

Assertions in counterterrorism debate difficult

ANALYSIS

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In the bitter debate over America's counterterrorism policies, former Vice President Dick Cheney has introduced an assertion that substantially raises the stakes.

Twice in the past two weeks — including during his speech Thursday — Cheney has said that the Bush administration's approach saved "perhaps hundreds of thousands" of lives.

It is a claim that goes beyond anything Cheney or former President George W. Bush said while in office, crediting their approach with preventing casualties on a scale the United States has not seen since World War II.

But terrorism experts said that although it is possible to envision scenarios that involve casualties of that magnitude, no evidence has emerged about the plots disrupted during the Bush admin-

istration to suggest that Cheney's claim is true.

"It's an easy thing to say and a difficult thing to prove," said Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert at Georgetown University. "I think it's another broadside in this ongoing feud."

Cheney first used the language during a May 10 appearance on CBS's "Face the Nation." "I'm convinced, absolutely convinced that we saved thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of lives," Cheney said.

Cheney's assertion is "plausible" if he is referring to concerns that al-Qaida had ambitions of acquiring a nuclear, biological or chemical weapon, said Gary J. Schmitt, an intelligence expert at the American Enterprise Institute, where Cheney delivered his speech Thursday.

"Because they disrupted the leadership of al-Qaida," Schmitt said, Cheney can reasonably claim that "they were able in some larger sense to preclude an attack in the years ahead."

But in his second reference to six-figure casualties, Cheney went farther, and said those lives were saved as a direct result of the CIA's use of waterboarding and other so-called enhanced interrogation methods.

"The intelligence officers who questioned the terrorists can be proud of their work, proud of the results," Cheney

There is no evidence that al-Qaida suspects in CIA custody yielded intelligence on plots involving weapons of mass killing.

said in his Thursday speech, "because they prevented the violent deaths of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of people."

That assertion is more difficult to support, experts said, because there is no evidence that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed or other al-Qaida suspects formerly in CIA custody yielded intelligence on plots

involving nuclear or other mass-casualty weapons.

Last year, President George W. Bush listed a series of plots that had been thwarted during his administration. Among them were plans to blow up fuel tanks at a New York airport, a plot to blow up airliners bound for the East Coast and a scheme to destroy the Library Tower skyscraper in Los Angeles.

Al-Qaida's efforts to produce anthrax at laboratories in Afghanistan were derailed by the U.S. invasion in 2001. The terrorist network's plots involving illicit weapons have so far been unsuccessful and small in scale.

After his arrest in Chicago in 2002, Jose Padilla was accused of plotting to detonate a radiological bomb, a device that uses a conventional explosive to spread contaminating debris. He was convicted of aiding terrorists.

In perhaps the most advanced terrorist plot involving unconventional weapons, Kamal Bourgass was accused in 2003 of making the poison ricin

TIMES GALLERY



French model Adriana Karembeu (right) appears with Mona Yamamoto, a Japanese TV personality, at a talk show at the Westin Hotel in Tokyo on May 15 to promote her total beauty brand "Adriana Karembeu," which will be marketed in Japan next month by Colza Incubator. YOSHIKI MIURA



Cameroon's Ambassador to Japan Pierre Ndzengue and his wife, Yasumu Sakamoto, welcome Hajime Shimizu, former head of Nakatsue Village Earth Foundation, to a reception at the Hotel New Otani in Tokyo on May 20. YOSHIKI MIURA