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PLAN

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Mark Malseed, a 1997 architecture graduate of Lehigh University who was my assistant on *Bush at War*, stayed on for this book, the next volume in the Bush saga. I have been blessed to have him assist me full-time in the reporting, writing, research and conception of the book. Mark blossomed in every way, particularly as an editor who knows how to compress, clarify meaning and find the proper words and rhythm for a story. He is incredibly well-informed on everything from literature to geography and current events. He is a computer and Internet whiz, one of the younger generation whose technical skills are a sixth sense. Though he retains a natural tough-mindedness, his hallmarks are a deep sense of fairness and an insistence that we reflect with precision what people said, meant and did. Ours is a friendship that has grown and one I continue to treasure. Last time he was a collaborator. This time he was a partner.

A NOTE TO READERS

The aim of this book is to provide the first detailed, behind-the-scenes account of how and why President George W. Bush, his war council and allies decided to launch a preemptive war in Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein.

Information in the book comes from more than 75 key people directly involved in the events, including war cabinet members, the White House staff and officials serving at various levels of the State and Defense Departments and the Central Intelligence Agency. These interviews were conducted on background, meaning I could use the information but not identify the sources of it in the book. The main sources were interviewed a number of times, often with long intervals between interviews so they could address new information I had obtained. In addition, I interviewed President Bush on the record for more than three and a half hours over two days, December 10 and 11, 2003. I also interviewed Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld on the record for more than three hours in the fall of 2003.

Many of the direct quotations of dialogue, dates, times and other details of this history come from documents, including personal notes, calendars, chronologies, official and unofficial records, phone transcripts and memos.

Where thoughts, judgments or feelings are attributed to participants, I have obtained these from the person directly, a colleague with firsthand knowledge or the written record.

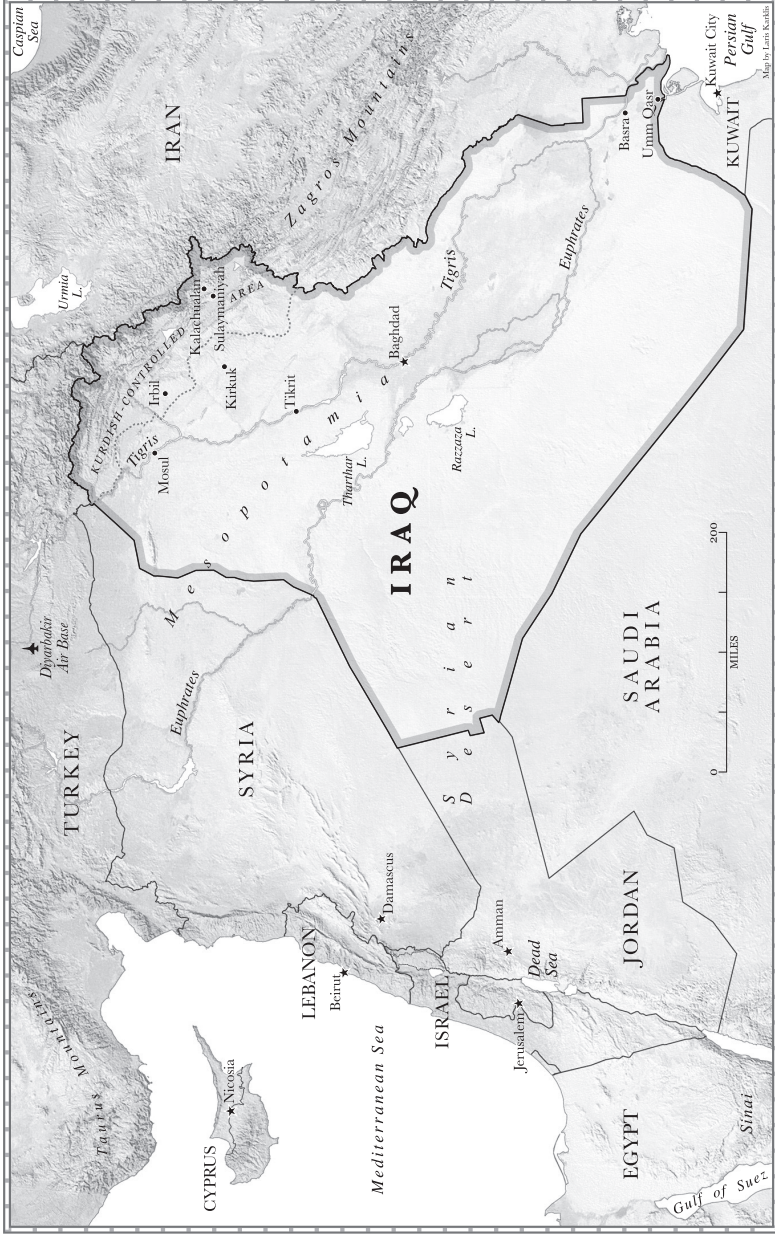
I spent more than a year researching and interviewing to obtain this material. The reporting started at the bottom of the information chain with many sources who are not mentioned in the book but were willing to share some of the secret history.

The decision making leading to the Iraq War—concentrated in 16 months from November 2001 to March 2003—is probably the best window into understanding who George W. Bush is, how he operates and what he cares about.

I have attempted, as best I can, to find out what really happened and to provide some interpretations and occasional analysis. I wanted to take a reader as close as possible to the decision making that led to war.

My purpose is to recount the strategies, meetings, phone calls, planning sessions, motivations, dilemmas, conflicts, doubts and raw emotions. The most elusive parts of any history are often the critical moments in the debates and the key turning or decision points that remain secret for years and are not revealed publicly until presidents and others leave office. This history presents many of those moments, but I am aware I have not found all of them.

*Bob Woodward
March 1, 2004
Washington, D.C.*



PROLOGUE

P^{RESIDENT} GEORGE W. BUSH clamped his arm on his secretary of defense, Donald H. Rumsfeld, as a National Security Council meeting in the White House Situation Room was just finishing on Wednesday, November 21, 2001. It was the day before Thanksgiving, just 72 days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the beginning of the eleventh month of Bush's presidency.

"I need to see you," the president said to Rumsfeld. The affectionate gesture sent a message that important presidential business needed to be discussed in the utmost privacy. Bush knew it was dramatic for him to call the secretary of defense aside. The two men went into one of the small cubbyhole offices adjacent to the Situation Room, closed the door and sat down.

"I want you . . ." the president began, and as is often the case he restarted his sentence. "What kind of a war plan do you have for Iraq? How do you feel about the war plan for Iraq?"

Rumsfeld said he didn't think the Iraq war plan was current. It didn't represent the thinking of General Tommy Franks, the combatant commander for the region, and it certainly didn't represent his own thinking. The plan was basically Desert Storm II Plus, he explained, meaning it was a slightly enhanced version of the massive invasion force employed by Bush's father in the 1991 Gulf War. "I am concerned about all of our war plans," the secretary added. He poured out some of his accumulated frustrations and consternation.

He was reviewing all 68 of the department's secret war and other contingency plans worldwide and had been for months.

Bush and Rumsfeld are a contrasting pair. Large and physical with a deep stare from small brown eyes, Bush, 55, has a quick, joshing manner which at times borders on the impulsive. Focused, direct, practical but not naturally articulate, he had been elected to his first political office as governor of Texas only nine years earlier, a novice thrust into the presidency. Rumsfeld, 69, had been elected to his first political office, congressman from the 13th District of Illinois in the Chicago suburbs, 39 years earlier. Small, almost boyishly dashing, with thinning combed-back hair, Rumsfeld was intense and also focused as he squinted through his trifocals. He is capable of a large, infectious smile that can overwhelm his face or alternatively convey impatience, even condescension, though he is deferential and respectful to the president.

