

CHAPTER I

Snowflakes from the Secretary

In late 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld summoned the senior military leadership to his office on the E-ring of the Pentagon. It had been an extraordinarily eventful period for the administration of George W. Bush. Kabul had recently fallen. U.S. commandos and Pashtun commanders in southern Afghanistan were on the hunt for Osama bin Laden. In Bonn, Germany, the United States and diplomats from allied nations were prepared to anoint a new group of Afghan leaders.

During his short tenure at the Pentagon, Rumsfeld had established himself as an indomitable bureaucratic presence. It was a commonplace among the Bush team that the military needed stronger civilian oversight, and Rumsfeld exercised control with the iron determination of a former corporate executive. He had a restless mind and was given to boast that he was genetically impatient.

When he arrived at the Pentagon, Rumsfeld made clear that his goal was nothing less than to remake the U.S. military to fashion a leaner and more lethal force. Notepads were strewn throughout his oversized office. When the defense secretary had an idea he scribbled it down. Four-star generals and high-ranking aides were accustomed to receiving snowflakes: terse memos that captured his latest brainstorm or query and that landed with a thud.

Rumsfeld had been receiving his daily CIA briefing shortly before the American Airlines plane plowed into the building on September 11. Afterward, he had staked out a clear position on how the Bush team should respond. The United States should take the fight to the Taliban and Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, but it would not end there. The Pentagon

needed to take an even more forceful step that would let its enemies know that the United States was now involved in a global war against the terrorists and the renegade states that helped them. The U.S. needed to land a series of blows well beyond Afghanistan. The question was where and when to strike.

The defense secretary's meeting had been called to ponder the war plan for another potential adversary. General Richard B. Myers, the pliable chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) who was picked by Rumsfeld because of his reputation as a team player, was there. So was Peter Pace, the ambitious vice chairman who was already being talked about as an officer who might follow in Myers's footsteps. Greg Newbold, the three-star general who served as chief operations deputy for the JCS, had the main assignment for the session. He was to outline Central Command's OPLAN 1003-98, the military's contingency plan in the event of a war with Iraq.

Newbold was armed with a pile of slides as the generals and Rumsfeld sat around a conference table. As Newbold outlined the plan, which called for as many as 500,000 troops, it was clear that Rumsfeld was growing increasingly irritated. For Rumsfeld, the plan required too many troops and supplies and took far too long to execute. It was, Rumsfeld declared, the product of old thinking and the embodiment of everything that was wrong with the military.

Myers asked Rumsfeld how many troops he thought might be needed. The defense secretary said in exasperation that he did not see why more than 125,000 troops would be required and even that was probably too many. Rumsfeld's reaction was dutifully passed to the United States Central Command.¹

"My regret is that at the time I did not say, 'Mr. Secretary, if you try to put a number on a mission like this you may cause enormous mistakes,' " Newbold later recalled. "Give the military the task, give the military what you would like to see them do, and then let them come up with it. I was the junior military guy in the room, but I regret not saying it."²

The 1003 plan was ripe for review and was based on the assumption that it would be Iraq that would start the fight. Nonetheless, the plan, which had been regularly exercised in war games, reflected long-standing military principles about the force levels that were needed to defeat Iraq, control a population of more than 24 million, and secure a nation the size of California with porous borders. Rumsfeld's numbers, in contrast, seemed to be pulled out of thin air. He had dismissed one of the military's

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long-standing plans and suggested his own force level without any of the generals raising a cautionary flag.

General Tommy Franks, the CENTCOM commander, would draw up the new plan, but Rumsfeld would poke, prod, and question the military at every turn. Defense Department civilians would move into Franks's planning cells to monitor his work, and the general would be summoned to Washington repeatedly to present his evolving plan and receive new guidance from his civilian master. The JCS chairman and his staff would be little more than onlookers. Two momentous signals had been sent at Newbold's briefing. Iraq would be the next phase in the Bush administration's self-declared "global war on terror" and the defense secretary would insist on an entirely new kind of Iraq war plan.

When he was running for president, George W. Bush had signaled that he wanted to overhaul the U.S. military. His father's earlier victory in the Persian Gulf, Bush said in a 1999 speech at the Citadel, was an impressive accomplishment, but also one that had taken six months of planning, amassing of military forces and supplies, and preparation. That was too long for the sole remaining superpower to project its power throughout the world. Bush pledged to develop lighter, more mobile, and more lethal forces.

Nor did Bush see the need for the sort of lengthy peacekeeping operations or difficult nation-building missions that the administration of Bill Clinton had undertaken in the Balkans. The purpose of the military, Bush argued, was to fight and win the nation's wars, not to linger to bring stability to newly ordained states. A strong secretary of defense would be appointed and he would have a broad mandate to develop a new military structure. Generals and admirals who supported the new program would be promoted. Billions of dollars in new spending would be channeled for the research and development of missile defense and other high-technology military systems.³

The speech was drafted by some of the so-called Vulcans, the cluster of conservative former national security officials who had formed the nucleus of a shadow government during the Clinton years and would later find a place at the top of the new administration. The idea of using advanced reconnaissance systems, command and control networks, and precision weapons to strip away the fog of war and strike the enemy with devastating effect had attracted a small, but influential, group of adher-

ents, and the Vulcans were among them. It was supposed to be nothing less than a revolution in military affairs that would reduce the requirement for large land armies, and with Bush's election some of the self-proclaimed revolutionaries would be in charge.

Once in office, Bush made good on the pledge to support a powerful defense secretary, settling on Rumsfeld, a choice that was strongly endorsed by Vice President Dick Cheney, who sensed that his former mentor would not only have a strong hand at the tiller but would serve as an ally in policy debates.

At sixty-eight, Rumsfeld was full of energy and brimming with confidence. He had been a wrestler in college, a combative and solitary sport, run with the bulls in Spain, followed his father into the Navy, been NATO ambassador, won a seat in Congress, earned a small fortune as the CEO of a pharmaceutical company, and run two government commissions: one on ballistic missile threats from Third World countries and the other on space policy. Rumsfeld was both the youngest and the oldest person to serve as defense secretary, having served as the Pentagon chief under President Gerald Ford. He had not been among the drafters of the Citadel speech, but he wholly supported the theme.

