



Plan of Attack

by Bob Woodward
 Copyright © 2004 by Bob Woodward
 Published by Simon & Schuster, Inc., N.Y.
 Used by permission.
 480 pages

Focus

Leadership & Mgt.
 Strategy
 Sales & Marketing
 Corporate Finance
 Human Resources
 Technology & Production
 Small Business
 ► **Economics & Politics**
 Industries & Regions
 Career Development
 Personal Finance
 Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Bush's war planning against Iraq began much earlier than announced: Nov. 21, 2001.
- Rumsfeld found existing war plans abysmal at best. Virtually all were antiquated.
- VP Dick Cheney demonstrated an anti-Saddam focus some considered near obsessive.
- General Tommy Franks cursed when, amidst the war in Afghanistan, he was told to update the war plans on Iraq.
- When Rumsfeld micromanaged the Afghan war, Franks said back off or replace me.
- Franks' initial brief to the president on war plans against Iraq was disguised as an update on the war in Afghanistan.
- Some CIA analysts voiced uncertainty about whether Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.
- Colin Powell warned about the Pottery Barn rule of war — you break it, you own it.
- Franks repeatedly cautioned his sub-commanders to take war planning against Iraq seriously, because it was going to happen.
- The Bush Administration took \$700 million that Congress appropriated for the war in Afghanistan and spent it to prepare for the war on Iraq.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
10	6	10	10

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) Why President Bush began planning war against Saddam Hussein immediately after Sept. 11; and 2) What strident political skirmishes took place within the Bush administration well before the first shot was fired against Iraq.

Recommendation

Veteran Washington reporter Bob Woodward continues to shine his lamp into the shadows of U.S. political life. Woodward has an uncanny ability to present a point of view without appearing biased, perhaps because he approaches truth with a complex worldview and eschews viewing individual leaders as either particularly good or evil. Although you may not want to hear what he learned, Woodward interviewed more than 75 officials directly involved in the war on terrorism, including spending three and a half hours with President Bush. He found out that Bush considered, and then planned, war in Iraq long before voters knew, and that his chief advisors debated it vigorously. Right or wrong, he seems to say, Bush's pivotal team members — Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell, Franks — were entirely earnest. *getAbstract.com* strongly recommends this book to anyone who wonders how the U.S. became the proud new owner of all of Iraq's problems. It gives you a breathtaking behind-the-scenes understanding of the decisions, for good or ill, that led to America's second war against Saddam.

Abstract

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

"The story of Bush's decisions leading up to the Iraq War is a chronicle of continual dilemmas, since the president was pursuing two simultaneous policies. He was planning for war, and he was conducting diplomacy to avoid war."

The Mother of All War Plans

The opening salvo in America's second Iraq War began much earlier than most voters realize. On Nov. 21, 2001, President George W. Bush put his arm around the shoulders of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld as a National Security Council meeting ended. The president said he needed to speak privately with Rumsfeld, and led him to a small office adjacent to the White House Situation Room. Closing the door, Bush asked what war plan had been prepared against Iraq?

The import of Bush's question cannot be underestimated. It was the President's first step in a long journey that ultimately led to war.

Rumsfeld railed against all 68 of the Pentagon's war plans. They were outdated, he said, and in desperate need of revision. Bush told Rumsfeld to get busy updating them. He wanted Tommy Franks, the general in charge of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) in Afghanistan, to calculate what it would take to oust Saddam Hussein.

The president added that he wanted to keep the whole thing quiet. He told Rumsfeld not to talk about what he was doing with other officials; Rumsfeld agreed. He left with the impression that the president had not spoken to any other official about the possibility of war with Iraq. This was not the case. That same morning, Bush told his national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, that he was planning to ask Rumsfeld to address the Iraq question. Whether the president also spoke with Vice President Dick Cheney before advancing war planning is unknown. However, asking Cheney for advice was unnecessary. He had made it clear since Sept. 11 that he viewed Saddam Hussein as a clear and present threat to peace.

“After the CIA and military campaign in Afghanistan looked successful, Rumsfeld declared that Franks was his man.”

“And it probably had been ten years since the senior generals and admirals — those like Franks himself — had had anyone chew their asses or even argue with them.”

“When Rumsfeld said, I don’t agree with that! Why do you do that? Let’s fix it!, the fellows felt challenged and went into hyper-ventilation. Not Franks. He was going to go along.”

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

Cheney the Steamroller

Cheney was a steamroller pushing toward a war with Iraq. Since Sept. 11, sources said he had developed an intense focus on the threats posed by Saddam and Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda. Some considered Cheney’s single-mindedness unsettling, perhaps almost obsessive. At a time when American military and CIA paramilitary forces controlled half of Afghanistan and appeared to be on the verge of marching into Kabul, clearly Cheney viewed the end of Hussein as a necessity to restore peace and order in the Middle East.