In his semi-professorial voice Rumsfeld explained to Bush that the process of drafting war plans was so complex that it took years. The present war plans tended to hold assumptions that were stale, he told the president, and they failed miserably to account for the fact that a new administration with different goals had taken over. The war planning process was woefully broken and maddening. He was working to fix it.

"Let's get started on this," Bush recalled saying. "And get Tommy Franks looking at what it would take to protect America by removing Saddam Hussein if we have to." He also asked, Could this be done on a basis that would not be terribly noticeable?

"Sure, because I'm doing all of them," Rumsfeld replied. His worldwide review would provide perfect cover. "There isn't a combatant commander that doesn't know how I feel and that I'm getting them refreshed." He had spoken with all the main regional commanders, the four-star generals and admirals for the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, as well as Franks's Central Command (CENTCOM), which encompassed the Middle East, South-Central Asia and the Horn of Africa.

The president had another request. Don't talk about what you are doing with others.

Yes, sir, Rumsfeld said. But it would be helpful to be able to know to whom he could talk when the president had brought others into his thinking. "It's particularly important that I talk to George Tenet," the secretary said. CIA Director Tenet would be critical to intelligence gathering and any coordinated covert efforts in Iraq.

"Fine," the president said, indicating that at a later date Tenet and others could become involved. But not now.

Two years later in interviews, Bush said he did not want others in on the secret because a leak would trigger "enormous international angst and domestic speculation. I knew what would happen if people thought we were developing a potential or a war plan for Iraq."

The Bush-Rumsfeld-Franks work remained secret for months and when partial disclosures made their way into the media the next year, the president, Rumsfeld and others in the administration, attempting to defuse any sense of immediacy, spoke of contingency planning and insisted that war plans were not on the president's desk.

Knowledge of this work would have ignited a firestorm, the president knew. "It was such a high-stakes moment and when people had this sense of war followed on the heels of the Afghan decision," - Bush's order for a military operation into Afghanistan in response to 9/11, "it would look like that I was anxious to go to war. And I'm not anxious to go to war." He insisted, "War is my absolute last option."

At the same time, Bush said, he realized that the simple act of setting Rumsfeld in motion on Iraq war plans might be the first step in taking the nation to a war with Saddam Hussein. "Absolutely," Bush recalled.

What he perhaps had not realized was that war plans and the process of war planning become policy by their own momentum, especially with the intimate involvement of both the secretary of defense and the president.

The story of Bush's decisions leading up to the Iraq War is a chronicle of continual dilemmas, since the president was pursuing two simultaneous policies. He was planning for war, and he was conducting diplomacy aiming to avoid war. At times, the war planning aided the diplomacy; at many other points it contradicted it.

FROM THE CONVERSATION in the cubbyhole off the Situation Room that day, Rumsfeld realized how focused Bush was about Iraq. "He should have," the president recalled. "Because he knew how serious I was."

Rumsfeld was left with the impression that Bush had not spoken to anyone else. That was not so. That same morning the president had told Condoleezza Rice, his national security adviser, that he was planning to get Rumsfeld to work on Iraq. For Rice, 9/11 had put Iraq on the back burner. The president did not explain to her why he was returning to it now, or what triggered his orders to Rumsfeld.

In the interviews the president said he could not recall if he had talked to Vice President Dick Cheney before he took Rumsfeld aside. But he was certainly aware of Cheney's own position. "The vice president, after 9/11, clearly saw Saddam Hussein as a threat to peace," he said. "And was unwavering in his view that Saddam was a real danger. And again—I see Dick all the time and my relationship—remember since he is not campaigning for office or his own future, he is around. And so I see him quite a bit. And we meet all the time as a matter of fact. And so I can't remember the timing of a particular meeting with him or not."

On the long walk-up to war in Iraq, Dick Cheney was a powerful, steamrolling force. Since the terrorist attacks, he had developed an intense focus on the threats posed by Saddam and by Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network, the group responsible for 9/11. It was seen as a "fever" by some of his colleagues, even a disquieting obsession. For Cheney, taking care of Saddam was high necessity.

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THE NATION WAS ON EDGE in November 2001, still in shock from the 9/11 attacks, and continually bombarded with dire-sounding national alerts warning of future terror attacks. Poisonous anthrax in mailings to Florida, New York and Washington had killed five people. But the joint military and CIA paramilitary attack on Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime and al Qaeda terrorists was meeting with extraordinary and somewhat unexpected success. Already, U.S.-supported forces controlled half of Afghanistan, and the capital of Kabul had been abandoned as thousands of Taliban and al Qaeda fled south to the Pakistan border. In an effective display of American technology, the CIA with millions of dollars and years of covert contacts among Afghan tribes, plus U.S. military Special Forces commando teams directing precision bombing, seemed to have turned the tide of war in a matter of weeks. It was a time of both danger and intoxication for Bush, his war cabinet, his generals and the country.

When he was back at the Pentagon, two miles from the White House across the Potomac River in Virginia, Rumsfeld immediately had the Joint Staff begin drafting a Top Secret message to General Franks requesting a "commander's estimate," a new take on the status of the Iraq war plan and what Franks thought could be done to improve it. The general would have about a week to make a formal presentation to Rumsfeld.

FRANKS, 56, HAD SERVED in the Army since he was 20—a Vietnam and 1991 Gulf War veteran. At 6-foot-3 with a gentle Texas drawl, he could get hot real fast and had a reputation as an officer who would scream at his subordinates. At the same time, he was a bit of a maverick reformer who at times deplored the leaden, unimaginative ways of the military.

It had been a brutal 72 days since 9/11 for Franks. There had been not even a barebones war plan for Afghanistan, and the president had wanted quick military action. Rumsfeld had been the strongest proponent of "boots on the ground," a commitment of U.S. military ground forces. But the first boots on the ground had been a

CIA paramilitary team on September 27—just 16 days after the terrorist attacks. This had driven Rumsfeld to the brink. It took another 22 days before the first U.S. Special Forces commando team arrived in Afghanistan. For Rumsfeld, each day had been like a month, even a year. The excuses were broken helicopters, fouled-up communications and weather delays. He had pounded on Franks very hard with increasing fury.

I don't understand, Rumsfeld had said. Why can't we do this? Soon the secretary was trickling down into lower-level operational decisions, demanding details and explanations.

According to Franks's contemporaneous account to others, he had told Rumsfeld, "Mr. Secretary, stop. This ain't going to work. You can fire me. I'm either the commander or I'm not, and you've got to trust me or you don't. And if you don't, I need to go somewhere else. So tell me what it is, Mr. Secretary."

Rumsfeld's version: "There's no doubt but that at the beginning we had to find our way."

The two had a very emotional discussion and it became a turning point in their relationship. They both pulled back from confrontation. Rumsfeld, the former college wrestler, appreciated someone confident enough to push back and lay it on the line from a subordinate position, maybe even take him down, throw him on the mat for a moment. They agreed to try to work as a team. Rumsfeld also needed Franks, even if he contemplated a replacement. Firing the general in charge at the onset of a war on terrorism of unknown duration and complexity, in the middle of the hopeful but still uncertain campaign in Afghanistan, and at the beginning of who-knows-what in Iraq would, in any practical sense, be difficult.

After the CIA and military campaign in Afghanistan looked successful, Rumsfeld declared that Franks was his man. Military men have always known they have to adapt to their superiors, adaptability having much in common with both subservience and survival. Franks would learn to adapt again. Rumsfeld could be tough, unpleasant, unrelenting, but Franks decided not to take it personally. There was much to be admired in Rumsfeld. The military needed to

modernize and Rumsfeld's talk about "transformation," bringing the military into the 21st century, made sense to Franks. Yes, Rumsfeld was bullheaded. And it probably had been ten years since the senior generals and admirals—those like Franks himself—had had anyone chew their asses or even argue with them. So when Rumsfeld said, I don't agree with that! Why do you do that? Let's fix it!, the fellows felt challenged and went into hyperventilation. Not Franks. He was going to go along. It might not be the way he would run things, but it was intellectually absorbing, and he decided to take Rumsfeld's prodding and questions and treat them as a needed stimulus. The tasks before them were large and fit with Franks's sense of national necessity. To reports of lingering tensions, Franks said much later, "Bullshit. He was pushing, and it satisfied me greatly."

