

New Documents Detail America's Strategic Response to 9/11

Rumsfeld's War Aim: "Significantly Change the World's Political Map"

By [The National Security Archive](#)

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Table of contents:

- [New Documents Detail America's Strategic Response to 9/11](#)

1. New Documents Detail America's Strategic Response to 9/11

- [New Documents Detail America's Strategic Response to 9/11](#) (09/11)
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Secret U.S. Message to Mullah Omar: "Every Pillar of the Taliban Regime Will Be Destroyed"

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Bush White House Resistant to Rebuilding Afghanistan

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For more information contact:

Barbara Elias - 202/994-7000

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Washington, D.C., September 11, 2011 - In October 2001 the U.S. sent a private message to Taliban leader Mullah Omar warning that "every pillar of the Taliban regime will be destroyed," according to previously secret U.S. documents posted today by the National Security Archive at www.nsarchive.org. The document collection includes high-level strategic planning memos that shed light on the U.S. response to the attacks and the Bush administration's reluctance to become involved in post-Taliban reconstruction in Afghanistan. As an October 2001 National Security Council strategy paper noted, "The U.S. should not commit to any post-Taliban military involvement since the U.S. will be heavily

engaged in the anti-terrorism effort worldwide.”

Materials posted today also include memos from officials lamenting the American strategy of destroying al-Qaeda and the Taliban without substantially investing in Afghan infrastructure and economic well-being. In 2006, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald R. Neumann asserted that recommendations to “minimize economic assistance and leave out infrastructure plays into the Taliban strategy, not to ours.” The ambassador was concerned that U.S. inattention to Afghan reconstruction was causing the U.S. and its Afghan allies to lose support. The Taliban believed they were winning, he said, a perception that “scares the hell out of Afghans.” Taliban leaders were capitalizing on America’s commitment, he said, and had sent a concise, but ominous, message to U.S. forces: “You have all the clocks but we have all the time.”

The documents published here describe multiple important post-9/11 strategic decisions. One relates to the dominant operational role played by the CIA in U.S. activities in Afghanistan. Another is the Bush administration’s expansive post-9/11 strategic focus, as expressed in Donald Rumsfeld’s remark to the president: “If the war does not significantly change the world’s political map, the U.S. will not achieve its aim/ There is value in being clear on the order of magnitude of the necessary change.” Yet another takes the form of U.S. communications with Pakistani intelligence officials insisting that Islamabad choose between the United States or the Taliban: “this was a black-and-white choice, with no grey.”

Highlights include:

- * A memo from Secretary Rumsfeld to General Franks expressing the Secretary’s frustration that the CIA had become the lead government agency for U.S. operations in Afghanistan, “Given the nature of our world, isn’t it conceivable that the Department [of Defense] ought not to be in a position of near total dependence on CIA in situations such as this?”

- * A detailed timeline of the activities of Vice President Richard Cheney and his family from September 11-27, 2001.

- * The National Security Council’s October 16, 2001 strategic outline of White House objectives to destroy the Taliban and al-Qaeda while avoiding excessive nation-building or reconstruction efforts. “The U.S. should not commit to any post-Taliban military involvement since the U.S. will be heavily engaged in the anti-terrorism effort worldwide.” The document also notes the importance of “CIA teams and special forces in country operational detachments (A teams)” for anti-Taliban operations.

- * U.S. Ambassador Neumann expresses concern in 2006 that the American failure to fully embrace reconstruction activities has harmed the American mission. “The supplemental decision recommendation to minimize economic assistance and leave out infrastructure plays into the Taliban strategy, not to ours.” A resurgent Taliban leadership summarized the emerging strategic match-up by saying, “You have all the clocks but we have all the time.”

- * A memo on U.S. strategy from Donald Rumsfeld to President Bush dated September 30, 2001, saying, “If the war does not significantly change the world’s political map, the U.S. will not achieve its aim/ There is value in being clear on the order of magnitude of the necessary change. The USG [U.S. Government] should envision a goal along these lines: New regimes in Afghanistan and another key State (or two) that supports terrorism.”

* A transcript of Washington's October 7, 2001 direct message to the Taliban: "Every pillar of the Taliban regime will be destroyed." [Document 16]

* The day after 9/11, Deputy Secretary Armitage presents a "stark choice" to Pakistani Intelligence (ISI) Chief Mahmoud Ahmed, "Pakistan must either stand with the United States in its fight against terrorism or stand against us. There was no maneuvering room."

* In talking points prepared for a September 14, 2001 National Security Council meeting. Secretary of State Colin Powell notes, "My sense is that moderate Arabs are starting to see terrorism in a whole new light. This is the key to the coalition, we are working them hard."

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