The meeting between Bush and Rumsfeld resulted in a top secret message to General Tommy Franks from the Joint Staff directing him to provide a “commander’s estimate” on the revisions needed to the Iraq war plan. He had one week to answer Rumsfeld’s directive. Franks had joined the Army at 20 and served in Vietnam and the 1991 Gulf War. A soft-spoken, 6’3” Texan, he was known as a general whose anger could flash unexpectedly.

Just 16 days after Sept. 11, the first CIA paramilitary team put its boots on Afghani soil. The first Special Forces commando team arrived 22 days later. That seemed too long to Rumsfeld. During this period, Rumsfeld pounded Franks daily, demanding details and justifications for the torpid pace of America’s counterattack. Finally, Franks had enough. He told Rumsfeld to trust him or fire him. After that, they worked out their turf as a team, even developing a grudging mutual respect. But Franks cursed when he heard that, even as his soldiers were ducking sandstorms and dodging rocket-propelled grenades in Afghanistan, he had to revise Op Plan 1003, the 800-page war plan against Iraq. It called for 500,000 U.S. soldiers, which would take seven months. In Rumsfeld years, Franks knew, seven months was a lifetime.

Welcome to Baghdad

The United States had been engaged in a type of undeclared war against Saddam Hussein ever since the war to liberate Kuwait. The U.S. enforced a no-fly zone north and south of Baghdad, about 60% of the country. Regime change in Iraq was standing policy inherited from the Clinton administration. Clinton signed a 1998 congressional measure providing \$97 million in military assistance to Iraqi forces opposed to Saddam’s brutal regime.

Ten days before Bush’s inauguration, he attended a Pentagon briefing on Iraq. During the briefing, statistics and acronyms were tossed back and forth like beanbags. Cheney dozed off conspicuously. Rumsfeld had trouble hearing and kept asking the generals to speak up. Bush consumed the peppermint from his place at the table, then eyed outgoing Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen’s mint and mouthed, “Do you want that?” Cohen shook his head, so Bush grabbed it and popped it in his mouth. Toward the end of the meeting, which ran less than 90 minutes, Army General Henry “Hugh” Shelton, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, observed the president-elect eyeing his mint. He voluntarily passed it over. After the meeting one of the chiefs remarked dryly that the new administration was off to a great start.

The fate of that administration and the country changed forever on Sept. 11, 2001. That night, Bush dictated to his daily diary, “The Pearl Harbor of the twenty-first century took place today.”

Rumsfeld’s office was located on the side of the Pentagon away from where a jetliner struck, killing 184 people. At 2:40 p.m. as smoke and dust filled the operations center, according to an aide’s notes, Rumsfeld raised the possibility of going after Iraq in response to the attacks.

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

“Cheney became the self-appointed examiner of worst-case scenarios. Though it was not formalized, he would look at the darker side, the truly bad and terrifying scenarios. By experience and temperament, it was the ideal assignment for Cheney.”

“Cheney thought that the Clinton administration had failed in its response to terrorist acts, going back to the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, and that there had been a pattern of weak responses.”

“Rumsfeld wanted the latest and best intelligence on the Iraqi military. It had been reduced substantially since the Gulf War. How much of a reduction? What did it mean?”

Meeting of the Minds

When Franks presented the revised Iraqi war plan on Dec. 4, 2001, at Rumsfeld’s Pentagon office, he confessed that it was a work in progress. Already, he had shaved off 100,000 soldiers and one month of preparation. Still, he warned, everyone would find shortcomings. A major war plan generally takes two to three years to develop and draft, so it wasn’t as if they could simply toss out Op Plan 1003 and start fresh. As the lessons being learned in Afghanistan were used to whittle it down, several more versions of Op Plan 1003 were drafted. None of them satisfied Rumsfeld. The plans were too cumbersome and took too long to get rolling.

On Friday, Dec. 28, Franks visited Bush’s Texas ranch, ostensibly, as the press was told, to brief Bush on Afghanistan. But the main purpose was to review the war plans in case Bush decided to go forward on Iraq. Franks carefully advised the president that preparation was needed, including the build-up of paramilitary and intelligence capability, and the pre-positioning of troops. This would take time. Bush encouraged Franks and Rumsfeld to take limited steps just in case, and to continue grinding on the plan until it was satisfactory.