As Rumsfeld prepared to take on his responsibilities at the Pentagon he met with William S. Cohen, the Maine Republican who served as Bill Clinton's secretary of defense. Cohen, who had traveled widely in the post, advised Rumsfeld to go to Wehrkunde, the premier European security conference, which was held annually in Munich over a February weekend. Rumsfeld, he said, needed to get to know the European allies, as otherwise there would not be another opportunity to do so until a NATO meeting the following June. Rumsfeld resisted the idea, arguing that he could not afford to loosen his grip on the Pentagon even for a weekend. Rumsfeld eventually relented and went to Munich, delivered a speech on missile defense, pronounced allied unease about the project to be utterly incomprehensible, and rushed back. The episode was telling: Rumsfeld's principal battleground was the Pentagon, his concern over relations with the allies was secondary, and he was uneasy leaving others in charge even for a day.

At the Defense Department, Rumsfeld was quick to demonstrate and solidify his authority. Each month, the defense secretary was required to approve sensitive reconnaissance operations. The missions were listed in a top secret binder, and once when an action officer came in to get Rumsfeld's okay he noted in passing that the State Department had already re-

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viewed the list and had not seen any problems. The innocent comment was like waving a red flag before a bull. Rumsfeld refused to sign, saying he would need to study the binder first. For several days, there was a mysterious lull in reconnaissance operations as the new defense secretary made clear that the building he was trying to bend to his will could not take him for granted. There were small changes that sent a message as well. The elaborate honor ceremonies for visiting dignitaries were declared to be an unnecessary frill and cut back.⁴

As Rumsfeld saw it, the biggest obstacles to his authority and vision were institutional. All of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—the leaders of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, who were presided over by a chairman selected by the president—were holdovers from the Clinton administration. Soon after arriving at the Pentagon, Rumsfeld met with General Hugh Shelton, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a former Special Operations Forces commander and an imposing physical presence. Shelton sought to assure Rumsfeld that there was no such thing as Clinton generals and admirals. Shelton and the chiefs would be loyal to the new administration. Rumsfeld, however, was concerned that the JCS and its staff had emerged as a rival source of power. The new defense secretary complained that the Joint Staff was too large and recommended that it be reduced by dispensing with Shelton's office of legislative affairs and his office of public affairs. Shelton stood his ground, arguing that the JCS chairman, by law, was the principal military adviser to the president and the National Security Council as well as the secretary of defense and that he needed a staff to support those responsibilities. Besides, Shelton argued, the civilian staff that reported to the defense secretary was even larger.

At one point, Shelton received a tip from a friendly member of the defense secretary's staff that Rumsfeld planned to fire Scott Fry, the Navy admiral who served as the director of the Joint Staff, which supported the chairman, and who never clicked with the new defense secretary. Shelton burst into Rumsfeld's office unannounced and said he would resign if Fry was replaced. Rumsfeld would then have two vacancies on his hands. Rumsfeld, who had made no secret of his disdain for Fry, insisted he had no such plan. The episode spoke volumes about the strains between the new civilian leadership and the military during the early months of Rumsfeld's tenure. Shelton was determined to defend the prerogatives of his office and its independence. Rumsfeld approached defense like a businessman who saw himself on the top of a steep pyramid.⁵

In his quest to remake the armed forces, Rumsfeld did not hesitate to go outside the military and tap a network of formal and informal advisers. Rumsfeld was fascinated by the views of Andrew Marshall, the seventy-nine-year-old head of the Defense Department Office of Net Assessment, a sort of Pentagon think tank, who saw satellites, information systems, long-range precision weapons, and advanced military technology as a way to check the rise of China. Marshall had not been an influential figure during the Clinton administration, and Cohen had proposed moving Marshall's office across the Potomac River and installing him at the National Defense University. Cohen relented following protests from Marshall's high-level friends, including Rumsfeld, who wrote Cohen a letter describing Marshall as a national treasure.⁶

At the Pentagon, Rumsfeld's program was dubbed "transformation," and it soon acquired the aura of an official ideology. The secretary was enamored of missile defense and space weapons, the issues he had worked on during his years out of office. He was also skeptical about the Army leadership, which he considered to be too old-fashioned, wedded to heavy forces, and too slow to change. Bush's Citadel speech had spoken of developing land forces that were more mobile and easier to deploy. Further, even with the hefty budget increases the new administration was projecting, there was not enough money to fund all the programs on the Pentagon wish list. With 476,000 troops, Army personnel costs were a major claimant on the budget—and, for the proponents of transformation, a sponge that soaked up much of the funding that could be used for space-based radars and other new systems they hoped would replace the cumbersome "legacy" systems of the Cold War.⁷

With Rumsfeld at the helm, some long-standing critics of the Army leadership felt that they had an ally at the top. Douglas A. Macgregor, an iconoclastic Army colonel who believed his service had too much of a Cold War focus, was one of them. When Macgregor ran into Steve Cambone, Rumsfeld's closest and most loyal aide, Cambone jested that Rumsfeld thought the Army's problems could be solved by lining up fifty of its generals in the Pentagon and gunning them down.⁸

General Eric Shinseki, the Army chief of staff, and Tom White, the secretary of the Army, sometimes felt as if they were a bureaucratic target and were not amused. Shelton, for his part, felt that Rumsfeld was not so much a visionary as parochial. Rumsfeld, the JCS chief told associates, had been a Navy fighter pilot, seemed partial to the Navy and the Marines, and was biased against the Army because it had mechanized

forces and had taken on Balkan peacekeeping missions that the Bush administration considered to be a distraction.

