

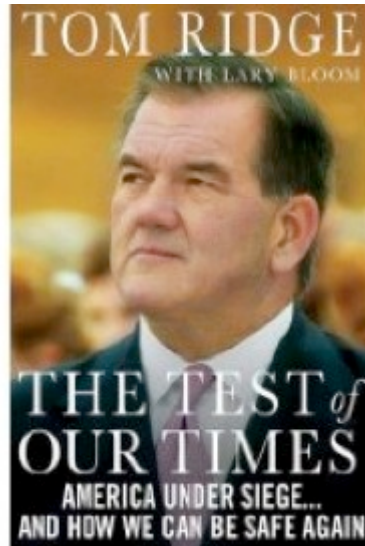


Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on August 21, 2009

## Ridge Questions Bush's Motives in Setting Terror Threat Level

Former Bush administration official and former governor of Pennsylvania, Tom Ridge, was secretary of Homeland Security, and his assertions in a new memoir of his years in the cabinet of George W. Bush are whipping up ire and allegations of shameless huckstering and "passing the buck" from some former colleagues.

In his soon-to-be-released book, [The Test of Our Times](#), Ridge claims that politics prompted the prodding he received from top-level Bush advisers to raise the terror-alert level in the days preceding the 2004 presidential election. Specifically, Ridge writes that Bush Attorney General John Ashcroft and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pointedly urged him to elevate the terror level in the wake of a videotaped message ostensibly released by al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden. Ridge steadfastly refused to change the status of the terror-alert level, but the pressure he felt to do so further justified his decision to resign from the Bush administration post he was the first to occupy.



For his part, a spokesman for Donald Rumsfeld, Keith Urbahn, adamantly disagrees with Ridge's interpretation of the actions in question and told the *New York Times*: "Given those facts [the bin Laden message], it would seem reasonable for senior administration officials to discuss the threat level. Indeed, it would have been irresponsible had that discussion not taken place." Urbahn further suggests that Ridge's revelations of purported self-serving statements on the part of the former administration ironically may be exactly the fuel propelling the provocative charges he is now making just weeks before his book is published.

In addition to his sharp and scolding description of the Bush administration's questionable rationale for altering the terror-threat level, Tom Ridge takes a shot at the former president's personal decision-making skill with regard to the mishandling of the government's response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster, a blunder that most have placed at the feet of Michael Brown, Bush's longtime friend and his personally selected head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Ridge relates that he lobbied unsuccessfully to replace Brown, but that President Bush would not be persuaded.

In fairness, Ridge isn't the only former Bush administration official to question the methods and motives of the previous occupants of the Oval Office. Scott McClellan wrote a scathing memoir about his time as



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the president's press secretary; Richard Clarke, former counterterrorism czar, wrote the tale of America's war on terror from an insider's point of view; and Paul O'Neill, former treasury secretary, chronicled his disillusionment with Bush's policies and procedures in his book, *The Price of Loyalty*.

In his book, set for release on September 1 from Thomas Dunne Books, Ridge argues that a threatening message "should not be the sole reason to elevate the threat level." Further, Ridge muses, "we weren't seeing any additional intelligence that justified it. In fact, we were incredulous. I wondered, 'Is this about security or politics?'" The 304 pages of ink that comprise the rest of the book purports to answer that question and the challenge set forth in the book's subtitle: "How We Can be Safe Again."



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