THE SAME PRE-THANKSGIVING Wednesday that Bush sent Rumsfeld on the mission about the Iraq war plan, Air Force Major General Victor E. "Gene" Renuart Jr., the director of operations for General Franks at Central Command, headquartered in Tampa, Florida, was in the thick of organizing and monitoring military movements and attacks in the Afghanistan war, 5,000 miles and nine and a half time zones away. Renuart, 51, a balding, brainy fighter pilot with a master's degree in psychology, was the man who knitted it all together for Franks. He had not had a day off since 9/11, and the thick, bound volumes in which he took down notes from endless meetings and extensive lists of tasks to be performed were multiplying. Renuart's executive assistant called each latest volume "The Black Book of Death" because the mounting number of tasks had become a killer.

Renuart picked up a call on a secure line from the Pentagon coming in from his counterpart there, Marine Lieutenant General Gregory S. Newbold, the director of operations or J-3 for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Newbold was the senior operations officer in the Pentagon, the liaison with the combatants and a reliable pipeline for what was stirring.

“Hey,” Newbold said in his best take-notice voice, “I’ve got a real tough problem for you. The secretary’s going to ask you to start looking at your Iraq planning in great detail—and give him a new commander’s estimate.”

“You got to be shitting me,” Renuart said. “We’re only kind of busy on some other things right now. Are you sure?”

“Well, yeah. It’s coming. So stand by.”

The current Iraq war plan, Op Plan 1003, was some 200 pages with 20-plus annexes numbering another 600 pages on logistics, intelligence, air, land and sea operations. According to this plan, it would take the United States roughly seven months to move a force of 500,000 to the Middle East before launching military operations. Renuart went to see General Franks, who had received only a vague indication there had been discussion in Washington about the Iraq war plan. Renuart now had more detail.

“Hey, boss,” Renuart said, reporting that a formal request of a commander’s estimate was coming. “So we’d better get on it.”

Franks was incredulous. They were in the midst of one war, Afghanistan, and now they wanted detailed planning for another, Iraq? “Goddamn,” Franks said, “what the fuck are they talking about?”

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IN EARLY JANUARY 2001, before George W. Bush was inaugurated, Vice President-elect Dick Cheney passed a message to the outgoing secretary of defense, William S. Cohen, a moderate Republican who served in the Democratic Clinton administration.

“We really need to get the president-elect briefed up on some things,” Cheney said, adding that he wanted a serious “discussion about Iraq and different options.” The president-elect should not be given the routine, canned, round-the-world tour normally given incoming presidents. Topic A should be Iraq. Cheney had been secretary of defense during George H. W. Bush’s presidency, which included the 1991 Gulf War, and he harbored a deep sense of unfinished business about Iraq. In addition, Iraq was the only country the United States regularly, if intermittently, bombed these days.

The U.S. military had been engaged in a frustrating low-grade, undeclared war with Iraq since the Gulf War when Bush’s father and a United Nations-backed coalition had ousted Saddam Hussein and his army from Kuwait after they had invaded that country. The United States enforced two designated no-fly zones, meaning the Iraqis could fly neither planes nor helicopters in these areas, which comprised about 60 percent of the country. Cheney wanted to make sure Bush understood the military and other issues in this potential tinderbox.

Another element was the standing policy inherited from the Clinton administration. Though not widely understood, the baseline policy was clearly “regime change.” A 1998 law passed by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton authorized up to \$97 million in military assistance to Iraqi opposition forces “to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein” and “promote the emergence of a democratic government.”

On Wednesday morning, January 10, ten days before the inauguration, Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice and the designated secretary of state, Colin L. Powell, went to the Pentagon to meet with Cohen. Afterward, Bush and his team went downstairs to the Tank, the secure domain and meeting room for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Bush sauntered in like Cool Hand Luke, flapping his arms slightly, cocky but seeming also ill at ease.

Two generals briefed them on the state of the no-fly zone enforcement. Operation Northern Watch enforced the no-fly zone in the northernmost 10 percent of Iraq to protect the minority Kurds. Some 50 U.S. and United Kingdom aircraft had patrolled the restricted airspace on 164 days of the previous year. In nearly every mission they had been fired on or threatened by the Iraqi air defense system, including surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). U.S. aircraft had fired back or dropped hundreds of missiles and bombs on the Iraqis, mostly at antiaircraft artillery.

In Operation Southern Watch, the larger of the two, the U.S. patrolled almost the entire southern half of Iraq up to the outskirts of the Baghdad suburbs. Pilots overflying the region had entered Iraqi airspace an incredible 150,000 times in the last decade, nearly 10,000 in the last year. In hundreds of attacks not a single U.S. pilot had been lost.

The Pentagon had five graduated response options when Iraqis fired on a U.S. aircraft. Air strike counterattacks were automatic; the most serious ones, involving multiple strikes against more important targets or sites outside the no-fly zones, required notification or direct approval of the president. No-fly zone enforcement was dangerous and expensive. Multimillion-dollar jets were put at risk

bombing 57-millimeter antiaircraft guns. Saddam had warehouses of them. As a matter of policy, was the Bush administration going to keep poking Saddam in the chest? Was there a national strategy behind this or was it just a static tit-for-tat?

An operation plan called Desert Badger was the response if a U.S. pilot were to be shot down. It was designed to disrupt the Iraqis' ability to capture the pilot by attacking Saddam's command and control in downtown Baghdad. It included an escalating attack if a U.S. pilot were captured. Another operation plan called Desert Thunder was the response if the Iraqis attacked the Kurds in the north.

Lots of acronyms and program names were thrown around—most of them familiar to Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell, who had spent 35 years in the Army and been chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1989 to 1993.

President-elect Bush asked some practical questions about how things worked, but he did not offer nor hint at his desires.

The JCS staff had placed a peppermint at each place. Bush unwrapped his and popped it into his mouth. Later he eyed Cohen's mint and flashed a pantomime query, Do you want that? Cohen signaled no, so Bush reached over and took it. Near the end of the hour-and-a-quarter briefing, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Army General Henry "Hugh" Shelton, noticed Bush eyeing his mint, so he passed it over.

Cheney listened but he was tired and closed his eyes, conspicuously nodding off several times. Rumsfeld, who was sitting at a far end of the table, paid close attention though he kept asking the briefers to please speak up, or please speak louder.

"We're off to a great start," one of the chiefs commented privately to a colleague after the session. "The vice president fell asleep and the secretary of defense can't hear."

Cohen, who was leaving the Defense Department in 10 days, believed that the new administration would soon see the reality about Iraq. They would not find much, if any, support among other countries in the region or the world for strong action against Saddam, which would mean going it alone in any large-scale attack.

What could they accomplish with air strikes? Not much, he thought. Iraq was treacherous. When everything was weighed, Cohen predicted the new team would soon back off and find “reconciliation” with Saddam, who he felt was effectively contained and isolated.

In interviews nearly three years later, Bush said of the pre-9/11 situation, “I was not happy with our policy.” It wasn’t having much impact on changing Saddam’s behavior or toppling him. “Prior to September 11, however, a president could see a threat and contain it or deal with it in a variety of ways without fear of that threat materializing on our own soil.” Saddam was not yet a top priority.

BUSH RECEIVED A SECOND critical national security briefing a few days later. CIA Director George Tenet and his deputy for operations, James L. Pavitt, gave Bush, Cheney and Rice the so-called secrets briefing. For two and one-half hours, the two ran through the good, bad and ugly about covert operations, the latest technical surveillance and eavesdropping, the “who” and “how” of the secret payroll.