With transformation in the air, a lively debate developed over which forces were most needed and the sort of wars the U.S. should prepare to fight. In the wake of the Gulf War, Dick Cheney had ordained that the United States should be able to fight two major wars in far-flung regions. The worry was that if the United States was tied down in one conflict a foe in another crisis zone might try to take advantage unless the U.S. had available forces that could be drawn on for the fight. It was not a hypothetical problem, but a real concern. When the United States was leading the coalition to retake Kuwait it had to keep a wary eye on North Korea.⁹

The problem with the two-war concept for Rumsfeld was that it required a large ground force. The Pentagon needed to have four Army corps, as well as the transport ships and planes to take them, nearly simultaneously, to distant battlefields. During a much ballyhooed review, it was decided that the requirement should be substantially watered down. Under a new doctrine, if adversaries attacked in two separate regions the goal would be to hold the line in both. The president would then pick the one the United States would “decisively win” while continuing to contain the other.¹⁰

As the two-war doctrine was being amended, the secretary and his aides turned their attention to trimming the forces. Shortly before September 11, Rumsfeld had presided over a meeting at which Cambone laid out several options, including one to reduce the Army by as much as two divisions, a proposal that drew vociferous and ultimately successful protests from the Army leaders, who argued that the service was already stretched thin.¹¹

On September 10, Rumsfeld held a town meeting at the Pentagon to let officials know that he felt the main threat to a more efficient and innovative defense structure was internal. “The topic today is an adversary that poses a threat, a serious threat, to the security of the United States of America,” Rumsfeld began. “From a single capital, it attempts to impose its demands across time zones, continents, oceans and beyond. With brutal consistency, it stifles free thought and crushes new ideas. It disrupts the defense of the United States and places the lives of men and women in uniform at risk. . . . You may think I’m describing one of the last decrepit dictators of the world. But their day, too, is almost past, and they cannot match the strength and size of this adversary. The adversary’s closer to home. It’s the Pentagon bureaucracy.”¹²

The next day, the Pentagon and the World Trade Center were attacked. The proposals to cut the Army receded into the background and Rumsfeld turned his restive intellect to the administration's new war on terrorism.

Strategizing with his top aides, Rumsfeld was not satisfied with the idea of pounding the Taliban. Striking back at the Afghan regime was a given, but it was not necessary that the operation be the nation's only mission or even its top priority. The Bush administration needed to demonstrate that the United States had the will to take the fight beyond Afghanistan as well as the guile to hit enemies when and where they did not expect it. First and foremost, it needed to head off future attacks by preventing terrorists from acquiring biological, chemical, or even nuclear arms from the United States's enemies.

"The idea was, of course, to go after Al Qaeda," said Douglas Feith, the undersecretary of defense for policy and a member of Rumsfeld's inner circle. "But punishment was not the issue. . . . Rumsfeld understood that the problem is not dealing with one organization in one place. It would not be solved by fighting Al Qaeda inside Afghanistan. It was a bigger problem. His mind ran immediately to the extra danger of the nexus of terrorism and WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. We were not going to solve this problem by focusing narrowly on the perpetrators of 9/11. Rumsfeld wanted some way to organize the military action so that it signaled that the global conflict would not be over if we struck one good blow in Afghanistan."¹³

Many of the secretary's musings were later included in a memorandum that Feith drafted on the limited value of hitting targets in Afghanistan. The independent commission that investigated the 9/11 attack cast the memo as a series of proposals by Feith, but in fact many of the notions had come from Rumsfeld himself.¹⁴ Before 9/11, Rumsfeld had not been obsessed with Iraq. After 9/11, Iraq was elevated as a potential military front.

For the first eight months of their term in office, the Bush administration's approach to Iraq was more of an attitude than a plan. Many of the administration's top echelon had been in office during the Persian Gulf War and their intuitions for how to respond to Saddam were shaped by that experience.

When the 1991 Persian Gulf War drew to a close, the administration of George H. W. Bush thought it might soon see the last of Saddam Hussein.

Although the removal of the Iraqi leader had not been an explicit goal of the Desert Storm campaign, U.S. air war commanders had directed strikes against virtually every location where they thought the Iraqi leader might be located and targeted the security forces, communications network, and Baath Party organizations that American intelligence believed he relied on to stay in power. The last target that was bombed in the Desert Storm operation had been the massive edifice that served as the Baath Party headquarters in Baghdad, a parting shot that expressed contempt for Saddam's ruling apparatus. The mission of the U.S.-led coalition, however, had been to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait and to deprive Saddam of the ability to threaten his southern neighbor again by destroying the Republican Guard divisions that had rolled into the tiny Gulf state and later taken up positions south of the Euphrates. A Western and Arab coalition had been raised on this premise. Eliminating Saddam, however, had not been essential but was seen as a potential bonus.

When the Iraqis were ejected from Kuwait in the 100-hour war, President George H. W. Bush calculated that Saddam might be overthrown by humiliated and disgruntled Iraqi generals.¹⁵ But Saddam proved to be a far more durable figure than the Americans expected. His network of security operatives and internal police was vast. His powerful Tikriti clan enjoyed the trappings of power. His sheer ruthlessness was a potent weapon. Beyond that, enough of his Republican Guard forces, including the critically important corps headquarters, had escaped during the Gulf conflict to help him contend with a spontaneous rebellion in the Shiite-dominated south and resistance in the Kurdish north. Saddam put down the uprisings with extraordinary brutality.¹⁶

The messy aftermath of a seemingly decisive war created a dilemma for Washington: whether to pocket its victory and turn its back on the anti-Saddam rebels or support the resistance and risk being drawn into Iraq's internal strife. General Colin L. Powell, the pragmatic chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was satisfied with the endgame. Shaped by his Vietnam experience, the four-star general had become the foremost advocate of a doctrine that called for using overwhelming force and then making a clean break. He was wary of civilians whom he thought were too quick to send forces in harm's way and was anxious to avoid a potential quagmire. For Paul Wolfowitz, who served as the chief policy official in Cheney's Pentagon, the victory had been tarnished: U.S. forces had stood on the sidelines while anti-Saddam rebels were ruthlessly suppressed by Saddam's troops. He had been intrigued by suggestions from the Saudis

that it might be wise to stir up trouble for Saddam by covertly arming the Iraqi Shiites and was concerned that Iraq would remain a danger.¹⁷

The dominant view, however, was summed up by Brent Scowcroft, Bush's national security adviser. While the administration was concerned about the repression of the Shiites, it was anxious to avoid any steps that would deepen the United States's involvement on the ground or risk the breakup of a nation that had served as a buffer against the expansion of Iranian power. Asked why the United States did not ally itself with the Shiite rebels after the war, Scowcroft summed up the policy in a word: "geopolitics."¹⁸

The Bush administration settled on a policy of economic sanctions, military containment, and regular United Nations inspections to dismantle Saddam's programs to develop nuclear, biological, and chemical arms. It was a strategy for a slow, steady squeeze, not deeper involvement. A no-fly zone was decreed over northern Iraq, effectively making Kurdistan an autonomous enclave. Six months later, as the Iraqis kept up their air raids against the Shiites, a no-fly zone was belatedly established over southern Iraq as well.

