

Today: Mostly sunny, hot.
High 92. Low 74.
Monday: Mostly sunny,
humid. High 98. Low 76.

Details, C12

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FIVE YEARS LATER

Politics as Usual

How Common Ground of 9/11 Gave Way to Partisan Split

By DAVID S. BRODER and DAN BALZ
Washington Post Staff Writers

It was the moment that was supposed to change everything. But almost five years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, American politics has reverted to many of its old habits and patterns.

The bipartisanship that appeared spontaneously in the aftermath of the attacks was quickly swallowed up by a resurgence of partisan differences among voters and politicians. National security emerged not as a source of unity, but as a new fault line between the two parties, creating a set of issues that have led to bitter disagreement.

The events of Sept. 11, 2001, and their aftermath played out in two national elections, in 2002 and 2004, as President Bush and his team skillfully used

the issue of terrorism to expand Republican congressional margins and to retain the White House. And with midterm elections looming in November, Sept. 11 still resonates politically, with fears of terrorism and memories of a nation bound together in shock and sadness capable of affecting the attitudes of some voters.

But in the intervening period, the war in Iraq has assumed a far more prominent role in the political debates and in shaping

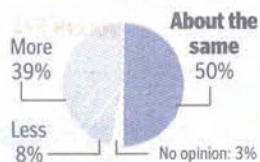
what have become the negative views of Bush's presidency that have defined much of his second term.

Whether the return to national rancor and partisan conflict was avoidable or inevitable remains a topic of debate, although the evidence tilts in the direction of inevitability. The deep divisions that produced the disputed election of 2000 never disappeared and quickly reasserted themselves shortly after Sept. 11. In a 50-50 America, the lust for political advantage overwhelmed calls for consensus and cooperation.

More fundamentally, the reemergence of security issues highlighted long-standing and heartfelt

The Washington Post-ABC NEWS POLL

Q: Would you say national politics has become more partisan since the events of Sept. 11, less partisan, or is it about the same?



This Washington Post-ABC News poll was conducted by telephone June 22-25, 2006, among a random national sample of 1,000 adults.

THE WASHINGTON POST

See CHANGE, A10, Col. 1

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Politics as Usual

As Nation Healed Surprisingly Fast,

CHANGE, From A1

differences between Republican and Democratic voters over the use of military force and American power to deal with threats old and new. Once Bush fixed his eye on taking out Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, there may have been no way to avoid the political clashes and subsequent divisions that followed.

Today, the war in Iraq and the economy's mixed signals rank higher than terrorism as voting issues. Public attitudes on Iraq are by now well fixed, to the detriment of the president. Those on the economy are subject to change, depending on whether the dominant news of the summer and fall is good or bad.

While terrorism remains a constant threat, it has subsided in the minds of many voters as the principal issue that will determine their vote in November.

Still, a survey experiment commissioned by The Washington Post and conducted by Stanford University communications Prof. Shanto Iyengar showed that, even five years later, visual reminders of the attacks of Sept. 11 can — modestly — affect attitudes about Bush, the causes of terrorism and how to combat it.

"The best way of summarizing this pattern of results is that it appears as though President Bush has a 9/11 halo," Iyengar said. "When people see 9/11, they immediately respond more positively to the president. In this context, given that his evaluations are fairly low, what we're saying is, it makes them less negative."

That makes it likely that reminders of those attacks and threats of global terrorism again will be seen in campaign ads for this fall's elections and in 2008. Just as likely, given public attitudes, are images of America's troubles in Iraq, with the first signs coming this month in an Internet ad by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee showing flag-draped coffins of U.S. soldiers.

These images will be put to work in the service of partisan advantage rather than national unity, a far cry from the immediate aftermath of the attacks, when extravagant claims about the lasting effects abounded.

"We are changed forevermore," Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) said on that bright and horrific day when the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed in rubble, one side of the Pentagon lay smoldering along the banks of the Potomac and a field in Pennsylvania had been turned into a graveyard for the passengers on hijacked United Flight 93.

