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Devin Gillen
CSUSB

Levi Gonzalez
CSUSB

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Donald Rumsfeld (1932–2021)

By Devin Gillen and Levi Gonzalez



Figure 1. Donald Rumsfeld (1932–2021) shaking hands with Saddam Hussein (1937–2006) in Baghdad on December 20, 1983. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.¹

“War Criminal Found Dead at 88: The Human and Economic Costs of Donald Rumsfeld’s Wars are Staggering.”

- Phyllis Bennis, *The Nation*, July 1, 2021.²

On June 29, 2021, Donald Henry Rumsfeld (1932–2021), a monumental American statesman, died at the age of 88 in Taos,

¹ Iraqi State Television, “Shaking Hands: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein greets Donald Rumsfeld, then special envoy of President Ronald Reagan, in Baghdad on December 20, 1983,” Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saddam_rumsfeld.jpg.

² Phyllis Bennis, “War Criminal Found Dead at 88,” *The Nation*, July 1, 2021, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/donald-rumsfeld-obit/>.

New Mexico.³ Throughout his life, Rumsfeld played a role in some of the most significant episodes of the last half-century of American political history, including, but not limited to, the Vietnam War (1955–1975), the Watergate scandal (1972–1974), ratcheting up relations with the Soviet Union, United States relations with Iraq and Saddam Hussein (1936–2006), the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the United States-led War on Terror (2001–present), and the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandals (2003–2004), to name a few. Throughout his long life—stretching from the Great Depression (1929–1939) to the COVID-19 pandemic (2019–present)—Rumsfeld served as an agent of neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and as an embodiment of the arrogance of American exceptionalism. First serving as a flight instructor in the Navy (1954–1957), then as an Illinois Congressman from 1963 to 1969, Rumsfeld filled various positions throughout the Richard Nixon administration (1969–1974), Gerald Ford administration (1974–1977), Ronald Reagan administration (1981–1989), and the George W. Bush administration (2001–2009), culminating in his role as the Secretary of Defense (for the second time). As Secretary of Defense, from 2001 to 2006, Rumsfeld was responsible for oversight of The War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan until his resignation in 2006.

By examining Rumsfeld's life and role in transforming American foreign relations and economic policy, as well as the ideological movements and developments he aligned himself with, the dark realities of a long history of American exceptionalism are laid bare. Rumsfeld's early identification with the business community eventually syncretized with the burgeoning school of economic principles later codified as neoliberalism around the 1980s. By the end of Rumsfeld's tenure in office in 2006, neoliberal deregulation and privatization were the norms of the day, entailing financial enrichment for himself and the Military-

³ Stephen Collinson & Paul LeBlanc, "Donald Rumsfeld, former secretary of defense, dies at 88," CNN, June 30, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/30/politics/donald-rumsfeld-dead/index.html>.

Industrial Complex (MIC). The widespread and indiscriminate use of torture, approved by Rumsfeld himself (later to be denied, then praised by Rumsfeld), also became the norm, along with the mass murder, maiming, and displacement of millions in the disastrous War on Terror throughout the Middle East and Africa.⁴ These disasters were the culmination of a lengthy career of bellicose fear-mongering and media and information manipulation by Rumsfeld and his neoconservative allies. Rumsfeld played a leading role in the political trickery, subterfuge, and manipulation of information throughout his career. In the latter post-war years, neoconservatism was rebranded as an aggressive and manipulative United States foreign policy that worked in service of United States business interests that existed before Rumsfeld, but he took up its reigns as a leading supporter of the neoconservative cause.⁵ Rumsfeld and the neoconservatives were not aberrations in the realm of United States foreign policy, rather, they were leading figures of a new expression and justification for a continued United States military presence across the globe and further intervention in foreign nations.

By the time Rumsfeld left office permanently in 2006, a bipartisan consensus formed on the grander schemes set forth by neoliberal advocates (like Rumsfeld and Milton Friedman [1912–2006], American economist and statistician) and the hyper-aggressive role of the United States in the world, as proposed by the neoconservatives like Rumsfeld. The War on Terror that Rumsfeld helped orchestrate continued to spill across the surrounding region after his resignation and continues to take lives and hemorrhage money today.⁶ It is worth examining the life of

⁴ Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J.S. Davies, “The staggering death toll in Iraq,” *Salon*, March 19, 2018, https://www.salon.com/2018/03/19/the-staggering-death-toll-in-iraq_partner/.

⁵ Allen Dulles (1893–1969) and John Foster Dulles (1888–1959) and their policies were at the helm of United States foreign policy formulation during the Eisenhower administration (1953–1961) which laid the groundwork for the later neoconservatives and neoliberals like Rumsfeld.

⁶ The Cost of War Project at Brown University estimated that by the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, the War on Terror claimed roughly 900,000 deaths (not

Rumsfeld and his allies who orchestrated their suffering to remember the thousands of innocent victims (past, present, and future) who, unlike Rumsfeld, did not get to die peacefully in their homes. Until his final days, Rumsfeld was able to falsely claim that all of these episodes of militaristic adventurism were purely motivated by innocent desires to promote democracy and freedom around the world.⁷ By analyzing Rumsfeld's life, political ideology, and role in the United States government, the authors aim to demonstrate that the innocent claims regarding the goals of the United States' foreign and economic policies are examples of cognitive dissonance at best.

including those killed by disease, displacement, or loss of access to food or clean drinking water), cost \$8 trillion dollars, and continues in over eighty countries. As the authors will discuss in detail, differing methodologies and terminologies produce figures (or death tolls) that drastically decrease the death toll. For example, studies such as those by *The Lancet Medical Journal* place the death toll at 600,000 in Iraq alone by 2006, with an additional 54,000 non-violent war-related deaths. In 2015, United Kingdom government officials later admitted that this was "likely to be right" and a report by Physicians for Social Responsibility found it to be "more reliable than other mortality studies conducted in Iraq. Just Foreign Policy's "Iraqi Death Estimator" compiled data from Iraq Body Count and adjusted it to the ratio of the discrepancy found in the 2006 Lancet study which brought the figure to 1.45 million before the project was discontinued in September 2011. In 2018, *Salon* published a study by Medea Benjamin (the co-founder of CODEPINK for Peace) using the 2006 *Lancet* study ratios, a variation on Just Foreign Policy's 2007 methodology, and contemporary data to bring the potential death total to 1.5 to 3.4 million by 2018. Benjamin and Davies, "The staggering death toll in Iraq;" "Costs of the 20-year war on terror: \$8 trillion and 900,000 deaths," Brown University, September 1, 2021, <https://www.brown.edu/news/2021-09-01/costsofwar>.

⁷ "Donald Rumsfeld talks to Al Jazeera," *Al Jazeera English*, October 5, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xosu94rPSmw>.

Origins of Rumsfeld and the Nuclear Age (1945–Present)

“I could feel that something terrible has happened. I saw it in my parents’ faces and heard it in the tense voices reporting the news of [Pearl Harbor].”

- Donald Rumsfeld.⁸

“The use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender.”

- Admiral William Leahy (1875–1959).⁹

Donald Henry Rumsfeld was born on July 9, 1932, in Chicago, Illinois, amid the Great Depression. According to Rumsfeld, this day also happened to symbolize the depths of the Depression:

The *Chicago Tribune* noted grimly that the Dow Jones Industrial Average had closed the day before at 41.22—the lowest point recorded during the Great Depression. This was the day I was born—on what may well have been the bleakest day of the cruelest year of the worst economic catastrophe in American history.¹⁰

⁸ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 38.

⁹ “The Key Reason Why America Refused Japan’s First Offer To Surrender,” World War Wings, accessed May 21, 2022, <https://worldwarwings.com/key-reason-america-refused-japans-first-offer-surrender/#:~:text=The%20key%20reason%20why%20the%20Allied%20Forces%20refused,the%20Emperor%20could%20be%20prosecuted%20for%20war%20crimes>.

¹⁰ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 40.

Despite these conditions, Rumsfeld's family managed to avoid the worst economic consequences. His father, George Rumsfeld (1904–1974), was a real estate broker and moved the family out of Chicago into the suburbs to gain access to better schooling facilities tied to higher property values.

Rumsfeld was nine years old when the United States entered World War II (1939–1945) following the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. At this early age, Rumsfeld claimed he had a vague idea of where Hawaii was but “didn’t know anything about Pearl Harbor or what it meant to the United States Navy. But [he] could feel that something terrible had happened. [He] saw it in [his] parents’ faces and heard it in the tense voices reporting the news of the attack.”¹¹ Rumsfeld’s father decided to enlist in the Navy after the attack on Pearl Harbor. As a result, the family moved around the country staying where he was stationed. The family made stops in North Carolina, Washington, Oregon, and California. In his memoir, Rumsfeld reminisced fondly of this time as he noted the “special bonds” he shared with other kids who also had fathers serving in the war: “Everyone I knew in [California] supported the war effort with a sense of common purpose...there was a sense we were all in it together.”¹² During this time, Rumsfeld also began to have the “aspiration” of following in his father’s footsteps by becoming a “flying naval officer.”¹³ Throughout the early years of Rumsfeld’s life, it is quite apparent that he had tremendous pride in his father’s service and also in what he perceived as his *country*’s service to the world as he notes, “the fate of democracy now hung on America’s success.”¹⁴

By August 1945, Rumsfeld just turned thirteen and, in a massive show of force, the United States dropped two nuclear bombs on an already defeated and inert Japan.¹⁵ It is traditionally

¹¹ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 38.

¹² Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 44.

¹³ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 45.

¹⁴ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 39.

¹⁵ “The Key Reason Why America Refused Japan’s First Offer To Surrender.”

argued that the use of nuclear weapons was a necessary evil to force the Japanese to surrender, yet Japan already attempted to conditionally surrender to the United States, however, the United States refused.¹⁶ Despite this, the myth that an unreasonable Japan constituted an ever-looming threat that forced the United States to use nuclear weapons took hold in the American conscience. Rumsfeld himself furthered this narrative in his memoir.¹⁷ This narrative, however, ignores the aforementioned attempted surrender and the fact that the Japanese war machine, and economy, had ground to a near-complete halt severely limiting their combat capabilities and the threat they posed.¹⁸ If the Soviets invaded, then “this Soviet ‘D-Day’ in Hokkaido would’ve been a walkover—the Japanese army was in shambles, and Emperor Hirohito [1901–1989] had recently proclaimed defeat.”¹⁹

Scholars such as Sergey Radchenko (b. 1950), a fellow at the Wilson Center and Professor of International Politics at Cardiff University, suppose the nuclear liquidation of 110,000 to 210,000 Japanese was a veiled threat directed toward the Soviet Union in one of the opening salvos of the Cold War (1947–1991), during which Rumsfeld became a crucial player.²⁰ As Radchenko states,

Although the bomb did not make Stalin [1878–1953] back off in Hokkaido [Japan], its implicit threat made superpower cooperation an increasingly

¹⁶ “The Key Reason Why America Refused Japan’s First Offer To Surrender.”

¹⁷ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 46.

¹⁸ The Japanese were oil deficient and this greatly hindered their war effort and planning throughout the war. In fact, Pearl Harbor was originally enacted in the hopes that a crippled United States Navy would not be able to respond to Japan, taking vital oil reserves in the East Indies to make up their already existing oil deficit. Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

¹⁹ Sergey Radchenko, “Did Hiroshima Save Japan From Soviet Occupation?,” Wilson Center, August 5, 2015,

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/did-hiroshima-save-japan-soviet-occupation>.

²⁰ Radchenko, “Did Hiroshima Save Japan From Soviet Occupation?”

remote prospect. Hiroshima, then, made the Cold War practically inevitable... Although just months earlier, the United States War Department had considered letting the Soviets occupy Hokkaido and even part of Honshu, Japan's largest island, Hiroshima had clearly changed things for [Harry S.] Truman [1884–1972]. Possession of a mighty new weapon gave Truman the confidence to set the terms of his relationship with Stalin. On August 18, Truman bluntly turned Uncle Joe down [on his proposal to occupy Hokkaido].²¹

Whether the Soviet presence was a determining factor or not, the United States supposedly refused the initial Japanese surrender because it called for the Japanese emperor, Showa Hirohito, to remain in power following the war, exempt from any form of war crime tribunal. The United States later decided that Emperor Hirohito could remain and that it would have been counterproductive to remove him in the reconstruction process. This rendered the motivating factor in the decision to nuke Japan twice (to avoid accepting a conditional surrender that hinged on retaining the emperor) completely unfounded, as was the other mythical justification of a threatening Japanese presence.

Despite refusing to accept a conditional surrender from Japan on the basis that it would infringe on the policy of non-conditional surrender and supposedly forcing the United States to drop the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, preliminary negotiations over a conditional surrender of a contingent of Nazi troops in Italy was conducted.²² When examining the United States' policies toward Nazi Germany, the cynical nature of the excuse given to reject any conditional

²¹ Radchenko, "Did Hiroshima Save Japan From Soviet Occupation?"

²² The Allied forces consisted primarily of the United States, The United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union, amongst others such as Canada and Australia. The Axis forces consisted primarily of Nazi Germany and their occupied territories, Japan, and Italy.

surrender by Japan is in full display. On March 8, 1945, Allen Dulles (1893–1969), as an Office of Strategic Services (OSS) operator, negotiated a potential early conditional surrender of Nazi troops in Italy with ranking SS leader Karl Wolff (1900–1984).²³ These discussions of a potential conditional Nazi surrender that never came to fruition, named Operation Sunrise (1945), and the later cooperation with Nazi scientists in Operation Paperclip (1945–1949), demonstrate the United States’ lack of interest in upholding the Allied policy of unconditional surrender that supposedly prevented acceptance of the Japanese surrender. When news of these discussions broke out amongst the Allied Powers, the Soviet Union was enraged that the United States negotiated in secret with the genocidal Nazi Germany that ultimately killed some twenty-seven million Russians.²⁴ In 1942, Wolff, a cheerleader of the Holocaust and personal chief of staff for Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), a main architect of the Holocaust, wrote of “his special joy that now five thousand of the Chosen People are going to Treblinka every day.”²⁵ Dulles later described Wolff as “distinctive” and “dynamic.”²⁶ This cooperation with a former evil enemy to eliminate the new evil is later mirrored by the

²³ The OSS was a precursor to the CIA. John Kenneth Galbraith, “Allen Dulles Under the Harsh Light of History Operation Sunrise: The Secret Surrender. By Bradley F. Smith and Elena Agarossi. Basic Books. 234 pages. \$11.95,” *The Washington Post*, September 9, 1979, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1979/09/09/allen-dulles-under-the-harsh-light-of-history-operation-sunrise-the-secret-surrender-by-bradley-f-smith-and-elena-agarossi-basic-books-234-pages-1195/385b6bff-080c-4ba2-8e3d-dd554c13ef59/>.

²⁴ Compare this figure to the roughly three thousand killed in the September 11, 2001, attacks that Rumsfeld and then-President W. Bush (2001–2009) later used to declare every nation was either with them (the United States) in the War on Terror or against them and with the terrorists. The United States government also used this figure as a justification for breaking international law by launching legally dubious wars.

²⁵ Galbraith, “Allen Dulles Under the Harsh Light of History Operation Sunrise.”

²⁶ Galbraith, “Allen Dulles Under the Harsh Light of History Operation Sunrise.”

neoconservatives, including Rumsfeld, in their later support for the Mujahideen and Saddam Hussein, and then opposition to both Saddam's Iraq, and the offshoots of the original Mujahideen holy warriors.

At the time, Rumsfeld thought little of the impact the nuclear weapons had on the Japanese cities, let alone global politics; he was just glad that it seemingly meant his father was coming home.²⁷ Coming of age through these world-shaking events likely left a lasting impact on Rumsfeld's psyche and developing political ideology, as it did for most Americans entering the Cold War. Rumsfeld's career kept him continually preoccupied with nuclear weaponry in his adult life.

Throughout his teenage years, Rumsfeld lived in and attended schools in the affluent neighborhoods of Winnetka, Illinois, a northern suburb of Chicago.²⁸ By this point, Rumsfeld's distaste for market intervention by the state was already apparent. As a young adult, he attended the elite Ivy League Princeton University, where he earned a degree in politics in 1954.²⁹ Rumsfeld's thesis argued in support of the recent Supreme Court decision that ruled against the Truman administration's (1945–1953) attempted seizure of the steel industry in 1952 during the Korean War (1950–1953).³⁰ He later commented that he wished he studied history instead of politics, citing his distaste for his left-wing professors who “littered the political science department.” Rumsfeld noted, “I was struck by the way one professor in particular seemed to disdain the private sector as rife with corruption and unethical behavior. The business world was an abstraction to him.”³¹ For Rumsfeld, this “business world” was tangible and influential. As a politician, Rumsfeld personified the corruption and unethical behavior of the private sector and the

²⁷ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 46.

²⁸ “The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld,” PBS, October 26, 2004, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pentagon/etc/cronfeld.html>.

²⁹ PBS, “The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld.”

³⁰ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 50–51.

³¹ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 50.

business world rebuked by Rumsfeld's professor and converged this corruption with the public sphere (government).

Start of Public Service

Shortly after his graduation, Rumsfeld enlisted in the United States Navy and served as a pilot and flight instructor from 1954 to 1957.³² Rumsfeld entered American politics as an assistant to the administrative staff of then-newly elected Congressman David S. Dennison Jr. (1918–2001) (R-OH), followed by a similar role with then-Congressman Robert P. Griffin (1923–2015) (R-MI) during the years of 1957 to 1960.³³ After a brief two-year stint at the investment firm A.G. Becker, Rumsfeld decided to pursue his own role in Congress and launched a campaign for a seat in the House of Representatives in 1962 to represent his hometown region of the northern suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. In his first attempt in an electoral contest, Rumsfeld claimed victory. By age thirty, Rumsfeld began his rapid ascension in the American political system by first obtaining a seat in one of its most powerful institutions: the House of Representatives.

Given Rumsfeld's upper-middle-class status and his institutional cultivation at an elite university, the United States military, and then the United States Congress, it is perhaps no surprise that he identified with the conservative Republican Party. Rumsfeld's early Congressional voting record showed that although he did lean conservative regarding fiscal and economic policies, he also supported socially progressive issues such as enhanced civil and voting rights for African-Americans.³⁴ Support

³² Vivienne Heines, "Rumsfeld Revealed: Secretary's Navy career spanned 35 years," Air Force Times, March 3, 2003, <https://archive.ph/20120722191209/http://www.airforcetimes.com/legacy/new/0-AIRPAPER-1610997.php>.