The Clinton years marked a curious role reversal in which the Democrats continued the containment policy of their predecessor while Republicans began to snipe at the strategy President Bush had originally put in place. By the late 1990s, there was growing debate over what to do with Iraq.

After meeting with Iraqi exiles, Wayne Downing, the former head of the Special Operations Command, drafted a plan, which he modestly entitled "An Alternative Strategy for Iraq." The idea was to grab a piece of southern Iraq, establish a provisional government in "liberated" Iraq, protect it with airpower, use the enclave to launch intelligence and commando operations into the nonliberated sectors, call on the Iraqi public to rise up, and gradually expand the zone until it included the entire country. The Iraqi Liberation Army could number as many as 10,000 and would be assembled in a year.¹⁹ The general strategy, which harked back to the proposals for arming the Shiites at the end of the Gulf War, was endorsed in an open letter to President Clinton from a list of conservatives that read like a who's who of the George W. Bush administration, including Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Zalmay Khalilzad, Richard Armitage, and Robert Zoellick. In 1998, the Republican-led Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act giving the executive branch the authority to dispense up to \$97 million worth of military equipment and weapons

to the potential insurgent army.²⁰ Eager to protect his right flank, Clinton signed it, though he had no intention of arming Iraqi insurgents and starting a proxy war.

With Saddam often at loggerheads with the United Nations weapons inspectors and the Republicans baying for the overthrow of his regime, the Clinton administration ordered a major air attack. To catch the Iraqis off guard and prevent them from moving their presumed caches of prohibited weapons, the plan was to outfox the Iraqi leader by striking just hours after U.N. inspectors were withdrawn from Iraq. The operation was consequently named Desert Fox. Only later was it pointed out that the Pentagon had inadvertently invoked the nickname of the World War II Nazi general Erwin Rommel. During the four-day blitz in December 1998, 415 cruise missiles were launched while American and British planes dropped more than 600 bombs. The Pentagon later estimated that it had killed 1,400 members of Iraq's Republican Guard and set back Saddam's supposed weapons program two years.²¹

Soon after the debate over the chads and ballots was settled by the Supreme Court in 2000 and George W. Bush was finally proclaimed the victor, Cohen received a call from the new vice-president-elect. Though he had defended the original decision to end the 1991 ground war at 100 hours, withdraw U.S. troops, and avoid the snare of potential occupation duties in Iraq, Cheney had come to believe that the containment strategy he had helped put in place was faltering. The web of economic sanctions seemed to be fraying and Cheney was convinced that Saddam was still a threat. He was the only senior member of the old team whose views on how to deal with Iraq had fundamentally changed. Now, Cheney wanted the Pentagon to arrange a security briefing for the president-elect. As Cohen recalled, Cheney made it clear that he did not want an eighty days around the world kind of approach. The session should focus principally on Iraq.²²

On December 19, a month before Bush was inaugurated, he went to the White House to meet with the outgoing president. The two men posed for pictures and were conspicuously gracious to each other.

"I'm here to listen, and if the president is kind enough to offer some advice I will take it in," Bush said.

"My only advice to anybody in this is to get a good team and do what you think is right," Clinton added.

Once the two men were behind closed doors. Clinton told Bush that he had read his campaign statements carefully and his impression was that

his two priorities were national missile defense and Iraq. Bush said this was correct. Clinton proposed a different set of priorities, which included Al Qaeda, Middle East diplomacy, North Korea, the nuclear competition in South Asia, and, only then, Iraq. Bush did not respond.²³

The Clinton administration left office believing that Saddam was a manageable nuisance. Most of the new Bush team read the situation differently. The new team did not have a preconceived plan on how to deal with Saddam's regime or a timetable for action, but there was an assumption on the part of the new president, his vice president, and most of his national security team that something had to be done.

For all that, the first six months of the Bush presidency seemed to be focused on everything but Iraq. The new administration scrapped the antiballistic missile treaty and endured a mini-crisis with China over the collision of a Chinese fighter with a U.S. Navy reconnaissance plane. The new defense secretary brusquely pursued his transformation agenda at the Pentagon and Bush fretted about finding a way to extract the U.S. military from its nation-building efforts in the Balkans. During a July swing through Kosovo, Bush leaned over to Brigadier General William David, the commander of U.S. forces there, and expressing his disdain for peacekeeping said, "We've got to get you out of here."²⁴

When the administration did focus on Iraq, its initial deliberations were inconclusive. One of the first high-level meetings on Iraq policy came on June 1 when Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, chaired a meeting of the Principals Committee, a panel that included the vice president, defense secretary, CIA director, and secretary of state. Four options were on the table: continuing the current containment strategy, continuing containment while actively supporting Saddam's opponents, setting up a safe haven for insurgents in southern Iraq, and planning a U.S. invasion. No policy was set and administration officials continued to pursue their separate agendas.

At the State Department, Colin Powell led the effort to narrow and tighten economic sanctions. The new secretary of state's first instinct was to constrain Saddam through diplomatic efforts with allies and leave force as a last resort. At the Pentagon, Wolfowitz's view of Saddam had only darkened over time. The new deputy defense secretary saw Saddam as unchastened by his Gulf War defeat and a supporter of terrorism.