Hagel's statement was echoed by many politicians, but today few Americans say the tone and practice of politics has changed for the better. A Washington Post-ABC News poll last month found that almost nine in 10 Americans said politics is the same or even more partisan than it was before the attacks. And on this, there is no partisan divide: Half of all Democrats, Republicans and independents said there has been no change, while about four in 10 in each of those groups said politics is more partisan.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) said Sept. 11 changed politics far less than he had hoped. "I'd hoped that we would be more bipartisan and I think we are bipartisan in the war on terror," he said in a recent interview. "But on every other issue, we are more divided and more partisan than I've ever seen us."

The partisan wars have severely limited Washington's ability to accomplish big things. Bush's second-term domestic initiative, the overhaul of Social Security, collapsed in the face of a partisan standoff in Congress. Public disaffection with politicians in the capital has increased since Sept. 11, 2001, and politicians are nervously wondering whether it will result in a major eruption this fall or in 2008.

The 'New Normal'

Last month, when Bush met with European Union leaders, foreign journalists pressed him to explain why so many Europeans have come to dislike the United States. "Look," he replied, "people didn't agree with my decision on Iraq, and I understand that. For Europe, September the 11th was a moment; for us, it was a change of thinking."

In reality, what is most striking was how quickly the country returned to normal after the attacks, albeit what pollster Bill McInturff called "the new normal." McInturff and his partners at Public Opinion Strategies, a firm that polls for Republican candidates and other clients, decided shortly after Sept. 11 to track the changes in public opinion systematically over the subsequent year.

What the surveys showed, as McInturff put it, is the nation's ability to shrug off even something as devastating as the attacks of Sept. 11. "There was a massive shock wave in the body politic, and then there was this recovery, and this recovery happened stunningly quickly," he said, adding, "It didn't take America five years to recover. It was like a year."

At first, changes in attitudes were dramatic, suggesting a potential break with the old politics. In the days after the attack, trust in government in Washington to do the right thing all or most of the time hit 64 percent, compared with 30 percent in the spring of 2000. By the summer of 2002, the percentage had settled back at 39 percent in the McInturff survey.

A Gallup poll in December 2001 found that 71 percent of Americans said that religion as a whole was increasing its influence on American life, a sharp turnabout from the findings of almost 20 years of polling. By March 2002, according to a Pew Research poll, the 9/11 effect had worn off and the public's view had reverted to pre-attack levels, with 37 percent saying religion's influence on American life was increasing.

Fear of attack also spiked, but then quickly began to recede, although women remained more nervous than men. Fear of flying increased, then began to decline within weeks of the attack. The attacks understandably scrambled the nation's issue agenda. Combating terrorism rose to the top of the country's priorities, while concern over other issues dropped. But by the end of 2001, concern about jobs and the economy once again were as high as terrorism and security. Health care also returned as a major issue.

Politicians quickly picked up the cues, sometimes with surprising speed. Bush stayed off the campaign trail, but there were negative ads (on issues other than terrorism) on the air in gubernatorial campaigns in New Jersey and Virginia by late October 2001, and the jockeying for control of Congress resumed in earnest by early 2002.

Presidential candidates, however, discovered a new set of realities, which played out dramatically in