Ten days later, Franks briefed Rumsfeld on the next version of the plan in a phone conversation. Rumsfeld, as always, presented a blizzard of questions. Franks also spoke with Secretary of State Colin Powell, a former general who wanted to know what was going on and who was “frozen out” of the administration mainstream. Based on Franks’ comments, Powell got the impression that Franks was charged with planning a war that would require the fewest possible number of troops. Franks strongly assured Powell that he was first and foremost a military officer, and had no intention of losing a war. Powell later expressed an interest in U.N. involvement in resolving Iraq, and warned the administration of what was jokingly referred to as “The Pottery Barn” rule: If you broke it, you owned it. Once the U.S. moved into Iraq and overthrew Saddam, it would be responsible for all aspects of Iraq’s fate.

By Jan. 17, Franks had further fleshed out the plan. He called for 45 days to deploy the initial force needed to attack Saddam. He then planned air sorties for another 45 days. Ground operations would begin on or about day 90, and would continue up to 150 days. The plan projected using 245,000 troops, less than half the original number. Franks hoped his plan could be trimmed to a 90-45-90 plan, or a 225-day war. It would be more effective, he felt, if a second front could be opened up, dropping south into Iraq from Turkey.

Countdown

Preparations continued at a furious pace as spring neared. March 21, Franks met at Ramstein Air Base in Germany with the commanders of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines who would fight the war if the president so ordered. He said he was convinced war would occur. Using an old Special Operations term indicating that a matter was urgent, he laconically told his warrior-colleagues: “Fellas, there’s a burglar in the house.” They understood: it was time to double check their plans, for they would likely soon be put to use. At a subsequent commanders’ meeting, Franks said it more bluntly: “This is f--- serious. You know, if you guys think this is not going to happen, you’re wrong. You need to get off your ass.”

Franks was right about momentum. On April 6 and 7, during a visit by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Bush told a British TV reporter he had made up his mind that Saddam must go.

“When he sorted out all the issues Powell felt that the State Department had done a good job and did not get sufficient credit for some of its successes such as improved relationships with China and Russia.”

“Powell did not share Armitage’s concern that the two of them had been enablers of the Cheney-Rumsfeld hard-line policies.”

Franks met with his commanders again on June 27 and 28. He told them the beginning of the war, assuming it took place, would be more of a running start than a blitzkrieg. On July 17, he gave Rumsfeld an estimated bill of about \$700 million for war preparations. The administration decided to take funds from the supplemental appropriations bill Congress was working on for Afghanistan and from old appropriations. Congress was not even notified that the Pentagon planned to divert the funds to a new purpose.

The administration moved a notch closer to war on Sept. 6 when Bush and Blair met at Camp David. To test Blair’s commitment, Bush looked him in the eye and told him Hussein was a threat that must be confronted. Clearly, he was bringing up the war option. Bush told Blair he wanted the British to participate and Blair agreed to side with him.

On Nov. 26, a year after Bush asked Rumsfeld to begin serious planning, Franks sent Rumsfeld a document called MODEPS. Franks called it jokingly “The Mother of All Deployment Orders.” MODEPS stood for mobilization deployments. It asked Rumsfeld to begin deploying 300,000 people. Rumsfeld discussed it with Bush who was concerned that an official deployment would make it difficult, or perhaps impossible, to continue diplomacy to avoid war. He wanted to keep his options open. In response, Rumsfeld broke the deployment into several pieces or modules. He issued the first deployment order on Dec. 6.

First Blood

On Jan. 11, 2003, Cheney invited Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar to a meeting with Rumsfeld and JCS Chairman General Richard B. Myers. They laid out the general war plans to him and explained that U.S. forces would need to cross Saudi soil to reach Iraq. Special forces were already in Iraq, distributing some \$300 million to local Iraqi tribal leaders and others. Still, several administration officials continued to doubt the assumption that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The evidence seemed circumstantial. Powell’s chief assistant, Richard Armitage, was one skeptic. Military officers and even CIA spokesman Bill Harlow repeatedly warned that no “smoking gun” clearly pointed to Saddam.

At 9:45 a.m. on Monday, March 17, press secretary Ari Fleischer told the press that the diplomatic window had closed. At 8 p.m., Bush told the nation that Hussein had to leave Iraq to avoid a military conflict. Two days later Franks informed Bush that the troops were ready to go. Special forces teams soon crossed the border into Iraq. Although the pre-emptive effort to bomb Hussein at the opening of the war failed to kill the Iraqi leader, by the end of March 20, the first full day of the war, Franks reported that Special Forces were already in partial control of at least one-fourth of Iraq’s territory.

The time for planning was over.

About The Author

Bob Woodward was key in exposing electoral wrongdoing in the Nixon Administration during the Watergate scandal, as reflected in his first book, *All The President’s Men*, written with colleague Carl Bernstein in 1974. He has been a reporter and editor at *The Washington Post* for 33 years. He wrote nine No. 1 best-selling nonfiction books, including *Bush at War* (2002), an account of the U.S. response to the attacks on September 11, 2001.