³³ "Rumsfeld, Donald Henry," *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*, accessed April 9, 2022, <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/R000508>.

³⁴ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 7.

for the latter was a position not commonly held by the established, rank-and-file Republican Party.

Rumsfeld's relations with Republican Congressman and then-Presidential nominee Barry Goldwater (1909–1998) exemplified this political ambiguity or, more appropriately, his opportunism. While Rumsfeld claimed that Goldwater's staunch opposition to the 1964 civil rights legislation made him feel "uncomfortable... [he] generally agreed with him, however, on economic issues and on national security."³⁵ As Goldwater's 1964 presidential run ran into the ground, Rumsfeld began to actively distance himself from Goldwater by attempting to avoid public appearances with him. Despite this, Rumsfeld notes, "though I didn't see eye to eye with him on civil rights, I certainly intended to vote for him."³⁶ Whether Rumsfeld's politics were motivated by an emerging political ideology or solely by political opportunism and self-interest, is difficult to tell. Rumsfeld himself acknowledged this seeming political ambiguity in his memoir when recounting the major influences on his political upbringing. Specifically, Rumsfeld recalls a speech given by the Democrat Adlai Stevenson (1900–1965): "It might seem strange considering my later career that the one who so strongly sparked the idea of public service for me was a liberal Democrat."³⁷

While in Congress from 1963 to 1968, Rumsfeld formed two friendships of great significance: Gerald Ford (1913–2006) and the aforementioned Milton Friedman. Examining these two relationships affords further insight into both Rumsfeld's role in Republican Party politics and his emerging political ideology. Rumsfeld's relationship with Ford began during their time in Congress when they both played roles in reshaping the Republican Party's leadership in the House. The Republicans had recently lost the 1964 elections, including then-presidential nominee Goldwater and a majority of their Congressional candidates. Consequently, an intra-party power struggle developed over who should lead the

³⁵ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 88.

³⁶ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 89.

³⁷ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 51

party in Congress going forward. Rumsfeld and his allies challenged the established leadership and rallied behind a new leader, Representative Gerald Ford of Michigan.³⁸ Rumsfeld and this faction eventually won out and established Ford as the new Republican Party leader in the House between 1965 and 1973, which paved the way for Ford's later ascent as then-President Nixon's Vice-President from 1973 to 1974 and then ultimately his role as President of the United States from 1974 to 1977. Rumsfeld actively participated in this transition and was described as "one of Ford's closest advisors" during and after this episode.³⁹ Given Ford's prominence in the then-near future, this was the formation of a critical relationship and political alliance that greatly rewarded Rumsfeld in his climb through the executive branch. Perhaps equally influential not just on Rumsfeld, but the future of the entire economic world order, was Milton Friedman.

Milton Friedman, Donald Rumsfeld, and the Neoliberal Terror State

I spent thirty-three years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902–1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit

³⁸ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 8.

³⁹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 8.

companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested.

- *Smedley Butler (1881–940) demonstrating how American militarism works to secure blood money for financial interests.*⁴⁰

Throughout Rumsfeld's time as a Congressperson, he attended seminars and lectures at the prestigious University of Chicago led by the prominent economist Milton Friedman.⁴¹ Friedman advocated for a new school of economic theories that came to be known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is, according to leading neoliberal critic and scholar David Harvey (b. 1935), "a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."⁴² Neoliberalism posits that the role of the state is to "create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets."⁴³ While neoliberalism calls for the creation of markets where markets do not exist, "state intervention in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum"⁴⁴ In other words, neoliberalism's primary goal was the creation of the

⁴⁰ Smedley Butler, *War is a Racket: The Anti-War Classic by America's Most Decorated Soldier* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), 16.

⁴¹ "Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld speaking at Tribute to Milton Friedman (transcript)," United States Department of Defense, May 9, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060824220033/http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=216>.

⁴² David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 2.

⁴³ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

⁴⁴ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

“free market” in which individuals could freely participate. Along with the “free market,” the classical liberal ideals of individual rights, freedom, and democracy were promised as a natural consequence. The pursuit of this “free market” required the reduction of state interference in the market, which included a reversal of the Keynesian economic principles that emerged from the Great Depression and World War II that advocated for increased public spending on social safety nets and welfare programs, along with national jobs programs, this reversal consisted primarily of deregulation, privatization, and cutbacks in public spending.⁴⁵

Before the 1960s, the Keynesian economic principles of Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) (1882–1945) successfully tamed part of the post-war business cycle that had previously been so explosive before imploding into the Great Depression Rumsfeld was born into.⁴⁶ However, the established economic order was faltering by the end of the 1960s.⁴⁷ Neoliberalism gained popularity during this time; while Rumsfeld attended Friedman’s lectures, the breakdown of Keynesian economics polarized many into either the socialist/social democratic leaning state-control camp or the neoliberal deregulation camp.⁴⁸ Rumsfeld’s adoption of neoliberalism, and later emphatic praise of Friedman, demonstrates that Rumsfeld played a pivotal role in shaping the modern world that neoliberal policy now dominates. Rumsfeld summarized this in his eulogy for Friedman on May 9, 2002. Rumsfeld stated, “What a difference forty years makes. Today, many of those ideas that seemed outrageous and so unorthodox to some in the 1960s are now the law of the land.”⁴⁹ Rumsfeld,

⁴⁵ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007), 69.

⁴⁶ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 10, 11.

⁴⁷ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 10, 11.

⁴⁸ Those in the state control camp argued against deregulation and in favor of market intervention on varying levels on behalf of the state. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 13.

⁴⁹ “Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld speaking at Tribute to Milton Friedman.”

saddened and somewhat afraid by FDR's death, remarked in his memoir, "In my young mind, FDR was tied to my father, his ship, our country, and the war. Now that monumental figure was gone. I cried."⁵⁰ Nonetheless, it did not take long for Rumsfeld to break with the political and economic conventions set by FDR; as noted, he already sided against state intervention in the market in his graduate thesis in 1954, approximately six years before the notable downfall of Keynesian economics.

It is worth noting here that in Rumsfeld's 2011 memoir, *Known and Unknown*, Rumsfeld does not mention that he attended Friedman's lectures at The University of Chicago as he did while speaking at a tribute to Friedman after his death in 2002. The first mention of Friedman in his memoir appears on page 101. In this account, Rumsfeld met Friedman when they served as advocates for an all-volunteer military system on a debate panel hosted by The University of Chicago. Rumsfeld admits he turned to Friedman,

...many times over the years for advice and guidance. Friedman's belief in the power of freedom was inspiring, and he felt the same way about giving people the choice to serve in the United States military as he did about giving them a choice about their education.⁵¹

The page ends, and the topic changes many times before Friedman is mentioned again, this time on page 125. Here, Friedman is not referred to as an economist but again as an advocate for education. It is strange that Rumsfeld either lied at his supposed friend's tribute to ingratiate himself or, did not find the room in his 800-plus page memoir to mention these lectures, seemingly attempting to obfuscate Friedman's role as an economist.

This inconsistency is worth extra scrutiny when further

⁵⁰ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 46.

⁵¹ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 101.

examining other famous attendees of Friedman's lectures at The University of Chicago. Throughout the 1950s to 1970s, the Chilean "Chicago Boys" were acolytes of Friedman's, their attendance arranged by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and paid for with United States taxpayer dollars.⁵² Participants of this program returned to Chile (and other home countries) afterward to serve as ideological warriors against the growing tide of Third World developmentalism, nationalization of foreign industry, and import substitution (essentially, various levels of state intervention to subsidize or nationalize products or industries on varying scales).⁵³ The democratically elected Chilean government, under Marxist Salvador Allende (1909–1973), served as the vanguard in this growing wave of Latin American economic nationalism. After a CIA-backed coup toppled Allende in favor of a military dictatorship by Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006) on "the little September the 11" of 1973, the "Chicago Boys" assumed positions of power and quickly eliminated Allende's popular programs in favor of neoliberal deregulation and cuts to social spending.⁵⁴ Opposition figures and protestors or political activists were arrested, tortured, killed, or disappeared en masse by Pinochet's goons. Over 3,200 disappeared or were executed and at least 80,000 were arrested.⁵⁵ Allende is without mention entirely in Rumsfeld's 2011 book, Pinochet is only mentioned once in the footnotes of page 596 (in a strangely positive light), and Chile is regarded as a democracy. These omissions and discrepancies leave Rumsfeld an unreliable narrator at best and seem to indicate that he attempted to obfuscate Friedman's role in sponsoring state terror and torture, just as Rumsfeld would later obfuscate his role overseeing torture programs during the United States-led War on Terror.

Friedman's economic policies, first put into practice by Pinochet's Chilean police state, required the violent use of force

⁵² Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 8.

⁵³ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 8.

⁵⁴ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 8.

⁵⁵ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 94.

which was antithetical to the supposed freedoms and individual rights that neoliberal reforms promised to bring. Here, another definition, or set of definitions, for neoliberalism set out by Harvey is demonstrated. Neoliberalism is either a utopian project to realize a theoretical design for international capitalism (the neoliberal pipe dream that “free markets” automatically bring a freer society) or a political project to restore the class power of the economic elite.⁵⁶ The rhetoric surrounding the theoretical utopian project (i.e. human or individual rights and freedom) is used as a system of justification and legitimation for achieving the restoration of class power. When the two come into conflict, the utopian ideals are quickly discarded to further the consolidation of the select economic elite.⁵⁷

The United States-backed Chilean government’s abandonment of these “utopian ideals” to further unfettered capital was expressed in the state repression in Chile. However, this was by no means an isolated incident. A handful of Latin American countries participated in the wider effort to eliminate Third World developmentalism for neoliberalism. Operation Condor (1968–1989), for example, was a coordinated effort by police states to turn South America into a “game reserve for hunting down anyone these regimes thought objectionable.”⁵⁸ Operation Condor included Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, amongst others, who received massive amounts of United States taxpayer dollars. Money was shoveled through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs and into police departments who, along with the military received, United States training in the use of explosives and torture.⁵⁹

Given Rumsfeld’s later ascent and stature in the United States government, it is of immense importance to acknowledge

⁵⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 19.

⁵⁷ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 19.

⁵⁸ Jeffery Ryan, “Turning on Their Masters: State Terrorism and Unlearning Democracy in Uruguay,” in *When States Kill*, ed. Cecilia Menjívar & Nestor Rodríguez (University of Texas Press, 2005,) 298.

⁵⁹ Ryan, “Turning on Their Masters,” 282, 298

and evaluate the influence of Friedman's economic and political theories in Rumsfeld's decision-making and policies throughout his career. In her 2008 book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, author Naomi Klein (b. 1970) detailed the relationship between these two figures: "[Rumsfeld] had developed a particularly close connection with Milton Friedman...helping [Rumsfeld] develop a bold free-market policy platform and tutoring him in economic theory."⁶⁰ Reflecting on his relationship with Friedman, Rumsfeld commented, "There is something about Milton that when I am around him, and talking to him, I feel smarter."⁶¹ Regardless of the potential discrepancy surrounding Rumsfeld's attendance of Friedman's lectures at The University of Chicago, which is suspicious in itself, the fact that a tome as lengthy as his 2011 memoir (again, 800-plus pages) devotes so little space to establishing background information to his supposedly "particularly close connection with Milton Friedman" is also suspicious. The fact that Friedman, who reportedly helped Rumsfeld develop his economic policies, is sparingly mentioned in Rumsfeld's memoir is suspicious. The fact that when he is mentioned, his role as an economist is initially obfuscated adds credence to the idea that Rumsfeld attempted to distance Friedman and himself from the consequences of neoliberal policies abroad. When Allende is not mentioned at all, while Pinochet is mentioned once, in a slightly positive manner in a footnote, it becomes clear that Rumsfeld purposefully obfuscated Friedman's complicity with state terror. Rumsfeld admired the deregulatory practices that functioned as a thin veil of corporate greed preached by Friedman. Once Rumsfeld left the lower echelons of representative politics for a series of on-again-off-again positions in the White House, he would ultimately find himself at a pinnacle of power capable of influencing drastic reform.

Rumsfeld Enters the White House

⁶⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 364-65.

⁶¹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 365.

*“The Eastern world, it is exploding.
Violent flares and bullets loading
You’re old enough to kill, but not for voting
You don’t believe in war, but what’s that gun you’re toting?
And even the Jordan river has bodies floating,
and you tell me
Over and over and over again my friend
How you don’t believe we’re on the eve of destruction.”*

- Johnny Thunders, “Eve of Destruction.”⁶²

*“Don’t you understand what I’m trying to say
Can’t you feel the fears I’m feeling today
If the button is pushed there’s no running away
There’ll be no one to save with the world in a grave.”*

- Barry McGuire, “Eve of Destruction.”⁶³

The Nixon Years (1969–1974)

By 1968, Rumsfeld served multiple terms in Congress and aspired to climb further up the political hierarchy. Throughout the year, he became involved with Richard Nixon’s presidential campaign (1969–1974). The Nixon campaign tasked Rumsfeld with gathering political intelligence (“dirt”) on Nixon’s rivals.⁶⁴ This role culminated with Rumsfeld’s attendance at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) of 1968, where he later relayed all the information and insight he gathered to the Nixon campaign. These activities ultimately pleased the Nixon team and, after Nixon’s subsequent election that year, Rumsfeld looked to exchange his

⁶² Johnny Thunders, “Eve of Destruction,” by Barry McGuire, track 2 on *Hurt Me*, New Rose Records, 1983, CD.

⁶³ Barry McGuire, “Eve of Destruction,” track 1 on *Eve of Destruction*, Dunhill Records, 1965, CD.

⁶⁴ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 8-9.

newly attained and valuable political capital for a role in the incoming administration. After just six years in Congress, Donald Rumsfeld had already set his sights on the next move: the White House.

The position Nixon initially offered Rumsfeld, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), was not accepted with great enthusiasm. Rumsfeld turned down the position twice, citing his voting record against anti-poverty programs and even the legislation that initially established the OEO in 1964, as reasons he did not want the position.⁶⁵ Then-President John F. Kennedy (1917–1953) created the nucleus of the OEO but Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration (1963–1969) overhauled the OEO to manage various programs for Johnson’s Great Society & War on Poverty which increased government spending on social safety nets and welfare programs.⁶⁶ The incoming Nixon administration not only had little interest in these offices and programs but actively opposed them and hoped Rumsfeld’s fiscally conservative neoliberal politics would sabotage the office’s capabilities.⁶⁷ According to Rumsfeld, it was a call from Nixon—and a nudge from his wife—that set up a face-to-face meeting between the two where Nixon ultimately convinced him to take the position.⁶⁸ These negotiations over a position in the administration marked the beginning of a complicated personal relationship between Nixon and Rumsfeld that facilitated Rumsfeld’s rise through the executive branch. After the two agreed that Rumsfeld would ultimately accept the OEO position, Rumsfeld gave Nixon unsolicited foreign policy advice. Rumsfeld warned against the continued secret bombing of Laos and Cambodia because of the

⁶⁵ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 118.

⁶⁶ Martha J. Bailey and Nicolas J. Duquette, “How Johnson Fought The War On Poverty: the Economics And Politics Of Funding At The Office Of Economic Opportunity,” National Bureau Of Economic Research, January 2014, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w19860/w19860.pdf.

⁶⁷ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 165.

⁶⁸ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 121.

potential media fallout if the information went public.⁶⁹ This interaction demonstrates Rumsfeld's personal interests in foreign policy and his preoccupation with the media as a political tool. Rumsfeld's interjections of his opinion became commonplace as Rumsfeld was grafted closer to the Nixon inner circle, even though he opposed heavyweights in the field like Henry Kissinger (b. 1923).⁷⁰

The Nixon administration supposedly brought Rumsfeld into the inner circle due to a potential legal hang-up and conflict of interest that kept him from taking the position at the OEO in a standard capacity.⁷¹ The legislation stipulated that any Congressperson could not collect the salary of an appointed position if that position's salary increased during the Congressperson's tenure. However, Rumsfeld could be employed as an aid to the President and filled the role at the OEO in that capacity. Initially, Rumsfeld followed the Nixon administration's fiscally conservative script and moved to cut back on the OEO's fiscally liberal programs. Yet, in an unforeseen development, Rumsfeld reversed course and became an advocate of the office and worked to see the programs thrive.⁷²

This turn by Rumsfeld was part of a political ploy to garner support for himself and the office amongst a traditionally hostile Republican Party.⁷³ Rumsfeld hoped that the image of a

⁶⁹ The bombings of Cambodia and Laos began in 1965 and continued periodically throughout the 1970s. The bombing campaigns were designed to cripple the Northern Vietnamese forces and their sympathizers that used the neighboring Cambodia and Laos to the West as covert logistical supply lines. Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 122.

⁷⁰ Kissinger acted as Nixon's Secretary of State and National Security Advisor and spent more than a dozen years serving as a foreign policy consultant and expert. Kissinger directed the Harvard Defense Studies Program and also consulted the United States State Department, the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the RAND Corporation, to name a few. Given Kissinger's immense stature in the field of foreign policy, it is notable that a relatively inexperienced Rumsfeld chose to openly challenge these policies.

⁷¹ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 123.

⁷² Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 13.

⁷³ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 120.

Republican in control of the initially liberal OEO who managed to turn it around into a successful office would be a powerful political statement that united Americans behind the Nixon administration.⁷⁴ Rumsfeld's management proved to be particularly frustrating and disappointing to the Nixon administration and media outlets reported that Rumsfeld "was viewed with open hostility."⁷⁵ For Friedman, Rumsfeld's actions at the OEO were not only disappointing but, as Klein describes, an act of "betrayal."⁷⁶ As one of Friedman's acolytes, Rumsfeld was perfectly positioned to implement the economic policies Friedman preached (i.e., make steep cuts in government spending on social welfare programs), however, he instead did the exact opposite. This action was unacceptable for Friedman who "[a]t one point...called Rumsfeld at the White House and berated his former 'young pup.' According to Rumsfeld, Friedman instructed him, 'You have got to stop doing what you are doing.'"⁷⁷ Nevertheless, this episode of blatant disregard for the burgeoning neoliberal teachings of Friedman proved to be an anomaly in Rumsfeld's long and destructive political career.

However, this episode demonstrated that Rumsfeld was less of a committed ideologue and more of a political opportunist at this point in his career. It is also worth noting that neoliberalism was not yet the all-dominant ideology of the period, nor was it as politically popular as it became following the election of Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013) as the United Kingdom's prime minister in 1979 and Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) as the United States' president in 1981. In the economic turmoil of the 1970s, Keynesian economics had not yet been buried by market interests when Reagan declared that government was the problem and retained a base of support. In the early 1970s, Nixon even signed in a substantial new set of regulatory reforms passed by a Democratic

⁷⁴ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 120.

