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How Donald Rumsfeld remade the U.S. military for a more uncertain world

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

What Rumsfeld Got Right



(Image credit: Brooks Kraft/Corbis)

In 1962, a Harvard economics professor named Thomas C. Schelling wrote an introduction to Roberta Wohlstetter's *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*. In a few hundred words, Schelling, a future Nobel Prize winner, delivered a tour de force about the failure to anticipate events. "We were so busy thinking through some 'obvious' Japanese moves," he writes,

that we neglected to hedge against the choice that they actually made ... There is a tendency in our planning to confuse the unfamiliar with the improbable ... Furthermore, we made the terrible mistake ... of forgetting that a fine deterrent can make a superb target.

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Schelling's introduction so impressed Donald H. Rumsfeld that he memorized parts of it and, as others have reported, regularly handed it out before the Pearl Harbor-level attack of 9/11. In his subsequent planning for the invasion of Iraq, Rumsfeld took Schelling's precepts to heart, thought pessimistically about all sorts of dire scenarios, and got the best possible result.

But only up to the point when organized Iraqi military resistance collapsed. In a tragic, latter-day extension of Schelling's analysis, Rumsfeld was so busy thinking about the Iraqis' "obvious" military moves—launching chemical weapons, making a last stand in Baghdad—that he neglected to hedge against what they actually did: melt away and return weeks later as small bands of insurgents. Because of the meager resistance to our interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, and the swiftness of our apparent victory in Afghanistan in 2001, which Rumsfeld had played a great part in orchestrating, by early 2003 the specter of a debilitating

Vietnam-scale insurgency against the United States military had been sufficiently exorcised to seem “unfamiliar,” and therefore to be confused with “the improbable.” By the time Saddam Hussein’s statue was toppled in Baghdad, we had become too impressed with our own military to see it as a “superb target.”

Rumsfeld, one former Pentagon official told me, saw Iraq’s degraded military as an easy target for our own; its destruction would provide a quick demonstration of American power, as well as get rid of the regional threat that the Iraqi regime constituted. No firm believer in democratic transformation, he probably assumed, as did many other people at the time, that any new regime in Baghdad, even a military one, would be a dramatic improvement, in strategic terms for the U.S. and in human-rights terms for the Iraqis. Rather than a fear of chaos, what is more apparent at this stage is a certain complacency on Rumsfeld’s part. For example, he evidently did not challenge the personnel system’s choice of ground commander in post-invasion Iraq. The Army’s 5th Corps was slated to rotate out of Germany and into Iraq. Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the 5th Corps commander, and his staff, despite their service in Bosnia, had done little thinking about counterinsurgency. From that set of circumstances, a long trail of well-documented mistakes followed. In this and other cases, Rumsfeld, who is often accused of micromanaging, did not micromanage enough.

“Rumsfeld got war and transformation only half-right,” says Richard H. Shultz Jr., the director of international security studies at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy near Boston. “He was right that the lethality and speed of a military advance could be transformational, but he didn’t realize that the enemy might have an answer to that in the form of a war after the war.” As Thomas Donnelly, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, puts it, Rumsfeld’s view of transformation was “profoundly self-referential,” concerned with what we could do, not what the enemy could.

Rumsfeld, an amateur wrestler and Navy S-2 Tracker pilot, had always seen the world as something that would bend to the force of his will. His early career was a triumph: a four-term congressman in his 30s, he was soon afterward director of the president’s office of economic opportunity, and then ambassador to NATO. Under Gerald R. Ford, he became, at 43, the youngest secretary of defense ever, oversaw the creation of the all-volunteer Army, and fought for a bigger defense budget to restore what he saw as a declining strategic advantage for the United States vis-à-vis the Soviet Union—just before the Kremlin’s geopolitical gains in Africa and Central America in the late 1970s. From 1977 to 1985, he ran the pharmaceutical company G. D. Searle.