After he received his new Defense Department post, Wolfowitz sought to enlist the Joint Staff's support to develop a strategy for aiding an anti-Saddam resistance. Saddam had drained the southern marshes in Iraq to

deprive Shiite rebels of a sanctuary, so Wolfowitz wondered if the dams could be bombed to re-create them. The Pentagon lawyers challenged whether such a strike would be consistent with the rules of war. Wolfowitz's view was that it would be more humane than leaving the Shiites to Saddam's mercy. Wolfowitz also wanted to know what it would take to arm and train Iraqi insurgents. At the White House, Zalmay Khalilzad, the National Security Council aide for the Middle East who had worked under Wolfowitz in the Cheney Pentagon, drafted papers that argued that supporting the Iraqi resistance in exile could lead to fissures in the regime.²⁵

As for Rumsfeld, he was working on a new strategy for enforcing the no-fly zones as a means of weakening the regime. If the Iraqis fired at U.S. or British planes, the allies would deliver a disproportionate response. Instead of going after air defenses, the U.S. would begin to whittle away at the weapons and capabilities that Saddam used to stay in power. It would be a way of keeping Saddam in check and adding a muscular element to the administration policy. One potential target was the concentrations of tank transporters the Iraqi military relied on to move Republican Guard T-72 tanks around the country.²⁶

Newbold had been in London briefing the plan to the British, who patrolled the Iraqi skies with the Americans, on September 11, 2001, when the news broke about the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. When he returned and talked to Feith he was surprised to find that the Rumsfeld aide had other things on his mind besides Afghanistan. "The environment was one of extreme tension," Newbold recalled. "We truly thought another attack might be imminent and that Al Qaeda was the cause of this Pearl Harbor-style attack. You could still smell the smoke in the corridors. In the middle of this I assured Feith that we were working hard on Afghanistan. Feith told me, 'Why are you working on Afghanistan? You ought to be working on Iraq.'"²⁷

Newbold, from his perch as the senior Joint Staff operations officer, later told some of his fellow officers that he considered the focus on Iraq to be a strategic blunder and a distraction from the real war on terror, but he was not in charge. Feith later denied making the comment and insisted that he was expressing the thinking Rumsfeld and his aides had been doing about taking the war on terrorism beyond Afghanistan and giving it a global dimension.

On September 15, Bush summoned his top aides to a two-day war council at the president's mountain retreat at Camp David to decide how

to respond to the 9/11 attacks. The administration's top security hands were there. CIA director George Tenet presented his plan for operations inside Afghanistan. Shelton, the JCS chairman, briefed a preliminary plan for military intervention in Afghanistan, including the significant use of ground troops, and also outlined additional bombing options. Powell explained his proposal to present the Taliban with an ultimatum to hand over bin Laden and to enforce the demand with a U.S.-led coalition.

The briefing papers that Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz took with them included three sets of potential targets: the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and Iraq. The papers asserted that only two of them—Al Qaeda and Iraq—were strategic threats to the United States. That day, Saddam had issued an open letter to the American people in which he declared that the United States was getting a taste of the pain it had inflicted on the Arab world. The Iraqi leader did not take responsibility for 9/11. While some State Department officials saw it as bluster, Wolfowitz saw Saddam's words as a threat.²⁸

Rumsfeld encouraged Wolfowitz to raise Iraq at the meeting. After Rumsfeld posed the question of what should be done about Saddam, Wolfowitz, who was sitting in a back row, pressed the case for confronting Iraq during the first round of the administration's new war on terror.

Powell pushed back. Afghanistan needed to be the main focus, he argued. Taking on Iraq would make it hard, if not impossible, to assemble a coalition. Rumsfeld countered that a coalition that was not willing to stand with the United States was one that was not worth having.

At the end of the day, Wolfowitz found himself in a discussion with the president over coffee near a fireplace. Vice President Cheney and I. Lewis Libby, known to everyone as "Scooter," Cheney's chief of staff, stood nearby. Bush remarked that the military options he had seen for Iraq were not that imaginative. Wolfowitz offered an option of his own. A large fraction of Iraq's oil was within forty miles of the Kuwait border. Most of southern Iraq was made up of Shiites who were deeply hostile to Saddam Hussein. The region included Basra, the second largest city in Iraq. The U.S. military could grab a foothold in southern Iraq, set up an enclave that would roughly parallel the sanctuary the Kurds enjoyed in northern Iraq, and gain a stranglehold on the Iraqi economy. The enclave could be used to arm insurgents and prepare for a push to Baghdad. It was a variation of the enclave plan that Wolfowitz and other conservatives had promoted during their years out of office. Bush listened and the argument appeared to register.²⁹

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At the end of the Camp David meetings, Bush spoke privately with Shelton, who was in his final month as the JCS chairman. The president asked Shelton to tell him if he was making a mistake by focusing on Al Qaeda instead of Saddam. Shelton reassured the president that he had made the correct call. Attacking Iraq out of the blue and apparently without clear provocation, Shelton argued, would upset the Middle East and hamper the coalition-building effort. Nor, he added, was there any reason to think that Iraq was linked to the September 11 attacks.

“That’s what I think,” Bush told Shelton. “We will get this guy but at a time and place of our choosing,” Bush added, referring to Saddam.

With an Afghan operation fast approaching, Shelton’s biggest worry was not Iraq but his concern that Rumsfeld’s new principles of transformation would be applied in Afghanistan too enthusiastically by an overzealous defense secretary. Five days before he retired at the end of September 2001, Shelton ran into Dell Dailey, the two-star head of the Joint Special Operations Command, in the White House parking lot. The Afghan war plan depended heavily on Special Operations Forces, and Shelton warned Dailey that the military had to resist Rumsfeld’s instinct to pare the Afghan force to a minimum. The defense secretary was prepared to send fewer forces than even the White House was willing to dispatch, Shelton argued. Dailey needed to hold firm. There was no need to take shortcuts that would risk unnecessary casualties. Lives and the success of his mission hung in the balance.³⁰

The president decided to keep the focus on Al Qaeda and eliminating its sanctuary in Afghanistan, reaffirming the counsel of the vast majority of his advisers. But Bush had signaled that Iraq was still on his mind. On Sunday, September 16, Bush called Condoleezza Rice. He wanted the focus to be on Afghanistan but also wanted plans drawn up in case it turned out that Iraq was somehow implicated in the 9/11 attacks. The next day, the president convened a meeting of his National Security Council during which there was some discussion of what might follow an Afghan campaign. Bush reaffirmed his decision that contingency plans should be drawn up to deal with Iraq, including a plan to seize Iraq’s oilfields.³¹

After Rumsfeld was selected as defense secretary, Richard N. Perle secured an influential position for himself as chairman of the Defense Policy Board, an advisory panel that counseled Rumsfeld on military and defense planning issues. The move gave Perle the latitude to express his own,

characteristically strong opinions and pursue his agenda while having an inside track.