⁷⁵ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 13.

⁷⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 166.

⁷⁷ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 166.

Congress, remarking, “We are all Keynesians now.”⁷⁸ However, through the 1970s multiple economic tribulations (such as the OPEC oil embargo in 1973 and the ensuing global recession in the 1980s) forced many to rethink their economic approach as Keynesian economics seemed to be failing across the globe.

After the implementation of neoliberalism in Chile and the suppression of the Pinochet regime’s violence, neoliberalism had a supposedly successful model that its advocates could point to by the Thatcher and Reagan era in the 1980s.⁷⁹ Despite this, neoliberalism’s harshest edges and austerity measures still had to be tempered. According to Thatcher,

The progression from Allende’s Socialism to the free enterprise capitalist economy of the 1980s is a striking example of economic reform from which we can learn many lessons. However...in Britain with our democratic institution and the need for a high degree of consent, some of the measures adopted in Chile are quite unacceptable.⁸⁰

Rumsfeld’s political instinct likely informed his decision to distance himself from his earlier fiscal conservatism while at the helm of the OEO much as Thatcher had to temper her own approach.

Although Rumsfeld rejected his marching orders at the OEO, he still garnered support from some of the highest figures in the Nixon administration which included not only senior staff but also Nixon himself.⁸¹ Some of the staff, such as Charles Colson (1931–2012) and John Mitchell (1913–1988), vouched for Rumsfeld because they believed him to be a valuable political operative that could ultimately help the public’s perception of the

⁷⁸ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 13.

⁷⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 13.

⁸⁰ Corey Robin, “Margaret Thatcher’s Democracy Lessons,” *Jacobin*, June 16, 2013, <https://jacobin.com/2013/07/margaret-thatcher-democracy-lessons/>.

⁸¹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 5.

Nixon administration.⁸² For example, Rumsfeld held a connection to the Gallup polling group, which Nixon thought of as helpful in shaping and manipulating public opinion.⁸³ Despite his frequent troubles, Rumsfeld knew how to exploit his political savvy to maintain his access to power, as he did when he first gained favor with the Nixon campaign in 1968 when he gathered intelligence at the DNC.

As previously mentioned, the relationship between Rumsfeld and Nixon was complicated. Frequently frustrated by Rumsfeld's actions, Nixon made derogatory comments about him. Comments such as, "He's a ruthless little bastard. You can be sure of that."⁸⁴ Yet, Nixon also had an appreciation for Rumsfeld, given their shared background as elected officials and politicians.⁸⁵ Rumsfeld saw Nixon as a political mentor and wanted to exploit this connection to advance his career, and thus they held numerous private conversations discussing Rumsfeld's path forward and future roles in the administration.⁸⁶ When Nixon and his staff determined that Rumsfeld was too much of a political liability at the OEO, he was given the new title of Counselor to the President, however, this position came with no tangible role and no office or department to lead or manage.⁸⁷

During this time, Rumsfeld continued to challenge other, more critical, components of the Nixon agenda, specifically their foreign policy in Vietnam, as he did in their first meeting regarding the OEO. Specifically, Rumsfeld criticized the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of escalation and privately advocated for the war's end.⁸⁸ When Rumsfeld first advised Nixon against the bombing of Cambodia and Laos, his primary concern was still the United

⁸² Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 16-17.

⁸³ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 17.

⁸⁴ Oliver Burkeman, "Rumsfeld's Progress," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/nov/10/midterms2006.iraq1>.

⁸⁵ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 6.

⁸⁶ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 5-6, 14-16.

⁸⁷ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 18.

⁸⁸ "The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld."

States' image. Rumsfeld was not motivated to stop the bombing campaigns because they quickly turned Laos and Cambodia into two of the most bombed countries per capita and bomb tonnage in the world. Rather, Rumsfeld likely wanted Nixon to end the bombings for pragmatic reasons. As the 1960s progressed, the Vietnam War became less and less popular in the eyes of the American public. He called for an end to the bombings because it might look bad if the then-secret bombing campaigns went public.⁸⁹

However, this challenge on Vietnam led to more animosity towards Rumsfeld, especially from Secretary of State Kissinger who argued for his firing.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, Rumsfeld evaded his ouster once again. This evasion was due in part to the internal support mentioned above, and also because Nixon and his advisers determined that Rumsfeld's criticism of the war effort in a public setting could prove more damaging should he be dismissed from the relatively private confines of the White House.⁹¹ Kissinger's worried comments regarding Rumsfeld demonstrates concern that Rumsfeld could potentially leak information. Kissinger stated, "He's just positioning himself to be close to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*."⁹² But were Rumsfeld's initial warnings to Nixon about the secret bombing campaigns going public actually a threat to gain political leverage? Kissinger had reason to worry as Rumsfeld, in private conversations with Nixon (unearthed as part of the release of the Nixon tapes during the Watergate scandal), had already issued a *warning* or veiled threat to Nixon about the potential consequences of his lack of a defined role; "There is a problem, potentially, with a guy floating around the

⁸⁹ Taylor Owen and Ben Kiernan, "Making More Enemies than We Kill? Calculating U.S. Bomb Tonnages Dropped on Laos and Cambodia, and Weighing Their Implications," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol. 13, no. 3 (2015): 2, 6, <https://apjif.org/-Taylor-Owen--Ben-Kiernan/4313/article.pdf>.

⁹⁰ "The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld."

⁹¹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 19-20.

⁹² Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 3.

White House.”⁹³ The implication was that without any defined purpose or role, Rumsfeld could find himself interacting with others the Nixon White House would not necessarily appreciate, i.e. the media.

Once again, Rumsfeld exploited his political savvy and trickery as his criticism and veiled threats afforded him future conversations with Nixon concerning United States foreign policy. Rumsfeld leveraged his inexperience in this realm to argue for a new position that would afford him more experience and prestige.⁹⁴ Although Nixon initially refused to offer Rumsfeld any position, Rumsfeld remained persistent in his request just as he did as a Congressman, angling to get a role in the White House.⁹⁵ Nixon, Kissinger, and other senior staff ultimately agreed it was in their best interest to give in to his demands and keep him away from the White House. They assigned Rumsfeld to the position of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Ambassador, a role that still lacked much prestige but enticed him due to his foreign policy experience. Furthermore, the role placed him in Europe and out of Nixon and Kissinger’s way, a win-win for all parties involved.⁹⁶

The Ford Administration (1974–1977) and Secretary of Defense

The move to NATO proved to be enormously consequential for Rumsfeld’s burgeoning career. First, the new position played a part in his evolving stances on foreign policy. According to PBS, the NATO role was,

An appointment that dramatically change[d] his political philosophy and the course of his career in politics. It [was] Rumsfeld’s first direct involvement in military and foreign policy, and the

⁹³ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 18.

⁹⁴ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 18-19.

⁹⁵ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 8-10.

⁹⁶ “The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld.”

formal and unproductive European style of
diplomacy aggravates Rumsfeld, pushing him
toward more hawkish, action-oriented methods.⁹⁷

Additionally, the role placed Rumsfeld across the Atlantic far removed from the explosive Watergate scandal that erupted shortly after and sank the Nixon White House. In one of the more infamous political scandals in American history, police apprehended individuals linked to the 1972 Nixon re-election campaign as they attempted to burglarize the DNC's office at the Watergate Hotel in Washington DC. This episode set off a chain reaction and investigations revealed further unsavory details about the Nixon administration, including their efforts to cover up Nixon's links to the attempted burglary.⁹⁸ As a consequence of this scandal, Nixon resigned in disgrace. Yet, in an ironic twist, Rumsfeld's career was about to take off. Rumsfeld evaded any links to Watergate, and his old congressional ally and friend, Gerald Ford, assumed the presidency.

Rumsfeld immediately took a leading role on the transition team and, shortly thereafter, Ford named him Chief of Staff.⁹⁹ Rumsfeld's rapid ascent in the political hierarchy saw him climb from a low-level Nixon administration official to one of the closest people to the new president in roughly five years. Riding Rumsfeld's coattails was one of his closest advisors and friend: Richard "Dick" Cheney (b. 1941). Cheney first met Rumsfeld as a congressional intern when he impressed Rumsfeld enough to be hired on as a staff member when Rumsfeld led the OEO.¹⁰⁰ Cheney eventually became Rumsfeld's right-hand man and assumed the position of Deputy Chief of Staff at the start of the Ford administration. As fast as Rumsfeld rose through the ranks, he took Cheney along at an even faster pace. The two continually reunited

⁹⁷ "The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld."

⁹⁸ Rick Perlstein, "Watergate Scandal," Britannica, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Watergate-Scandal>.

⁹⁹ "The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld."

¹⁰⁰ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 12-13.

in differing positions of political power over the coming decades, culminating in Cheney securing the position of Vice President and Rumsfeld's return to Secretary of Defense during the W. Bush administration from 2001 to 2009.

Despite Rumsfeld's meteoric rise, he remained unsatisfied and aspired to obtain a more distinguished role and influence inside the White House. Rumsfeld ultimately achieved this in the aftermath of one of the most significant White House and Cabinet shakeups. Deemed the 1975 Halloween Massacre, then-President Ford fired defense secretary James Schlesinger (1929–2014) and replaced him with Rumsfeld.¹⁰¹ Additionally, Kissinger lost his title of national security advisor but retained his position as Secretary of State.¹⁰² Other notable moves included replacing William Colby (1920–1996) as Director of CIA with H.W. Bush (b. 1924–2018) and replacing Rumsfeld as White House Chief of Staff with his protege Cheney.¹⁰³ In Rumsfeld's confirmation hearing for his new defense secretary title, he described the contemporary global security setting stating,

The hearing was dominated by the urgent national security issue of the day: the Cold War. Millions of Americans have since come of age without knowing the fear of a nuclear exchange between two superpowers. But as I went through the confirmation process, the Soviet Union posed what was widely considered, as then-President Kennedy had put it, a 'clear and present danger.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Gilbert King, "A Halloween Massacre at the White House," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 25, 2012, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/a-halloween-massacre-at-the-white-house-92668509/>.

¹⁰² Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 65.

¹⁰³ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 65.

¹⁰⁴ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 214.

Despite these comments, during his tenure as Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld played a significant role in bringing the two superpowers closer to a nuclear exchange. (as will be detailed shortly). It is telling that Rumsfeld relied on words from the Democratic Kennedy, dead for over a decade by the time of Rumsfeld's confirmation, to make his point about the danger posed by the Soviet Union. Contemporaries at the CIA soon disagreed with Rumsfeld's diagnosis of the danger posed by the Soviet Union.

His promotion to Secretary of Defense also signaled a victory in the power struggle Rumsfeld waged with Kissinger, a Nixon administration holdover who lost one of his two Cabinet titles (National Security Advisor) during the 1975 Halloween Massacre, for influence over Ford's foreign policy.¹⁰⁵ Rumsfeld, just as he did when he was in the Nixon administration, criticized and challenged Kissinger's policies. Rumsfeld—the flight instructor, Congressmen, head of an economic office, and briefly ambassador to NATO—had little foreign policy experience compared to Kissinger. Kissinger was an expert in nuclear geopolitics and served in World War II, while Rumsfeld's thesis was on domestic trade, and his stint in the Navy kept him in the United States. This lack of genuine foreign policy experience, however, hardly kept Rumsfeld from asserting his opinion when he disagreed, as he did over the secret bombing of Laos and Cambodia. In that case, Rumsfeld appeared to be a 'dove' (someone who opposed military confrontation), if only to help the United States save face publicly in Rumsfeld's case. However, his positions in the Ford administration painted the picture of a 'hawk.' He opposed Detente, the easing of Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union via greater diplomatic coordination, and its accompanying arms control treaties, many of which Kissinger negotiated.¹⁰⁶ Rumsfeld argued for an increased defense budget to

¹⁰⁵ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 62-67.

¹⁰⁶ Elaine Sciolino and Eric Schmitt, "Defense Choice Made a Name As an Infighter," *The New York Times*, January 8, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/08/us/defense-choice-made-a-name-as-an-infighter.html>

meet the perceived security threat that the Soviet Union supposedly imposed on the United States.¹⁰⁷ In 1976, Rumsfeld made his case before the press stating,

The Soviet Union has been busy. They've been busy in terms of their level of effort, they've been busy in terms of the actual weapons that they've been producing, they've been busy in terms of expanding production rates, they've been busy in terms of expanding their institutional capability to produce additional weapons at additional rates. They've been busy in terms of expanding their capability to increasingly improve the sophistication of those weapons. Year after year after year they've been demonstrating that they have steadiness of purpose, that they're purposeful about what they're doing.¹⁰⁸

According to Adam Curtis (b. 1955), an English documentary filmmaker, the CIA (amongst other organizations who constantly monitored the Soviet Union) considered this “complete fiction” as “there was no truth to Rumsfeld’s allegations.”¹⁰⁹

To counter the established intelligence community’s claims and bolster his own, Rumsfeld urged then-President and friend Ford to establish an independent commission to investigate Soviet nuclear capabilities.¹¹⁰ This commission, called “Team B,” consisted of non-intelligence agents. Nevertheless, they were given access to all relevant information available to the CIA and analogous groups. Amongst this group was Rumsfeld’s future

¹⁰⁷ “The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld.”

¹⁰⁸ Adam Curtis, “The Power of Nightmares part 1- Baby It’s Cold Outside,” BBC, 2004, video, 26:07, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wmz_Ngdm1GY&t=2895s&ab_channel=AmInIslamov.

¹⁰⁹ Curtis, “Power of Nightmares Part 1,” 26:51.

¹¹⁰ Curtis, “Power of Nightmares Part 1,” 27:00.

second in command (and frequent collaborator) at the Pentagon during the W. Bush administration, Paul Wolfowitz (b.1943). According to Melvin Goodman, Head of Soviet Affairs in the CIA from 1976 to 1987, before Team B, “Rumsfeld and others, people such as Paul Wolfowitz, wanted to get into the CIA, and the mission was to create a much more severe view of the Soviet Union, Soviet intentions, Soviet views about fighting and winning a nuclear war.”¹¹¹

After failing to infiltrate the CIA (not for the last time), Rumsfeld and his hawkish allies used the Team B commission to cynically manipulate United States foreign policy (again, not for the last time) to fall in line with Rumsfeld’s view of the Soviet Union. The head of Team B, Richard Pipes (1923–2018), was not an expert on nuclear weapons or technology but supposedly a leading expert in Soviet wartime psychology. Pipes developed the idea of the “Soviet Hidden Mindset,” which claimed that despite any evidence or statements to the contrary, the Soviet Union was nevertheless preparing to attack America.¹¹² Given Rumsfeld’s earlier statements (which countered the prevailing intelligence available) and his and Wolfowitz’s failure to internally manipulate these very intelligence agencies, Team B must be understood as an attempt to purposefully manipulate intelligence in a way that would benefit Rumsfeld and his allies’ political ends. Assigning such a staunch anti-Soviet fearmongering alarmist as Pipes to head the team almost certainly ensured their findings would align with Rumsfeld’s bellicose claims.

With access to all of the evidence and information available to the CIA, Team B could not come up with any evidence of the weapons they claimed the Soviet Union produced. Instead of accepting that the weapons systems did not exist, they assumed that the systems were actually so sophisticated that they just could not be detected.¹¹³ Dr. Anne Cahn, who worked for the Arms

¹¹¹ Curtis, “Power of Nightmares Part 1,” 27:19.

¹¹² Curtis, “Power of Nightmares Part 1,” 27:55.

¹¹³ Curtis, “Power of Nightmares Part 1,” 29:02.

Control and Disarmament Agency from 1977 to 1980, described the situation as follows:

They couldn't say that the Soviets had acoustic means of picking up American submarines because they couldn't find them, so they said maybe they have non-acoustic means of making our submarine fleet vulnerable. But there was no evidence that they had a non-acoustic system.¹¹⁴

She continued stating, "I would say that all of it was fantasy... if you go through most of Team B's specific allegations about weapons systems, and you just examine them one by one, they were all wrong. All of them."¹¹⁵ The only evidence Team B produced to back their claims that a highly sophisticated Soviet missile system existed, which conflicted with the CIA's assessment of Soviet air defenses as dilapidated, was an official Soviet training manual that claimed their Soviet air defense systems functioned flawlessly.¹¹⁶

Despite the lack of evidence, the neoconservatives that Rumsfeld now allied with established a lobbying group, called The Committee on the Present Danger, to spread their findings; Ronald Reagan was among the number of influential politicians to join.¹¹⁷ Rumsfeld's alignment with this group of neoconservatives signaled a break in United States foreign policy that ultimately led the United States into what Curtis terms a "fantasyland of imagined [or greatly exaggerated] enemies."¹¹⁸ At this point, the neoconservatives were attempting to assert that the Soviet Union constituted a threat that most other analysts did not agree existed. Soon the Soviet Union would no longer exist, and Rumsfeld and company would be forced to find a new enemy to fearmonger

¹¹⁴ Curtis, "Power of Nightmares Part 1," 29:47.

¹¹⁵ Curtis, "Power of Nightmares Part 1," 32:06.

¹¹⁶ Curtis, "Power of Nightmares Part 1," 31:08.

¹¹⁷ Curtis, "Power of Nightmares Part 1," 33:08.

¹¹⁸ Curtis, "Power of Nightmares Part 1," 35:10.

against.

The Rise and Origins of the Neoconservatives

“For us, there are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who are Christians and support free enterprise, and there are the others.”

- John Foster Dulles, *The New York Times*.¹¹⁹

“We’re closer to being revolutionaries than conservatives in the sense that we want to change some deeply entrenched notions about the proper role of American power in the world.”

- Richard Perle, *“Power of Nightmares Part 2.”*¹²⁰

As with some of the other political positions Rumsfeld took in his early days, it is difficult to separate actual ideology from political opportunism. Kissinger and his allies adopted the more cynical interpretation and determined Rumsfeld’s hawkish positioning as an act of political opportunism on Rumsfeld’s part to endear himself with the burgeoning neoconservative wing of the Republican Party, and therefore advance his political ambitions.¹²¹ Kissinger cared little for ideology, religion, or the lives or rights of people in the Third World and dealt in modern realpolitik. He considered the world a complicated, interconnected, and intricate balance of power, and only considered what must be done to

¹¹⁹ Adam LeBor, “Overt and Covert,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/books/review/the-brothers-by-stephen-kinzer.html>.

