

Report on “The 9/11 Commission Report”

by Stewart Coffin

This message to friends pertains to my reading of the report and my thoughts about it. If you have already read it, I will be curious to hear how your reactions may coincide with, or differ from, mine.

Mary and I watched with interest some of the hearings of the Commission that were televised. We have also heard some of the candidates for the upcoming elections trying to outdo each other on how swiftly they would implement the recommendations in the report. So, I thought I had better read it and see just what those recommendations were.

When the report became listed in the online catalog of our local library, I rushed down there, expecting to be placed on a waiting list for it. However, I found it prominently displayed at the main desk, begging for readership.

The report consists of a Preface, 13 chapters, Appendix, and Notes – 582 pages in all. Missing, much to my chagrin, is an index. Also missing is the date or year of publication, but I believe it to be around July 2004. Likewise missing, surprisingly, is any indication of who wrote the various parts. My guess is that most of the report was written by the 78-member staff, and probably almost none by the ten Commission members. The names of all Commission members and staff are listed at the beginning.

The ten Commission members are described as five Democrats and five Republicans. We are not told how or by whom they were chosen. Five are described as lawyers, and four as present or former members of Congress. The chairman is a former governor, and the vice-chairman served in the House for 34 years. Yet they describe their report as “nonpartisan.” The first question that comes to my mind, confronted immediately with this apparent contradiction, is why did any of them need to be Democrats or Republicans? Why not nonpartisan? And why members of Congress? How can they possibly be expected to objectively and honestly investigate their own failings?

As for the 78 staff members, none of the names are familiar to me, and my search for them on the web did not turn up much background information. In view of the amount of opinionated discussion of Middle East problems contained in the report, I looked for Arabic or Palestinian members, or names that sounded like they might be Arabic, but could not find any.

I will have to admit that many pages of the report I just skimmed. The events and circumstances leading up to the attack are covered in exquisite (and sometimes boring) detail, such as the terrorists and their associates -- their backgrounds, travels, meetings, execution of plans, and their previous attacks -- Beirut in 1983, World Trade Center in 1993, al-Khobar in 1996, and USS Cole in 2000. Several chapters are devoted to day-by-day accounts of the internal workings of the U.S. government for the previous several years leading up to the attack – who met with whom, reports, memos, conversations,

briefings, and what was or was not done as a result of them. All of this is supported by 107 pages of notes in fine print at the end of the report listing sources. Many are given vaguely as “intelligence report,” “CIA report,” “NSC memo,” “FBI email,” or the like, with no indication of whether they are secret or open to the public. One can only wonder about their reliability.

The second chapter, “The Foundations of the New Terrorism,” especially interested me. There is a good concise summary of the history of Islam, the rise of Bin Laden and al Qaeda, and their activities in Afghanistan. Why do they hate us? The authors of this chapter offer their answer to this vital question by their interpretation of various remarks attributed to Bin Laden and his associates. Frankly, I would have much preferred a direct translation, especially of Bin Laden’s taped remarks aired on Arab television in 2001. One possible reason for not including them is that some of Bin Laden’s language sounds alarmingly similar to battle cries heard coming from our own White House, such as: holy war against an evil empire, murder of innocent civilians, God is on our side, we will seek out and kill the enemy, they cannot hide, and the like.

I also note that the entire report, and this chapter especially, has obviously been carefully edited and slanted to placate the powerful Zionist lobby in Washington. For example, “Americans are blamed when Israelis fight with Palestinians.” [51] (Note: all numbers in brackets are page numbers in the report.) Of course, it is the U.S. backed partition of Arab lands, the 56-year occupation of Palestine, and the subjugation, torture, and killing of Palestinians using American funds, support, and weaponry that have been from the start and continue to be the number one cause of our troubles in the Middle East. Later in the report, this policy is referred to as being “perceived” as anti-Arab, as though perhaps it wasn’t really, but rather just imagined. [362]

Regarding the occupation, I believe that the word “occupation” occurs only once in the entire report [59] as: “‘occupation’ of Islamic lands,” and the report has the word inexplicably in quotation marks, as though perhaps it never really happened! (Note: I was hampered by lack of an index and my inability to download a PDF version in which I could do a word search, hence the qualification. I would welcome corrections.)

Throughout the report, the PLO is demonized, vilified, and referred to only as a terrorist organization. However, one should also note that the PLO was recognized at the 1974 Rabat summit of Arab leaders as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people,” and shortly thereafter the PLO was recognized and granted observer status in the U.N. General Assembly as representing the Palestinians. I thought that ignoring these facts in the report was especially biased and insulting to the long-suffering Palestinians.

At the time of this report, the sadistic torture of prisoners, mostly Arab, by the U.S. military, with tacit approval from higher up, was known and seen throughout the world, yet this report refers to it only once and as “*allegations* that the U.S. abused prisoners in its custody” as though there was some question that it really took place! And then it goes on to suggest, with regard to the torturing of prisoners, the need to “balance humanity and security,” whatever *that* is supposed to mean! [379]

For another attempt to explain why the U.S. is so wrongly hated in the Arab world, the report offers the conjecture that foreign powers have become a “scapegoat” [52] for anger against autocratic regimes within the Arab countries, but with no further explanation of how, or why the U.S. in particular. Could historic strong support of those repressive oil-rich regimes by the U.S., going all the way back to the 1930s, be a reason? The report snidely dismisses these unfavorable views of the U.S. as “at best uninformed.” [375] In the next paragraph is the implication that everything will be fine if only we can inculcate the ignorant and backward Arabs and Muslims with “U.S. values.”

No wonder that America, or more specifically the U.S. government, is so hated not only in the Middle East but now throughout the world. This report can only make matters worse. Many more examples could be given, but we must move on.

