felt a big thump and heard a big boom.

Goldberg: Was there any anticipation at that time that the Pentagon also might be at risk?

Clarke: There was anticipation that lots of things might be at risk. There was a very clear understanding by this time that it was two commercial airliners in a terrorist attack of some kind. My memory of when people said different things is a bit vague, but the smart people had already started to figure out and speculate that it might be al Qaeda. Everybody was fixated for the first few hours on what could be next. People were talking about Washington targets, in recognition that we had thousands of commercial airliners still in the air. So there was a big thump and a boom, and I thought there must have been a car bomb. Steve Cambone, the smartest guy in the Building, pointing to the ceiling, said the heating and cooling system sounded like that all the time. I didn't think so. What's extraordinary to me is that we knew that two commercial airliners had hit the Trade Center, a terrorist attack, and smart people were guessing it was al Qaeda. Yet when something bad happened here, it didn't occur to us that it was another airliner. That's how unfathomable it was. It never occurred to us that it was another plane.

Goldberg: In everybody's imagination now, everything is clear.

Clarke: The pace of things picked up, and a lot of people began coming to the area. As the morning went on, Admiral Giambastiani, the senior military assistant, the Deputy Paul Wolfowitz, and the cable people came in. Several times in the next half-hour or so people would ask where the Secretary was. The answer was "out of the Building." I did, and others took that to mean that he had been taken to a secure location. But he

had gone out to the site. The next thing we know he had come in, dirty, sweaty, with his jacket over his shoulder.

Goldberg: How long was he out there?

Clarke: I think it was about fifteen to twenty minutes. His security people wanted to get him out of here. He came into the command center and said that it was a big plane. Even then there was a bit of disbelief in people's minds. He said there were thousands of pieces everywhere and the overpowering smell of jet fuel. He never says he's sure unless he absolutely is, and he said it sure looked like it to him. Then the systems for videoconferences were up and going and he was making phone calls to the White House. Condi Rice and the Vice President were there, and he was on the phone to George Tenet pretty quickly. The Secretary was obviously the center of activity most of the morning, he and the Vice Chairman, because General Shelton was out of the country. The Vice had been nominated but was not supposed to take over until around October 1. Almost the entire time the Vice was right there with the Secretary. At times the Vice would get up to do something and the Secretary's head would come up and he'd ask where Myers was and bring him back. After the plane hit the Building, the entire Building, including where we were, was getting very smoky. Some people had real problems with it. People were trying to find sodas, water, and the like.

Cameron: Nobody tried to evacuate the Secretary and the rest of you?

Clarke: Different people—Larry Di Rita, the Deputy, Steve, the Vice Chairman—said at different times they wanted to get the Secretary out of the Building.

Goldberg: The Secretary got them out.

Clarke: To my recollection, he never said no, he just kept working. As he often does, he was constantly writing down notes on his yellow pieces of paper. Whenever he had a conversation with the Vice President or George Tenet or the President, he was very methodical, using his notes on what we knew, what we were trying to find out, what we were trying to do and what we needed to do.

Cameron: What about taskings to you during this time?

Clarke: It was just looking for people with information. I was staying in touch with people in public affairs who had gotten out. Most of the Building had been evacuated. I was trying to give them any information and guidance about things to say and not to say: no speculation about extent of damage, number of dead, those sorts of things.

Goldberg: Did the Secretary speak about these things to you?

Clarke: Yes. I would bounce things off him and he would say yes or no. Or I would sketch out on a piece of paper what we were thinking of saying and he would scribble changes or additions. It was very informal, but very efficient in a way. At the same time, he was already starting to map out the approach going forward. Relatively early in the day he had a conversation with Myers and started to ask questions about what to do to go forward. They would talk about the kinds of things we needed to ask ourselves, what to think about and what we wanted to accomplish; it couldn't be a quick fix. We had to understand what all the implications might be if we did something, how we should respond. He started to task the Joint Staff via Myers and the military to start figuring out right away what our response was going to be, our responsibilities and plans. If it was more than going after al Qaeda, what considerations would we have.

He was multi-tasking and multi-dimensional working, constantly going through lists of information as well as starting to put in motion long-term planning.

Goldberg: He also knew how much he didn't know and had to find out.

Clarke: Absolutely.