¹²⁰ Adam Curtis, “The Power of Nightmares part 2- The Phantom Victory,” BBC, 2004, 5:49, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SB7XbeZ0Xis&t=2s&ab_channel=OpenYourEyes.

¹²¹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 68-9.

preserve that balance of power.¹²² In Kissinger's calculations, the intricate global balance of power was never far from being thrown into chaos, a preconception that lent itself to a consideration of global contexts. For example, Nixon's famous handshake with Mao Zedong in 1972 was only possible with such consideration, for the United States and a communist power to make amends during the Cold War required a pragmatic and non-moralistic approach.

Neoconservatives, on the other hand, saw the world in a simple dichotomy of good versus evil, with the United States as the premier force for good in the world destined to battle evil. The neoconservative movement always had at least one foot firmly planted in conservative Christian moralistic panic. The intellectual and political fathers of the neoconservative movement, Leo Strauss (1899–1973) and Irving Kristol (1920–2009), both emphasized the lack of moral clarity in modern liberal society as degenerative.¹²³ Kristol claimed in an interview that “the notion that a purely secular society can cope with all of the terrible pathologies that now affect our society, I think, has turned out to be false... I mean I really think religion has a role now to play in redeeming the country.”¹²⁴ This pandering to the Christian right-wing ultimately served the neoconservatives well, as it motivated masses of Evangelical Americans, however, it also complicated Rumsfeld's relationship with the movement.¹²⁵

Rumsfeld was a Presbyterian Christian, but was described as “normally tight-lipped around religion” and personally claimed to have “never been one to wear my faith on my sleeve.”¹²⁶ It is

¹²² Adam Curtis, “HyperNormalisation,” BBC, 2016, video, 14:43 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thLgkQBFTPw&t=883s&ab_channel=SamJohnson.

¹²³ Curtis, “The Power of Nightmares part 2,” 5:07.

¹²⁴ Curtis, “Power of Nightmares Part 1,” 47:55.

¹²⁵ Curtis, “Power of Nightmares Part 1,” 47:30.

¹²⁶ Nicolas G. Hahn III, “Donald Rumsfeld's Golden Rule,” RealClear Religion, August 5, 2013, https://www.realclearreligion.org/articles/2013/08/05/donald_rumsfelds_golden_rule.html#.

somewhat strange then that Rumsfeld came to be so closely associated with the neoconservative movement. But Rumsfeld's associations with the neoconservatives proved unshakable throughout the decades. In 2004, in a BBC docuseries, "The Power of Nightmares," a smug Rumsfeld is on display when the narrator first introduces American neoconservatives. The series recounts the political ascension of neoconservatives, like Rumsfeld. According to the director Adam Curtis,

At the heart of this story are two groups, the American neoconservatives [here Rumsfeld is presented on screen as the embodiment of the movement] and the radical Islamists. Both were idealists who were born out of the failure of the liberal dream to build a better world. And both had a very similar explanation for what caused that failure... together they created today's nightmare vision.¹²⁷

The explanation given by neoconservatives for the failure to build a better world was the aforementioned lack of moral clarity emphasized by Strauss and Kristol. Neoconservatives restored moral clarity by trashing political complexity; the reconstruction of the world in a template of black and white, good versus evil, combined with righteous glory to form a delusional mix. Rumsfeld's public persona and media appearances over the coming decades characterized the self-assured and self-righteous smugness embodied by this worldview.

In foreign policy, this simplistic worldview expressed itself in the neoconservative trend toward greater and increasingly aggressive United States interventionism abroad. The neoconservatives, the same politicians that positioned themselves as the cleansing force of good in the world, did not consider regional political context in their grand calculations to do away

¹²⁷ Curtis, "Power of Nightmares Part 1," 1:37.

with evil. These efforts to purify the world included the use of the military, not just to destroy “evil empires” like the Soviet Union or dethrone dictators like Saddam, but to pursue American interests, i.e., overthrow adversary governments and establish free-market capitalism to benefit American companies. Thus, these efforts also served as the militarist wing of neoliberalism, not only establishing “free market” neoliberal capitalism through overt and covert aims regardless of the consent of the governed, but Rumsfeld ultimately turned the neoconservative’s wartime destruction, wrought to establish a “free market,” into a closed feedback loop of neoliberal profiteering during the W. Bush administration.¹²⁸ Ultimately, neoliberalism and neoconservatism served as two sides of the same coin, guided by American exceptionalism and the pursuit of American dominance of the world.

Proto-neoconservatives: The Dulles Brothers

Considering the neoconservative’s simplistic worldview and their willingness to use military force to expand the reaches of capitalism around the turn of the 1970s, they most resembled the earlier Cold War mentality enshrined by McCarthy-ist fearmongering and the power of the Dulles brothers during the Eisenhower-era (1953–1961). This period of the late 1940s through the late 1950s and into the early 1960s carried with a deep anxiety and fear of an ever-looming communist threat.¹²⁹ The fear of Communism was used to justify the continued United States’ military presence across the globe in the post-war world. The neoconservatives latched on to this same narrative and later used the threat of Islamic terrorism after 9/11 to justify their military adventurism. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s (1890–1969) election in 1953 ushered in Allen Dulles as the new head of the CIA and his brother John Foster Dulles as the Secretary of State.¹³⁰ Allen’s

¹²⁸ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 482.

¹²⁹ LeBor, “Overt and Covert.”

¹³⁰ Eisenhower was in office from 1953 to 1969. Galbraith, “Allen Dulles Under the Harsh Light of History Operation Sunrise.”

previous underhand dealings with the SS in Operation Sunrise as an OSS agent placed him as a “leading expert” in covert operations.

If Rumsfeld can be placed in the political lineage of any American political leader, it is with these two. The Dulles brothers held intimate connections with the upper class of the United States’ business elite, as the two previously worked as lawyers for the corporate firm Sullivan & Cromwell (amongst other similar institutions).¹³¹ Before their tenure in the Eisenhower administration, the Dulles’ (on their corporate client’s behalf) presented their case to powerful government officials. Once inside the government, appointed as two of the premier forces in the formulation and execution of United States foreign policy, they served as agents of their corporate friend’s interests.¹³² Like the later neoconservatives, the Dulles brothers, also inspired by their religious roots, saw the world in a simplistic good versus evil dichotomy. John once summarized his worldview: “For us, there are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who are Christians and support free enterprise, and there are the others.”¹³³ This quote aptly describes the neoconservatives’ view decades later. Once in office, the two brothers quickly went to work to further “free enterprise” against the “others” (those who opposed such free enterprise).

In under two years, Allen and John organized and executed successful regime change efforts in Iran and Guatemala on behalf of corporate interests which served as a direct historical precedent for the later neoconservatives and neoliberals.¹³⁴ In Iran, the CIA and MI6, The Secret Intelligence Service, fomented unrest against the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh (1882–1967) by sending money and operatives to foster his opposition in 1953

¹³¹ Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 130.

¹³² LeBor, “Overt and Covert.”

¹³³ LeBor, “Overt and Covert.”

¹³⁴ LeBor, “Overt and Covert.”

as a part of Operation Ajax.¹³⁵ The Dulles' also purposefully mischaracterized Mossadegh as a communist to incite fear and justify his removal.¹³⁶ However, Mossadegh was no communist. Rather, he acted as the leading figure in the efforts to nationalize the British-dominated Anglo Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) and redirect Iranian oil profits into the development of their own country.¹³⁷ The British insisted that they must have their oil back and aided in the propaganda campaign to convince the Americans that Mossadegh was a threatening Soviet pawn.¹³⁸ The Dulles' used their powerful connections with the American business elite to keep the *New York Times* from publishing contradictory statements or evidence of the United States' involvement in the coup provided by one of their correspondents on the ground in Iran, Kennet Love (1924–2014).¹³⁹ Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919–1980) was restored to power as an autocratic dictator that marginalized Iran's infantile democratic systems and set up a repressive regime with its own secretive and inhumane torture program, the SAVAK.¹⁴⁰

In Guatemala, nationalist Jacobo Árbenz (1913–1971) threatened The United Fruit Company's massive agricultural holdings that they acquired through a series of corrupt deals with dictators. In total, this amounted to over 550,000 acres making up one-fifth of all arable land in the country, with nationalization.¹⁴¹ The state even offered to compensate the company for part of the land. Árbenz supposed that the Guatemalan state paid the company 1.185 million dollars for 234,00 acres of the 295,000-acre

¹³⁵ Yergin, *The Prize*, 452.

¹³⁶ Yergin, *The Prize*, 439.

¹³⁷ Yergin, *The Prize*, 439.

¹³⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (University of California Press, 1993), 118.

¹³⁹ William Dorman & Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 60.

¹⁴⁰ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2016), 279.

¹⁴¹ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 133.

Tiquisate plantation, one of United Fruits dominions.¹⁴² United Fruit previously declared its holdings to be worth the offered 1.185 million dollars in legal documents, however, the company undervalued the land as part of a tax-dodging scheme.¹⁴³ This proposal was unacceptable and United Fruit called on the power that their association with Sullivan & Cromwell, and thus the Dulles brothers, afforded them. Árbenz's attempt to redirect Guatemala's resources to be used for and by Guatemalans, and away from United States corporations, was seen as Stalin's second coming, at least that is the picture United Fruit's public relations propagandist, Edward Bernays (1891–1995) painted on United Fruit's behalf.¹⁴⁴

Allen quickly joined in on the project to smear Árbenz as a communist as he could not stand idly by while the company he personally held a large stock in was threatened.¹⁴⁵ Allen Dulles once again applied pressure on the *New York Times*, which pulled their journalist Sydney Gruson (1916–1998) out of Guatemala after Gruson disputed United Fruit's fictitious vision of Arbenz as a Communist. Allen also orchestrated the creation of a propaganda radio station, "Voice of Liberation," that spread disinformation on the ground in Guatemala.¹⁴⁶ The CIA launched Operation Success—modeled after Operation Ajax—on December 3, 1953, to depose Árbenz.¹⁴⁷ Allen personally advocated for a more violent approach: to arm opposition groups, then bomb the country to sow the seeds of chaos that justified an overt United States-sponsored coup to "restore order" in the country.¹⁴⁸ Árbenz knew the Americans were coming for him like they did Mossadegh and implored the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to open an inquiry into the situation. The United States successfully shut

¹⁴² Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 133.

¹⁴³ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 133.

¹⁴⁴ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 134.

¹⁴⁵ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 130.

¹⁴⁶ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 141.

¹⁴⁷ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 136.

¹⁴⁸ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 136.

down the request on June 25, 1954.¹⁴⁹ Árbenz had previously turned to the Soviets to purchase arms in May of that year (the weapons were mostly unusable or inadequate and outdated, The United States previously supplied Guatemala with most of its arms, however when Guatemala turned to democracy the United States ceased its support).¹⁵⁰ This weapons deal ultimately triggered Allen and Eisenhower to begin a bombing campaign over Guatemala on June 18, 1954.¹⁵¹ A military junta coordinated by the United States removed Árbenz from power on June 27, 1954, but the United States did not like his replacement, Colonel Carlos Diaz (1915–2014), and they continued bombing until allies of CIA asset Carlos Castillo Armas (1914–1957) took control of the country briefly until Armas assumed direct power on July 5, 1954.¹⁵²

The Dulles brothers' foreign policy formulation was an early embodiment of neoliberal market practices, justified by a dogmatic religious worldview that wealthy politicians employed to garner support for United States intervention abroad. Their actions functioned as a blueprint for neoconservatives like Rumsfeld; Friedman certainly loved the blueprint's employment in Chile. In both Iran and Guatemala, the Dulles brothers manipulated information to fearmonger an exaggerated threat to further an aggressive foreign policy in service of Western business interests. Both times, market intervention by a government triggered a covert operation or the use of military force to protect the market's existence (profit) on behalf of the United States which is, as David Harvey notes, one of the only justified forms of state intervention in the market according to neoliberalism.¹⁵³ The Dulles' militarism also backfired in ways the neoconservatives would later contend with and then replicate throughout the Middle East in the form of blowback. Blowback is a concept in the intelligence community referencing unintended consequences from covert/secret operations

¹⁴⁹ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 143.

¹⁵⁰ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 140.

¹⁵¹ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 141.

¹⁵² Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 141.

¹⁵³ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

that may initiate a chain reaction of consequences for which the general public has no frame of reference to contextualize the events. By destroying Iran's democracy and propping up the Shah's police state to continue sapping Iran's resources, the United States started a chain reaction that led thousands of protestors to shout "Death to America" in the streets of Tehran and topple their CIA-backed dictator in 1979.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran was born and one of the neoconservatives' great boogeymen in the coming years emerged.

The Private Sector, PNAC, and Saddam Hussein

*"They bombed innocent people, trying to murder Saddam
When you gave him those chemical weapons to go to war
with Iran
And the world doesn't believe that you're fighting for
freedom
Cause you fucked the Middle East, and gave birth to a
demon."*

- *Immortal Technique "The 4th Branch."*¹⁵⁵

Rumsfeld in the Private Sector

Rumsfeld's tenure at the upper echelons of United States foreign policy did not last long as Ford lost the election to Democrat Jimmy Carter (b. 1924) in 1976 and a political transition in the White House forced Rumsfeld to the sidelines. From the time he left Congress for the Nixon administration in early 1969, Rumsfeld rose from the head of a marginalized domestic policy office to the distinguished office of Secretary of Defense. Despite his consistent challenges to the policies of Nixon and Kissinger, Rumsfeld exploited his political savvy to attain more prestigious titles and

¹⁵⁴ LeBor, "Overt and Covert."

¹⁵⁵ Immortal Technique, "The 4th Branch," track 10 on *Revolutionary Vol. 2*, Viper Records, 2003, CD.

greater political influence. Furthermore, Rumsfeld's hawkish foreign policy during the late Ford years from 1974 to 1977 served as a symbol or signal of the impending rise of the neoconservative movement. Rumsfeld and his new neoconservative political allies shepherded the next iteration of an aggressive, American exceptionalist foreign policy, a reincarnation of the Dulles brothers' policies at the start of the demonstrated by the examples of Iran and Guatemala). At this time, the burgeoning neoconservative movement had to compete for influence in the arenas of domestic American politics and United States foreign policy. Over the next several decades, however, Rumsfeld and the neoconservatives would wield vast power and influence that would afford them dominance in these areas and ultimately surpass the destruction of their forerunners, the Dulles brothers.

With his party out of the White House following Carter's election in 1976, Rumsfeld was not out of work for long as he decided to assume a role in the private sector. Despite having no experience leading a company, Rumsfeld became President & CEO of G.D. Searle & Co. between 1977 and 1985. Rumsfeld held prior connections with the firm given its Chicago-based location and its financial support for his Congressional campaigns.¹⁵⁶ G.D. Searle & Co. was a large corporation in the pharmaceutical industry that is arguably most famous for developing artificial sweetener aspartame. Rumsfeld's tenure as CEO proved to be quite a lucrative venture for him and the corporation.¹⁵⁷ In particular, the aforementioned aspartame was afforded FDA approval under Rumsfeld's guidance and he also facilitated a deal that ultimately sold Searle to the agrochemical giant Monsanto, a deal that earned him twelve million dollars.¹⁵⁸ The approval of aspartame proved to be a controversial decision as allegations of the artificial

¹⁵⁶ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 101.

¹⁵⁷ "The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld."

¹⁵⁸ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 365.

sweetener's potential toxicity continually arose (and continue to arise to this day).¹⁵⁹

Rumsfeld's self-enrichment through the private sector, specifically the pharmaceutical industry, became a noticeable pattern from this point on culminating in his position as Secretary of Defense during the W. Bush administration. Rumsfeld's tenure as CEO was indicative of the wider neoliberal trend toward blatant corruption CEO wealth skyrocketed compared to the median worker's compensation. In 1970, a CEO averaged a salary of thirty times the median worker, and by 2000, the CEO's figure was nearly five hundred times that of the worker's salary.¹⁶⁰

After Rumsfeld left his Special Envoy role in the Reagan administration which he occupied from 1983 to 1984 (covered in detail shortly), he continued to oscillate between interests in the private and public sector for the rest of this decade throughout the 1990s. After leaving Searle in 1985, Rumsfeld began preparing for candidacy in the 1988 presidential election. To many, this was an expected pursuit given Rumsfeld's rapid ascension within the political and governing hierarchies and his relentless efforts to attain more considerable experience and prestigious titles during his time in the Nixon and Ford administrations. Yet, his presidential aspirations came to a crashing halt in 1987, before the first primaries and caucuses were even held, due to a lack of funding or popular support.¹⁶¹ From 1990 to 1993, he returned to the helm of a large corporation as the CEO of General Instrument Corp. where he found similar financial success by facilitating its move to a publicly held company—again ballooning his personal wealth.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Arbind Kumar Choudhary and Ethersia Pretorius, "Revisiting the safety of aspartame," *Nutrition Reviews* Vol. 75, no. 9 (2017): 718-30, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Arbind-Choudhary/publication/319482917_Revisiting_the_safety_of_aspartame/links/5b4767370f7e9b4637cfe56a/Revisiting-the-safety-of-aspartame.pdf.

¹⁶⁰ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 16.

¹⁶¹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 165-67.

¹⁶² Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 231.

Rumsfeld then returned to the pharmaceutical industry, when he served as Chairman of the Board for Gilead Sciences between 1997 and 2000.¹⁶³ Both of these companies, General Instruments and Gilead, had business dealings with the Department of Defense, an explicit sign of the “revolving door” that is a feature in American politics and economics. As Klein notes, “[Rumsfeld’s] status as a former defense secretary, meanwhile, made him a score for any company that was part of...the ‘military-industrial complex.’”¹⁶⁴ His role at Gilead is noteworthy not only because of his business activities during those years but more so because of how these business links served to influence Rumsfeld’s blatant corruption in his return to government during the W. Bush administration (these decisions will be addressed in greater detail in the next section).¹⁶⁵

Rumsfeld and the Continuity of Government Exercises

Despite his financial success in private industry, Rumsfeld still held deep political aspirations and remained connected with his political networks. In the 1980 presidential election, Rumsfeld believed that he was a solid candidate to be Ronald Reagan’s vice president, given that his personal connections and friends were advising the Reagan campaign.¹⁶⁶ Although that decision did not go his way, he remained involved in the federal government’s executive branch throughout the Reagan years in a couple of diverse ways. First, Rumsfeld participated in the Continuity of Government exercises in the 1980s.¹⁶⁷ Continuity of Government (COG) was a Cold War-era classified program that strategized federal government contingency plans during a potential crisis or

¹⁶³ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 366.

¹⁶⁴ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 365.

¹⁶⁵ These decisions will be addressed in greater detail in the next section.

