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Michael Chertoff

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Jamie Rose for The New York Times

Michael Chertoff, the former secretary of homeland security, came to the job with experience in fighting terrorism, having served as the head of the Justice Department's criminal division in the months after Sept. 11th.

He began his prosecutorial career working in Manhattan under Rudolph W. Giuliani, and was named United States Attorney in New Jersey by President George H.W. Bush, a post in which he made a reputation by pursuing political corruption cases. His introduction to Washington came as counsel for Republicans on the

Senate Whitewater Committee. In 2003, after Mr. Chertoff had proved instrumental in winning approval of the Patriot Act and other anti-terrorism measures, President Bush appointed him as an appeals court judge.

Mr. Bush turned to Mr. Chertoff in early 2005 to head the Department of Homeland Security after his first choice, Bernard B. Kerick, Mr. Giuliani's former police commissioner, withdrew in the face of newspaper accounts of possible tax fraud and other improper business dealings. Mr. Chertoff was confirmed unanimously, and set out with his usual energy to remake the giant young department that had originally been led by Tom Ridge.

His focus was clearly on terrorism, but events had other plans. Under his department's umbrella fell the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and with it, responsibility for natural disasters. But when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and its levees collapsed, Mr. Chertoff was, by his own later admission, slow to focus on the domestic disaster as it developed, even flying off to Atlanta for a terrorism conference as the city flooded. The head of F.E.M.A. at the time, Michael Brown, later furiously criticized Mr. Chertoff and blamed him for the dilatory federal response, but reports by investigative committees in the House and Senate found enough to blame both men for. Mr. Chertoff was cited in particular for delays in activating the federal emergency plan that could have rushed aid more quickly to the Gulf Coast. On terrorism, even some critics of Mr. Chertoff's policies while at the Justice Department have said they respected his legal intellect. They noted that Mr. Chertoff was willing at times to distance himself from administration policies, as he did in an opinion article in 2003 for The Weekly Standard in which he questioned the practice of holding enemy combatants indefinitely without charges.

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CNN JUNE 19, 2011 CNN.com

MSNBC.COM MAY 8, 2011 May 8: Donilon, Chertoff, Hayden, Giuliani, roundtable

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