Cameron: Did you all get information from people who had left the Building? Were you in touch with the Defense Protective Services, or the search and rescue people?

Clarke: Yes, but some of them didn't have accurate information. Somebody from Arlington County speculated publicly that up to eight hundred had been killed here. The people were so busy getting out the injured and putting the fire out, that we didn't look to them for any solid information

Cameron: You were thinking more strategically.

Clarke: Right.

Goldberg: There were two levels of information there, the Building itself and what happened physically, and concern about information and consequences and what could be done. You presumably got some reports about what was happening in the Building itself.

Clarke: Right, and the Secretary repeatedly would ask about casualties.

Goldberg: Did he go out again?

Clarke: The air was of very poor quality, and it bothered some people more than others. Somebody told us the air was better in the Army Command Center and we moved there for some period of time. It wasn't much better, and we went back up to the command center when it got better there. Throughout the day the Secretary asked about casualties, and different entities were checking in, almost a muster. The Joint Staff was

checking on the Chiefs, and we had started to get reports, but there were some people we didn't know about for some time. We knew early on who was in the Building, and that the Army had taken a pretty big hit. To the point of trying to get the Secretary out of the Building, at some time during the day he looked up and realized that there were about seventy-five people in the immediate vicinity, and he said something to the effect that they could leave if they wanted to. Myers said, "Sir, they will not leave unless you do. They will go down with you." I remember writing notes, and in my margin I wrote, "Uh oh, this could be pretty serious." That was the only time I heard him verbalize, personalize, but he just went right back to his work.

Goldberg: Was Wolfowitz there during this time?

Clarke: He was, and at some point in early afternoon the Secretary would not leave, but the people who truly understand the procedures and the need for a functioning leadership said the Deputy had to go off-site.

Goldberg: Who said that?

Clarke: I don't remember. In my opinion, he clearly didn't want to go. Larry Di Rita went with him. One of the main reasons the Secretary wanted to stay where he was, was that he knew the communications were the single most important thing—with the White House, the CIA, FAA, the President—and they were working well. He felt a great deal of confidence with that.

Goldberg: It's a good thing he didn't go to Site R.

Cameron: Communications didn't work.

Clarke: Right. So the decision was for the Deputy and Larry to go. The day was just ongoing communications with a variety of people; videoconferences with a variety of

people; conversations with the President. At some point in the day he would relay to us what the President said, but it was very clear that the President expressed a desire to get back to Washington. The Secretary told him to stay put, as he was the number one priority in terms of protection. That was early in the day, probably his first conversation with the President. He returned to several things throughout the day. One of them, as they were getting all the commercial aircraft down, was his discomfort at how broad the rules of engagement were, and how much judgment was put on the shoulders of a jet pilot. He returned to it in conversations with his counterparts on the national security team, and he thought it put enormous responsibility on somebody's shoulders as to whether to shoot down a commercial airliner. He kept trying to tighten those up as the day went on.

Goldberg: They were lucky it didn't happen.

Clarke: Right. There were some two thousand commercial airliners.

Cameron: There were over four thousand in the air.

Clarke: They got a lot of them down amazingly quickly, but there were those that were tracking at different times and started exhibiting really disturbing behavior. Tracking those, and reconfirming rules of engagement at different times, that got everybody's attention and everybody focused on that a couple of times. A big part of my challenge was getting in touch with my people who had gotten out of the Building and sharing information, finding out where everybody was. I went out to the Citgo, where our people and the media were organized. They needed a vantage point. The perimeter had been established around the site and they needed a spot for ongoing briefings, so they went

to the Citgo up by the Navy Annex. It's run by the Navy. The people there took everybody in and that became the outdoor briefing center for a while.

Cameron: PenRen people couldn't get their cell phones to work. In early conversations with your staff outside the Building, how did you communicate?

Clarke: When the plane first hit, I didn't use my cell phone, and the regular phones went through after an hour or so. I first talked to Admiral Quigley, then Brian Whitman, and Captain Taylor throughout the day, the three senior people in terms of dealing with the press. I was using the regular phones from the command center, and they were using cell phones that were working. I heard that was a common problem all over town.

Goldberg: Did you walk to the Citgo?