¹⁶⁶ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 123.

¹⁶⁷ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 138-145.

emergency.¹⁶⁸ COG was designed to prevent a complete severance of the governmental hierarchy, especially when tensions and the threat of nuclear war with the Soviet Union intensified (which Rumsfeld's earlier brinkmanship certainly did not help).¹⁶⁹ During the Reagan years, these exercises were held several times a year and involved various current and former political and government officials, including both Rumsfeld and Cheney who acted as "team leaders" to establish parallel government leadership hierarchies to avoid political decapitation from a nuclear strike.¹⁷⁰

Although the Reagan administration inherited pre-existing COG strategies and programs, the administration utilized executive orders (such as EO 12656) that marginalized the Congress's role in establishing presidential succession hierarchies and drastically revamped COG's functionality. As a report published by the *Miami Herald* described in 1987:

Reagan's top advisers have operated a virtual parallel government outside the traditional Cabinet departments and agencies almost from the day Reagan took office, congressional investigators and administration officials have concluded. Secret contacts throughout the government act on the advisers' behalf, but do not officially report to them. The group is reportedly involved in arming the Nicaraguan rebels, the leaking of information to news agencies for propaganda purposes, the drafting of martial law plans for national emergencies, and the monitoring of United States citizens considered potential security risks.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Tim Shorrock, "Exposing Bush's historic abuse of power," Salon, July 23, 2008,

https://www.salon.com/2008/07/23/new_churchcomm/.

¹⁶⁹ Shorrock, "Exposing Bush's historic abuse of power."

¹⁷⁰ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 138-40.

¹⁷¹ "Profile: Jack Brooks," History Commons, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://archive.ph/gxdDt>.

The report concluded that “the secret parallel government” was “tied to the highly classified Continuity of Government (COG) program, originally designed to keep the government functioning in times of disaster.”¹⁷²

Critically, the Reagan administration’s version of COG went beyond merely rehearsals or exercises for government contingency and instead operated as a shadow government that facilitated some of the administration’s most infamous (and illegal) activities such as the Iran-Contra Affair (1981–1986). Iran-Contra, orchestrated and facilitated by figures in Reagan’s National Security Council and intelligence agencies, involved the covert sale of various weapons to Iranian entities.¹⁷³ The profits from the sales were used to covertly fund the Contras, an extremely violent “rebel” organization propped up by the Reagan administration in an attempt to overthrow the Socialist Sandinista government (1979–1990) in Nicaragua.¹⁷⁴ Reagan’s COG delivered an inherent challenge, by the Executive branch, to the established law and the Constitution regarding the process of presidential succession by sidestepping Congress entirely while also exploiting COG as a front in the Iran-Contra operation that actively broke the law—as Congress had already made the funding of the Contras by United States intelligence agencies illegal.¹⁷⁵ It is unclear to what extent Rumsfeld participated in these darker functions of the Reagan-era COG programs but it is noteworthy to mention his role here for a few reasons. The first reason is that Rumsfeld’s COG participation, as well as Iran-Contra, occur simultaneously with Rumsfeld’s brief role as Special Envoy to the Middle East (discussed in the next

¹⁷² “Profile: Jack Brooks,” History Commons, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://archive.ph/gxdDt>.

¹⁷³ Douglas Valentine, *The CIA as Organized Crime: How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World*, (Atlanta: Clarity Press, Inc., 2017), 126.

¹⁷⁴ Valentine, *The CIA as Organized Crime*, 146.

¹⁷⁵ Doyle McManus, “Contras Amply Funded Despite Congress’ Ban: Reportedly Got \$88 Million From 1984 to ‘86, Half Coming From Private, Foreign Sources,” *The Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 1, 1987, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-02-01-mn-502-story.html>.

section) which also happens to involve United States' covert foreign policy in Iran, specifically in the war between Iraq and Iran. Second, during the 9/11 attacks, COG went live with former Reagan-era COG team leaders Rumsfeld and Cheney now occupying prominent roles in the W. Bush administration as Secretary of Defense and Vice-President, respectively.¹⁷⁶

Rumsfeld as Special Envoy to the Middle East

Rumsfeld also held a brief yet significant role in the Reagan administration as a Special Envoy to the Middle East in parts of 1983 and 1984. The Reagan administration established the position immediately following the aftermath of the deadly 1983 attack on United States Marines in Beirut, Lebanon, in an attempt to retain American influence in the region. It was a product of a more extensive United States foreign policy operation to curtail and sabotage the rising influence and power of Iran—a burgeoning adversary to the United States' interests in the region.¹⁷⁷ With his new role, Rumsfeld returned to his roots of challenging the foreign policy consensus just as he did with Kissinger during his days in the Nixon and Ford administrations. This time, Rumsfeld's primary target was Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger (1917–2006), who Rumsfeld accused of not being tough enough with Iran and not effectively challenging its influence in the region, specifically in Lebanon.¹⁷⁸ In addition to causing immediate friction within the Reagan administration's foreign policy team, Rumsfeld was assigned a noteworthy task as Special Envoy: to meet with Iraq's Saddam Hussein.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Eric R. Daleo, "State Constitutions and Legislative Continuity in a 9/11 World: Surviving an "Enemy Attack," *DePaul Law Review* Vol. 58, no. 4 (2009): 919-70, <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1237&context=law-review>.

¹⁷⁷ "The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld."

¹⁷⁸ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 125.

¹⁷⁹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 124.

During the infamous meetings between Saddam and Rumsfeld, the two supposedly met to reinvigorate the relations between the United States and Iraq within the greater context of checking Iran's power and influence.¹⁸⁰ Given that Iraq and Iran had been engaged in war since 1980, Iraq was considered the most formidable challenge or opponent to Iran in the region, and this, of course, served the United States' interests.¹⁸¹ According to the foreign correspondent Robert Fisk (1946–2020), throughout the conflict, the United States' security and intelligence agencies, along with Western European counterparts, actively supplied Iraq with "battlefield intelligence so that [Iraq] could prepare themselves for the mass Iranian attacks."¹⁸² The American government attempted to conceal this joint-military cooperation with Iraq against Iran from the public. Despite their efforts, the information became widely public following a joint *Newsweek* and *Nightline* investigation that called the United States' cooperation with Iraq against Iran a "Secret War."¹⁸³ The full scope of the United States' cooperation with Saddam came to light following an initial investigation into the downing of Iran Air 655 on July 3, 1988, which killed 290 civilians.¹⁸⁴ The USS Vincennes, a missile cruiser in service with the United States Navy, shot down this Iranian civilian airliner while the United States cruiser illegally occupied Iranian national waters as part of a broader scheme to provide naval support to Saddam's ground troops; this maneuver was known as Operation Praying Mantis in 1988.¹⁸⁵

It did not end there, though. Part of the "battlefield intelligence" the United States provided to Iraq to help them "prepare for the mass Iranian attacks" included target sites and

¹⁸⁰ Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East*, (New York: Random House, 2005), 213.

¹⁸¹ Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization*, 214.

¹⁸² Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization*, 213.

¹⁸³ Ted Koppel, "Public War/Secret War," *Nightline/Newsweek*, 1 July 1992, video,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-ElU38kipk&ab_channel=Kalseborz.

¹⁸⁴ Koppel, "Public War/Secret War," 8:09.

¹⁸⁵ Koppel, "Public War/Secret War," 33:30.

logistics for strategic and offensive bombing against Iran. This collusion (ironic due to future circumstances) was ultimately born out of another irony. The United States and Iraqi cooperation began after Iraq bombed the USS Stark on May 17, 1987.¹⁸⁶ After this attack, which killed thirty-seven American military men, the United States came closer together with Iraq and began sharing intelligence and coordinating their bombing targets. Speaking in memorial of those killed in the attack, neoconservative ally and then-President Reagan singled out not Iraq but Iran.¹⁸⁷ In supposed honor of the men who died, the president did not scorn the attackers but used it as a ploy to further what Nightline/Newsweek called the “Secret War” in cooperation with Iraq, all while continuing to demonize the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the closure of the televised segment Ted Koppel (b. 1940) supposed that the highly publicized Iran-Contra scandal (running from 1985 to 1992) was, in part, a diversion from this support of the Iraqi war effort against Iran.¹⁸⁸

The meetings between Rumsfeld and Saddam were ostensibly held to establish a United States Embassy in Iraq. In late 1984, after Rumsfeld had already departed from his position as Special Envoy, the Reagan administration announced that it had “restored full diplomatic relations with Iraq” due in part to the groundwork Rumsfeld laid in his 1983 meetings with Saddam.¹⁸⁹ Yet, other reports on this position revealed a much darker component of these meetings wherein Rumsfeld was sent to personally reassure Saddam of the United States’ support, despite the United States’ widely known indiscriminate use of chemical weapons against Iran.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Koppel, “Public War/Secret War,” 24:03.

¹⁸⁷ Koppel, “Public War/Secret War,” 25:00.

¹⁸⁸ Koppel, “Public War/Secret War,” 38:23.

¹⁸⁹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 126.

¹⁹⁰ Dana Priest, “Rumsfeld’s ‘84 Visit was to Reassure Iraqis,” *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2003, <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/history/2003/1219rumsfeldvisit.htm>.

The depravity and sheer irony of this entire episode are utterly astonishing. For all the concern that would be later promulgated by people like Rumsfeld about Saddam's alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), there was not a scintilla of concern for the *confirmed* use of chemical weapons when it served the interests of the United States foreign policy and its conductors like Rumsfeld. Furthermore, this support for Iraq and its blatant war crimes and crimes against humanity completely undermines the idea that United States foreign policy is governed by the pursuit of strengthening human rights. It is this mythology that drives neoliberalism and neoconservatism and positions the United States as the premier force for good in the world. The brief history of United States foreign policy over the better part of the twentieth and twenty-first century, through the analysis of Rumsfeld's life, ideology, and role in the United States government, demonstrates the fallacy of the myth of American exceptionalism and humanitarianism. And to top this all off, Rumsfeld, of all possible figures, acted in the role of lead facilitator in strengthening relations with Iraq when, in short order, he would be a lead saboteur in these same relations in the W. Bush administration.

Thus, Rumsfeld's role as a conductor of United States foreign policy lays bare the inconvenient truths and contradictions embedded in these policies. Overall, this episode between the United States and Iraq, mediated by Rumsfeld, reveals the actual intentions of the United States foreign policy elite: to pursue the geopolitical interests of the United States and to sabotage, by whatever means necessary, potential and actual rivals such as Iran and, later, Iraq. This would come to be enshrined as a set of principles called Dual Containment where the United States wished to limit both Iraqi and Iranian influence and hoped to pit them against each other by fueling the flames on both sides during the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988. It was also enshrined in another set of principles in the early 1990s known as the Wolfowitz Doctrine. Named after Rumsfeld's close neoconservative ally, Wolfowitz, the Wolfowitz Doctrine is the

informal name given to the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, a biannual evaluation of the United States foreign policy formulation. This was the first biannual revaluation since the collapse of the Soviet Union at the turn of the decade and now the United States, directed by the neoconservatives, saw itself as the sole superpower in the world with no potential military adversary to counter their neoliberal and neocolonial designs backed up by military might.¹⁹¹

PNAC and the 1990s

During the 1996 presidential election, Rumsfeld shifted his attention back to partisan politics as a foreign policy advisor and then National Campaign Chair for the Republican Party candidate Bob Dole (1923–2021).¹⁹² Here, Rumsfeld's actions as a foreign policy advisor show, once again, his preoccupation with geopolitics throughout the decades, even when he was technically out of government. Rumsfeld increased his participation and affiliation with the Republican Party and neoconservative political circles after his work on the Dole campaign. For example, between 1998 and 2000, Rumsfeld became a prominent figure in a series of meetings that included the most established leaders in the Republican Party.¹⁹³ These meetings intended to determine the policy platform of the Republican party in preparation for the presidential election in 2000.¹⁹⁴ Rumsfeld collaborated with leading figures in the neoconservative faction—such as Cheney, Wolfowitz, and Condoleezza Rice (b. 1954) on the foreign policy platform.¹⁹⁵

Additionally, Rumsfeld affiliated with a new think tank called Project for the New American Century (PNAC) which

¹⁹¹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 209.

¹⁹² “The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld.”

¹⁹³ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 238–42.

¹⁹⁴ “The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld.”

¹⁹⁵ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 238–42.

produced reports and analyses on United States foreign policy.¹⁹⁶ PNAC was founded and coordinated by many leading neoconservative figures and intellectuals such as Bill Kristol (b. 1952), son of neoconservatism founder Irving Kristol, and Robert (b. 1958) and Donald Kagan (1932–2021). The project promoted a worldview that portrayed a United States that embraced its role as a global hegemon, as supposed by the Wolfowitz Doctrine.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, many individuals who collaborated in PNAC went on to serve in the W. Bush administration. These collaborators included Rumsfeld as Defense Secretary, Dick Cheney as Vice President, Wolfowitz as Deputy Defense Secretary, John R. Bolton (b. 1948) as a State Department official, and the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Armitage (b. 1945) as Deputy Secretary of State, and Elliot Abrams (b. 1948) as Deputy National Security Advisor), among others.¹⁹⁸

PNAC strongly advocated for policies that increased military and national security spending, pursued and protected American interests around the globe, and used aggressive military force against states that threatened these interests.¹⁹⁹ Rumsfeld,

¹⁹⁶ Project for the New American Century home webpage, Internet Archive Wayback Machine, accessed April 8, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130615140450/http://newamericancentury.org/index.html>.

¹⁹⁷ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “Toward a NeoReaganite Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, 1996. For more information, see also: “About PNAC.” Project for the New American Century. Accessed April 5, 2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20130615131127/http://newamericancentury.org/aboutpnac.htm>; Gary G. Kohls, “A Think Tank Named PNAC (the Project for a New American Century),” *Free Press*, September 11, 2019, <https://freepress.org/article/think-tank-named-pnac-project-new-american-century>.

¹⁹⁸ George Packer, “PNAC and Iraq,” *The New Yorker*, March 29, 2009, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/george-packer/pnac-and-iraq>.

¹⁹⁹ Donald Abelson, “First Impressions, Second Thoughts: Reflections on the Changing Role of Think Tanks in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Critical Issues of Our Time* Vol. 8, (2011): 1-24, https://web.archive.org/web/20121130180152/http://cas.uwo.ca/_files/Critical%20issuesvol81.pdf.

along with many of those listed above, was a signatory to PNAC's original Statement of Principles and was also involved in a PNAC-led campaign that pushed for the removal of Hussein in Iraq in 1998.²⁰⁰ One of PNAC's most significant reports, *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources For a New Century*, published in 2000, called for a "transformation" of the United States military (which PNAC affiliate Rumsfeld would implement as incoming Defense Secretary) and detailed and analyzed numerous strategies and findings of reestablishing and maintaining the United States' military superiority to facilitate its global dominance. The goal of the report read as follows: "This report proceeds from the belief that America should seek to preserve and extend its position of global leadership by maintaining the preeminence of the United States' military forces."²⁰¹

Moreover, the report emphasized throughout that the "preeminence" of the United States, along with its interests, was threatened by adversary nations such as China, Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Iraq was mentioned twenty-five times in the document, more frequently than any of the other countries listed above.²⁰² According to PNAC,

The United States has for decades sought to play a more permanent role in Gulf regional security. While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the

²⁰⁰ "Statement of Principles," Project for the New American Century, June 3, 1997, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130621044610/http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm>; See also Abelson, "First Impressions, Second Thoughts: Reflections on the Changing Role of Think Tanks in U.S. Foreign Policy."

²⁰¹ Donald Kagan, Gary Schmitt, and Thomas Donnelly, "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources For a New Century," Project for the New American Century, September 2000, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130817122719/http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>.

²⁰² PNAC, "Rebuilding America's Defenses."

immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein.²⁰³

For PNAC and its contributors, Iraq was to be targeted by a revamped and aggressive United States foreign policy, expressed through the military. Iraq served as the model for how the United States should deal with adversaries that “threatened” United States interests around the globe.

During the same time as the rise of PNAC in the late 1990s, Rumsfeld also advocated for the installment of an increased quantity and advanced quality of missile defense systems as a policy to meet these supposed threats.²⁰⁴ In 1998, Rumsfeld led the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States.²⁰⁵ This congressional commission, informally called the Rumsfeld Commission, was fueled by the Congressional Republican leadership’s discontent with the intelligence community’s assertions that the United States was relatively secure from ballistic missile threats. Thus, an external evaluation was ordered.

Rumsfeld modeled the commission after the Ford-era Team B intelligence review, a review Rumsfeld knew well given his role as Defense Secretary at the time and because he personally urged Ford to establish it in the first place. Moreover, Wolfowitz, who also participated in the Team B review, served as a commissioner.²⁰⁶ Unsurprisingly, given the political figures involved, the Rumsfeld Commission followed the Team B precedent and also concluded that the United States was *more insecure* than the intelligence community’s assertions.²⁰⁷ The commission’s report specifically named Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as the greatest threats to United States national security. As

²⁰³ PNAC, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses.”

²⁰⁴ “The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld.”

²⁰⁵ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 240-42.

²⁰⁶ “The Life & Times of Donald Rumsfeld.”

²⁰⁷ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 240-42.

noted, PNAC came to the same conclusion in 2000, and eventual President W. Bush also grouped these three supposed adversaries again publicly in an upcoming, and rather infamous, “Axis of Evil” State of the Union speech on January 29, 2002.²⁰⁸ Overall, the commission’s findings were used by the Republicans in Congress not only to undermine then-President Bill Clinton’s administration (1993–2001) but to call for more spending on missile defense systems causing a boon for defense and weapons contractors.²⁰⁹

Several of the figures involved (such as Cheney, Wolfowitz, Rice, and Rumsfeld) went on to occupy the highest positions in the administration. They emphasized the neoconservative critique of then-President Clinton’s foreign policy as what they perceived as being too accommodating to geopolitical rivals and adversaries, such as China, Russia, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea.²¹⁰ The Democratic Clinton administration did not publicly embrace the Wolfowitz Doctrine, yet it offered no alternative points of view and, ultimately, the rhetoric and actions of the Clinton administration hardly differed from the directives of the Wolfowitz Doctrine formulated under the H.W. Bush administration, despite Rumsfeld’s and his ally’s criticisms.²¹¹ The Clinton administration used their own spin on “liberal internationalism” which functions to justify military operations such as the spread of democratic values, economic liberalization

²⁰⁸ “Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission To Assess The Ballistic Missile Threat To The United States,” Federation of American Scientists, July 15, 1998, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090104044129/http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/bm-threat.htm>. See also: Rachel Bronson, “The American Surprise,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 1, 2002, <https://archive.ph/KLF8>.

