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In Book, Rumsfeld Recalls Bush's Early Iraq Focus

By **THOM SHANKER** and **CHARLIE SAVAGE**

WASHINGTON — Just 15 days after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, President **George W. Bush** invited his defense secretary, **Donald H. Rumsfeld**, to meet with him alone in the Oval Office. According to Mr. Rumsfeld's new memoir, the president leaned back in his leather chair and ordered a review and revision of war plans — but not for Afghanistan, where the Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington had been planned and where American retaliation was imminent.

“He asked that I take a look at the shape of our military plans on Iraq,” Mr. Rumsfeld writes.

“Two weeks after the worst terrorist attack in our nation's history, those of us in the Department of Defense were fully occupied,” Mr. Rumsfeld recalls. But the president insisted on new military plans for Iraq, Mr. Rumsfeld writes. “He wanted the options to be ‘creative.’ ”

When the option of attacking Iraq in post-9/11 military action was raised first during a Camp David meeting on Sept. 15, 2001, Mr. Bush said Afghanistan would be the target. But Mr. Rumsfeld's recollection in the memoir, “Known and Unknown,” to be published Tuesday, shows that even then Mr. Bush was focused as well on Iraq. A copy was obtained Wednesday by The New York Times.

The book mixes the policy and the personal; at the end of the same Oval Office session in which Mr. Bush asked for an Iraq war plan, Mr. Rumsfeld recounts, the president asked about Mr. Rumsfeld's son, Nick, who struggled with drug addiction, had relapsed and just days before had entered a rehabilitation center. The president, who has written of his own battles to overcome a drinking problem, said that he was praying for Mr. Rumsfeld, his wife, Joyce, and all their children.

“What had happened to Nick — coupled with the wounds to our country and the Pentagon — all started to hit me,” Mr. Rumsfeld writes. “At that moment, I couldn't speak. And I was unable to hold back the emotions that until then I had shared only with Joyce.”

(Mr. Rumsfeld notes that his son has lived a drug-free life in the years since.)

His biggest mistake, Mr. Rumsfeld writes, was in not forcing Mr. Bush to accept his offers to resign after the abuse of Iraqi detainees by American military jailers came to light in early 2004. Mr. Rumsfeld insists that the abuses were the actions of rogue soldiers and that they did not reflect any approved policies, but nevertheless he offered to step down.

“Abu Ghraib and its follow-on effects, including the continued drum-beat of ‘torture’ maintained by partisan critics of the war and the president, became a damaging distraction,” Mr. Rumsfeld writes. “More than anything else I have failed to do, and even amid my pride in the many important things we did accomplish, I regret that I did not leave at that point.”

Mr. Rumsfeld denies that he ever rejected requests from his commanders for more troops to invade Iraq. In hindsight, he concedes that additional forces might have prevented the post-invasion looting in Baghdad, which preceded the far more dangerous and deadly insurgency.

While some military officers complained privately of not having sufficient forces, and some of those anonymous comments ended up in news reports, Mr. Rumsfeld writes that he never received a formal request from commanders for an increase in forces for the 2003 invasion, although he did sign orders for an increase of 20,000 troops for the January 2005 elections.

While describing Mr. Bush as “a far more formidable president than his popular image,” Mr. Rumsfeld, who spent time as a corporate chief executive, reveals his frustration with the president’s management style. Meetings of the [National Security Council](#), even with Mr. Bush presiding, he said, too often ended without precise objectives for the way ahead or decisions on how to proceed to reach those goals.

He faults in part [Condoleezza Rice](#), the national security adviser. [Colin L. Powell](#), who served as secretary of state, and his top subordinates are criticized for interagency feuding.

But his sharpest critique is saved for [L. Paul Bremer III](#), the civilian director of the American occupation of Iraq, who sought a direct line of communication to the president, bypassing both the Pentagon and State Department, which Mr. Rumsfeld said blurred oversight. “There were far too many hands on the steering wheel, which, in my view, was a formula for running the truck into a ditch,” he writes.

Mr. Rumsfeld condemns what he describes as Mr. Bremer’s heavy-handed, top-down approach and his decision to delay the transfer of authority back to Iraqis. Those actions, he writes, “inadvertently stoked nationalist resentments and fanned the embers of what would become the Iraqi insurgency.”

Mr. Rumsfeld portrays the Defense Department as a reluctant jailer, saying he resisted proposals to build a larger prison at the military base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba — fearing that if the space existed, it would be filled up. And, in an era when many Republicans have criticized the Obama administration's efforts to transfer out some detainees, he notes that the Bush team eventually transferred more than 500 detainees from the facility.

“I knew we ran the risk of mistakenly releasing some people who might attack us in the future, just as is the case in our civilian prison system, but I saw this as a risk that we had to take,” he writes.

He also repeatedly emphasizes that the [interrogation techniques](#) he approved for use by the military were less extreme than some of the tactics used by the [Central Intelligence Agency](#), like the drowning technique called [waterboarding](#).

While generally defending the Bush administration's counterterrorism legal policies, Mr. Rumsfeld expresses some regrets. He suggests several times that some criticism and setbacks could have been avoided if the administration had gone to Congress for legislation authorizing the policies instead of relying on the president's war powers.

He also says it was “a mistake” for him to write on a 2002 memorandum approving the use of certain stress techniques in interrogations, “I stand for 8-10 hours a day. Why is standing limited to four hours?” But he denies that the note, which became notorious after the document was made public several years later, was a signal that “it would be okay to stretch the rules.”

He said he was “surprised and troubled” to learn of the particularly harsh and sexually humiliating treatment inflicted on [Mohammed al-Qahtani](#), a Guantánamo detainee who was believed to have been the intended “20th hijacker” for the Sept. 11 attacks.

Interrogators had gone beyond what he had approved for Mr. Qahtani, he said. He also reveals that he approved the use of aggressive tactics against one other Guantánamo detainee as well, a Mauritanian named Mohammedou Ould Salahi.

Julie Bosman and Scott Shane contributed reporting.