The report defends the infamous Patriot Act. [394] It lauds the “brilliant strengths” of the faltering FBI and its various inept directors. [75] It calls our attention to the “tremendous talent, energy, and dedication” of the dysfunctional CIA, which it also describes as “extraordinarily motivated.” [93] The report tells us that “the President and the Congress deserve special praise for their efforts in Afghanistan.” [370] Various other administration members also receive their share of praise. The one exception is Richard Clarke, the whistleblower, who is described as “causing friction.” [402]

There are numerous instances where information given in the report does not agree with that which is widely reported in the news media. For instance, numerous sources have reported that the CIA helped fund and train Bin Laden and his associates in the use of explosives and other weaponry in Afghanistan, but the report says this is not so. I lack the time or resources to ferret out all of these apparent contradictions and see which is closer to the truth, so I must skip them here.

What is *not* included in the report is equally revealing. There is no mention that the President tried his best to prevent the creation of this Commission, and then tried to block the investigation at every step of the way, including interviews, open hearings, and the release of critical documents. The secret testimony by the President is not included. In four pages of discussion on the possible use of planes as weapons, including four reports, one prior incident, and a practice exercise conducted by Clarke, there is no mention of the infamous lie by National Security Advisor Rice that none of this ever happened. Nor is there any mention of Rice and others making false statements under oath in the televised Commission hearings. There is no mention of assassination or attempted assassination of foreign leaders all over the world by the CIA. There is no mention that the U.S. military shuts down Arab newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations that are considered objectionable, all in the name of preserving “liberty and freedom.” There is hardly any mention of the ill-conceived and hopelessly misguided invasion of Iraq, and no mention of the unknown number of innocent civilians and children killed by U.S. forces, possibly upwards of 20,000. There is no mention of the countless children who died because of sanctions imposed by the U.S. after the Gulf War, which numerous sources (of

admittedly unknown reliability) all place at somewhere between half a million and one million. There is no mention of the shameful and well-documented contempt for Arabs in general, and Palestinians in particular, begun during the Roosevelt administration, intensified by Eleanor Roosevelt during the Truman administration, and continued nearly uninterrupted to this day. There is no mention that the makings for Saddam Hussein's dreaded biological weapons came from the U.S. during the Bush Sr. administration, facilitated by Donald Rumsfeld and the CIA. There *is* mention of possible "ties" between various terrorist organizations, but no mention of their connections to the Pentagon and CIA. If there is one line anywhere in the report that indicates the United States has ever done anything wrong in Middle East policy, I certainly have not been able to find it.

Finally we come to the last two chapters, the meat of the report, in which the Commission makes its recommendations on how to conduct this "war on Islamist terrorism." They can be summarized as follows:

1. Seek out and kill or capture Islamist terrorists, wherever they may be.
2. Destroy their now worldwide al Qaeda organization by every possible means.
3. Urgently prepare and defend America against likely future attacks.
4. Protect America by erecting a tight wall of security around our borders.

One might have hoped that at least one chapter, if not the bulk of the report, be devoted to addressing the roots of this hatred against the U.S. that originated in the Middle East and is now spreading throughout the world, and then proposing some possible remedies. Alas, scarcely a word. What a disappointment!

I have not yet seen any books coming out with a critical analysis of this report, but perhaps it is still too early. I have not seen any magazine articles either, but perhaps I have missed them. I would appreciate being posted with any commentary on this report that you may have come across.

If you want my assessment of this deplorable report, here it is in a nutshell: It can only make matters worse than they already are, if that is even possible. Another monumental failure and another golden opportunity lost.

STC, Oct. 23, 2004

Update, March 2006:

In a recent interview on TV, commission chairman Kean boasted about how his report had come out against the torture of prisoners by the U.S. military. Evidently he had not read his own report very carefully, which did not surprise me. I suspect it was nearly all written by staff. As I have mentioned, his report (page 379) appears to imply that torture is acceptable under certain circumstances to "balance humanity and security."

No one in the Bush administration most directly involved in the torture and death of prisoners by the U.S. military has yet been charged with crimes, or even forced to resign from office (or impeached).

Following the infamous and nationally televised false statements under oath by the hopelessly incompetent National Security Advisor Rice stating that her office had received no warnings of possible attacks on the U.S., including the use of airplanes as weapons, she was never charged with perjury. Indeed, following her promotion to Secretary of State she is now even mentioned as a possible presidential candidate.

Another update, August 2009:

I have just read Richard Ben-Veniste's new book, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, one chapter of which is devoted to his serving on the 9/11 Commission. Now some of the reasons for their Report being so woefully flawed and biased are made clear. The autocratic director of the staff, Philip Zelikow, had complete control over selection of staff members, who of course wrote most of the Report. He also had a strong pro-Israeli bias and even stronger pro-Bush administration ties. Look up his bio and judge for yourself.

Instead of chapter after chapter of trivia, I would have preferred to see nearly the entire report devoted to "why do they hate us?" What does Ben-Veniste have to say about that? Nothing. Also, a worthy addition to their report would have been an appendix listing all the lies told by the Bush administration, especially under oath. I do give credit to Ben-Veniste credit for at least mentioning some of those in his book. But then why not in the Report?

After a lapse of five years, my chance discovery of Ben-Veniste's new book has renewed my interest in the *9/11 Commission Report*. Finally, alongside his book in our library are several other books on the subject, the best by far being *The Commission; The Uncensored History of the 9/11 Commission*, by Philip Shenon. It confirms my worst suspicions and supports my most damning assessments. By all means read it, but brace yourself for the worst.

Another update, June 2010:

According to a report in the current *Newsweek*, the Obama administration has finally decided to stop using the insulting term *radical Islamism* as the cause of trouble. But why did anything so obvious take six years to rectify?