Rumsfeld’s reputation in the 1970s was as it would be when he returned to government decades later. The dark master himself, Richard M. Nixon, had pronounced him a “ruthless little bastard.” If Franklin Delano Roosevelt possessed, as Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. supposedly put it, “a second-class intellect, but a first-class temperament,” Rumsfeld was a man with a first-class intellect, but a third-class temperament. His in-your-face disposition led to dreadful relations with Congress and the so-called Revolt of the Generals in 2006, when a half-dozen retired senior officers demanded his resignation. “The man is capable of raking down all opposition, and has an astonishing ability not to listen to experts,” said retired Army General Barry McCaffrey, who says he admires Rumsfeld’s patriotism, ferocious intelligence, and formidable charm. But heeding experts, McCaffrey went on, is what has saved the career of many a high official not nearly as intelligent.

During the Clinton years, the military gained too much power over the civilian defense leadership, subtly using the president’s lack of military service to get its way. Rumsfeld, a civilian primacist, shifted that dynamic too far in the other direction. His method of creative destruction, brought over from his years in the corporate world, was simply too much for a static, hidebound institution like the Pentagon. “Rumsfeld was more effective as a critic of the Pentagon than as a leader of it,” says Richard J. Danzig, a Clinton-era secretary of the Navy, now an adviser to Barack Obama. A critic sees problems; a leader creates dynamic consensus.

A Tom Toles cartoon in 2006 declared Rumsfeld “WRONG ABOUT EVERYTHING.” Not quite. I discussed Rumsfeld with more than two dozen defense experts, Republicans and Democrats alike (though mostly centrists), many of whom had government experience. Their impressions were more measured than Rumsfeld’s toxic image in the media would suggest. Although I had briefed Rumsfeld twice, in 2002 and 2006, about my worries regarding Iraq, when I reached out to him a year ago he wouldn’t meet with me. For this piece, he provided matter-of-fact, occasionally opaque written responses to some of my questions. Thanks to his long tenure and personal

dynamism, Rumsfeld has had an impact that will go far beyond Iraq in shaping the actions of future administrations. Obsessed with what could go wrong, Rumsfeld was a brilliant worrier. It is in his Schelling-inspired pessimism where we might find some saving graces to his legacy.

MANIFEST UNCERTAINTY

Even before 9/11, Rumsfeld saw a new strategic landscape of manifest uncertainty, of fundamental and catastrophic surprise. Consider the conclusions drawn in 1998 by the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, which Rumsfeld chaired (and which had, among its members, Paul D. Wolfowitz): the ballistic-missile threat to the United States was growing; our intelligence community's ability to track that threat was diminishing; and the "U.S. might well have little or no warning before operational deployment" by countries like Iran of ballistic missiles that could reach our soil.

Not surprisingly, that threat and the need to counter it topped Rumsfeld's fret list when he returned to the Pentagon, in January 2001. Before his first year in office was over, the United States had moved to abrogate the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty it had signed with the U.S.S.R. in 1972, limiting missile-defense systems. As Rumsfeld saw it, while the logic of mutually assured destruction still held for two rational and conservative defense bureaucracies in Washington and Moscow, it might not work with terrorist groups or rogue states that lacked proper command-and-control oversight. Development of a missile-defense system accelerated; as of early 2008, there were 24 interceptors in silos in Alaska and California, and 25 on board U.S. ships in the Pacific. The system remains far from foolproof; it is also the single most expensive weapons system in the Pentagon's budget, as well as its most costly R&D program. And the money spent on missile defense might have been better used to counter more-immediate nuclear threats, such as dirty bombs and the cross-border smuggling of enriched uranium. Yet there have been big improvements in the system's capabilities, and even a partial missile defense will give America more leverage and freedom of action in dealing with adversaries than did a relic like the ABM treaty.