On September 19, Perle convened the panel for two days of meetings, which largely concentrated on Iraq. Washington was still in a state of shock from the terrorist attack and security was extraordinarily tight. The board members gathered at a Washington hotel, boarded minibuses, and were whisked across the 14th Street Bridge to the Pentagon with a police escort. They convened in Rumsfeld's conference room to hear from the visiting speakers: Professor Bernard Lewis, the emeritus Princeton University professor who was among the conservatives who had long advocated arming and backing Iraqi insurgents, and Ahmed Chalabi, the director for the Iraqi National Congress, the umbrella organization of anti-Saddam exiles.

Lewis set the tone. Iraq needed to be liberated, and Middle East nations would respect the use of force. Chalabi spoke next. The CIA considered him a scoundrel who, it charged, bilked the Petra Bank in Jordan out of millions and was little more than a poseur as a London-based guerrilla fighter. The State Department thought he was a master manipulator with little constituency inside Iraq. But Perle, Wolfowitz, and aides in Cheney's office saw him as a talented and dedicated organizer who had made more than his share of enemies with his single-minded focus on stirring a rebellion in Iraq.

Chalabi argued that Saddam acted like an occupying power. He was surrounded by bodyguards and fearful of assassins and coup plotters. The north was virtually out of his control. The south was isolated. Saddam's armored forces were desperately in need of maintenance and lacked fuel. Officers were not being paid. True, his army had tanks and helicopters and WMD, but Saddam could be toppled by Iraqi insurgents with U.S. airpower. The uprising would turn Iraq into a good, stable, modern, pro-Western free market country. The Iraqi military forces would help stabilize the country afterward. Ordinarily, Chalabi was not permitted to move around the Pentagon without an escort, but that day he and Francis Brooke, his public affairs adviser, were given passes that allowed them to walk the corridors on their own, and after Chalabi's presentation they went like a couple of tourists to see the damaged, smoke-filled wing.

Rumsfeld showed up toward the end of the session and made a broader point. Yes, it was important to topple the Taliban as quickly as the U.S. could, but that would not be enough. The United States needed to do

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more to demonstrate that there were serious consequences for mounting an attack on the U.S. and to show it would not suffer unsavory governments that were affiliated with terrorists. There was no flowery talk of inculcating democracy in the heart of the Middle East. Rumsfeld was advocating a demonstration of American power. It was a reprise of the brainstorming session the defense secretary had carried out with Feith and his aides soon after the 9/11 attacks. Rumsfeld had not proclaimed Iraq to be the next target, but he had made it clear that he felt there needed to be a Phase 2.³²

Washington's new interest in Iraq was soon apparent to the military's war planners in the field. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Reilly was at Fort McPherson when he heard a snowflake was coming down from the Defense Department. Fort McPherson was the home of the Third Army, an Atlanta-based headquarters that would serve as the major command for land warfare in the event of a conflagration in Central Asia, the Horn of Africa, or the Middle East.

When the query arrived, Reilly and his team of five planners were summoned to a windowless room in the bowels of the Third Army headquarters that was reserved for the most sensitive communications. Lieutenant General Paul T. Mikolashek, the Third Army commander, pulled the message off a classified fax machine and passed it around. The Third Army planners had seventy-two hours to sketch a plan to seize and hold Iraq's southern oilfields. The operation, indeed the very existence of planning effort, would be classified at the highest level: Polo Step.

The snowflake had arrived on September 13, two days before the Camp David war council. Rumsfeld's Pentagon was one step ahead of the president. By the time Bush ordered that a contingency plan for Iraq be drawn up the effort was already quietly under way.

Closeting himself with his team of planners, Reilly sketched out the strategy to seize a chunk of southern Iraq. The U.S. military would control everything from the port city of Umm Qasr and the southern Shiite city of Basra to Nasiriyah along the Euphrates River. That would give the U.S. control of the Rumaylah oilfields and cut Saddam off from his only seaport.

The mission of preparing the invasion of southern Iraq was assigned to V Corps, the Army's main fighting force in Europe. In October, the Third Army staff gathered more than 1,000 slides of background mate-

rial on terrain, Iraqi forces, and other vital data and sent them over the military's classified e-mail system to the V Corps planners in Heidelberg, Germany. The cover slide showed a picture of a flying duck striking a Saddam Hussein-like figure with a frying pan. Underneath was written: "Operation Schwack Iraq." The official code name was more patriotic: Vigilant Guardian.

In Heidelberg, Lieutenant Colonel James Danna, the chief V Corps war planner, was cranking up the work on Vigilant Guardian. In addition to the background material, Reilly sent him a five-page paper to guide the planning. The V Corps would be under the operational control of CENTCOM on Iraq, and it should be ready to attack as early as January or February 2002. There was no talk of going to Baghdad; the mission was described as establishing an enclave in southern Iraq.

Danna fleshed out and expanded the plan. To control the southern Iraqi oilfields, he envisioned a substantial security zone, one that extended north of the Euphrates. A security zone of that size would keep any U.S. forces that arrived in Kuwait out of the range of Iraq's short-range missiles. The lodgment would also give the United States a base for further attacks deeper into Iraq: the V Corps would operate within 75 miles of Baghdad. The Army could fly UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) in and over Baghdad, dispatch attack helicopters, or strike targets to their north with ATACMS surface-to-surface missiles. In the meantime, the American forces could sell oil and import food to the presumably grateful residents of southern Iraq.