The Power of an Image

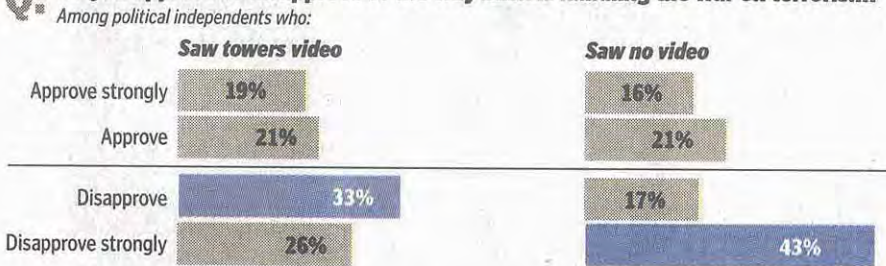
Five years after the attacks on Sept. 11, images of the Twin Towers in flames still have the power to make modest changes in people's opinions about President Bush and U.S. foreign policy, according to a survey-based experiment sponsored by The Washington Post. In the experiment, more than 2,500 online respondents were broken into groups, and each was shown a brief news clip before being asked to reply to a series of questions. As shown below, opinions varied depending on which video clip people saw. The images depicted are similar to the ones respondents saw in the videos.

9/11: A Modest, Lingering Effect

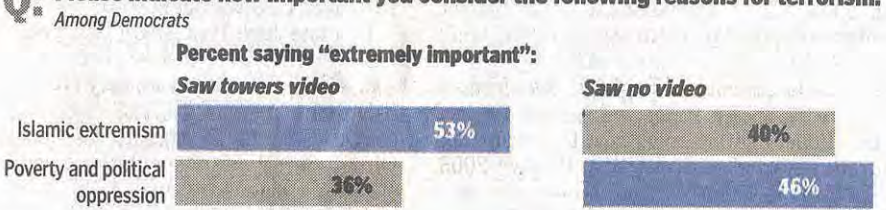
Those who saw the towers video, particularly political independents, were somewhat less harsh in evaluating Bush's effort against terrorism. They were also more likely to see terrorists as motivated by fanaticism and criminal intent, rather than by political grievances.



Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling the war on terrorism?



Q: Please indicate how important you consider the following reasons for terrorism:

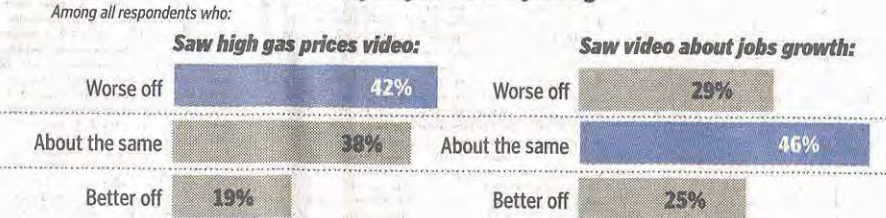


The Economy:

Gas Prices (bad news) vs. Jobs Growth (good news)

Differing media portrayals of the economy — a "bad news" clip about high gasoline prices versus a "good news" clip about jobs growth — had a strong effect on respondents' evaluations of the country's economy and their own finances. It also affected their views of Bush's work on economic issues.

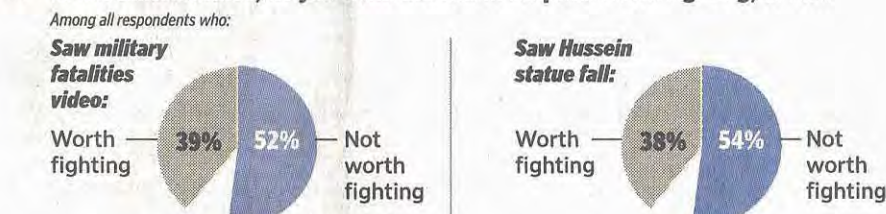
Q: Would you say that you and your family are better off, worse off, or just about the same financially as you were a year ago?



Iraq War: Fixed Opinions

Views on the war didn't change, no matter whether respondents saw evidence of success — the toppling of the 40-foot statue of Saddam Hussein soon after the invasion — or evidence of sacrifice, in the form of a video clip about military fatalities.

Q: All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war in Iraq was worth fighting, or not?