Just as Rumsfeld wanted to do away with the enshrined assumptions of Cold War deterrence, he was keenly focused on altering the Pentagon mind-set captured by the so-called Powell doctrine. When Rumsfeld was secretary of defense in the 1970s, Colin Powell was an Army colonel. By the time Rumsfeld returned to the Pentagon, a quarter century later, Powell's canonical fingerprints were all over the building. As the senior military assistant to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger in the early 1980s, Powell had helped devise the Weinberger doctrine, from which his own doctrine emanated. Both favored major conventional combat operations with beginnings, middles, and ends, to be undertaken only when a vital national interest was threatened. Powell, in his later roles as national-security adviser and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, emphasized overwhelming force, exit strategies, and clear, attainable objectives, not to mention the need for broad international support. The Powell doctrine essentially saw the military as a precious national asset that stupid civilians should not be able to deploy too casually. But Rumsfeld worried that the world was too messy, too fluid—with one crisis flowing into the next across geographical regions—and the dangers facing America too complex and varied for such a cut-and-dried approach.

Of course, by violating aspects of the Powell doctrine in Iraq, Rumsfeld and his subordinates arguably showed themselves to be precisely the stupid civilians the doctrine was meant to guard against. Yet the Powell doctrine isn't perfect. Kuwait was pillaged in 1990 while Powell spent months building up forces in Saudi Arabia. His doctrine seemingly justified ignoring the Balkans in the 1990s, but we inserted troops anyway, and debilitating wars did not result—indeed, the stabilization of the former Yugoslavia and the expansion of NATO to the Black Sea indicate that the Balkan interventions were in the nation's interest. An unwillingness to engage in any but the smallest deployments, or in big ones that carried the certainty of a clean conventional victory, can itself be a form of retreat and defeat. "What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about, if we can't use it?" Madeleine Albright, then-ambassador to the United Nations, asked then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Powell in 1993, during a discussion of intervention in Bosnia. Rumsfeld might have complained similarly, though his conception of the national interest was very different from hers.

In Rumsfeld's view, U.S. troops in one part of the world would have to be ready to deploy to another on a moment's notice, and be ready to fight or to provide relief. Everything would be expeditionary. Hence his fixation with changing the global posture of the military, and transforming it as a fighting force. The intellectual groundwork for both transitions was started during Bill Clinton's administration, but

Rumsfeld is the one who got them going.

In the mid-1980s, the United States had a cluster of large, fully developed bases in Europe and the Far East, with 250,000 personnel in West Germany and 125,000 in East Asia. By 9/11, because of a process begun by the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations, those numbers had dropped to 118,000 in Europe and 89,000 in East Asia. Rumsfeld wasn't satisfied, though. Afghanistan and Iraq had justified his worries that our troops were not only poorly positioned to fight where they were needed, but also unable to move quickly or freely because of the occasional need to secure transit permission from host countries. In 2003, for example, Austria forbade the use of its airspace and declined to give the U.S. any transit rights en route to Iraq.

Thus, by 2004, the Pentagon unveiled plans to bring home an additional 70,000 troops from those fixed garrisons, even as it moved to expand a network of bare-bones sites in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America to support rotational rather than permanently stationed forces. Such "lily pad" bases would be different from the "Little Americas" of the Cold War: no soldiers' spouses, no kids, no day-care centers, no dogs, no churches. A leaner presence might prove less of an impediment to bilateral relations. The number of status-of-forces agreements with host countries doubled from the end of the Cold War through the end of Rumsfeld's tenure, from 45 to over 90. And the Air Force signed more than 20 comparable gas-and-go agreements with countries in Africa while Rumsfeld was secretary of defense. Andrew Krepinevich and Robert Work, president and vice president, respectively, at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, told me that Rumsfeld got global posture basically right for a chaotic world by emphasizing, in Work's words, an austere "global coaling-station network." Other experts, including some from Democratic administrations, echoed their views.

A counterargument is that troops are needed not just to fight but to show political will. As one Democratic former defense official told me, "You need to demonstrate to the Russians that NATO still matters," and that means troops in Europe. McCaffrey, in particular, poured scorn on Rumsfeld's desire to draw down further in Germany, noting that American troops there not only are important to the Poles and other eastern Europeans threatened by Russia, but also are much closer to the Middle East than they would be back in "fortress America."