²⁰⁹ The money pocketed by for-profit weapons manufacturers for this missile defense system was just one small sum in the massive pool of United States taxpayer dollars hemorrhaged out of the state into private companies in the neoliberal transformation of the Pentagon Rumsfeld ultimately oversaw as Secretary of Defense. This will be discussed further later in the article.

²¹⁰ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 238-42.

²¹¹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 214.

(neoliberalism), and humanitarian concerns.²¹² These actions by Clinton thus proved to launder these neoconservative views and shifted the Democratic foreign policy towards the neoconservative bent.²¹³ Overall, the meetings amongst neoconservative policymakers and thinkers, contributions with PNAC, and collaborative work in the Rumsfeld Commission in the late 1990s ultimately served as a staging ground for the foreign policy agenda of the future W. Bush administration.

Ultimately, the Democrats' inability or unwillingness to offer an alternative to the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance brought the parties together in a bipartisan consensus on the grand schemes of United States foreign policy, "the Republicans didn't oppose Clinton's economic vision of globalization [neoliberalization], and the Democrats did not challenge the Republican military vision of America as the sole superpower."²¹⁴ In the case of Iraq, Rumsfeld and his neoconservative PNAC colleagues already laid the intellectual groundwork for an aggressive United States military intervention to remove Saddam from power in Iraq and establish a United States presence in the country and region. The coming W. Bush administration, made up of these exact figures, ultimately continued to make aggressive and violent regime changes in Iraq, demonstrating the salience and influence of these neoconservative schemes.

For Rumsfeld, his leadership on the commission and his presence in the Republican Party's meetings and discussions on their foreign policy platform assisted in re-establishing Rumsfeld as a prominent leader in this arena, especially during W. Bush presidential campaign. Once W. Bush was named the President-elect, Rumsfeld was considered a prime candidate for one of the administration's top foreign policy posts. Initially, Rumsfeld was considered for Director of the CIA, but former CIA director and President, H.W. Bush, quashed this plan and advocated for

²¹² Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 214.

²¹³ Decades later, the Obama administration would make a similar decision. This will be discussed in further detail later in the article.

²¹⁴ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 215.

continuity in this position, as opposed to making it a purely political role.²¹⁵ In 2000, Rumsfeld continued to angle to get into the CIA, just as he was immediately before the Team B Commission. As Director of the CIA, Rumsfeld would have had massive and non-transparent influence over United States foreign policy and he would have been able to direct covert operations in service of neoliberal and neoconservative aims much like Allen Dulles was able to during his reign in the OSS and CIA.

After being rejected from the CIA for a second time, then-President-elect W. Bush and incoming Vice President Cheney selected Rumsfeld as the Secretary of Defense nominee.²¹⁶ Cheney made a strategic decision as he sought “to limit the authority of Colin Powell (1937–2021) [incoming Secretary of State and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] over the administration’s foreign policy.”²¹⁷ Before being appointed chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Powell served in active duty in Vietnam and as a chief advisor to the prior Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger (1917–2006), who Rumsfeld criticized for being too soft on geopolitical adversaries. Under Weinberger, Powell began to develop a set of principles later known as the Powell Doctrine which set out a series of requirements to be met to guarantee a successful military operation and avoid another quagmire like the Vietnam War. The doctrine required a clearly identified threat to the United States’ national security, a predetermined goal and exit strategy, an overwhelming deployment of troops as an occupation force capable of quickly quelling insurrection, and popular support from the United States’ public and international community. Following these guidelines (or Powell’s leadership) would have likely prevented the launch of the global War on Terror. Moving Powell to Secretary of State where he was in charge of civilian affairs and moving Rumsfeld to the Pentagon as Secretary of Defense was a similar maneuver to the Halloween Massacre of 1975 where Rumsfeld was appointed to

²¹⁵ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 262, 268-70.

²¹⁶ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 264-70.

²¹⁷ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 273.

Secretary of Defense for the first time to “limit the authority” of Kissinger. A quarter-century after Rumsfeld first served as Secretary of Defense during the Ford administration, he was now about to take over the same position in a move that would consolidate neoconservative influence over United States’ foreign policy for years to come.

The War on Terror

*“We gotta work to make the facts fit the false charges
Pull the wool over the eyes of the filthy masses
Stab the people in the back for the corporate choice
Roll the propaganda out using The People’s Voice...
The press scribble scribble every half-truth spoke
Then shoot it round the country like an April Fool’s joke
Hype the nation for a Desert Storm love affair
Wave the stars and stripes like you just don’t care...
And on the TV screen
Diversion and aversion is the flavor of the day
Was it WMD’s or democracy?”*
- Anti-Flag “The Press Corpse.”²¹⁸

*“Embedded correspondents don’t tell the source of the
tension
And they refuse to even mention European intervention
Or the massacres in Jenin, the innocent screams
U.S. manufactured missiles, and M-16’s
Weapon contracts and corrupted American dreams
Media censorship blocking out the video screens...
It’s like MK ULTRA controlling your brain*

²¹⁸ Anti-Flag, “The Press Corpse,” track 2 on *For Blood and Empire*, RCA Records, 2006, CD.

Suggestive thinking causing your perspective to change.”

- *Immortal Technique, “The 4th Branch.”*²¹⁹

Rumsfeld’s Neoliberal Transformation of the Pentagon and PNAC

Upon Rumsfeld’s return to the helm of the Pentagon under W. Bush, he prioritized the objective of transforming the military. The use of the word “transforming” or “transformation” is instructive as it is the same language used by PNAC (over one hundred times) in their 2000 report, *Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources For a New Century*.²²⁰ Moreover, the PNAC report explicitly cited both the “Cheney Defense Department” and the 1992 Defense Policy Guidance (i.e. Wolfowitz Doctrine) as its influence on the transformation. The report stated,

In broad terms, we saw the project as building upon the defense strategy outlined by the Cheney Defense Department in the waning days of the [W.] Bush Administration. The Defense Policy Guidance (DPG) drafted in the early months of 1992 provided a blueprint for maintaining United States preeminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests.²²¹

To reiterate, Rumsfeld, Cheney, and Wolfowitz all participated and collaborated with PNAC and now occupied the appropriate positions of power in the W. Bush administration to implement the *exact* policies they and their PNAC affiliates promoted.

In one sense, this transformation meant bringing the institution up to a twenty-first-century standard concerning its

²¹⁹ Immortal Technique, “The 4th Branch,” track 10 on *Revolutionary Vol. 2*, Viper Records, 2003, CD.

²²⁰ PNAC, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses.”

²²¹ PNAC, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses.”

weaponry, technology, and strategy to effectively meet the supposed threats as PNAC routinely urged.²²² However, according to Klein, this transformation was as much about economics as it was about military capabilities.²²³ Influenced by his decades of experience running large corporations (G.D. Searle, General Instruments, Gilead Sciences), Rumsfeld brought many of the same tendencies to the Pentagon, some of which included: outsourcing, increased reliance on private contractors, cost-cutting on labor, and increased privatization of Department of Defense services and functions.²²⁴ This project of neoliberalism, obfuscated through the abstract language of a “transformation,” aimed to further entrench the interests of capital and profiteering at the heart of government and at the heart of waging war.

In a now widely forgotten speech delivered by Rumsfeld on September 10, 2001, he made the goals of this impending neoliberal transformation clear when he explicitly called for greater privatization efforts at the Pentagon to replace the “inefficient” services and functions of government. According to Klein, Rumsfeld “had already directed his senior staff to ‘scour the Department [of Defense] for functions that could be performed better and more cheaply through commercial outsourcing.’”²²⁵ Moreover, in reference to the Pentagon’s health services, Rumsfeld explained that “some of those needs, especially where they may involve general practice or specialties...might be more efficiently delivered by the private sector.”²²⁶ With this speech, Rumsfeld put the Pentagon on notice. In short order, the Pentagon was to be “transformed” into one giant public-private partnership wherein increased functions and operations—previously done in-house—were

²²² PNAC, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses.”

²²³ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 361-64.

²²⁴ Paul C. Light, “Rumsfeld’s Revolution at Defense,” *Brookings*, July 1, 2005, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/rumsfelds-revolution-at-defense/>.

²²⁵ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 362. See also: “Donald Rumsfeld 9/10 FULL Context,” C-SPAN, September 10, 2001, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4976593/user-clip-donald-rumsfeld-910-full-context>.

²²⁶ “Donald Rumsfeld 9/10 FULL Context,” C-SPAN, 14:35 to 14:45; Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 362.

now outsourced to a network of for-profit private contractors. In 1992, the Cheney Defense Department laid the groundwork for this neoliberal-sided transformation when it contracted with Kellogg Brown & Root (KB&R), a subsidiary of Halliburton (an American multinational corporation responsible for most of the world's hydraulic fracturing operations), to produce a study on the efficacy of neoliberal privatization.²²⁷ The study found, unsurprisingly, that such privatization would be a win-win for the government and private corporations that key government officials such as Cheney and Rumsfeld held connections to and had financial interests in (such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin for Rumsfeld personally). The production of the B2 bomber is most emblematic of this neoliberal transformation's interconnected economic and political goals. By 2005, at least one part of the bomber was produced in each of the fifty states ensuring continued bipartisan support for privatization for the MIC, which created jobs in every jurisdiction.²²⁸

Rumsfeld functioned as a conductor of this neoliberal transformation, masquerading as a government official to supposedly "serve the public interest" while simultaneously advancing the profiteering interests of capital, as well as his own. Gone were the days of the Nixon administration when Rumsfeld advocated for increased social program spending at the OEO and showed disregard for the script of his mentor, Friedman. Now in his late sixties, with neoliberalism generally adopted as a globalized economic consensus since the Clinton administration, he fully embraced the economic theories of Friedman.²²⁹ Thirty years after his stint at the OEO, he came back around to actualizing Friedman's goals of marginalizing the role of government and giving more power and control to private enterprise and capital on a scale infinitely larger than his old department.

²²⁷ Cheney would lead as CEO of Halliburton after serving as Defense Secretary. *Why We Fight*, directed by Eugene Jarecki (BBC Storyville & CBC, 2005), DVD, 42:45.

²²⁸ *Why We Fight*, 38:44.

²²⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 13.

Whether Rumsfeld truly subscribed to the neoliberal ideology espoused by Friedman or if those economic theories were solely a vehicle to achieve his self-interests, his actions under the W. Bush administration skirted the lines of blatant corruption. Throughout Rumsfeld's time as Secretary of Defense, there were numerous conflicts of interest and controversies related to the private contractors that did business with the Pentagon. One of the most noteworthy conflicts of interest related to Rumsfeld was the case of Gilead Sciences where he served as Chair of the Board from 1997 to 2000. As part of his compensation, he held a sizable amount of stock in the company, "[y]et despite his glaring conflict of interest, Rumsfeld failed to sell off his Gilead stocks for his entire term in office, holding on to somewhere between \$8 million and \$39 million worth of Gilead holdings."²³⁰ This move paid off mightily for Rumsfeld when, a few years later, an Avian Flu outbreak led the Department of Defense to purchase \$58 million worth of Tamiflu, a Gilead Sciences product, and the Department of Health and Human Services purchased nearly \$1 billion worth.²³¹ Between 2001 and the time Rumsfeld left his post as Secretary of Defense in 2006, the stock price for Gilead had increased by over eight hundred percent.²³² This Gilead Sciences affair demonstrates what Rumsfeld's position as an agent of neoliberalism entailed: the complete infiltration of private capital and enterprise into the public sector so that their interests merge into one, with extreme profiteering and self-enrichment as a result. Rumsfeld synthesized the power and authority of both government and capital. These Gilead contracts were one of the most blatant forms of corruption between Rumsfeld's Pentagon and private contractors, but it was by no means the only case.

In addition to the Gilead conflict of interest, Rumsfeld also held stocks in numerous defense industry firms, including MIC behemoths such as Lockheed Martin and Boeing, during the W.

²³⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 394.

²³¹ Nelson Schwartz, "Rumsfeld's growing stake in Tamiflu," *Fortune*, October 31, 2005, http://911omissionreport.com/rumsfeld_tamiflu.html.

²³² Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 395.

Bush administration.²³³ Although he would elect to sell off the stocks he owned in those larger firms, for other contractors he put his holdings in a blind trust or asked for extensions to organize these assets.²³⁴ All of these various conflicts of interest with defense contractors imposed a direct impact on his functions as defense secretary, as he begrudgingly recused himself from decisions that involved companies in which he had a financial stake.²³⁵

By no means, however, were these episodes of corruption and war profiteering unique or only limited to the actions of a *rogue* Rumsfeld. At least seventy-one companies received contracts in the impending invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. All of the top ten corporate recipients of government funding had ties to former United States officials who worked in the Pentagon or other parts of government. The number one recipient was the aforementioned Halliburton (connected KB&R) which employed roughly sixty-five thousand people in various private roles assisting the troops.²³⁶ In roughly five years, Cheney's own wealth shot up from roughly one million or less to sixty or seventy million.²³⁷ On the topic of Halliburton's seemingly corrupt dealings, Republican Senator John McCain (1936–2018) commented, "It looks bad and apparently more than once [Halliburton] has overcharged the federal government. That's wrong. I would have a public investigation of what they've done."²³⁸ Although he was a critical facilitator, Rumsfeld served as merely a single node in a vast network of appointed and elected government officials, defense contractors, and others who would

²³³ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 393.

²³⁴ "Rumsfeld: Over \$20 Million In Stock Sold to Avoid Conflicts," *The Washington Post*, June 19, 2002, <https://archive.ph/ysnfR>.

²³⁵ Robert Burns, Burns, Robert. "Defense Chief Shuns Involvement in Weapons and Merger Decisions to Avoid Conflict of Interest," *Associated Press*, August 23, 2001.

²³⁶ *Why We Fight*, 40:21.

²³⁷ *Why We Fight*, 43:35.

²³⁸ *Why We Fight*, 44:22.

financially benefit from this neoliberal transformation towards a MIC-dominated foreign policy.

Despite the priority that Rumsfeld and the W. Bush administration placed on this neoliberal transformation, other leaders in the Pentagon and the military pushed back.²³⁹ In fact, in that same widely forgotten speech delivered by Rumsfeld on September 10, 2001, he declared the bureaucracy of the Pentagon to be an “adversary that poses a threat, a serious threat to the security of the United States of America...today we declare war on bureaucracy.”²⁴⁰ This provocative stance stemmed from Rumsfeld’s discontent with what he determined as obstacles to the neoliberal transformation. Rumsfeld, however, was not the first to complain about the barriers the contemporary Pentagon posed to a potential transformation. In September 2000 (a year before Rumsfeld’s speech), PNAC made a similar complaint about their own “transformation” in *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*.²⁴¹ In a section entitled, “Creating Tomorrow’s Dominant Force,” the report’s authors lament over a Pentagon “constrained” in its ability to carry out PNAC’s recommendations to improve the military’s capabilities due to its limited budget and resources.²⁴² The authors of the report go on to make a highly noteworthy prediction as to how their recommendations may be adopted and implemented in the future stating, “the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor.”²⁴³ It is worth noting again some of Rumsfeld’s earlier testimony surrounding his first-hand memories of Pearl Harbor, where he hardly understood its significance but still understood that the country must now go to war from a cursory understanding of media reports and the public hysteria. After a catastrophic and

²³⁹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 289-91.

²⁴⁰ “Donald Rumsfeld 9/10 FULL Context,” C-SPAN, 0:40 to 1:45, 24:10 to 24:23.

²⁴¹ PNAC, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses.”

²⁴² PNAC, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses.”

²⁴³ PNAC, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses.”

catalyzing event, Rumsfeld didn't *need* to know the facts, the information was not important; the fever of war was infectious.

Only one year after the publication of *Rebuilding America's Defenses*, and mere hours after Rumsfeld's Pentagon speech, the United States was dealt this new Pearl Harbor when it experienced arguably the most catastrophic and catalyzing event in its history on September 11, 2001. Now, Rumsfeld and his other PNAC-affiliated colleagues in the W. Bush administration would see all of these obstacles brushed aside given the unprecedented national emergency ushered in by the 9/11 attacks. This unilateral power would be a transformation that went beyond the neoliberal scheme at the Pentagon and even United States foreign policy; it would engulf the entire political order of the world.

Rumsfeld's War: Afghanistan (2001–2021)

“And is it possible that what took place on September 11th...that maybe out of this tragedy comes opportunity. Maybe, just maybe, the world will sufficiently register the danger that exists on the globe and have this event cause the kind of sense of urgency and offer the kind of opportunities that World War II offered, to refashion much of the world.”

- Donald Rumsfeld in an interview with *The New York Times* on October 12, 2001.²⁴⁴

The 9/11 attacks marked a turning point in United States foreign policy which was now shaped in the image of the neoconservatives in the Bush administration who embodied the ideas of the Wolfowitz Doctrine and PNAC. Moreover, 9/11 allowed these neoconservatives to fast-track their agenda in a heightened environment of fear. Fear like the fear Rumsfeld drummed up

²⁴⁴ “News Transcript – Secretary Rumsfeld Interview with the New York Times,” United States Department of Defense, October 14, 2001, <http://www.aldeilis.net/terror/1192.pdf>.

under Team B, repeated in The Rumsfeld Commission, and used to sell the American public on a war in Iraq after 9/11, or even the fear he remembered from Pearl Harbor that justified the United States' entrance into a war that the United States government had been slowly trying to convince the public of. In other words, the neoconservatives knew how to take advantage of the crisis. They packaged their foreign policy under a catch-all term that exemplified this heightened environment of fear: the War on Terror. Afghanistan was to be the opening salvo of their war, as one commentator on CNN put it shortly after 9/11: "We're gonna attack somebody, we're gonna bomb some place, there's no question about that. The question is where are we gonna do it and why?"²⁴⁵

Afghanistan remained a focal point of the United States' foreign policy since at least the Carter administration (1977–1981) when National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–2017) "was the driving force behind the Carter administration's strategy in Afghanistan" in a covert scheme called Operation Cyclone.²⁴⁶ This operation, coordinated by the CIA and Saudi and Pakistani intelligence agencies between 1979 and 1992, involved the funding, arming, training, and facilitating of fundamentalist Islamic extremists in Afghanistan and the surrounding region, called the *Mujahideen*; this included native Afghans and foreigners such as the Saudi-born Osama bin Laden (1957–2011).²⁴⁷ The first purpose of this operation was to support an armed rebellion by the Mujahideen against the communist Afghan government to draw a Soviet military response in aid of the Soviet-allied Afghan government. Next, the operation aimed to ultimately support and arm the Mujahideen in a guerrilla war with the Soviet Union itself.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ *Why We Fight*, 23:27.