Clarke: About the middle of the afternoon a car took us up with Chief Jester, the head of DPS. We said very little, but we told them there was a lot we didn't know but we would keep them informed. We were trying to tamp down any speculation about casualties, because we just didn't know. We did an impromptu briefing up there and then I came back to the Building.

Goldberg: Did you go inside the perimeter?

Clarke: Yes.

Goldberg: So you had a close-up view and could see there had been tremendous damage.

Clarke: Oh, yes.

Goldberg: That was a far more complete impression than the Secretary had gathered early on.

Clarke: I can't tell you what kind of impression he got early on, I just don't know. But I was out there with the knowledge that it was indeed a plane. He might have been seeing it through different eyes. If I hadn't been told that a plane hit the Building, I don't know when I first went out there if I would have recognized it.

Cameron: What was happening when you went out?

Clarke: There was still a lot of search and rescue operation going on. A lot of the heavy black smoke was gone, but there was still a lot of smoke, heat, people and activity. Senators Warner and Levin came down to the Building in late afternoon. They had called in and asked if they could do anything. I'm not sure what connection was made, but they had decided to come down. They sat in one of the smaller work stations in the command center and the Secretary took a call from the President and put them on the phone with the President. They were clearly struck by what had happened and came down simply to show their support. They didn't want to get in the way or have anybody wait on them. They went out with the Secretary to tour the site in the late afternoon.

As the afternoon went on, as I said, I went to the Citgo to try to tamp down speculation and to say that the Pentagon was up and operating. This was a result of conversations with the Secretary, and also with the White House and others. The agencies were doing a great job of staying in touch with each other.

Cameron: You were talking with your counterparts?

Clarke: I honestly don't remember with whom I spoke, but it was no-nonsense information about what was happening and what our plans were, staying in touch with each other, very businesslike. Then the Secretary went out to brief.

Goldberg: Where did he brief?

Clarke: It seemed so obvious that he would go out and brief, demonstrate to the American public that the Pentagon was operating, it was functioning. There were plenty of people who said he couldn't do it in the briefing room here, suggesting Fort Myer or Henderson Hall. Some public affairs people found another location. If we needed to have public affairs operations and briefing operations on an ongoing basis outside the Pentagon we needed a location, so they found multiple sites, some of them setting up Henderson Hall. The Building was still filled with smoke, and quite a few people thought the briefing should be held off-site. I was not the only one, but I was probably the most vocal advocate for briefing here in the Building. We had to show that the Building was up and operating and it was important that people see their Secretary of Defense and the leadership here. We also decided it was a good idea to have Senator Warner and Chairman Levin with him. I was in touch with my folks at the Citgo and said we would do it here in the Building and that the press would have to get buses and escorts from Chief Jester. There were no vehicles there. They needed help carrying equipment. My people said they would help get them down here and give them escorts.

Goldberg: Chief Jester did this?

Clarke: No, my people out there. It was still quite smoky in the hallways, but they got them into the Building. I'm sure it's tracked somewhere but I don't know exactly what time they did the briefing. It was the four of them, and it didn't last long, half an hour or forty-five minutes.

Goldberg: Who was the fourth?

Clarke: It was the Secretary and Myers, Warner, and Levin. They all spoke briefly and then took questions for a little while.

Goldberg: That was the first time.

Clarke: The first of many briefings.

Cameron: Nobody thought the Pentagon building was in danger of further attack, that it was safe for people to remain?

Clarke: I don't know about that. If you have seen the movie Inside the Pentagon, National Geographic had decided to do the movie well before 9/11. They did Inside Air Force One, and Inside the White House, an up-close and personal look at how agencies work.

Goldberg: It was shown on July 4.

Clarke: We have a copy if you want it. A part of their focus was on the people who run the mechanics of the Building—the heating and cooling systems and the water. A bunch of them stayed in the Building and kept it up and operating. I mention it because in the morning and early afternoon one of Steve Cambone's big concerns was that if they hit the Pentagon with a plane they could also be trying to do something with the air system. He kept asking people to check the air. It was hard enough with the smoke, but he was very concerned about that. So there were ongoing concerns, but not much of a question in several people's minds as to whether or not they would leave. After the briefing they went back up to the Secretary's office. He went over for the President's speech and the NSC meeting after the President's speech, at the White House.