A NEW COMMAND STRUCTURE

A world in which troops have to traverse regions or hemispheres to get to the fight required a more unified command structure. Rumsfeld was not comfortable with the power of geographic-area commanders and the fact that they *owned* troops. The area commands had been given new powers by the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols act, which aimed to reduce the interservice rivalries exposed by the Vietnam War and the failed attempt to rescue hostages in Iran. They are joint commands, in which one commander represents all the services. As such, the area commands had become the most powerful bureaucratic elements within the military, with the authority to fight the nation's wars. Rumsfeld tried to break the lock that individual services still held on area commands (a lock that Goldwater-Nichols was supposed to have prevented) by naming a Navy admiral to run the Army-dominated Southern Command, trying to get an Air Force general to run the Navy-dominated Pacific Command, and so on.

He spent a lot of time worrying about seams on the map—for example, where Central Command ended and Pacific Command began (at the borders of India and Pakistan, and Kazakhstan and China, and in the middle of the increasingly critical Indian Ocean). How would the Pentagon handle a conflict athwart such a seam? Rumsfeld centralized the command structure by subtly weakening the area commands and strengthening the global commands. Joint Forces Command got responsibility for recommending troop rotations from one area to another. Transportation Command took control of various air- and sealift commands, and of getting matériel right up to the battlefield. Strategic Command got control of space, cyber warfare, reconnaissance, and missile defense. Special Operations Command took on the global manhunt for al-Qaeda and went from being a mere force provider to a full-fledged war-fighting command that could operate alongside or even ahead of the area commands.

Parts of the world were unassigned when Rumsfeld came into office; he assigned them. He created Northern Command for the defense of the continental United States and put Canada and Mexico inside it. He assigned Russia to European Command and Antarctica to Pacific Command. Out of part of European Command, which was responsible for much of Africa, he created Africa Command—a potentially pathbreaking bureaucratic instrument that incorporates other agencies like the State Department and emphasizes bilateral

training programs and indirect, humanitarian-affairs-oriented approaches over combat. As obvious as all these choices seem, they weren't when Rumsfeld made them.

GO EAST, YOUNG MAN

In a larger sense, Rumsfeld saw military power and competition moving from Europe to Asia. He worried that, as in Europe, our considerable military presence in South Korea and Japan—the legacy of the Korean War and World War II—had bred unhealthy dependencies. In South Korea, we had a major ground-forces commitment to a country that was shrinking its army, even though it had become one of the world's largest industrial powers, with an economy 30 times the size of North Korea's.

Rumsfeld told the left-wing, anti-American government in power in Seoul in the middle of this decade that the United States had to reposition its forces in the country or leave. This very risky gambit resulted in protracted negotiations involving the Pentagon, the National Security Council, the State Department, and the South Korean government, ultimately yielding a new framework for American soldiers to remain in Korea indefinitely. U.S. forces would redeploy south of the demilitarized zone, return facilities to the South Korean military (including the contentious Yongsan Garrison in the heart of Seoul) and shrink from 37,000 to 25,000 troops, with more air and naval assets to make up for the loss of boots on the ground. Meanwhile, the South Koreans agreed to reconsider their own troop reductions, to take over responsibility for the DMZ, and to accept operational control of allied forces in the event of a war. Here is one danger, though: with China rising and America preoccupied in Mesopotamia, our troop drawdown could result in the very Finlandization of the Korean Peninsula that Rumsfeld sought to avoid.

Rumsfeld also took the lead in revamping the U.S.-Japan military relationship. Japan agreed (among other things) to spend billions of dollars to defend itself against North Korean ballistic missiles, and to host the first nuclear aircraft-carrier strike group to forward-deploy overseas (a notable development for a country neuralgic about nuclear weapons). This was painstaking micro-work for Rumsfeld: moving carrier air wings—pilots and their families—from Atsugi, where the Japanese wanted them out, to more-spacious quarters in Iwakuni. The Marine Air Corps Station at Futenma, in a very congested part of Okinawa and a target of Japanese hatred for the American military, would be relocated to Naha, in the less populous north of Okinawa. Meanwhile, the Marine presence on Okinawa overall would be reduced from 18,000 to 10,000, with the difference moving (at Japanese expense) to Guam, which Rumsfeld was building up with submarines, aerial tankers, fighter jets, bombers, and so forth. Although the Clinton administration had started expanding facilities on Guam, here again was another instance in which Rumsfeld's intervention was critical to forcing change.