²⁴⁶ Max Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery* (New York: Verso, 2019), 10-14.

²⁴⁷ Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery*, 10-14.

²⁴⁸ Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery*, 10-14.

In an interview given in 1998, Brzezinski, in no uncertain terms, explained what the goal of this operation was: “That secret operation [Operation Cyclone] was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into an Afghan trap...The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter, essentially: ‘We now have the opportunity of giving to the Soviet Union its Vietnam War.’”²⁴⁹ This opportunity, seized by Brzezinski and the Carter administration, carried over into the incoming Reagan administration. The CIA-backed Mujahideen ultimately outlasted the Soviet Union in 1989, in large part due to the failing Soviet economy, which forced their withdrawal from the prolonged conflict. Both the neoconservatives and the Islamists falsely believed that their collaborative project in Afghanistan was *solely* responsible for the Soviet Union’s impending dissolution.²⁵⁰ Rather than consider the internal political contexts of the Soviet Union’s dissolution, both believed a simpler myth that their militaristic adventurism was directly responsible for the Soviet’s fall.

In the aftermath, the victorious and empowered Mujahideen factionalized and began to turn their inherited weapons against each other in the power vacuum that was Afghanistan which led to further bloodshed in a years-long violent civil war.²⁵¹ Of the various groups that formed as direct descendants of the Mujahideen, two deserve mention: the Taliban and al-Qaeda. These groups maintained fundamentalist Islamic extremist tendencies but had distinct political goals. The Taliban, composed of primarily ethnic Pashtuns, attained power in Afghanistan in 1996 after they gained control of the capital, Kabul. According to

²⁴⁹ Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery*, 11.

²⁵⁰ Steve Coll, “Anatomy of a Victory: CIA’s Covert Afghan War,” *The Washington Post*, July 19, 1992, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/07/19/anatomy-of-a-victory-cias-covert-afghan-war/1bd10b14-a0cc-441c-99cc-d2b5d1ba6e2d/>.

²⁵¹ Katherine Harvey, “Afghanistan, The United States, and the Legacy of Afghanistan’s Civil War,” Stanford University, June 5, 2003, <https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/Afghanistan,%20the%20United%20States.htm>.

Fisk, “The Taliban had finally vanquished twelve of the fifteen venal Afghan mujahedin militias...and imposed their own stark legitimacy on its people. It was a purist, Sunni Wahhabi faith whose interpretation of sharia recalled the most draconian of early Christian prelates.”²⁵² The Taliban primarily concerned itself with establishing order via strict Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan *exclusively*. It is also worth noting that despite the bellicosity of the W. Bush administration towards the Taliban after 9/11, United States companies such as the Union Oil Company of California (Unocal) negotiated with the new Taliban government to secure pipeline rights in the country.²⁵³ Two of Unocal’s employees—Zalmay Khalilzad (b. 1951), future United States Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2004 to 2005, and Hamid Karzai (b. 1957), future President of Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014—would then be put in power by the W. Bush administration to facilitate Afghanistan’s new government after the United States invasion.²⁵⁴

The second faction of the Mujahideen, al-Qaeda, was largely created and led by Osama bin Laden. The faction devoted itself to expelling the presence of the United States military in the entire Middle East region.²⁵⁵ Bin Laden specifically protested the United States military presence in his birthplace of Saudi Arabia following the war in Iraq in 1991. Fisk argues that the “big mistake by the Saudi regime of inviting the American troops revealed [the Saudi regime’s] deception. They were giving their support to nations [the United States] which were fighting against Muslims.”²⁵⁶ The United States government began to blame al-Qaeda for violent terror tactics against United States government infrastructure in and outside the region in the years before 9/11, such as the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996, the

²⁵² Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization*, 27.

²⁵³ Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization*, 28.

²⁵⁴ Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization*, 28.

²⁵⁵ Najwa bin Laden, Omar bin Laden, and Jean Sasson, *Growing Up bin Laden* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 175; Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization*, 21, 31-32.

²⁵⁶ Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization*, 21.

United States Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the USS Cole bombing in Yemen in 2000.²⁵⁷ Throughout the mid to late 1990s, bin Laden lived in Afghanistan with the permission of the Taliban.²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the United States government accused bin Laden of operating al-Qaeda while he lived here. Critics of the United States' narrative pointed out the disconnection between the allegations and the reality. Fisk, who personally interviewed bin Laden multiple times, questioned,

Was [Osama's tent in the Afghan mountainsides] really...the centre of 'world terror'? Listening to the spokesman at the United States State Department, reading the editorials in *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, I might have been forgiven for believing that bin Laden ran his 'terror network' from a state-of-the-art bunker of computers and digitalized battle plans, flicking a switch to instruct his followers to assault another Western target. But this man seemed divorced from the outside world.²⁵⁹

Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the W. Bush administration began to confidently assert that al-Qaeda and bin Laden were primarily responsible, despite the absence of a thoroughly comprehensive investigation.²⁶⁰ In an interview in 2001, Condoleezza Rice—then-National Security Advisor—stated that “everybody assumed that it was al-Qaeda because the operation looked like al-Qaeda, quacked like al-Qaeda,

²⁵⁷ “TIMELINE - Major attacks by al Qaeda,” *Reuters*, May 2, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-56711920110502>.

²⁵⁸ Bin Laden, et al., *Growing Up bin Laden*, 175.

²⁵⁹ Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization*, 30.

²⁶⁰ Kevin Robert Ryan, *Another Nineteen: Investigating Legitimate 9/11 Suspects* (Las Vegas: Microbloom, 2013), 6-8.

seemed like al-Qaeda.”²⁶¹ After the W. Bush administration assigned blame for the attacks to al-Qaeda, they decided to launch a war in Afghanistan to eliminate their presence and its Taliban sponsors. As Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld assumed his turn to manage United States foreign policy in Afghanistan, which effectively involved the destruction of the descendants of the Mujahideen. Yesterday’s holy warriors who had the unbridled support of United States foreign policy elites in both the Carter and Reagan administration (Rumsfeld included) were today’s terrorists.²⁶² Like the Soviets in 1979, the United States began a nightmarish invasion of Afghanistan and, on October 7, 2001, just twenty-six days after the 9/11 attacks, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom with a United States-led invasion and assault on Afghanistan.

By December of 2001, the war had begun to severely cripple the Taliban, and United States media reported that the Taliban leaders were offering terms of surrender to the United States-backed Northern Alliance and its leader Hamid Karzai (b. 1957).²⁶³ Rumsfeld, however, showed no interest in negotiating a surrender. According to New York Times writer, Brian Knowlton (n.d.),

Mr. Rumsfeld raised questions...about the agreement, saying that United States forces were continuing their attacks unabated in eastern and southern Afghanistan and saying that the war was far from being over... ‘I do not think there will be a

²⁶¹ “Bush’s War Transcript,” PBS, 2008,

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline////////bushswar/etc/script.html>.

²⁶² *Why We Fight*, 58:30.

²⁶³ Brian Knowlton, “Rumsfeld Rejects Plan To Allow Mullah Omar ‘To Live in Dignity’: Taliban Fighters Agree to Surrender Kandahar,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 2001,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/07/news/rumsfeld-rejects-planto-allow-mullah-omar-to-live-in-dignity-taliban.html>.

negotiated end to the situation that's unacceptable to the United States.'²⁶⁴

Consequently, the war continued while the W. Bush administration and Rumsfeld turned their attention away from Afghanistan and focused on the next stage of the War on Terror. Rumsfeld and other officials in the administration maintained their sights on Saddam and Iraq.²⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Afghanistan and its people were subject to a war that went on for almost twenty more years and extended into three subsequent presidential administrations: Obama (2009–2017), Trump (2017–2021), and Biden (2021–Present). By the time of the final withdrawal in 2021, over 200,000 people were killed in this war with a conservative estimate of over 70,000 civilians.²⁶⁶

In a war euphemistically named Operation Enduring Freedom (reportedly coined by Rumsfeld) after nearly twenty years of bloodshed and the United States' occupation, only violence and death have appeared to endure while freedom has not *existed* in any substantial form let alone *endured*.²⁶⁷ As former NATO commander Wesley Clark (b. 1944) testified in an interview with *Democracy Now!*, this invasion of Afghanistan represented only the beginning of a larger plot:

About ten days after 9/11, I went through the Pentagon and I saw Secretary Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz... and one of the generals called me in, he said, "Sir, you gotta come in, you've gotta come in and talk to me a second"...He says "We've made the decision we're going to war

²⁶⁴ This draws parallels to the United States' refusal to accept the Japanese surrender in World War II to justify United States militarism. Knowlton, "Rumsfeld Rejects Plan To Allow Mullah Omar 'To Live in Dignity.'"

²⁶⁵ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 307-10.

²⁶⁶ "Costs of War: Afghan Civilians," Brown University, April 2021, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>.

²⁶⁷ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster 2002), 134-35.

with Iraq”... I said “We’re going to war with Iraq? Why?” He said, “I don’t know.” He said, “I guess they don’t know what else to do.” So I said, “Well did they find some information connecting Saddam to al-Qaeda?” He said, “No, no... there’s nothing new that way they just made the decision to go to war with Iraq”... So I came back to see him a few weeks later, and by that time we were bombing in Afghanistan, I said, “Are we still going to war with Iraq?” And he said, “Oh it’s worse than that.” He reached over on his desk, he picked up a piece of paper and he said, “I just got this down from upstairs”—meaning the Secretary of Defense’s [Rumsfeld’s] office—he said, “This is a memo that describes how we’re going to take out seven countries in five years starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finishing off, Iran.”²⁶⁸

As of 2022, a bipartisan consensus effectively implemented this neoconservative policy. All of these countries have been targeted by the United States (such as Syria and Libya under Obama, or Biden’s redeployment to Somalia declared on May 16, 2022) or their allies (such as Israeli aggression against Lebanon) with direct military action or constant saber-rattling and intermittent conflict (such as then-President Trump’s assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani (1957–2020)).²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ *Democracy Now!*, “1. Gen. Wesley Clark, Democracy Now! interview, 2007,” YouTube, 1:25-2:55, March 2, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSL3JqorkdU&t=48s&ab_channel=jerepah.

²⁶⁹ Natasha Bertrand, “Biden approves plan to redeploy US troops to Somalia,” CN, May 16, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/16/politics/somalia-troop-redeployment/index.htm>. See also: “Trump’s assassination of Soleimani: Five things to know,” Al Jazeera, January 3, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/3/trumps-assassination-of-soleimani-five-things-to-know>.

Rumsfeld's War: Iraq (2003–2011)

Iraq was in the crosshairs of United States foreign policy for years before the 2003 invasion. The United States had already launched a devastating war in Iraq during the H.W. Bush administration from 1990 to 1991 in reaction to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The United States-led coalition bombed large swaths of Iraqi infrastructure, including civilian infrastructures such as electricity grids and water treatment facilities.²⁷⁰ The bombing campaign was backed up by years of sanctions placed on Iraq that crippled their ability to rebuild the water treatment facilities which led to contaminated water supplies spreading disease like wildfire. Along with the initial bombings, these actions by the United States racked up a massive body count, likely into the millions. Then-President Clinton's Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright (1937–2022), infamously justified this body count of roughly "half a million children... more than died in Hiroshima" as "worth it" in an interview with *60 Minutes*.²⁷¹ This was not enough blood spilled and the neoconservatives, particularly those affiliated with PNAC, clamored for the United States to finish the job and remove Saddam from power.²⁷² With many of those same PNAC affiliates and contributors now nestled in the W. Bush administration, it was only a matter of time before they pulled the trigger and American bombs flew over Iraq. Through these actions,

The United States deliberately targeted the civilian infrastructure of Iraq to make the war aims more easily attainable. But unlike in 1991, when it could

²⁷⁰ Sukumar Muralidharan, "Brutal Wars and a Malevolent Peace: Anatomy of US Policy in Iraq," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 38, no. 20 (2003), 1940.

²⁷¹ *60 Minutes*, "Madeleine Albright - 60 Minutes," YouTube, 0:03, 1997, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbIX1CP9qr4&ab_channel=KevinGroenhaugen.

²⁷² Packer, "PNAC and Iraq."

afford to just wreck a whole country and walk away from the mess, this time around it is committed to fostering a whole new political order in Iraq.²⁷³

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Rumsfeld and the W. Bush administration attempted to link Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and the 9/11 attacks to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. A report from *CBS News* recounting these efforts stated that Rumsfeld "was telling his aides to come up with plans for striking Iraq—even though there was no evidence linking Saddam Hussein to the attacks."²⁷⁴ Another report from investigative journalist Bob Woodward (b. 1943) writes that in a meeting the night of 9/11, "Rumsfeld actually puts Iraq on the table and says 'part of our response maybe should be attacking Iraq. It's an opportunity.'"²⁷⁵ The W. Bush administration's conjecture about Saddam's role in the attacks quickly became public through the facilitation of the mass media. In fact, polls from that time showed that sizable majorities of respondents believed that Saddam was involved or responsible for these attacks.²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the administration ultimately decided that more convincing intelligence and time were needed to make a case for going to war with Iraq, and Afghanistan was the first hit.

Rumsfeld led the effort in building the case for war with Iraq. He aimed to convince the public through his frequently televised press conferences held to boast of the now infamous

²⁷³ Muralidharan, "Brutal Wars and a Malevolent Peace: Anatomy of US Policy in Iraq," 1939.

²⁷⁴ Joel Roberts, "Plans For Iraq Attack Began On 9/11," *CBS News*, September 4, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090927043007/http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/04/september11/main520830.shtml>.

²⁷⁵ Patrice Taddonio, "A Look at Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's Legacy, Following His Death at 88," PBS, June 30, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/donald-rumsfeld-dies-88-documentaries-legacy/>.

²⁷⁶ "Bush administration on Iraq 9/11 link," *BBC News*, September 18, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3119676.stm>.

claims that Iraq, and specifically Saddam, possessed an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).²⁷⁷ In a press conference in February 2002, a full year before the invasion, he stated that “there are known knowns” regarding the existence of WMDs.²⁷⁸ This claim implies that Saddam’s Iraq posed a national security threat to the United States and could lead to another 9/11-like event if left unchecked. This episode harkens back to the Team B findings where a lack of evidence of Soviet weapons did not interfere with the neoconservative’s supposedly “known known” of a non-existent missile defense system. Rumsfeld’s efforts in this push for war went beyond simply *presenting* the “intelligence” for the public’s consumption; he also worked behind the scenes to *manufacture* the faulty “intelligence.”

According to the journalist Seymour Hersh (b. 1937) who reported on the W. Bush administration’s push for war with Iraq, Rumsfeld and his deputy, Wolfowitz, organized what was deemed a “cabal” of analysts in the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans (OSP) to “find evidence...that Saddam Hussein had close ties to Al Qaeda, and that Iraq had an enormous arsenal of chemical, biological, and possibly even nuclear weapons that threatened the region and, potentially, the United States.”²⁷⁹ Furthermore, Hersh also reported that this OSP cabal “rivalled both the CIA and the Pentagon’s own Defense Intelligence Agency, (DIA), as then-President [W.] Bush’s main source of intelligence regarding Iraq’s possible possession of weapons of mass destruction.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Christopher J. Coyne and Abigail R. Hall, *Manufacturing Militarism: U.S. Government Propaganda in the War on Terror* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), 51-61.

²⁷⁸ “News Transcript – DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers,” United States Department of Defense, February 12, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160905184152/http://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=2636>.

²⁷⁹ Seymour Hersh, “Selective Intelligence: Donald Rumsfeld has his own special sources. Are they reliable?” *The New Yorker*, May 12, 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20140717100914/http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2003/05/12/030512fa_fact.

²⁸⁰ Hersh, “Selective Intelligence.”

Rumsfeld's decades of experience manipulating intelligence and public opinion proved helpful in constructing this case, now in charge of a new Team B to sell a faulty war based on a greatly exaggerated threat. On the global front of the war's buildup, Rumsfeld publicly chastised European allies, such as Germany, France, and even the United Kingdom, if they showed even the slightest hesitation to join the United States in the war.²⁸¹ In nearly every way the war effort could be advanced, Rumsfeld functioned as the focal point and lead conductor. Under no circumstances was Iraq to be spared.

When the war with Iraq finally commenced in March 2003, Rumsfeld (in addition to still overseeing the war effort in Afghanistan) now helped orchestrate the Shock & Awe campaign the United States military unleashed on Iraq. Shock & Awe, referred to formally as the Doctrine of Rapid Dominance by its authors at the National Defense University, was an expression of raw American military might characterized by the use of "overwhelming force." The authors, Harlan K. Ullman (b. 1941) and James P. Wade (n.d.), spell this out explicitly:

Shutting [Iraq] down would entail both the physical destruction of appropriate infrastructure and the shutdown and control of the flow of all vital information and associated commerce so rapidly as to achieve a level of national shock akin to the effect that dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on the Japanese. Simultaneously, Iraq's armed forces would be paralyzed with the neutralization or destruction of its capabilities. Deception, disinformation, and misinformation would be applied massively.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 354-55.

²⁸² Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, *Rapid Dominance: A Force for All Seasons* (London, UK: Royal United Services Institute in Defense Studies, 1998).

Seemingly overnight, Shock & Awe had completely crippled and destroyed not only Iraq's military but Iraqi society itself—the damage was especially severe in the capital Baghdad.²⁸³ According to former *New York Times* war correspondent Chris Hedges (b. 1965), who covered the war and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2002 for his coverage of terrorism at the *New York Times*, “Shock and Awe saw the dropping of 3,000 bombs on civilian areas that killed over seven thousand noncombatants in the first two months of the war.”²⁸⁴ During the post-9/11 hysteria that Rumsfeld helped stir up, dissenting opinions were sidelined, as was Hedges. Even though Hedges spoke fluent Arabic and lived in Iraq and throughout the Middle East during his time as a journalist, the *New York Times* ultimately forced his resignation for his criticism of the Shock & Awe campaign.²⁸⁵

Shock & Awe was not confined solely to the overwhelming display of military might. Noting the inherent psychological aspect of this warfare, Klein stated, “Rumsfeld’s war would use everything short of a nuclear bomb to put on a show designed to bombard the senses, pull and play on emotion, and convey lasting messages.”²⁸⁶ Klein argues that this psychological aspect was a critical component of Shock & Awe as it became the “blueprint” for sending messages all around the world, especially to those who dared to challenge the authority of the United States.²⁸⁷ Designed to inflict mass fear and terror amongst the target population as well as for the global audience, Shock & Awe became the ultimate symbol of the transformation of the United States’ foreign policy; a transformation angled towards explicit offensive wars to bring perceived challengers and threats to the United States hegemony to

²⁸³ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 423-24.