Cameron: You stayed here until what time?

Clarke: After midnight.

Goldberg: How about the Secretary?

Clarke: After the President's speech at the White House and the NSC meeting afterward, the Secretary went home. Cambone had gone over with him, and came back and debriefed us on the NSC meeting. The Secretary went from the White House home.

Goldberg: It was a busy day.

Clarke: Yes, it moved quickly.

Cameron: Had all of your staff left, or were there people here, perhaps videotaping or recording, etc., here in the Building?

Clarke: Not to my knowledge. A couple came back in, for instance Brian Whitman, who is my head of press ops, to try to assess the briefing room.

Cameron: Early on did you meet with the facilities people and brief on the progress of clean-up and renovation?

Clarke: Yes. There was an almost fifty-fifty interest. One was the actual status of the Building and people who had been killed or injured. It continued to burn. I can't remember exactly when it got put out. On Thursday night we were sitting here and somebody said, "Look, the Building is on fire again." The briefings are all documented on Defense Link. We had several briefings with people in the Building who could actually assess the Building, such as Lee Evey. We also had updates with people involved in search and rescue and recovery—Arlington County Fire Chief, Ed Plaughter—that was about half the interest. The other half was about what the U.S. military was going to do, going forward. We were filling those two holes, if you will.

Cameron: By this time, had you decided whether to talk a lot about the progress of reclamation but not much about military action? Had you begun to make that distinction?

Clarke: No, although we make those distinctions all the time. One thing we were adamant about for the first couple of days was tamping down any speculation as to numbers. We could track this in the briefings for you. The first day or so somebody from Arlington County said there could be up to eight hundred dead; we said we didn't know, but we did not think it was eight hundred. That was a big focus of ours. Issues of sensitivity for the families and friends of victims were things we addressed and we continue to address—what we talk about, how we talk about it in terms of the actual incident, the rescue and recovery operation, the disposition of remains. It is all drawn through the filter of great sensitivity of the families. We try to keep a lot of that information and communication as contained as possible.

Goldberg: Most people don't have the slightest notion of how complicated a business this sort of thing can be and continues to be.

Cameron: Did your office schedule family visits to the crash site, and those kinds of things?

Clarke: Yes, and some of our people worked for General Van Alstyne in the family assistance center as liaison. They were dramatically touched by that.

Goldberg: He is a retiring and reserved man.

Clarke: He is an incredible person and did a phenomenal job, the level of trust he built up with those people. So we were part of the facilitation of who wanted to come and when, those sorts of things. We were also the first line of defense. The site very

quickly became a major attraction and everybody and his brother, most with the very best of intentions, wanted to come down. Again, it became a sensitive issue for the families, and also became a resource issue. For the first few weeks we could have had teams out there escorting different groups 24/7. That's how high the level of interest was. Most people were well-intentioned, wanting to pay respects, make a memorial, but we had to find a way to balance that. Very quickly it had become a crime scene, and we were constantly working with the FBI, DPS, and others. We didn't do anything to disrupt the crime scene.

Goldberg: The FBI took over, didn't they?

Clarke: Yes.

Cameron: The renovation people said that they were swamped with congressional delegations and staff. Would those people come through your office or did they just show up?

Clarke: We coordinated it with legislative liaisons. The overwhelming majority of people were remarkably respectful and understanding. I probably blanked it out, but I don't remember anybody who got unpleasant when we had to tell them it was not a good time.

Cameron: You came back the next day.

Clarke: I came back very early the next morning. Obviously, the security was extraordinary. Roads were blocked off everywhere. I normally drive in across Memorial Bridge, but it was all blocked off, and I didn't know how to get here. There was a police car there, I walked over and asked him how to get here. He recognized me and moved

the sawhorse so I could drive the usual road and get in. That was about 4-4:30 in the morning.

Goldberg: You got here that early?

Clarke: We had a hint it would be a busy day! What was extraordinary was hearing what people did to get to work because the security was beyond belief and it wasn't perfectly organized. You wouldn't expect it to be. But people were leaving cars on roads far away, riding bikes, or walking miles to get here.

Goldberg: People had to walk home, too.

Clarke: Right. The estimates were that as many as 18,000 people were back into the Building at some point the next day. Some 23,000 work here and roughly 3,000 had been displaced, but some 17,000-18,000 got back to work the next day. It was extraordinary.