The Philippines was a major focus of Rumsfeld's attempt to recast American strategy in Asia, and it is one whose importance has been underestimated. In 2002, U.S. Special Operations forces teamed up with the Philippine military to clear the south of the country of Islamic terrorists linked to al-Qaeda. The operation on the strategic island of Basilan was successful, and in 2005 it was extended to the island of Jolo. The U.S. military, mainly Army Special Forces, trained the Filipinos, helped gather intelligence, and conducted humanitarian relief, even as the Filipinos did the actual fighting. By using the indirect approach, the operation raised the stature of the U.S. military in the Filipino media for the first time since the 1992 closure of American bases there, opening the door to a new bilateral defense relationship.

Rumsfeld threw his support behind a plan to deploy more aircraft-carrier strike groups in the Pacific rather than keep them hugging the shores of the continental United States. He concluded a strategic framework agreement with Singapore and played a large, very deliberate role in the post-Cold War U.S. rapprochement with India: selling the amphibious ship U.S.S. *Trenton* to the Indian navy, offering F-18 Super Hornets to the Indian air force and P-8 Poseidons as replacements for India's P-3 Orion surveillance planes, and boosting the number of naval and air-force exchanges.

By the middle of this decade, just as a new, more flexible, austere, and far-flung basing constellation was emerging worldwide, empowered by a more centrally controlled command structure, troubled relationships with crucial Asian allies were on the mend. Such developments, as Rumsfeld saw them, would help the United States react in expeditionary style to unforeseen emergencies, prosecute the war on terrorism, and hedge against a rising Chinese military without unnecessarily provoking it. These are aspects of Rumsfeld's legacy that any

new administration will quietly adapt or reengineer to its own needs, rather than repeal outright. Barry Blechman, a distinguished fellow at the Henry L. Stimson Center in Washington who is respected by Democrats and Republicans alike, credits Rumsfeld for these changes, which he notes that Congress has also supported. In a note to me, Rumsfeld categorized these decisions as “tough, sometimes criticized, and even condemned, but necessary and, I believe, enduring.”

A TRANSFORMATION, OF SORTS

Why was Rumsfeld, by many accounts, more astute in dealing with Korea and Japan than with Iraq? Ironically, the quagmire that Rumsfeld helped create in Mesopotamia also had the effect of turning these once-inviolable Asian relationships into second-order issues open to renegotiation. Rumsfeld also had more-immediate access to area expertise. He himself had been a Japan aficionado since the early 1960s, with his own longtime contacts, a passion that came from having a father aboard a carrier in the Pacific during World War II while the family lived in Coronado, California. Moreover, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs from 2001 to 2005, Air Force General Richard B. Myers, who was in over his head when dealing with Middle Eastern insurgencies, had commanded U.S. forces in Japan. On the whole, thanks to the half-century-long presence of so many American troops in Korea and Japan, people around the table in the ERing knew what they were dealing with when it came to the Far East—something that could not always be said of their encounters with the Muslim world.

Another factor was also at work: the whole point of Rumsfeld’s Pacific-centric military worldview, which his global coaling-station network was meant to enforce, was for U.S. forces to be light and lethal, reacting quickly without getting entrenched in any spot. A long occupation of Iraq didn’t fit into this vision, which may be one reason that, as Andrew Hoehn, a Rand Corporation vice president and former deputy assistant defense secretary under Rumsfeld, told me, Rumsfeld often seemed more passionate about preparing the military for future challenges in Asia than he did about dealing with the occupation of Iraq. Rather than constructively worry about Iraq and take charge of policy there, he veered toward ambivalence: he allowed Sanchez and L. Paul Bremer III, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, to work at cross-purposes, and his neglect yielded an enfeebling status quo and ultimately a slide into civil war.