When all the intelligence was sorted, weighed and analyzed, Tenet and Pavitt agreed there were three major threats to American national security. One was Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda terrorist network, which operated out of a sanctuary in Afghanistan. Bin Laden terrorism was a “tremendous threat” which had to be considered “immediate,” they said. There was no doubt that bin Laden was going to strike at United States interests in some form. It was not clear when, where, by what means. President Clinton had authorized the CIA in five separate intelligence orders to try to disrupt and destroy al Qaeda.

A second major threat was the increasing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, WMD—chemical, biological and nuclear. This was of immense concern, they said. Third was the rise of China, especially its military, but that problem was 5 to 15 or more years away.

Iraq was barely mentioned. Tenet did not have an agenda for Iraq as he did for bin Laden and al Qaeda.

On the 17th day of the Bush presidency, Monday, February 5, Rice chaired a principals committee meeting that included Cheney, Powell and Rumsfeld. Deputy CIA Director John E. McLaughlin substituted for Tenet. The purpose was to review Iraq policy, the status of diplomatic, military and covert options. Among the first taskings were for each principal and his department or agency to examine and consider how intelligence collection could be increased on Iraq's suspected weapons of mass destruction.

At least on paper, the United Nations had an economic sanctions policy directed at Saddam's regime. The principals conceded that Saddam had basically won the public relations argument by convincing the international community that the sanctions were impoverishing his people, and that they were not stopping him from spending money to keep himself in power.

Powell very quickly said they needed to attempt to get the U.N. to revise the sanctions to tighten them on material that might advance Saddam's military and WMD programs. Sanctions could then be eased on civilian goods.

Another issue was the weapons inspections inside Iraq that the U.N. had authorized after the Gulf War to establish that Saddam no longer possessed weapons of mass destruction. The inspectors had helped to dismantle Iraq's chemical, biological and surprisingly advanced nuclear programs, but suspicious accounting of destroyed munitions and elaborate concealment mechanisms left many unanswered questions. In 1998 Saddam had forced the inspectors out, and the question was what might be done to get them back in. No one had a good answer.

What should be the approach to Iraqi opposition groups both outside and inside Iraq? When should weapons and other lethal assistance be provided? Who should provide it—the CIA or Defense? Again no one had a complete answer.

Rice asked for a review of the no-fly zones. What was their purpose? What were the costs and risks? The benefits?

Bush himself worried about the no-fly zone enforcement. The odds of Iraq getting lucky and downing a pilot were bound to catch

up with them. He later recalled, "I instructed the secretary of defense to go back and develop a more robust option in case we really needed to put some serious weapons on Iraq in order to free a pilot."

The eventual result was a plan to fly fewer sorties and fly them less predictably to enhance the safety of the pilots. If a plane was shot at, the response would be more strategic, hitting Iraqi military installations important to Saddam.

ON FRIDAY, February 16, two dozen U.S. and British bombers struck some 20 radar and command centers inside Iraq, some only miles from the outer areas of Baghdad. A general from the Joint Staff had briefed Rice beforehand and she in turn had informed the president, saying that Saddam was on the verge of linking some key command and control sites with hard-to-hit underground fiber optic cables. They would be destroyed before they were completed. The attacks would be part of the routine enforcement of the no-fly zones. It was the largest strike in two years.

Somehow no one at the Pentagon or the White House had thought to make sure that Rumsfeld was fully in the loop. In the first month, his front office was not yet organized—"complete and total disarray" in the words of one White House official. His deputy and other top Defense civilian posts had not been filled or confirmed. Within the Pentagon there also had not been adequate appreciation of the location of one of the sites near Baghdad. Saddam or his security apparatus had panicked, thinking the United States had launched a larger attack. Air raid sirens went off in Baghdad, briefly putting Saddam on CNN, and reminding the White House and the Pentagon that Saddam had a vote in these shoot-outs: He could respond or escalate.

Rumsfeld, furious, declared that the chain of command had been subverted. By law, military command ran from the president to him as secretary of defense to General Franks at CENTCOM. The Joint Chiefs' role, again by law, was advice, communications and oversight. He should be the one to deal with the White House and

the president on operational matters. Period. "I'm the secretary of defense," he reminded one officer. "I'm in the chain of command."

ON MARCH 1, the principals met again and Powell was given the task of devising a plan and strategy to refocus the U.N. economic sanctions on weapons control. Powell knew that the French and Russians, who had substantial business interests in Iraq, were doing everything possible to pull the sanctions apart, get Iraq declared in compliance, and have the sanctions lifted. On the opposite side, the Pentagon did not want anything changed or eased. Rumsfeld and others from Defense repeatedly voiced concern about dual-use items—equipment that might seem innocent but could be used or converted to assist Iraq's weapons programs.

Look what they are buying, Rumsfeld complained to Powell at one point. They are buying these dumptrucks. They can take off the hydraulic cylinder that pushes the truck bed up and they can use it for a launcher for a rocket. You want to sell them the means to erect rockets to shoot at us or Israel?

For Christ's sake, Powell said, if somebody wants a cylinder to erect a rocket, they don't have to buy a \$200,000 dumptruck to get one!

Another issue for Rumsfeld was the so-called HET—Heavy Equipment Transporters—that the Iraqis were buying. These are trailers heavy enough to carry a tank. Intelligence had some overhead photography showing the Iraqis were reinforcing some of the transporters, leading to the conclusion that revised sanctions would allow clandestine development of a fleet of tank transporters. To Powell, it seemed that Rumsfeld was suggesting that the Middle East might be overrun by Iraqi tanks.

"Come on!" Powell said. He had become increasingly skeptical. There was a heated fight that led to some of the most bizarre debates he had within the administration.

Rumsfeld also complained about the no-fly zones. Iraqis were shooting at our planes routinely. Where else in our history have we ever let people shoot at us like that? he wanted to know.

What's the alternative? Powell asked. What did he want? No one ever came up with a viable alternative. Rumsfeld continued to express his discontent, finally saying that the administration was playing "patty-cake."

Okay, what do you want to play? Powell asked. The discussions moved on to the president's request for a better military plan in the event that a pilot was shot down. Was there a "big bang" that would deter Iraq from shooting at our pilots? Was there a way to have strategic impact which might both weaken the regime and send a message of seriousness to Saddam?

A formal alternative was not forthcoming.

IT WAS UNPRECEDENTED for someone who had served as secretary of defense—or for that matter any top cabinet post—to come back 25 years later to the same job. It was a chance to play the hand again. Rumsfeld was determined to play it better.

For a whole series of reasons—some that went back decades, some only months—Rumsfeld was going to push hard. Perhaps pushing was an understatement. Rumsfeld not only preferred clarity and order, he insisted on them. That meant personally managing process, knowing all the details, asking the questions, shaping the presidential briefings and the ultimate results. The questions always before him were: What did the president need to know and what could the president expect his secretary of defense to know? In other words, Rumsfeld wanted near-total control.

In part, this desire stemmed from his experience and deep frustrations from 1975–76 when he had been President Gerald Ford's defense secretary. Rumsfeld was secretary for only 14 months because Ford did not win election in his own right in 1976. Only 44 at the time, he had found the Pentagon difficult and almost unmanageable.

In 1989, some 12 years after leaving the Pentagon, Rumsfeld reflected on the frequent impossibilities of the job during a dinner he and I had at my house. I was writing a book on the Pentagon, and was interviewing all the former secretaries of defense and other top mili-

tary leaders. The Princeton wrestler had not mellowed. It was just ten days before the presidential inauguration of his longtime GOP rival, George H. W. Bush. In the 1960s and 1970s, Rumsfeld had been a Republican star and a good number in the party, including Rumsfeld, thought he might be president one day. Rumsfeld thought Bush senior was weak, lacking in substance, that he had defined his political persona as someone who was around and available. That night as the two of us ate in my kitchen, he showed no bitterness, perhaps only a sense of lost opportunity. The business was the Pentagon and he stuck to it.