Cameron: Is there anything else you want to say about that day or its immediate aftermath?

Clarke: It struck me that everything worked from the first the way you would want it to. There were lots of people I didn't see.

Goldberg: What worked was the central essential core of the Building. You stayed there at the command center or the Secretary's office. But most of the people had been evacuated.

Clarke: It worked, and communications with the right people worked, not just the infrastructure supporting what we needed to get done. We didn't have much time to sit back and reflect on things. I do remember reflecting a few times that day about how matter-of-fact, businesslike, and non-emotional the key players were. I didn't hear the

President's words to the Secretary, but he would debrief us and we could hear his answers to the Vice President or national security adviser George Tenet. It was functioning.

Goldberg: The next day the whole Building was up and running at the Secretary's insistence that it get going as quickly as possible.

Cameron: Did the way you organize your office, procedures, or functions change as a result of September 11?

Clarke: The pace and quantity of it, not the functionality of it. We had always had regular and very good communications with the White House, State, NSC, CIA, etc. It was clear that would be constant, and it was. We didn't say we would have certain updates throughout the day, but key players in public affairs did come together three or four times a day to do a status check. We just increased what was already our natural functioning.

Cameron: Did you talk more to your counterparts at State, the White House, etc, than you normally would have?

Clarke: Yes, and I had the advantage of previous relationships. I have known Ari Fleisher for almost twenty years; Karen Hughes for a fairly long time; Richard Boucher for a long time; my counterpart at CIA Bill Harlow I've known for a long time. We had fairly regular and very good communication prior to September 11. Post-September 11, obviously, we picked up the pace considerably. All of us knowing one another really helped. There is a shorthand that develops. You don't have to waste time explaining, which makes interaction very efficient and disciplined.

Cameron: What about communication with our allies as we moved toward a wartime footing?

Clarke: There was a pretty steep morphing from search and rescue, recovery, and immediate status of the Building to what the response would be and how we would put it together and what questions we needed to ask ourselves. State was very heavily focussed on this. They communicated what they could, there wasn't that much for them to send abroad. Then as we got closer to what we knew would be the first military operation, we all started to pick up the pace of communication with our counterparts overseas, the Brits more than others.

Cameron: Once we went to a wartime status, in what way did your relationship with the press change?

Clarke: There was an incredibly intense interest, as there should be. It's their job. They should want to be everywhere, see everything, and know everything. They should show up every day with that goal. It was our job to make sure the Department of Defense could execute any military operation it wished and protect the safety of the men and women in uniform. It was a balance. Very quickly we began to work on that balance and that relationship. It's a very difficult one. It takes a lot of attention and care, especially since this was such an unconventional war. It was not like Desert Storm, where we had a six-month buildup with hundreds of thousands of military on the ground—boots on the ground, as they call it. This would be very different. We would not have boots on the ground in Afghanistan in any numbers for some time in the foreseeable future. We had to facilitate media access and coverage in those unusual

circumstances. The media always wants more, as they should. We try to find the balance.

Goldberg: You had a pretty good relationship until the hostilities began in Afghanistan.

Clarke: Absolutely. One thing we instituted quickly was a weekly meeting with the bureau chiefs. The press corps are here with us 24/7, and we have had a very good and constructive working relationship for a long time. They tend to be people who have covered the Building for a long time and really know the military. In my opinion the bureau chiefs were much more frustrated than the reporters. They were not as close to the action, not understanding. If we were going to do something in Afghanistan, why weren't we there. So we instituted weekly bureau chief meetings. They would all come here, thirty or forty of them.

Goldberg: This was Washington bureau chiefs?

Clarke: Yes, Washington bureau chiefs of all the news outlets. We told them what we knew, what we didn't know, and worked on how we would do things. We get some constructive points for trying to do that, in terms of the relationship. Everybody fully acknowledged that it was an unconventional war where we had to think outside the box.

Goldberg: How did the Secretary's relations with the press change as a result of this? There was a kind of sea change, wasn't there, in their attitudes, and his also?