HOW THE SURVEY WAS DONE: The survey-based experiment reported in the article was commissioned by The Washington Post and conducted online June 29 to July 5 by Polimetrix of Palo Alto, Calif., under the direction of Stanford University Prof. Shanto Iyengar. A representative sample of 2,529 adults participated in the project. These voters were not, strictly speaking, selected randomly, but in a way that produced a sample that reflected the makeup of the electorate in terms of age, race, gender, party identification, income, education and other key variables.

In previous tests, the sampling methodology used in the experiment produced results that compared favorably with those based on traditional random sample techniques.

Respondents were then randomly assigned to one of nine experimental conditions — eight groups each saw a different video clip before taking the survey, while one group saw no news clip — to compare the way different images affect public opinion.

IMAGES VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS; GRAPHIC BY CLAUDIA DEANE, SETH HAMLIN AND LAURA STANTON — THE WASHINGTON POST

2004. "We essentially transformed our [Democratic] convention into a VFW meeting," said Democratic strategist David Axelrod. "That would not have happened if not for 9/11."

The "new normal" meant that it became essential for anyone seeking the presidency to establish credibility on national security. Sen. John F. Kerry (Mass.) won the Democratic nomination in 2004 in part because his résumé included combat service in Vietnam, which Democratic primary voters regarded at the time as an essential prerequisite to winning the general election.

John Edwards, the Democratic vice presidential nominee, found himself on the defensive in the primaries because he lacked foreign policy experience. Edwards, then a first-term senator from North Carolina, spent the two days before Sept. 11 meeting with advisers about running in 2004. "I woke up the next morning and went to work, and 9/11 happened," he recalled.

When he resumed campaign planning in the spring of 2002, Edwards had concluded that voters would have a new set of criteria for evaluating candidates: How tough are you? Are you tough on terrorism? Are you tough in what you're willing to do? Are you tough in your ability and willingness to use military force?

Today he believes the contours of those criteria are different still. "I think 9/11 made national security/foreign policy a dominant issue in presidential races," he said. "I think Iraq changed the criteria by which people evaluate what matters."

No one knows what the state of Iraq will be in 2008, or the state of the world generally. But there is little doubt that the threat of terrorism will continue to shape candidacies and campaign strategies.

Potential 2008 candidates such as McCain and former New York mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani (R) will boast résumés that speak of their experience in times of crisis and conflict. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) will point to what she has learned on the Armed Services Committee and to her support for the war, if not always the way Bush has handled it. Newcomers such as Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (R) and former Virginia governor Mark R. Warner (D) will be under pressure to demonstrate their capacity to deal with the new world.

Images and Impacts

The first television commercials aired by Bush's reelection campaign in the spring of 2004 featured brief footage of flag-draped remains being carried out of the ruins at Ground Zero. The ad sparked instant controversy, with critics charging the Bush team with exploiting Sept. 11 for political gain.

Bush was determined to use 9/11 in his campaign, and, knowing that any ad featuring the attacks would be controversial, his advisers had shown the opening commercials to groups of voters before putting them on the air.

"We discovered that people absolutely wanted to talk about it, felt it was totally appropriate and felt it would have been odd if we hadn't talked about it," said Mark McKinnon, Bush's media adviser. "They felt 9/11 was a defining moment for America. . . . They felt it was a moment that brought us all together."

To help gauge how effects of the Sept. 11 attacks, as well as the role of the war in Iraq and the national economy, could influence voters this November, The Post conducted the online experiments for use in this article, under the direction of Iyengar.

A representative sample of 2,529 adults participated in the experiments, which were conducted June 29 through July 5. The online tests were conducted by Polimetrix, a California research company, with participants recruited by the firm.

Individuals were randomly assigned to view one of eight actual news broadcasts aired by one of the major television networks. Each brief video featured one or more distinctive visual images in addition to narration. One group saw a news video showing smoke billowing out of the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001. Others saw news clips reporting specific events in the war in Iraq, while still others saw clips reporting on economic developments.