The job of secretary of defense was “ambiguous,” Rumsfeld said, because there was only “a thin layer of civilian control.” He said it was “like having an electric appliance in one hand and the plug in the other and you are running around trying to find a place to put it in.” He added, “You can’t make a deal that sticks. No one can deliver anything more than their temporary viewpoint.” Even the secretary.

There was never enough time to understand the big problems, he said, adding that the Pentagon was set up to handle peacetime issues, such as the political decision about moving an aircraft carrier. In a real war these would be military questions, and he went so far as to say that in case of war the country would almost need a different organization than the Pentagon.

Rumsfeld recalled how the top senior civilian and military officials, some 15, had come into his Pentagon office about 6:30 one night. They needed a decision on which tank the Army should buy. The choices were the one with the Chrysler engine or the one with the General Motors engine. You’ve got to decide, they told him, we can’t. A press release with the announcement was all ready to go with blanks to be filled in with his decision. By his own description, Rumsfeld began flying around his office, telling them they all ought to be “hung by their thumbs and balls.” His voice rising, he had shouted, “You idiots, jerks!” They were not thinking—they would wind up getting neither tank from Congress because “THE BUILDING IS DIVIDED!” Congress would inevitably learn of the divisions. So he refused to decide and the press release was abandoned. It took

another three months, but he forced them to reach a decision “unanimously.”

“If someone does not know how to wrestle he will get hurt. If you don’t know how to move, you will get a black eye. Same in Defense,” he said.

RUMSFELD HAD WORKED HARD behind the scenes on the Bush campaign in 2000 on substantive matters, and was at first interested in becoming CIA director in a new administration, having concluded that intelligence was what needed fixing. He had spoken with his one-time aide and friend Ken Adelman, who had been head of arms control in the Reagan administration. Adelman told Rumsfeld bluntly that the CIA would be the wrong job. “It’s a mean place and they eat their own,” he said. “Secondly, I think it is just totally unrealistic. Let me paint you a picture. You’re in the Situation Room and you are going to sit there and say well, here our intelligence shows this and shows that but I’m not going to tell you any policy recommendation.” The CIA director is supposed to stay out of policy. “You are just so out the ass. You can fool other people but that’s not you, it’ll never happen.” Rumsfeld would feel compelled to make his recommendation. “I don’t think you should go into a job playing a role you - can’t play.”

When the top candidates for Defense flubbed their interviews or turned the job down, Bush and Cheney, who had been Rumsfeld’s deputy when Rumsfeld served as White House chief of staff for President Ford, turned to him as the surprise choice.

As an illustration of the way Washington works, when Rumsfeld was being considered for Defense by Bush junior, Vice President-elect Cheney—who headed the transition team—sought a confidential opinion from Brent Scowcroft, who had served as national security adviser to both Ford (1974–77) and Bush senior (1989–93).

As Cheney knew, Scowcroft said, Rumsfeld was secretive.

Scowcroft said he did not find it necessarily pernicious, but that it made it difficult if not impossible to read him. He doesn't signal. He asks questions and throws out doubts and rarely says, "I think we ought to do this."

Of course, the description also fit Cheney, who wanted his old boss at Defense.

Before Rumsfeld became George W. Bush's secretary of defense, he had a talk with the president-elect. It was a sort of test. During the eight years of Clinton's presidency, the country's natural pattern when challenged or attacked had been what Rumsfeld called "reflexive pullback." He said he believed that, in contrast, the new Bush administration should be "forward-leaning," and Bush had agreed.

Two months into the job, Rumsfeld drafted a three-page memo called "Guidelines When Considering Committing U.S. Forces." He took the fourth revision to the president and went over it in detail. It was a series of questions to be addressed: "Is a proposed action truly necessary?" "Is the proposed action achievable?" "Is it worth it?"

Rumsfeld argued for being clear-eyed. One passage foreshadowed problems to come: "In fashioning a clear statement of the underpinning for the action, avoid arguments of convenience. They can be useful at the outset to gain support, but they will be deadly later." He also had written, "U.S. leadership must be brutally honest with itself, the Congress, the public and coalition partners." And he added, "It is a great deal easier to get into something than it is to get out of it!"

Rumsfeld found the president responsive, but during the first months of his second Pentagon tour, he discovered that the place was more broken than he had anticipated.

AS DISCUSSIONS on Iraq policy continued at the cabinet level and at the second tier, the so-called deputies committee, attention turned to the support of the opposition groups—both those outside the country, such as the Iraqi National Congress (INC) headed by the controversial Ahmed Chalabi, and groups inside Iraq. Chalabi, an

American-educated mathematician who left Baghdad in 1958 as a boy, had become the darling of senior Defense officials who saw him and his London-based exile organization as a potential armed insurgent force. The State Department and CIA viewed Chalabi with skepticism—too slick, they felt, too divisive, out of touch with the horrors of life under Saddam—and he was wanted in Jordan for bank fraud.

Within the deputies committee, which included defense deputy Paul D. Wolfowitz and the No. 2 at State, Richard L. Armitage, the debate was passionate about how far and how fast to go with the opposition. At what point would the U.S. provide weapons? At what point would they support lethal operations inside Iraq if the opposition wanted to go inside and conduct operations there? Would training of the opposition be done by Defense or the CIA? Though Armitage had promoted the idea of rearming opposition forces in Afghanistan, he wasn't enthusiastic about Chalabi.

Armitage, 56, is Powell's best friend, adviser and most outspoken advocate. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1967 and served four tours in Vietnam, ending his naval career in 1973 after teaching counterinsurgency. In the 1980s, Powell and he both served under Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, Armitage as assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs—the Pentagon's mini-State Department—and Powell as Weinberger's senior military assistant. The two talk on the phone so many times each day that aides think of them as teenagers joined at the hip, committed to sharing absolutely everything.

The common goal among the deputies was to increase pressure on Saddam, to try to create fissures and disagreements within the regime. But then the question was how and to what extent they would be exploited if they could be created? The deputies could not reach anything close to agreement. On June 1, the principals asked the full National Security Council to address a policy that would help the Iraqis help themselves. "Stirring the pot and seeing what happens" is how one participant described it.

But that half-policy carried the danger that Saddam might react.

He might attack into the Kurdish areas in the north, or go after the Shiite population again in the south. He might attack a neighbor—Israel, Kuwait again. Or he might fire Scud missiles at Israel, Saudi Arabia or Kuwait. There were no easy answers.

BETWEEN MAY 31 and July 26, 2001, Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley convened the deputies four times to work the Iraq policy. Hadley, 54, was a smart attorney who had worked for Cheney in Defense and was known for his workaholic tendencies. As Rice's deputy, he chaired the deputies committee. On August 1, the group presented a Top Secret paper to the principals entitled, "A Liberation Strategy." It proposed a phased strategy of pressuring Saddam and developing the tools and opportunities for enhancing that pressure, and how to take advantage of the opportunities. It relied heavily on the Iraqi opposition.

The paper had classified attachments that went into detail about what might be done diplomatically—economic sanctions and U.N. weapons inspectors; militarily with the no-fly zones and the contingencies if a pilot were shot down; and what the CIA or others might do to support, strengthen and empower the Iraqi opposition.

The interagency process had yielded up lots of meetings and paper but no plan and no action toward regime change. This led to discussions among the principals and deputies about the circumstances under which the U.S. military might be used directly. Powell called this the "Suppose-we-ever-have-to-do-this" attack on Iraq to overthrow Saddam. Though there was a lot going on over in the Pentagon that was never shown to the principals, Powell heard enough officially and unofficially from his old military contacts—the generals' grapevine.