Clarke: Public perception always takes a while to catch up with reality. The press had not been around him much. Those who had, for instance the Pentagon press corps, were starting to have some grudging admiration for him, and began to understand what he was trying to do and how he was going about it. They weren't too sure that he was going to succeed, but they had grudging admiration for what he was bringing to the

table. It's still not without its controversies, but it was quite controversial in the beginning that the Secretary became the lead spokesman on the war. There are still people in this Building who say that he should not be doing that. The interesting thing was that they said "that's not how it's done. People over here, or down here, do it." I said that we were not training or fighting the same way we used to, everybody acknowledges that it is an unconventional war. Why would we brief the war activities the same way we used to do?

Goldberg: Cheney did a lot of briefing during the Desert Storm buildup, right alongside Powell.

Clarke: Trust me, people have put paper in front of me counting up the number of briefings by whom, saying it is highly unusual and what were we trying to do. But the media loved it, loved having access to the leadership.

Goldberg: They wouldn't have gotten better briefings from anybody else.

Clarke: Their stories would not have been on the front page as much and they would not have made the evening news as much. I also come from a school where people expect and deserve hearing from the leadership. Also, quite practically, he is really good at it.

Cameron: How did you, the Secretary, and the military divvy up briefing responsibility?

Clarke: Another point not without its controversy. At least once a week somebody pings me on this one, saying you shouldn't have the Secretary and the Chairman out there together, or it shouldn't be you and a military person. DoD is all about the civilian and military leadership working together.

Goldberg: Cheney and Powell were out there all the time, and they had Pete Williams with them, too.

Clarke: But standard ongoing briefings, the normal conventional wisdom is that you don't have that much of the Secretary of Defense himself; you have either the ASD(PA) by himself, or an operations briefer. The Department of Defense is about the military and civilians working together. Again, I come from where the American people expect and deserve to see their civilians and military working together.

Cameron: It appears that the Secretary and the Chairman are often together, and Admiral Quigley or another military person briefs with you.

Clarke: I'm there sometimes with Pete Pace, Admiral Stufflebean, and now it's General Rosa. It really works. They shouldn't be expected to address policy issues *per se*, and policy people shouldn't necessarily be talking about the nuts and bolts of an operation in Afghanistan.

Cameron: Are people now asking you questions about policy?

Clarke: It's everything from A to Z.

Goldberg: Obviously the public prefers to hear the Secretary more than anybody else.

Clarke: In unconventional times, that's part of it. He has been extraordinarily effective with the American public, and with our friends, allies, and adversaries around the world. We have traveled a lot since last fall, to every single country. I have heard people say, either in his presence or to me privately, that they know if they hear it from him they can take it to the bank, it is good and solid information and he is telling them the truth. So we know it has been powerful.

Cameron: You travel with him regularly?

Clarke: Yes.

Goldberg: What role has Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz played since 9/11?

Clarke: It adapts and changes depending on the circumstances. In the first several weeks and months there were so many things going on and so many needs for information, assimilation of information and decisions going forward, that he was a right arm for the Secretary. There were so many meetings and briefings that they had to be in many places at once with constant interaction. The Deputy constantly in and out of his office, pretty much glued to his hip half the day and the other half out gathering information and coming back and assimilating it. As time went on and we were trying not only to prosecute the war on terrorism but also move forward with the big transformation issues, more organizational things and business initiatives, he has taken on a huge load of responsibility there. Also, as number two, he was one of the biggest movers on the Crusader, and the big issues significant far beyond the Crusader itself. He is an all-purpose hitter, in my opinion.

Cameron: He briefs, too.

Clarke: On certain topics. It has become more important since 9/11 that DoD public affairs has not done a good job in the past of communicating overseas. This is what we are trying to accomplish. It was never considered a function. In a global 24/7 information environment you have got to be out there, so we need lots of people talking to the media from all over the place, including the world. The Deputy, particularly from his past, is very good at that. That's a big need he fills for me, personally.

Goldberg: It's my impression that the Secretary is more out in front than most Secretaries that we have had, going back to McNamara. McNamara was out front all the time. But this one is certainly more than most of his predecessors.

Clarke: Yes, and certainly, from what I've heard, a lot more than even McNamara.

Goldberg: Most Secretaries often wanted to have somebody else out in front on particular issues, that's one reason they are there.

Clarke: The other part of your question was how do we decide who briefs and when?

Cameron: Yes.