Danna and his planners figured that the risk was manageable. Iraq's Republican Guard was barred from driving south of the 32nd parallel. If the Iraqis dispatched forces south to attack the Americans they would be destroyed by airpower.

The U.S. would need two divisions, the requisite artillery, Patriot anti-missile batteries, logistics, and fuel. With the combat service support the invasion force could amount to 75,000 to 100,000 troops and would take thirty to forty-five days to deploy from "go." Once the force was assembled in Kuwait, Danna figured that establishing a lodgment in southern Iraq would take four days.³³

When Wolfowitz and other conservatives advocated arming and equipping the Iraqi resistance, they estimated that a rebel force of fewer than 10,000, supported by U.S. airpower, could establish and protect an enclave in southern Iraq. They could stir up a rebellion across the country. But now, Army planners were projecting an industrial strength operation.

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To further develop the strategy, Lieutenant General William Scott Wallace and his V Corps planners donned civilian clothes and caught a commercial flight to Kuwait the next month to meet with Mikolashek, who had moved his headquarters there to oversee the Afghan campaign. Mikolashek was concerned by the V Corps plan, which took forces beyond the Euphrates so they could launch attacks near Baghdad and favored something more conservative.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Eassa was among Danna's team of planners. His father was a Lebanese Christian who had immigrated to the United States, made a career for himself at the Carrier air-conditioning company, and later represented the firm in the Middle East. One of his father's major projects was overseeing the installation of an air-conditioning system in the Republican Palace, a citadel on the Tigris that Saddam Hussein later expanded and adorned with four helmeted figures that bore a striking likeness to himself. Eassa had never been to Baghdad, but now it looked like he might one day make the trip.³⁴

Vigilant Guardian turned out to be little more than a contingency plan, but it energized Third Army headquarters, as well as the Army's V Corps, which would later be the Army corps that would carry out the main attack. It also reflected many of the assumptions that would guide the planning effort: an opponent whose military was weakened by more than a decade of sanctions and a welcoming Iraqi population in the south. When it came time to drawing up an invasion strategy for Iraq, however, Rumsfeld intended to control the process.

On November 21, Newbold called Victor "Gene" Renuart, an Air Force two-star general who served as Franks's chief operations officer, and gave him a quick heads-up: CENTCOM would receive an order to develop a new estimate of how many forces would be needed to invade Iraq and remove Saddam from power. Five days later, Rumsfeld flew to Tampa to meet with Franks. Later that day, at a joint press conference with Franks, Rumsfeld was asked if pursuing terrorist groups in Somalia would be the next phase in the war on terror. Rumsfeld parried the question, but the defense secretary was actually thinking much bigger.

Rumsfeld met alone with Franks. But before he engaged with the CENTCOM commander, he had drafted a set of talking points with the assistance of Wolfowitz and Feith. A review of the document provides a sense of Rumsfeld's guidance for drafting a new war plan. There were in-

dications, Rumsfeld maintained, that Saddam's hold on power was brittle. So the key was to identify the vulnerabilities that could be exploited to heighten Saddam's paranoia and strip away his supporters. The talking points listed the main objectives, describing them as "slices." They included the northern and southern oilfields, Saddam's presumed stocks of WMD, Iraq's missile sites and air defenses, and the Republican Guard.

The campaign, the talking points note, should be marked by surprise, speed, shock, and risk, as well as actions that, Rumsfeld wrote, would add to the momentum for regime change. It would be important to start the military action before moving all the forces in place for the worst case. The decapitation of the Iraqi government could occur early. It would be important to cut off communications as well as any orders to "sleepers," terrorists who might be positioned around the world.

Rumsfeld's document also said it would be necessary to deploy Special Operations Forces in the north to work with the Kurds, protect a provisional government, seize the western desert, and cut off Baghdad. Steps had to be taken to deter Saddam from lashing out at the Kurds and to respond if he ignored the warnings. Rumsfeld's talking points further stressed the need for a "declaratory policy" to warn Saddam of the consequences of using chemical and biological weapons.

Rumsfeld's talking points further indicated that he wanted Franks to produce a "rough concept," not a finished plan for execution. And he stressed the need for tight deadlines. The secretary wanted to iterate a plan, develop it through constant interaction with the military instead of waiting for a finished product. Rumsfeld's talking points also indicated that he offered to have the services contribute staff if Franks was short-handed because of Afghanistan. The planners could work at the Pentagon or at CENTCOM's headquarters in Tampa. Clearly, Rumsfeld was not about to let the war in Afghanistan get in the way of a new war with Iraq.

Rumsfeld also wanted to think ahead. The Bush administration had gotten lucky in Afghanistan, Rumsfeld noted, when it found Hamid Karzai and arranged for him to run the country. But this time the administration could not afford to muddle through. Along with a new war plan it would need a political solution for postwar Iraq.³⁵

After his meeting with Rumsfeld was over, Franks related much of the guidance to his trusted officers. Aides to Rumsfeld described the defense secretary's approach as "an exercise in suasion." Rumsfeld never directed Franks on how to write the plan. But he would plant ideas, send concepts

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and papers his way, and ask questions to shape the plan. There is a saying in Washington that you can get a lot done if you do not want credit for it. Rumsfeld took the notion a step further. It was better that he not receive credit. Rumsfeld understood that there was political value in being able to stand at the Pentagon podium and say that the Bush administration was implementing the military's plan.

In the case of Afghanistan, the Pentagon had to throw together a strategy on the fly. With Iraq, the administration had the luxury of time. It could challenge old assumptions and develop a bold new plan.

Notes

CHAPTER 1: *Snowflakes from the Secretary*

1. Central Command, or CENTCOM, is the U.S. combat command assigned responsibility and authority for U.S. military operations in the Middle East.
2. Interview, Lieutenant General Gregory S. Newbold (Ret).
3. George W. Bush, "A Period of Consequences," 23 September 1999, the Citadel, available from http://citadel.edu/r3/pao/addresses/pres_bush.html, accessed 1 November 2005. Richard Armitage, who later served as deputy secretary of state under Colin Powell, drafted much of the text.
4. Interview, former Pentagon official. Also see James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans* (New York: Viking, 2004), pp. x–xiii, and Midge Decter, *Rumsfeld: A Personal Portrait* (New York: Regan Books/HarperCollins, 2003), for accounts of Rumsfeld's career.
5. Interview, former senior military officer.
6. Interview, former senior official.
7. Quadrennial Defense Review Report, 30 September 2001.