The intellectual godfather and fiercest advocate for toppling Saddam was Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense. A 58-year-old Ph.D. in political science, with long, thick, graying hair and a soft, almost rabbinical manner, Wolfowitz had edgy, hawkish

views. The reasons for getting rid of Saddam were: It was necessary and it would be relatively easy.

Wolfowitz believed it was possible to send in the military to overrun and seize Iraq's southern oil fields—1,000 wells, which had about two-thirds of Iraq's oil production—and establish a foothold. All the wells were within some 60 miles of the Kuwait border. - "There's nothing to stop you from seizing it," he declared. The proposal was dubbed the "enclave strategy." From the enclave, support would be given to the anti-Saddam opposition, which would rally the rest of the country and overthrow the dictator.

Powell thought that Wolfowitz was talking as if 25 million Iraqis would rush to the side of a U.S.-supported opposition. In his opinion, it was one of the most absurd, strategically unsound proposals he had ever heard.

But Wolfowitz was like a drum that would not stop. He and his group of neoconservatives were rubbing their hands over the ideas, which were being presented as "draft plans."

And Powell, shaking his head, kept saying, "This is lunacy." It was not clear where the off switch was or whether there was an off switch. So the secretary of state sought opportunities to speak directly to the president.

"Don't let yourself get pushed into anything until you are ready for it," Powell advised Bush, "or until you think there is a real reason for it. This is not as easy as it is being presented, and take your time on this one. Don't let anybody push you into it."

"Don't worry about it," the president replied. "It's good contingency planning and I know what they are doing and I'm in no hurry to go look for trouble."

Still alarmed that such a scheme might get traction, Powell again raised the matter of a quick strike or incursion into Iraq to the president. He said, "You don't have to be bullied into this." He urged Bush to take it slowly.

"I've got it," the president replied. "I know it."

Bush never saw a formal plan for a quick strike, he recalled. "The idea may have floated around as an interesting nugget to chew on," he

said. Whatever it was, the concept and the loose thinking behind it was a source of continuing and mounting consternation for Powell.

On August 10, U.S. and British jets bombed three air defense sites in Iraq, the largest strikes since February. It wasn't even front page news. *The Washington Post* story the next day on page A18 characterized the attack as one of "relatively limited scope" and business-as-usual. "Yesterday's strikes appeared to continue the Clinton-era pattern of hitting Iraqi air defenses every six months or so."

Most work on Iraq stopped for the rest of August as Bush and his top advisers left for vacation. A policy recommendation on Iraq was never forwarded to the president.

The deep divisions and tensions in the war cabinet with Powell the moderate negotiator and Rumsfeld the hard-line activist meant no real policy would be made until either the president stepped in or events forced his hand.

No one realized that better than Rice. At 46, she had a Ph.D. in political science and had taught at Stanford where she had risen to be provost. A Russian expert, she had been on the NSC staff in the presidency of Bush senior. Graceful and tall with an outgoing smile, she had forged her relationship with George W. Bush during the 2000 campaign when she served as his chief foreign policy adviser. She is not married and has no immediate family; it seemed she was on call for the president 24 hours a day in her West Wing office, with him on trips abroad, at Camp David on weekends or at his Texas ranch. She was the connective tissue with the principals. Tending to the president and his priorities was her primary goal.

2

THE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington that killed nearly 3,000 altered and defined the Bush presidency. It was not an exaggeration when Bush dictated to his daily diary that night that, “The Pearl Harbor of the 21st century took place today.” In some respects the attacks were more devastating. Instead of 1941 Hawaii, which was not then a state, the targets were the power centers of the homeland. Instead of Japan, the attacks were conducted by a shadowy enemy that had no country or visible army. Worse for Bush, CIA Director Tenet had explicitly warned him about the immediacy and seriousness of the bin Laden threat. Focusing on domestic issues and a giant tax cut, Bush had largely ignored the terrorism problem. “I didn’t feel that sense of urgency,” the president acknowledged later in an interview. “My blood was not nearly as boiling.”

THE TERRORISTS who struck the Pentagon flew their plane into the building on the opposite side of Rumsfeld’s office, tearing a gaping hole and killing 184 people. At 2:40 P.M. that day, with dust and smoke filling the operations center as he was trying to figure out what had happened, Rumsfeld raised with his staff the possibility of going after Iraq as a response to the terrorist attacks, according to

an aide's notes. Saddam Hussein is S.H. in these notes, and UBL is Usama bin Laden. The notes show that Rumsfeld had mused about whether to "hit S.H. @ same time—not only UBL" and asked the Pentagon lawyer to talk to Paul Wolfowitz about the Iraq "connection with UBL." The next day in the inner circle of Bush's war cabinet, Rumsfeld asked if the terrorist attacks did not present an "opportunity" to launch against Iraq.

Four days later in an exhaustive debate at Camp David, none of the president's top advisers recommended attacking Iraq as a first step in the terrorism war—not even Vice President Cheney, who probably read where Bush was headed and said, "If we go after Saddam Hussein, we lose our rightful place as good guy." Cheney, however, voiced deep concerns about Saddam and said he would not rule out going after him at some point. Colin Powell was adamantly opposed to attacking Iraq as a response to September 11. He saw no real linkage between Saddam and 9/11. Members of a rapidly forming international coalition of other nations would jump off the bandwagon, Powell said. "They'll view it as bait and switch—it's not what they signed up to do," the secretary of state said bluntly. He was pumping the brakes.

White House Chief of Staff Andrew H. Card said Iraq should not be a principal, initial target. Tenet also recommended that the initial terrorist target for the military should be Afghanistan, not Iraq.

A tally would show that it was 4 to 0 against hitting Iraq initially, with Rumsfeld abstaining, making it 4 to 0 to 1. Powell found Rumsfeld's abstention most interesting. What did it mean? he wondered. Rumsfeld had this way of asking questions—questions, questions, questions!—and not revealing his own position.

As a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Powell was direct with one of his successors, Army General Hugh Shelton, in a private discussion after an NSC meeting. Powell had rolled his eyes at Shelton after Rumsfeld had raised Iraq as an "opportunity."

"What the hell! What are these guys thinking about?" Powell had asked Shelton. "Can't you get these guys back in the box?"

Shelton promised he was trying. The only strong advocate for attacking Iraq at that point was Wolfowitz, who thought war in Afghanistan would be dicey and uncertain. Wolfowitz worried about 100,000 American troops bogged down in the notoriously treacherous mountains six months from then. In contrast, Iraq was a brittle, oppressive regime that might break easily with an opposition yearning to topple Saddam. He estimated that there was a 10 to 50 percent chance Saddam was involved in the 9/11 attacks—an odd conclusion that reflected deep suspicion but no real evidence.

The next afternoon, Sunday, September 16, Bush told Rice that the first target of the war on terrorism was going to be Afghanistan. “We won’t do Iraq now,” the president said, “we’re putting Iraq off. But eventually we’ll have to return to that question.”

On September 17, the president signed the Top Secret/Pearl order for new CIA and military operations against terrorists worldwide. Afghanistan was the first priority. Rumsfeld was directed to continue working on Iraq war plans but it was not to be a top priority.

In an interview nearly one year later, President Bush said that in the immediate aftermath of September 11, “There were some who discussed Iraq. That’s out of the question at this point. I mean, I - didn’t need any briefings.” He added, “Don, wisely—and I agreed with this—was looking for other places where we could show that the war on terror was global.” Rumsfeld also wanted ground forces in Afghanistan, not just cruise missiles and bombers launched from afar. “He was the man who was insistent upon boots on the ground to change the psychology of how Americans viewed war,” the president said.

Bush believed Clinton had been risk-averse. He had used cruise missiles to attack bin Laden in Afghanistan in 1998 after al Qaeda had bombed two American embassies in East Africa. During the Kosovo war, he had limited U.S. involvement to an air campaign, still spooked by the disastrous mission in Somalia in 1993 when 18 U.S. soldiers died in a fierce urban firefight.