Clarke: Half of the time it turns out to be schedules. For quite some time there were briefs five times a week, which was something I thought not necessarily the best course of action. But the bureau chiefs were so adamant and were making our lives so painful. The Secretary actually came to a bureau chiefs meeting once. I think he was somewhat taken aback by it. He said that he understood that the purpose of a brief was to share something of value or news to share with people. But they were saying they wanted a brief for the sake of briefing. It sold newspapers and gets them on the news each evening. So he said okay, we give, we would brief every single day. That was as much about schedules as it was circumstance. If there was a high level of activity of some kind or a significant activity of some kind, or something significant we wanted to advance in terms of the DoD's views on some particular issue, it was the Secretary and the Chairman. That, in very informal intuitive fashion, is how I handled these things. There is a certain amount of care and feeding, and disseminating information to give them the nuts and bolts, which is perfectly appropriate for me and General Rosa to do. In terms of actually moving something forward, a new initiative in the war on terrorism,

or we are beginning to signal the road ahead in the war on terrorism, that is done by the Secretary. Moving the agenda is something appropriate at his level, not at mine or somebody else's below. That's an informal but important break we make in deciding who briefs and when.

Cameron: When we interviewed Ken Bacon, he said that he oftentimes got information from the press corps itself as to issues they would like to know about. Is your out-front Secretary more inclined to let the press throw questions, and he responds to what they ask?

Clarke: It's a mixture. One other thing we've done is that the Secretary always has remarks at the top of his briefing. It's for a reason, a purpose. I don't believe that anybody should stand up there and be a punching bag. There should be something we are trying to communicate. He always has remarks, and if you do that, often the questions are about what he said instead of what little they have come with. We can be more strategic about our purpose than just reacting to things.

But in the world of practicality it's a great advantage to have our own press corps here. It's the right thing, they should have as much access as possible to what we do in this Building. But we spend a lot of time with them, checking in with them, talking about what is important to us and to them, what their boss in New York thinks is important and what to respond to that. You get a good sense of what they are about and what they are likely to ask. It's not rocket science.

Goldberg: Do you think that the bureau chiefs feel that their representatives here in the Building are being cooperative?

Clarke: No.

Goldberg: They don't think about it at all? They are sure of it?

Clarke: I think most people who know anything about the news media, particularly in this town, know that if you want to generalize about a group, you won't get any better than the Pentagon press corps. They are really phenomenal. People like David Martin, Jack McWethy, Miklasewski, Jamie McIntyre—start right there. Usually your really strong journalists are not in TV these days. Those are four incredibly solid people with a ton of experience. Then you have the print people, like Tom Ricks, who knows a ton about the military. Tom Shanker, of the New York Times—it goes on and on.

Goldberg: They are independent-minded people.

Clarke: Very. They are also very responsible, and dedicated to what they do. Every single one of them has enormous respect and appreciation for what the military does.

Goldberg: They are probing, but are they distrustful?

Clarke: Healthy skepticism, usually based on experience.

Cameron: This administration has been described as being very controlling about release of information. It sounds as though the Secretary has a view of what he thinks is important and that is what you want to communicate.

Clarke: To an extent the circumstances of the day will dictate what you talk about and what you have to address. There are circumstances beyond your control, such as the incident yesterday in Afghanistan. You try to do that, but I think, being in this town for twenty-some odd years in this business, that there is a real culture change between this administration and the previous one. Unlike a lot of people, I think there are a lot of things the Clinton administration did right. I have plenty of friends who worked in the Clinton administration, very good, hard-working, patriotic public servants. They had a

very different approach and style with the media, which was to give them as much as possible, background them extensively, use leaks as an ongoing and common practice to advance their agenda. I didn't agree with everything they did, but that was their approach. We have a different team, a different administration that doesn't have that same style or approach. Narrowing it down to the DoD and what we focus on, and given the unconventional circumstances and the unconventional nature of the war, I'm convinced that five or ten years from now people will look back to see how extraordinary is the kind of access we did facilitate. We didn't have any boots on the ground on October 7, the first day of military action in Afghanistan, but we had some thirty-nine media representatives on a couple dozen ships in the area, we had people with bombers, those sorts of things. We were operating pretty unconventionally, from a public affairs perspective.