After watching the news broadcasts, participants answered a survey that measured their attitudes toward Bush, the campaign against terrorism, the war in Iraq and the economy, as well as views on the two political parties and prominent Republican and Democratic leaders. By looking for differences in the way respondents who saw different news broadcasts responded to the survey questions, Iyengar could estimate the impact of each visual image on political attitudes.

What the experiments showed is that, even five years after the attacks, the image of the Twin Towers under attack has lingering effects on the public's political attitudes on a range of security-related questions. Those who were shown the Twin Towers video tended to be less hostile toward the president's handling of terrorism than was a separate group that did not see the same video.

"We went in with the expectation that people would have had so much exposure to 9/11 over the past five years that another 30 seconds of watching the same old video would not add very much," Iyengar said. "It turns out that reminding people of 9/11 modifies their opinions on a variety of issues."

The Twin Towers imagery also affected how Americans assess the causes of terrorism. The experiment found that 53 percent of Democrats who saw the video said Islamic extremism was extremely important in causing terrorism, compared with 40 percent of Democrats in a control group, who saw no video. Those in the control group were more likely to cite poverty and political oppression as causing terrorism than were those who saw the Twin Towers video.

By way of contrast, images of the war in Iraq failed to change attitudes. Whether images of success (the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue) or setbacks (U.S. or Iraqi casualties), the videos did not affect views about the war, about Bush, about the upcoming election. After more than three years of daily reporting from Iraq, public opinion now is difficult to sway. "Seeing a small clip about something in Iraq, they say, 'I already know this,'" Iyengar said.

Economic images, however, demonstrated considerable power — greater than the video of the Twin Towers, but strictly limited to attitudes about the state of the national economy and personal finances.

FIVE YEARS LATER

Politics as Usual

Iraq, Economy Became the Issues

How We've Changed



LEADERS UNITE: The day after, President Bush convenes leaders of both parties as the nation prepared a unified response to the Sept. 11 attacks.

"We are changed forevermore."

Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) used these words on Sept. 11 to express sentiments that many elected leaders echoed at the time.



A CAMPAIGN ISSUE: Running for reelection in 2004, the Republican commander in chief uses images of Ground Zero to buttress his case.

"... I think we are bipartisan in the war on terror. But on every other issue, we are more divided and more partisan than I've ever seen us."

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.)

CHANGE, From A10

Different groups were shown images either of bad news (rising gasoline prices) or good news (jobs growth). Among those who saw the reports of gas prices, 42 percent said their family is worse off than a year ago, compared with 29 percent of those who saw the good news video. The spread was even greater among independents. Those who saw the gas prices video also were more pessimistic about the national economy.

"I wasn't expecting the kind of effect we found on the economy, particularly because those are really large effects, on the order of magnitude of 10 percentage points," Iyengar said. "Given what we know about the impact of perceptions of the economy on voting, those are consequential effects."

Reversion to Partisanship

Could the reversion to the partisanship that prevailed before Sept. 11 have been averted by different presidential leadership?

One view comes from Lee H. Hamilton, the former Democratic congressman from Indiana who was co-chairman of the commission that investigated the events that led up to 9/11 and recommended sweeping changes in America's counterterrorism strategy and organization.

"You would not expect the massive unity we saw in the immediate aftermath of the attacks to continue indefinitely," Hamilton said in an interview. "But you would also not expect it to dissipate as quickly as it did. The president could have consulted more with Congress and with allies, and generally been more inclusive, rather than expand executive power as much as he did. Rather than go off on his own on Guantanamo and national surveillance, he could have done a lot more to maintain unity. But he would not have been entirely successful, even under the best of circumstances."

Thomas H. Kean, the former Republican governor of New Jersey, who led the 9/11 commission along with Hamilton, said in a separate interview that Iraq "shattered the coalition" of support for the war on

terrorism — a conclusion that is challenged by surveys taken within months of the attacks that even then revealed deep divisions between the parties on the use of force that dated perhaps as far back as Vietnam.