President Bush said, “And Rumsfeld wanted to make sure that

the military was active in other regions. My point was that the degree of difficulty had to be relatively small in order to make sure that we continued to succeed in the first battle.”

TWO YEARS AFTER 9/11, during an interview in his office in the White House residence, President Bush said, “September the 11th obviously changed my thinking a lot about my responsibility as president. Because September the 11th made the security of the American people the priority . . . a sacred duty for the president. It is the most necessary duty for the president, because if the president - doesn’t take on that duty, who else is going to?”

It changed his attitude toward “Saddam Hussein’s capacity to create harm,” he said, adding that “all his terrible features became much more threatening. Keeping Saddam in a box looked less and less feasible to me.” Saddam was a “madman,” the president said. “He had used weapons of mass destruction in the past. He has created incredible instability in the neighborhood.” Saddam had invaded Iran in the 1980s and Kuwait in the 1990s.

Bush added, “The options in Iraq were relatively limited when you are playing the containment game.”

CHENEY, THE 61-YEAR-OLD conservative hard-liner, had already carved out a special position in the administration and held great sway with the president. He was the résumé vice president: White House chief of staff to President Ford at age 34; then 10 years as the only congressman from Wyoming, his home state; briefly the No. 2 House Republican leader before being selected by Bush’s father to be secretary of defense in 1989. Thought by many Republicans to be the best qualified in their party for the presidency, Cheney had considered running in 1996. But he found the fund-raising and media scrutiny distasteful, and he was named CEO of Halliburton, the large Texas-based energy and oil service firm, in 1995. He served until Bush picked him to be his running mate in the summer of 2000 with

these words, “If times are good, I’m going to need your advice, but not nearly as much as if times are bad.”

It was not clear how such a high-powered figure who had a chief executive’s instincts and order-giving habits would fit into the new Bush administration, since as vice president he would have no operational responsibility, no department, no agency. But two roles emerged.

After the close election, in which Bush-Cheney won only after a 36-day recount in Florida and a Supreme Court ruling, the conventional wisdom—what Cheney liked to call “the bottled wisdom of Washington”—held that Bush would have to proceed carefully. He was technically a minority president, since Al Gore had won 500,000 more popular votes. But Bush told Cheney up front that they weren’t going to have any trimming of sails, no acting like some kind of minority president. “From the very day we walked in the building,” Cheney once said privately, “a notion of sort of a restrained presidency because it was such a close election, that lasted maybe 30 seconds. It was not contemplated for any length of time. We had an agenda, we ran on that agenda, we won the election—full speed ahead.” Cheney was delighted at this approach. He did not like going wobbly on matters in which he deeply believed.

The first matter was a massive tax cut. As the vice president, Cheney was president of the Senate and had the power constitutionally to break tie votes. Since the Senate was split 50–50 between Republicans and Democrats, he technically held the balance of power. So Cheney was closely involved in the behind-the-scenes negotiations over Bush’s first tax cut. At a closed-door meeting on the morning of April 4, 2001, he grabbed one of the small pale yellow napkins with “Majority Leader” printed on it from Senator Trent Lott’s office and wrote three numbers:

1.6

1.425

1.25

Bush's proposal for the entire tax cut package was \$1.6 trillion, the number being floated by a group of Senate Democrats was \$1.25 trillion. In a blue pen, Cheney drew a big circle around \$1.425—a compromise, the first time the administration had moved. Bush eventually got \$1.35 trillion.

Cheney had been a key administration figure in prolonged, secret negotiations to win Vermont Republican Senator James Jeffords's vote on the tax cut. Not only did the administration lose Jeffords's vote but he resigned from the Republican Party, became an Independent, and gave the Democrats temporary control of the Senate. Legislative compromise was not Cheney's strength.

Bush and Cheney agreed on still another role for the vice president. Given Cheney's background in national security going back to the Ford years, his time on the House Intelligence Committee, and as secretary of defense, Bush said at the top of his list of things he wanted Cheney to do was intelligence. In the first months of the new administration, Cheney made the rounds of the intelligence agencies—the CIA, the National Security Agency, which intercepted communications, and the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency. He was determined to get up to speed on what had transpired in the eight years since he had left government. Bush also asked Cheney to study the nation's vulnerability to terrorism, primarily from biological and chemical threats. By the summer of 2001, Cheney had hired a retired admiral, Steve Abbott, to oversee a program for taking homeland defense more seriously.

With the president's full knowledge and encouragement, Cheney became the self-appointed examiner of worst-case scenarios. Though it was not formalized, he would look at the darker side, the truly bad and terrifying scenarios. By experience and temperament, it was the ideal assignment for Cheney. He felt they had to be prepared to think about the unthinkable. It was one way to be an effective second in command—carve out a few matters, become the expert in them, and then press the first in command to adopt your solutions.

Cheney thought that the Clinton administration had failed in its response to terrorist acts, going back to the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, and that there had been a pattern of weak responses: No effective response to the 1996 bombing of Khobar Towers, the U.S. military installation in Saudi Arabia, not enough to the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings, none to the 2000 bombing of the *USS Cole*.

After 9/11 it was clear to Cheney that the threat from terrorism had changed and grown enormously. So two matters would have to change. First, the standard of proof would have to be lowered—smoking gun, irrefutable evidence would not have to be required for the United States to act to defend itself. Second, defense alone wasn't enough. They needed an offense.

The most serious threat now facing the United States was a nuclear weapon or a biological or chemical agent in the hands of a terrorist inside the country's borders. And everything, in his view, had to be done to stop it.

BY THAT NOVEMBER 21, when he took Rumsfeld aside, Bush had decided it was time to turn to Iraq. "I want to know what the options are," Bush recalled. "A president cannot decide and make rational decisions unless I understand the feasibility of that which may have to happen. And so in dealing with Don Rumsfeld on this issue, the point I was making to him was at the time, show me what you have in place in case something were to happen. And we had already been through this exercise once [in Afghanistan]."

Bush said he knew it was a big step and that it entailed preparing the country and the world for war. "I have no idea what it takes to cause the Pentagon to respond to a request since I've never been there. I presume Don Rumsfeld . . . was making sure that the product got done and the process didn't linger." The president knew his man.

3

AFTER FRANKS'S MINI-EXPLOSION on November 21 when he had gotten word that Rumsfeld wanted a commander's estimate on the Iraq war plan, the general soon settled down. "We'll give them our best shot at it," he told his operations chief, Renuart. He knew the staff was under immense pressure, that the workload was staggering and round-the-clock because of the war in Afghanistan. "Don't get too worried. We'll just do what we can." Franks added reassuringly, "Man, I just can't imagine this is something we're going to be doing anytime soon."

But Rumsfeld now had his orders and he was not about to waste any time. The president was focused on the Iraq war plan, and when the president was focused, Rumsfeld was focused. Much of the year he had been casting about, some felt stumbling about, trying to answer the question of how to fight the next war. His new, 71-page defense strategy published that fall hadn't really answered that question. But Rumsfeld's method—the constant questioning, interrogations and never-ending reassessments of reassessments—had already unearthed immense problems. He had hit pay dirt months before when he had begun asking to see the war and contingency plans, the actual details for fighting specific wars.

"Let me see the Korean war plan," Rumsfeld ordered soon after he became secretary. The isolated, brutal and militaristic regime of

North Korea, headed by leader Kim Jong Il, was thought by many to be the next potential hot spot and the most dangerous threat. Kim either had or was dangerously on the verge of building nuclear weapons.

So the planners briefed Rumsfeld on Op Plan 5027, the Top Secret contingency plan for war with North Korea.

"I was stunned," Rumsfeld later recalled in an interview. It was years out of date, and focused on the mechanics of transporting large numbers of troops to the region. The plan also had not taken into account that the United States had a new president, Bush, and a new secretary of defense. They had different ideas and strategies. He was appalled.