All of Rumsfeld’s changes to the U.S. military presence overseas fit into a larger effort to transform the military as a fighting force. Transformation, particularly of the Army, began in the 1990s under a Democratic administration and Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki, among other general officers. Then-Governor George W. Bush, in a 1999 speech at the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina, cited “a revolution in the technology of war” and called for forces that must be “agile, lethal, readily deployable, and require a minimum of logistical support.” Rumsfeld would become associated with transformation, though it was not as much a part of his original agenda as was missile defense. In fact, had former Indiana Republican Senator Dan Coats and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage, who had both pushed the issue in the 1990s, been chosen as the defense secretary and deputy defense secretary, respectively (as was mooted in late 2000), transformation might have been further along today—one reason why Kurt M. Campbell, chief executive officer of the Center for a New American Security (where I am a senior fellow), says that the failure to appoint Coats and Armitage was “one of the biggest personnel blunders” of the Bush administration.

Rumsfeld, of course, wouldn’t agree. Regarding transformation, he wrote me that his team “put special emphasis on the importance of more horizontal, decentralized structures that share and leverage the information necessary for effective and timely decision-making, as opposed to the bureaucratic stovepiping that dominated U.S. national security institutions during the Cold War.” Yet one could also argue that much of the transformation that did occur under Rumsfeld was the result of the debilitating war in Iraq, which forced the Pentagon, and the Army in particular, to change momentarily, in ways that no defense secretary could have managed on his own.

Nevertheless, Rumsfeld did press for one of the most significant shifts in Army organization since the Napoleonic era, changing the Army’s central maneuver unit from the division to the brigade combat team. A brigade was only half or a third the size of a division (which could have anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers). Its headquarters element was less bureaucratic and less top-heavy with colonels. The size of a brigade could be fitted to the situation. Rumsfeld’s emphasis on brigades represented an organizational means for dealing with a more anarchic, unconventional world. He planned to increase the number of Army brigades by a third, even as he reduced the overhead staff at

the division level.

But for Rumsfeld, transformation was primarily about changes not in how we structure forces but in *how we fight*. Exhibit A was Afghanistan, where, as he put it in a *Foreign Affairs* article in 2002, “the nineteenth century met the twenty-first century,” as Army Special Forces and CIA troops coordinated with Air Force special operators on horseback calling in precision strikes. Indeed, Rumsfeld was an avid supporter of special-operations forces (SOF). Against Navy resistance, he led the effort to refit ballistic-missile submarines with SEAL delivery vehicles in place of Trident nuclear warheads, to make it easier to land special operators on beachheads. His passion for SOF was shared by a number of Democrats, including Senators Carl Levin, John Kerry, and Jack Reed. With Congress’s support, Rumsfeld got SOF’s budget doubled, from \$3.5 billion to \$7 billion: proof that just because Donald Rumsfeld believed something, didn’t mean it was wrong.

Yet SOF has two traditions: direct action (combat), and a softer, embrace-your-indigenous-brother training approach. In his early years as defense secretary, Rumsfeld was more interested in direct action. Al-Qaeda, he thought, warranted a global manhunt and little more. Only later, after his comeuppance in Iraq, and as confirmed by the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, did he come around to the view that with an unpredictable enemy—and one that was easy to kill but hard to locate—we needed to understand the local language and culture and to bond with the indigenous inhabitants. During his tenure, the number of Arabic speakers in the military grew by 30 percent, Farsi speakers by 50 percent, Urdu speakers by 76 percent, and Chinese speakers by 57 percent. But these figures seem impressive only because the starting numbers were so low. For example, before 9/11 there were 4,384 speakers of Arabic, but only 5,703 by 2005. Compare this with 92,852 Spanish-speakers and 14,097 French-speakers. Future defense secretaries will have to do much better.