Goldberg: My suggestion might be to put some media people on the ground to find out things for themselves, like they did in Somalia.

Clarke: The third week of November is the first time we had a significant number of troops, the Marines went into Camp Rhino, but between October 7 and that period, for several weeks there were more media on the ground in Afghanistan than U.S. forces. People like Ashley Banfield, and other enterprising reporters and correspondents said they would not count on the U.S. military for news. They did it, and covered the stuff.

Goldberg: And some of them paid the price.

Clarke: Some of them did. The bureau chiefs would beat up on me weekly, saying that they had to get people in. I told them they had more people in there than we had here.

Goldberg: There were foreign media, too.

Clarke: Right. It was a bit of a culture shift for a lot of people in the media in this town because they went from a world in which they were being fed constantly with great leaks and scoops, to our different approach. We were heavily constrained by the fact that operational security was absolutely critical. We could not telegraph our punches, because the al Qaeda and Taliban were watching TV and listening to the radio 24/7. We knew that for a fact, and we knew that any suggestions or hints would immediately affect their behavior, affecting our operational security.

Goldberg: Almost everything we do is not only second-guessed, but pre-guessed in this country by the pundits and talking heads and all the ex-military who ring all the changes at every possibility.

Clarke: The majority of ex-military and talking heads tends to be good, and responsible. One of the most controversial things was that in the earliest days the reports out of Afghanistan were very quick and detailed. But half of that would be wrong. Normally, when certain things happened, somebody on background would help reporters understand what part was accurate and what part wasn't. When it started with us, the Secretary and I made a decision not to deal with all the different parts of the stories. If we did that, there would be accurate pictures of what we were going to do that would be helpful to the enemy. We understood they wanted to present as accurate a picture as possible in the newspaper or on TV, and they were in an uproar about that. But it did not make sense from a national security standpoint.

Cameron: As we move back toward normalcy, does your job get easier?

Clarke: We don't have the same kind of restrictions. We would like to talk to people until the cows come home about why killing Crusader was the right decision, and what it

means for transformation and preparing, equipping, and training our forces. We'd love to talk endlessly about that, and we do. The only place where we have tight restrictions on what we say and how we say it is when it comes to operational security or something that might put people's lives at risk.

Goldberg: You don't need a foreign war, you have enough confrontation right here in the Building.

Clarke: Exactly, from the 23,000 people right here. The way things change is when there is a high level of military activity, very intense interest, lots of pressure, and narrow focus. When the military activity begins to ebb a bit, you have less pressure, less interest, and a wider range of things, and people can go off and make mischief. It just changes.

Goldberg: There was an Assistant Secretary, Harry Rown, here some years ago who said that the Pentagon was like a log floating down the river with 25,000 ants on it, each one thinking he is steering.

Clarke: Admiral Crowe has left some of the best lines around here, which I am sure get changed around. He said that we have 23,000 or 24,000 people, and there are about 20,000 who think they can background the press better than you, and they do, every single day. One thing I find hilarious from my predecessors is the consistency of what they would offer up, and I would never say anything to prejudge them. Every single one said I would learn about things from the media first, more often than I would from anybody in the Building. Very often that is the case.

The world in which we live has changed so much. The way people get news and information and how they accept or reject it has changed so much, you can't count on

just the news media. We have broadened our tools and tactics around here to do much more than just communicate via the news media. Through direct communication with a variety of audiences and constituencies that we think are important, enhancing our Internet activity and presence. There was a huge demand in the very early stages from the American public for every scrap of information about the war effort. We couldn't meet it just via the news media, so overnight we created a new website called "Defend America," which became enormously popular right away. We didn't try to pretend it was anything but user-friendly information from us about the war effort. Lots of different groups, and most people, thought that if the Secretary of Defense met with anybody, it would just be military people or national security experts. We immediately said we needed support from a broad spectrum of American people understanding and appreciating what we were trying to do. We brought in labor leaders, educators, religious leaders, and maintained communication with them after they'd met with the Secretary. So we have broadened out the tools and tactics. It's not just the news media, and it's also not without controversy.

Goldberg: It keeps you busy.

Clarke: It does, and out of trouble.

Cameron: Is there anything else you would like to say?

Clarke: We appreciate what you are doing, and we're lucky he is upstairs.