A Washington Post-ABC News Poll in November 2001 asked, "Would you support or oppose sending a significant number of U.S. ground troops into Afghanistan if it meant getting into a long war with large numbers of U.S. troops killed or injured?" Among Republicans, 72 percent answered yes; among Democrats, 57 percent said no.

The war in Iraq further divided the two parties, even before the invasion in March 2003. A Post-ABC News poll taken in early 2003 found that 57 percent of Democrats opposed going to war with Iraq, while 78 percent of Republicans supported it.

When U.S. forces entered Baghdad, two-thirds of the Democrats moved to support of the war, but once the conventional fighting ended and the occupation began, they reverted to opposition. By July 2003, only 34 percent of Democrats said the war was worth fighting, while 84 percent of Republicans supported it. The latest Post-ABC News poll shows an even wider split between the parties.

Bush insisted that Iraq was the new front in the war on terrorism, and when he asked Congress in 2002 to authorize the use of force, 29 of 51 Democrats in the Senate voted with him, but 126 of 207 House Democrats disagreed. That November, Democrats were assailed by the president and other Republicans for their supposed reluctance to combat terrorism abroad or at home.

Many Democrats cite the political attacks on then-Sen. Max Cleland (D-Ga.), a wounded Vietnam veteran, whose votes for several union-protection amendments helped delay passage of the bill creating the Department of Homeland Security. His opponent ran ads saying that Cleland "pretends to support President Bush, but he voted against homeland security 11 times." That campaign signaled to many Democrats that Republicans would not hesitate to use the terrorism issue as a partisan club.

The argument was repeated in the 2004 campaign, as Bush and Vice President Cheney painted Kerry

and Edwards as naive or wavering in their approach to combating terrorism.

For Electorate, the Future

After campaigns in 2002 and 2004, the Democrats are on notice that they must try to persuade voters they have the backbone for the fight against terrorism.

As Hamilton said, "The Republicans have made national security the paramount issue for both the presidency and Congress. The Democrats have had a very difficult time responding. They have been accused of being weak on national security, and they still haven't figured out how to answer."

In a late June Post-ABC News poll, when voters were asked which party they trust to handle certain issues, Republicans led on only one topic: the campaign against terrorism. Their 46 percent to 39 percent lead over the Democrats was modest, compared with the 2 to 1 advantage they enjoyed earlier, but it stands out at a time when Republicans are trailing on the economy, immigration, corruption and Iraq.

The continued public perception that their party is weaker on defense explains why Kerry endorsed giving the Army more troops, and why congressional Democratic leaders pulled out all the stops this spring to promote their proposals for national security, before unveiling their domestic priorities.

At the same time, that war has become a major burden for the GOP. The Post-ABC News poll showed Iraq was rated the most important issue by 24 percent of the voters, leading seven topics, along with the economy. Terrorism was in sixth place, with 8 percent.

By 56 percent to 43 percent, respondents said they think the Iraq war is part of the war on terrorism, as the president maintains. But the percentage seeing them as separate has doubled since the spring of 2003.

Only 40 percent of Americans now say that, considering the costs and the benefits, they think it was worth fighting. Almost twice as many feel strongly that it was not worth it as believe strongly that it was. Three out of five say it has not contributed to long-

term peace and stability in the region, and three out of four say it has damaged the United States' image in the world.

Iraq appears destined to define Bush's legacy. A Post-ABC News poll last month asked Americans whether Bush will be remembered most for Iraq or efforts to combat terrorism: 79 percent picked Iraq, while 15 percent said terrorism.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove signaled earlier this year that Republicans will continue to use terrorism and national security to put the Democrats on the defensive, this fall and likely in 2008, by invoking the president's resolve to defeat terrorists no matter how long it takes.

But Democratic pollster Geoffrey Garin said the GOP strategy has been compromised by Iraq, which he said has profoundly affected the way Americans think about what it takes to keep them safe.