THE PRICE OF BEING HALF-RIGHT

The real tragedy of Rumsfeld’s career may not have been that he didn’t plan for an occupation of Iraq, but that 9/11 happened in the first place. On September 10, 2001, Rumsfeld gave a speech lambasting the Pentagon bureaucracy, his overriding concern. He was so frustrated by the glacial pace of progress that it was unclear whether he would have stayed on as defense secretary without a 9/11. “Do you know why Rumsfeld picked Wolfowitz to be his deputy defense secretary?” one former Republican defense official began. “Because Rumsfeld cared more about organization than he did about policy, and needed an alter ego to handle the policy side. Rumsfeld planned to be his own chief operating officer.” After 9/11, management reverted mostly to Wolfowitz, as Rumsfeld began to concentrate more on the “Global War on Terrorism.” It is famously said in Washington that Wolfowitz, as an academic, had no management experience. That is a narrow version of the truth, however. He was not just an academic but a dean, an assistant secretary of state for East Asia, an undersecretary of defense for policy, and an ambassador to Indonesia, running one of America’s largest embassies, which won a management award from the State Department during his tenure. Wolfowitz may have been a bad manager, but his résumé gives little indication of it.

Regarding management, Rumsfeld was at times his own worst enemy, distracting rather than concentrating the bureaucracy with his famed notes, or “snowflakes.” But Rumsfeld did after a fashion attend to the books, even if massive cost overruns and a ballooning defense budget were the hallmarks of his tenure. According to his comptroller, Dov S. Zakheim, currently a vice president at Booz Allen Hamilton, Rumsfeld reduced the more than \$3 trillion of improperly recorded, unaudited Pentagon transactions to hundreds of billions. He created a defense business board, and reformed the national-security personnel system to take into account considerations of merit. Rumsfeld is often spoken of in the same negative breath as Vietnam-era Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara. Zakheim and others with whom I spoke made a positive association: McNamara failed on Vietnam, but he succeeded in devising a planning, programming, and budgeting system that lasted for 40 years. Time will tell whether Rumsfeld accomplished something similar.

Additionally, Rumsfeld may have been right on other things: de-emphasizing nuclear weapons by giving Strategic Command a conventional-strike capacity, and by sharply reducing the nuclear stockpile; creating an undersecretary of intelligence to make relations with the civilian intelligence community more seamless; developing the littoral combat ship, however overpriced, as the first phase of a counterinsurgency force at sea; killing the Crusader artillery program and using the funds to research precision-guided rockets and mortars

for the Army; encouraging the Marines to stand up several battalions to Special Operations Command; helping expand NATO eastward; and forcing change upon NATO by appointing Marine General James Jones to run the Army-centric organization, by trying to establish a NATO rapid-reaction force, and by replacing the supreme allied command for the Atlantic, located in Norfolk, with an allied command for transformation. On a number of these things, he got significant help from the much-maligned Wolfowitz.

The list of things Rumsfeld got wrong is also long, better known, and historically more consequential. To wit, his decision to more or less go it alone in Afghanistan in 2001 made strict military but not political sense. The failure to allow NATO a large role in the beginning gave alliance members little stake in the outcome—a dynamic that continues to hamper the war's conduct. His use of private contractors in Iraq made sense in order to create efficiencies in the rear, but because Iraq constituted an irregular war, there was often no rear there, so contractors found themselves in the midst of the fighting. The abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib was an abject failure in the chain of command going all the way up to the defense secretary, who must be held accountable.

Rumsfeld did achieve a measure of redemption in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review. The concept of the “long war” elaborated in the QDR was less a sign of Rumsfeld's warmongering than of his belated realization that the indirect approach exemplified by the strategy in the Philippines pointed a way forward. As the QDR says, “Efforts ... on five continents demonstrate the importance of being able to work with and through [indigenous] partners, to operate clandestinely and to sustain a persistent but low-visibility presence.” This last of his QDRs also acknowledged the need for stabilization operations, or nation-building. That is a far cry from the Rumsfeld who at the beginning of his tenure couldn't wait to get our troops out of their peacekeeping mission in the Balkans.

So Donald Rumsfeld finally got it right. But as Richard Shultz Jr. of the Fletcher School argued, his being half-wrong on operational strategy for too many years cost too many Iraqis, Afghans, and Americans untold suffering. No improvements in Iraq and Afghanistan will reverse that verdict. As for the rest, developments in Asia, Africa, and Europe for years to come will say much more about Rumsfeld's legacy: a legacy that, in one final irony, may give future Madeleine Albrights more of the tools they need to intervene for humanitarian reasons.

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