For the United States, the revolution in military affairs holds the potential to confer enormous advantages and to extend the current period of U.S. military superiority. . . . Moving to a capabilities-based force also requires the United States to focus on emerging opportunities that certain capabilities, including advanced remote sensing, long-range precision strike, transformed maneuver and expeditionary forces and systems, to overcome anti-access and area denial threats, can confer on the U.S. military over time.

8. Interview, Douglas Macgregor.
9. Dick Cheney, "Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy," DOD publication, January 1993.
10. Quadrennial Defense Review Report, 30 September 2001.
11. Interview, Tom White.
12. Donald Rumsfeld, "Bureaucracy to Battlefield," speech, 10 September 2001, available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2001/s20010910-secdef.html>, accessed 1 November 2005.
13. Interview, Douglas Feith.
14. Thomas Kean et al., *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: Norton, 2004), pp. 559–60; Interview, Douglas Feith.

15. Letter to the authors from former President George H. W. Bush, as published in Michael R. Gordon and Lieutenant General (Ret.) Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War* (New York: Little, Brown, 1995), p. 517.
16. The cease-fire arrangements agreed on at the March 1991 talks at Safwan also inadvertently gave the regime a badly needed boost. When the Iraqi generals complained that their bridges had been bombed and asked H. Norman Schwarzkopf, the chief allied commander, for the right to fly helicopters throughout southern Iraq, Schwarzkopf agreed. The Iraqi commanders quickly exploited the concession to mount ferocious helicopter attacks on the Shiites—including, American intelligence learned more than a decade later, with chemical weapons—prompting Schwarzkopf to complain that he had been duped. At the forward headquarters of the Third Army, Brigadier General Steve Arnold, the command's chief operations officer, drew up a top secret contingency plan to march on the Iraqi capital and dislodge Saddam, which he dubbed fittingly enough "The Road to Baghdad." Concerned that Saddam had survived the Desert Storm campaign and anxious to create problems for him at home, the Saudis proposed a covert program to arm the Shiite rebels during a visit to Riyadh by Secretary of State James Baker and a team of Bush officials. "The Road to Baghdad" plan, in possession of the authors.
17. Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, pp. 455–56.
18. Interview, Brent Scowcroft.
19. Wayne Downing, "An Alternative Strategy for Iraq" plan, in possession of the authors. It called for assembling a core of 300 to 500 Iraqi expatriates with military experience, which would be trained in the U.S. In addition, a 2,000- to 10,000-man force would be recruited and transported to a base in the Middle East. Two special units would be formed, including a 200-man Commando Company trained for raids and ambushes and strike operations, and a 150-man vehicle Anti-Tank Company armed with medium- and long-range antitank missiles.
20. William J. Clinton, "The Iraq Liberation Act," statement by the president, 31 October 1998, available from <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mid-east/libera.htm>, accessed 28 October 2005.
21. Alfred B. Prados, "Iraqi Challenges and U.S. Military Responses: March 1991 Through October 31, 1998," *CRS Report for Congress*, 20 November 2002.
22. Interview, former Pentagon official.
23. Interview, former Clinton aide.
24. Interview, former Pentagon official; George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President to the American Troops in Kosovo," 24 July 2001, available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/07/20010724-1.html>; David E. Sanger, "Bush, in Kosovo, Tells U.S. Troops Role Is Essential," *New York Times*, 25 July 2001, Section A, p. 1.
25. Interview, former member of the Joint Staff.
 Wolfowitz was influenced by the views of Laurie Mylroie, who argued that the 1993 attack was an Iraqi plot. As dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, a post he held after leaving the administration of George H. W. Bush, Wolfowitz informally looked into the matter. See Laurie

Mylroie, *The War Against America: Saddam Hussein and the World Trade Center Attacks: A Study of Revenge* (New York: Regan Books/HarperCollins, 2001).

26. Interviews, former Joint Staff officials.
27. Interview, Lieutenant General Gregory S. Newbold.
28. Saddam Hussein, "Open letter from Saddam Hussein to the American peoples and the western peoples and their governments," 15 September 2001, available from http://www.everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=1172306, accessed 20 October 2005. The second letter is available from <http://web.archive.org/web/20010922151907/www.uruklink.net/iraqnews/enews12.htm>.

We say to the American peoples, what happened on September 11, 2001, should be compared to what their government and their armies are doing in the world, for example, the international agencies have stated that more than one million and a half Iraqis have died because of the blockade imposed by America and some Western countries, in addition to the tens of thousands who died or are injured in the military action perpetrated by America along with those who allied with it against Iraq. Hundreds of bridges, churches, mosques, colleges, schools, factories, palaces, hotels, and thousands of private houses were destroyed or damaged by the American and Western bombardment, which is ongoing even today against Iraq. . . . There is, however, one difference, namely that those who direct their missiles and bombs to the targets, whether Americans or from another Western country, are mostly targeting by remote controls, that is why they do so as if they were playing an amusing game. As for those who acted on September 11, 2001, they did it from a close range, and with, I imagine, giving their lives willingly, with an irrevocable determination. . . . Americans should feel the pain they have inflicted on other peoples of the world, so as when they suffer, they will find the right solution and the right path. . . . America needs wisdom, not power. It has used power, along with the West, to its extreme extent, only to find out later that it doesn't achieve what they wanted. Will the rulers of America try wisdom just for once so that their people can live in security and stability?

29. Interview, senior official.
30. Interview, former senior official.
31. Kean et al., *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 2004, p. 335.
32. Interview, Francis Brooke.
33. Interview, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Danna.
34. Interview, Lieutenant Colonel Chuck Eassa.
35. Review of Rumsfeld's talking points by the authors.