"In some ways, the war in Iraq has become an object lesson of what not to do," he said, adding that Democrats now may have an opportunity to go toe-to-toe with Republicans on national security. "You can't think about the political consequences of 9/11 separate from this intervening event of the war in Iraq."

Bush's reelection campaign taught Edwards that character and leadership and integrity mean more to voters than particular positions on issues. But five years after Sept. 11, he said the contours of those attributes continue to change. "I think they're [voters] looking for different leaders than they were right after 9/11 or even in the 2004 election," Edwards said.

Against this backdrop, the Republican House voted recently to endorse a continuation of the Bush policy toward Iraq and the Republican Senate defeated two alternative Democratic resolutions calling for immediate or phased withdrawal of U.S. troops.

That sets up a debate in which the lingering effects of 9/11 are, in effect, pitted against the more recent news and pictures from Iraq.

Both parties nervously await the voters' answers.

Polling director Richard Morin, assistant polling director Claudia Deane and researcher Zachary A. Goldfarb contributed to this report.

Health and Human Services

Unprepared for the Attacks; Preparing for Flu Pandemic

Whatever it meant for politics, for many government agencies and those who ran them, Sept. 11, 2001, was a life-changing experience. Tommy G. Thompson, then the secretary of health and human services, had called a meeting that morning with a group of scientists to discuss the threat of pandemic flu.

The meeting was canceled as Thompson struggled to organize a delivery of emergency medical supplies to New York City. But in the aftermath of 9/11 and that fall's anthrax scare, it became clear to him that the United States was seriously unprepared for major emergencies.

"For the first time," Thompson said in a recent interview, "state and federal governments began looking at how we might rebuild public health facilities" that had suffered from years of budgetary neglect. Inside the Department of Health and Human Services, he said, "we realized how disjointed we were and how the various divisions were completely independent."

In response, an organization that had been preoccupied with the bureaucratic demands of Medicare, Medicaid and welfare began to refocus on urgent threats to homeland security and the need for rapid response. The changes included a centraliza-

tion of authority symbolized by the creation of a "war room" crammed with the latest communications equipment on the same floor as the secretary's office, to coordinate information from all the divisions and issue orders to all hands.

As the threat has grown in scale, the budget of HHS has grown apace. Official figures show the department's bioterrorism and emergency preparedness budget went from \$237 million in fiscal 2000 to \$9.7 billion in fiscal 2006.

Now, said Mike Leavitt, Thompson's successor as HHS secretary, the department is focused on what could be an even bigger challenge: the threat of pandemic flu, the very subject that Thompson was planning to discuss on the morning of Sept. 11.

"It has created a need for an even deeper inspection of our readiness throughout the country," Leavitt said. "The people of Salina, Kansas, weren't really worried about terrorists coming to their town, but they have reason to be concerned about a pandemic."

What was true of HHS was repeated throughout the government, and the result was a rapid increase in the overall federal budget. In the fiscal year that ended three weeks after Sept. 11, Washington spent \$1.86 trillion; this year, the compar-



Operations center deputy director Daniel Coviello at work in the "war room" near the office of the HHS secretary.

ble figure is \$2.71 trillion, an increase of 46 percent.

And the attention of government officials, from the president down, shifted from routine matters, especially from their domestic policy concerns.

"I feel certain that I have spent a substantially

higher percentage of my time focusing on matters related to the security of the homeland than I would have five years before," Leavitt said. "It became evident to me early on that this was a major part of my responsibility."

— David S. Broder

Special Report

Between now and Sept. 11, this series of articles will explore the impact of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

washingtonpost.com

To participate in the Stanford University-Washington Post online video experiment, go to www.washingtonpost.com/politics. To view an archive of photos, videos and news stories on the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, go to www.washingtonpost.com/nation.

Washington Post Radio

7:10 a.m. Monday: National political reporter Dan Balz on how politics have changed five years later; and Bill McInturff of Public Opinion Strategies on post-9/11 attitudes.