Did North Korea have nuclear weapons or not? Rumsfeld wanted to know. It sure as hell would make a giant difference if there was war. Were they assuming nuclear weapons or not? The Pentagon war planners and briefers didn't have an answer. Were they assuming the North Koreans were one year away from having nukes? Two years? Again there were no real answers.

As he recalled, he had more questions. "What's happened to their military capabilities? Have they gone up or down in the intervening period?"

Vice Admiral Edmund P. Giambastiani, a nuclear submariner and Rumsfeld's senior military assistant at the time, recognized that the plan provided no options, no intermediate solutions. The choices, as he put it, were: "Would you like to use rhetoric or would you like to bring in 75 sledgehammers to beat that gnat into the ground?" It was either diplomacy or total war.

"What I would like to do is next Saturday," Rumsfeld directed—he liked to haul people in on Saturday—"I want the war planners, the contingency planners, to come in and brief me on *all* of the major contingency plans' assumptions, not the plans, but I want to see the assumptions."

So on a Saturday in early August 2001, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the director of the operational plans staff and all his section chiefs appeared in Rumsfeld's office.

Of the 68 war plans, fewer than 10 were massive, fully developed plans such as those for Korea, Iraq and a few other potential hot spots. The rest were smaller contingency plans for civilian evacuations or for defending key areas such as the Panama Canal. After spending hours going through four or five, Admiral Giambastiani, who was supposed to keep the Pentagon train—i.e. Rumsfeld—running on time, said, “We are going to be here for about a week if we keep up this pace. You need to pick this up.”

Rumsfeld did. The basic solution in most of the plans was to move a vast portion of the American military machine, and in some cases a portion of the U.S. transportation infrastructure and logistics capability, to the region, whether it be Asia or the Middle East, over many months for a war.

“Well, I don’t agree with that guidance,” he snapped at one point when someone tried to justify what had been planned.

Rumsfeld recalled the scene two years later. “And I sat there for, in that room down there”—and he pointed across his vast Pentagon office down to his conference room—“so I sat there and these people couldn’t believe it. It took most of the day. And then one colonel would pop up and he’d go through the assumptions and I’d discuss them and talk about them.” Others in attendance said it was more a grilling with Rumsfeld pointing out that the colonels and others hadn’t really isolated the assumptions and didn’t know what the new administration wanted. “And then the next guy would come up and we went through one after another after another.

“They were just briefing what was on the shelf.” And it was an old, dusty shelf going back four or five years in some cases. The formal guidance to the war planners often went back to the mid-1990s. “Yet it had never been even discussed here,” Rumsfeld recalled with disdain, indicating the secretary’s office.

“Furthermore, we had a new defense strategy by then,” Rumsfeld said, referring to his concept that called for deterring aggression against U.S. interests by demonstrating a capacity to swiftly defeat attacks. “Of course the old plans were not looked at that way at all in that new context. So we had to fix them all.

"I said, 'Look, we've got to do two things. We owe the country and the president war plans, contingency plans, thinking that is current. And the only way we're going to get that is if we can compress that process dramatically and shorten it from years down to some cycle that it can be refreshed with current assumptions.' "

There was a convergence with Rumsfeld's hurry-up agenda on war planning and the lessons of 9/11 as he saw them. In an interview four months after 9/11, he said, "The key thought about this is that you cannot defend against terrorism." He had learned that when he had spent six months as the Middle East envoy for President Reagan in 1983-84. "You can't defend at every place at every time against every technique. You just can't do it, because they just keep changing techniques, time, and you have to go after them. And you have to take it to them, and that means you have to preempt them."

This was four and one-half months before Bush formally announced his preemption doctrine. Rumsfeld was thinking of a future when the U.S. should be ready to strike first.

RUMSFELD WAS GOING to tune up the war machine everywhere. "What I did was I went to literally all of the area-of-responsibility geographic combatant commanders and said, 'Pull 'em out, let's look at them, let's put a priority order and we're going to compress this cycle so that they get done in a much shorter period.' " That meant starting with the assumptions, "which most people don't," he noted, "and most people start with a plan that's there and then tweak it."

Well, there was going to be no more tweaking, micro-steps of change. "I said we're going to start with assumptions and then we're going to establish priorities and each of the combatant commanders are then going to start working through their plans. And the way - they're going to work through them is they're going to come back to me every six or eight weeks." He was going to check their homework.

"That way," Rumsfeld continued, "all of the grunt work that people have to do, which is an enormous amount of work, won't get done until we get the front right." The grunt work was the detailed

charts and timetables of moving forces, the logistics and communications of assembling an army thousands of miles away.

"I don't know who it was," Rumsfeld said, "[George] Marshall or somebody that said, if you get the strategy right, a lieutenant can draft the plan. If you know what you're doing, and where you're going." Well, he did, and the implication was that no one else really did.

"You can move a long distance in the right way without jerking people around and wasting their time. And it just breaks my heart to see fine, talented people working so hard on something that when you look at it, you say, well my goodness, we never should have gone that way."

Rumsfeld's way was clear, and he was precise about it. "The only way these things can be done well is *if risk is elevated*, put on the table and discussed, instead of trying to mitigate it down below at a level where you don't have the benefit of trading off with and balancing risk." He was willing to assume risk by planning to use less force, or at least he wanted to identify the trade-offs.

No one at the lower levels, the colonels, would embrace risk. They would add another division to a plan, some 20,000 troops, just to be sure. "So it gets dealt with that way, if it's lower. It gets dealt with in a totally different way if it's at a higher level."

After the Saturday review session was over, Rumsfeld pronounced his verdict: "That is insane, that is crazy." The war plans were improperly designed. "Either it's world peace or it's World War III. Either the switch is off or on." His orders were clear. "We're not going to do it that way."

Though he was trying to fix all the major war and contingency plans, after the president asked about the Iraq plan Rumsfeld shifted into high gear. "It at a certain point became much more intense," he said, "and it had the highest priority."

THE MONDAY MORNING after Thanksgiving, November 26, the president welcomed two humanitarian aid workers in the Rose Garden of

the White House. Heather Mercer and Dayna Curry had been rescued by the U.S. military in Afghanistan. During a long question session, reporters asked about Iraq and Saddam.

"In order to prove to the world he's not developing weapons of mass destruction, he ought to let the inspectors back in," Bush said.

"If he does not do that, what will be the consequences?"

"That's up for—" the president replied, "he'll find out."

"Readmit Inspectors, President Tells Iraq; 'Or Else' Is Unstated," said the front page headline in *The New York Times* the next day.

That morning, six days after the president's request on the Iraq war plan, Rumsfeld flew to see General Franks at CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa. After greeting everyone, he kicked Franks's staff as well as his own aides out of the room, even telling his military assistant, Vice Admiral Giambastiani, "Ed, I need you to step outside."

"Pull the Iraq planning out and let's see where we are," Rumsfeld told Franks when they were alone. The existing Iraq war plan, the mammoth Top Secret document, Op Plan 1003, outlined an attack and invasion of Iraq designed to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein. "Don't start without letting me look at those assumptions you made," he directed, "because we need to challenge everything - we've done in that regard." One additional focus was what they knew about the current status of the Iraqi military. What are they capable of doing? What of their training levels? What is their willingness to fight for Saddam?

Rumsfeld said that the president to his knowledge does not have a desire to go do something right now, but it would be prudent to begin.

The existing plan was a real hodgepodge. Rumsfeld found it cumbersome; it provided every evidence of refighting the 1991 Gulf War. It called for a force of some 500,000, including six Army and Marine divisions on the ground, and essentially envisioned only one scenario: an action by Saddam like his 1990 invasion of Kuwait that would require a massive response but also allow an extended period of time for a force buildup before the start of offensive military ac-