²⁸⁴ Chris Hedges, “Chris Hedges: Worthy and Unworthy Victims,” MintPress News, March 7, 2022, <https://www.mintpressnews.com/chris-hedges-worthy-unworthy-victims/279884/>.

²⁸⁵ American Program Bureau Inc, “Speaker Chris Hedges: Foreign Correspondent & Author,” accessed June 12, 2022, <https://www.apbspeakers.com/speaker/chris-hedges/>.

²⁸⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 421.

²⁸⁷ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 420-21.

heel. This was the full realization of the neoconservatives' foreign policy goals. It began in the days of the Ford administration when a young Rumsfeld, acting as Secretary of Defense, challenged the perceived complacency of the foreign policy elite towards the Soviet Union. In a post-Soviet world with no equivalent challenger to the United States' hegemony, coupled with the neoconservative's dominance in the United States' foreign policy, the war of aggression against Iraq and Afghanistan were the first disastrous strikes in the War on Terror that only continued to expand in the region for decades.

The very nature of the Shock & Awe bombing campaigns almost necessarily created the circumstances that ensured that the War on Terror became an unending quagmire. Rumsfeld himself once personally asked, "Are we creating more terrorists than we're killing?"²⁸⁸ Genocide studies scholar at Yale University, Ben Kiernan, answers this question affirmatively. The mass killing of civilians and extensive damage to civilian infrastructure quickly turned public opinion against the United States in the populations affected, making many who lost loved ones, their homes, and livelihoods more receptive to extremist rhetoric. In 2012, former director of the CIA's Counter-Terrorism Center, Robert Greiner (n.d.), reflected on drone strikes in Yemen:

One wonders how many Yemenis may be moved in the future to violent extremism in reaction to carelessly targeted missile strikes." That same month, a Yemeni lawyer Ibrahim Monthana (n.d.) wrote in an open letter to then-President Obama "when a United States drone missile kills a child in Yemen, the father will go to war with you, guaranteed. Nothing to do with Al Qaeda."²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Kiernan, "Making More Enemies Than We Kill?" 1.

²⁸⁹ Kiernan, "Making More Enemies Than We Kill?" 1.

Despite a near-endless drip of media propaganda surrounding the use of “smart bombs” or “precision-guided munitions” (PMGs), the use of large explosives with high fragmentation and penetrating power in densely inhabited urban spaces necessarily entailed civilian casualties.²⁹⁰ Bruce Cronin (n.d.) at the Department of Political Science at the City College of New York calls this the “collateral damage exception to IHL [International Humanitarian Law].” The IHL resulted in,

Legally sanctioned warfighting strategies that result in significant numbers of civilian casualties. Such an exception allows military organizations to follow IHL while killing and injuring many civilians during their operations... They do so by employing overwhelming force under conditions that they know are likely to fatally affect the civilian population. Under these conditions, collateral damage may be incidental but it is also usually foreseeable and therefore preventable. Such calculations push the boundaries of legal behavior.²⁹¹

On July 22, 2022, Rumsfeld claimed that “we can take some comfort in the knowledge that this war has seen fewer tragic losses of civilian life than perhaps any war in modern history. We can also take pride in the fact that coalition forces have gone to extraordinary lengths not only to avoid civilian deaths but to save civilian lives.”²⁹² The arguments provided by Cronin contradict

²⁹⁰ Mark Herold, “‘Unworthy’ Afghan Bodies ‘Smarter’ U.S. Weapons Kill More Innocents,” in *Inventing Collateral Damage*, edited by Stephen J. Rockel and Rick Halpern, 303-327 (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2009), 303; Bruce Cronin, “Reckless endangerment warfare: Civilian casualties and the collateral damage exception in international humanitarian law,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 50, no. 2 (2013):176, <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/stable/23441184?sid=primo&seq=1>.

²⁹¹ Cronin, “Reckless endangerment warfare,” 176.

²⁹² Herold, “‘Unworthy’ Afghan Bodies,” 308.

Rumsfeld's claims.

Neoliberal Torture Racket

There are a few aspects of the War on Terror that deserve deeper scrutiny throughout Rumsfeld's term as Secretary of Defense, which lasted until the end of 2006: the "reconstruction" efforts and the systemic corruption and abuse of prisoners of war (POWs). Reconstruction, a principal component of the war in Iraq, included extreme war-profiteering that remained at the heart of Rumsfeld's neoliberal transformation at the Pentagon. In this effort to rebuild a destroyed Iraq, the United States government handed out a seemingly limitless amount of money to private, for-profit contractors to facilitate these projects.²⁹³ This was not only a boon for the web of Department of Defense (DoD) contractors, but also for government officials and politicians who had links to these firms, for example, then-Vice President Cheney and his old firm Halliburton.²⁹⁴ Yet despite the endless flow of money used to help rebuild Iraq, the efforts mostly failed due to rampant corruption and the persistent security threat in Iraq, which United States policy exacerbated through aggressive bombing campaigns as detailed above.²⁹⁵

Although this furthered the Iraqi toil, it made no difference to the contractors who already had their cash in hand. To quote

²⁹³ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, Ch. 17-18.

²⁹⁴ Conor Friedersdorf, "Remembering Why Americans Loathe Dick Cheney," *The Atlantic*, August 30, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/08/remembering-why-americans-loathe-dick-cheney/244306/>.

²⁹⁵ Kenneth M. Pollack, "The Seven Deadly Sins of Failure in Iraq: A Retrospective Analysis of the Reconstruction," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10, no. 4 (2006): 1-20, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kenneth-Pollack/publication/237113122_The_Seven_Deadly_Sins_of_Failure_in_Iraq_A_Retrospective_Analysis_of_the_Reconstruction/links/57025d0f08aefe5e2e95498f/The-Seven-Deadly-Sins-of-Failure-in-Iraq-A-Retrospective-Analysis-of-the-Reconstruction.pdf.

Klein, “This was the genius of Rumsfeld’s ‘transformation’ plan: since every possible aspect of both destruction and reconstruction has been outsourced and privatized, there’s an economic boom [for both]...a closed profit-loop of destruction and reconstruction.”²⁹⁶ To reiterate, in a Pentagon fully dominated by the interests of capital and led by corrupted agents of the MIC like Rumsfeld, every decision was heavily influenced by return on investment or profiteering. Whether it was the so-called reconstruction efforts or the waging of war itself, the economic benefits would be realized by this nexus of public-private actors, furthered by the W. Bush appointed head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (responsible for oversight of the reconstruction effort), Paul Bremer (b. 1941). Bremer instituted “the full privatization of public enterprises, full ownership rights by foreign firms of Iraqi businesses, full repatriation of foreign profits... the opening of Iraq’s banks to foreign control... and the elimination of nearly all trade barriers.”²⁹⁷ This pertained to every aspect of the economy, including “public services, the media, manufacturing, services, transportation, finance, and construction.”²⁹⁸ For Iraqis, their interests were marginalized (if not entirely ignored) and brushed aside. According to Harvey, “strikes were effectively forbidden in key sectors and the right to unionize restricted. A highly regressive ‘flat tax’ (an ambitious tax-reform plan long advocated for implementation by conservatives in the United States) was also imposed.”²⁹⁹ The supposed reconstruction became just another layer in the deep injustice that had been levied upon Iraqis that some critics argued violated the Geneva (1864–1949) and Hague (1899 and 1907) Conventions, “since an occupying power is

²⁹⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 482.

²⁹⁷ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 6.

²⁹⁸ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 6.

²⁹⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 6.

mandated to guard the assets of an occupied country and not sell them off.”³⁰⁰

The systemic corruption and abuse of POWs is another aspect of Rumsfeld’s War on Terror policies that deserves more attention. Similar to the reconstruction efforts, the policies and schemes implemented by Rumsfeld and the W. Bush administration to purge both Afghanistan and Iraq of supposed terrorists via mass imprisonment were poisoned by the corruption and extreme profiteering of private interests. For example, in Afghanistan,

Once the prisoners arrive at the destination, they face interrogators, some of whom will not be employed by the CIA or the military but by private contractors. If these freelance interrogators are to keep landing lucrative contracts, they must extract from prisoners the kind of ‘actionable intelligence’ their employers in Washington are looking for. It’s a dynamic ripe for abuse...contractors have a powerful economic incentive to use whatever techniques are necessary to produce the sought-after information, regardless of its reliability.³⁰¹

At this point it is quite apparent how the neoliberal transformation Rumsfeld shepherded into the Pentagon, infused with outsourcing to private contractors and profiteering, thoroughly and systematically corrupted nearly every aspect of these wars. From the launching of the wars themselves, the so-called reconstruction, and even the detainment and mass imprisonment of *enemy combatants*, all were guided by schemes designed to enrich the contractors who performed the duties.

³⁰⁰ The Hague Conventions are focused on the actual conduct of war, while the Geneva Conventions are focused on the humanitarian aspects. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 6.

³⁰¹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 384-85.

This culture of corruption was so intoxicating that it also ensnared the locals of these countries, especially in Afghanistan where CIA and private contractors offered bounties to the locals to provide intelligence or turn in suspected terrorists. These bounties paid roughly three thousand to twenty-five thousand dollars for al-Qaeda or Taliban fighters, Klein noted that “soon enough, the cells of Bagram and Guantanamo were overflowing with goatherds, cabdrivers, cooks and shopkeepers—all lethally dangerous according to the men who turned them over and collected the rewards.”³⁰² Consequently, the lure of the blood-soaked dollar not only fueled the destruction and death of the wars but also the mass imprisonment schemes of innocent locals, now labeled as dangerous terrorists. Unsurprisingly, this malevolence was only one feature of the systemic abuse of the prisoners. Inside the prisons, a whole other system of absolute horror took place.

Rumsfeld, along with other W. Bush administration officials, argued that the Geneva Conventions, the documents establishing the international legal standards for humanitarian treatment in war, did not protect POWs captured in Afghanistan and Iraq due to their newly assigned label of “enemy combatants.”³⁰³ Rumsfeld was a key player in this endeavor. According to Michael Ratner, “On January 19, 2002, defendant Rumsfeld [Ratner’s book, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld*, is presented as a court case] informed the chief of the United States military, Richard B. Myers [b. 1942], that those detained in the war against Afghanistan would not be granted prisoner of war status as would normally be required by the Geneva Conventions. They would not even be given hearings to determine if they were prisoners of war.”³⁰⁴ This ad hoc legal distinction served as the

³⁰² Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 385.

³⁰³ Leila Nadya Sadat, “A Presumption of Guilt: The Unlawful Enemy Combatant and the U.S. War on Terror,” *Denver Journal of International Law & Policy* 37, no. 4 (2009): 539-53, <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1241&context=djilp>.

³⁰⁴ Michael Ratner, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld: A Prosecution by Book* (New York: The New Press, 2008), 15.

legal basis for both “administrative detention” (imprisonment without trial) and “enhanced interrogation” (torture).

In Iraq, a policy of mass imprisonment of Iraqi troops who surrendered or were captured led to systemic abuse by United States troops, most emblematic in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal which publicized widespread torture and the abuse of prisoners.³⁰⁵ Ratner explains that as part of the torture programs “human beings were stripped, hung from ceilings, beaten, threatened and attacked by dogs, sexually abused, subjected to hot and cold temperatures, deprived of food and sleep, waterboarded, and held in isolation day after day, month after month. More than occasionally, they died from torture.”³⁰⁶

When the crimes against humanity at Abu Ghraib became known, Rumsfeld appeared to shoulder the blame after being subject to intense criticism and even offered his resignation.³⁰⁷ Then-President W. Bush, however, refused this offer and kept him on board. To be clear, although Rumsfeld publicly shouldered this blame, this should not be confused with him disapproving or being unaware of these detestable acts. As a *Frontline* documentary entitled “Rumsfeld’s War” explains, “Rumsfeld [had] already promulgated some harsher interrogation techniques of his own, including the use of dogs to intimidate, stripping, deprivation of food in combination with stress positions for a given amount of time.”³⁰⁸ Moreover, in a declassified memo dated December 2, 2002 (well before the publicization of the torture at Abu Ghraib) Rumsfeld bemoaned of the apparent gentleness of these “interrogation techniques” stating, “I stand for eight to ten hours a

³⁰⁵ Seymour M. Hersh, “Torture at Abu Ghraib,” *The New Yorker*, May 10, 2004, <http://www.colonelby.com/teachers/krichardson/Grade%2012/Carleton%20-%20Int%20Law%20Course/Week%2011/TortureAtAbuGhraib.pdf>.

³⁰⁶ Ratner, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld*, 8.

³⁰⁷ Thom Shanker, “Rumsfeld Says He Offered to Quit,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2005, <https://archive.ph/qMv89>.

³⁰⁸ “Transcript: Rumsfeld’s War,” PBS, 2004, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pentagon/etc/script.html>.

day. Why is standing limited to four hours?”³⁰⁹ In this same memo, Rumsfeld personally signed off on the aforementioned use of “hooding, stripping, dogs, and sleep deprivation” on detainees.³¹⁰ Despite this, Rumsfeld later claimed in his memoir that,

None of the authorized interrogation methods—either those approved in December 2002 and used on one detainee until I rescinded them, or those that I later approved in April 2003—involved physical or mental pain. None were inhumane. None met any reasonable person’s definition of torture.³¹¹

Rumsfeld then goes on to also deny that waterboarding never occurred in Guantanamo Bay and defends torture as critical for getting key information out of al-Qaeda operatives.³¹² This is counter to what Ratner and The Center for Constitutional Rights claim which was that “tortured people say whatever they can to stop the torture, and often the information is false.”³¹³

Rumsfeld’s denial then appraisal of torture is also emblematic of the entire administration’s stance. Once again deferring to Ratner and The Center for Constitutional Rights,

The [W.] Bush administration has argued from both sides of its mouth in its efforts simultaneously to deny that it has engaged in a torture program and to justify the use of torture. On the one hand, it claims it does not torture and treats prisoners humanely. As you will see, it makes this claim because it has redefined torture and inhumane treatment so that the

³⁰⁹ Murray Waas, “Rumsfeld on Detainees: ‘I Stand for 8-10 Hours a Day. Why is Standing Limited to 4 Hours?’” *Huffington Post*, May 14, 2010, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/rumsfeld-on-detainees-i-s_b_189833.

³¹⁰ Ratner, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld*, 14.

³¹¹ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 582.

³¹² Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 585, 586.

³¹³ Ratner, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld*, 10.

coercive interrogations it employs do not come within what courts, treaties, and lawyers always found constituted torture. At the same time it denies employing torture, the [W.] Bush administration insists that it needs harsh interrogation tactics to get information, and that the president, in the name of national security and self-defense, may employ torture. In fact, his lawyers argue that there are no limits on the cruelties he can impose on others if he thinks he needs to do so to make us safer.³¹⁴

The Abu Ghraib scandal was not a phenomenon but merely one node in a global infrastructure of systematic imprisonment and torture—anchored by CIA black sites and the Guantanamo Bay detention facilities—erected by the United States Military in the War on Terror and under the watch of Rumsfeld, along with other officials in the W. Bush administration.³¹⁵ The global torture infrastructure did not wither away after the ignominious exit of the administration but instead remained very much intact and a feature of the United States’ so-called “rules-based order,” an Orwellian term used to obfuscate that the United States does not obey actual international law. As Ratner notes,

Did Rumsfeld authorize conduct that constituted war crimes? Absolutely...According to the report of the government’s Schlesinger investigation, the entire military chain of command was involved... up to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld... None of the defendants fulfilled their legally mandated roles to prohibit torture; all were complicit in the propagation of torture.³¹⁶

Media and Information Manipulation

³¹⁴ Ratner, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld*, 9.

³¹⁵ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 384-86.

³¹⁶ Ratner, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld*, 18-19.

Throughout the War on Terror, Rumsfeld and the neoconservatives in the W. Bush administration directly and purposefully manipulated information and evidence to the media and inside the government. This manipulation aimed to both manufacture the public's consent for the wars and to obfuscate and obscure the crimes (discussed above) associated with the wars. Information manipulation as a means to promote aggressive policy represented a continuation of Rumsfeld's standard operating procedure à la the Team B Commission. Furthermore, it was in line with the even longer history of manipulation by the likes of the Dulles brothers. According to Tom Rosenstiel (n.d.), former executive director of the American Press Institute and founder and former director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism,

We now know that you had people on the vice president's [Cheney] staff talking to Judy Miller [*New York Times* reporter], who was one of the key reporters doing these stories for the Times, leaking that material to her or helping her with her stories. Those stories would appear, and then they would reference the very material that they'd given her and say, 'See, this is coming from *The New York Times*, not just us,' when, in fact, it was coming from the administration.³¹⁷

This trickery is emblematic of the advancements of the political and economic elites' ability to control information and thus public opinion. The Dulles brothers used their connections to pressure *The New York Times* to suppress information from their reporters on the ground in Guatemala and Iran. While these simple methods were still employed, as in the aforementioned Hedges case of censorship (also at the hands of *The New York Times*), the

³¹⁷ "Interview Tom Rosenstiel," PBS, October 16, 2006, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newswar/interviews/rosenstiel.html>.

infiltration of the media by the W. Bush administration was comprehensive:

Officials offered various new pieces of pro-occupation information to particular news outlets who would subsequently relay these new ‘leads’ or ‘facts’ to the public. In later discussions, officials would cite the press pieces as the source of their information, although officials generated and provided materials to the news outlets in the first place.³¹⁸

Rumsfeld himself played an active role in this manipulation. The subterfuge included the manipulation of internal government information through the Office of Special Plans (OSP) that Rumsfeld created. The OSP concocted half-truths about Iraq to create talking points that justified the war, such as Saddam’s supposed WMD programs which Rumsfeld propagated with outdated and out-of-context evidence from the 1980s.³¹⁹ Moreover, Rumsfeld’s OSP not only manufactured false information for the wars but also filtered and distributed false information from the web of private intelligence contractors who, as discussed above, had an economic incentive to manipulate information to keep their DoD contracts. According to Klein,

Part of the reason the W. Bush administration has relied so heavily on private intelligence contractors working in new structures like Rumsfeld’s secretive [OSP] is that they have proven far more willing than their counterparts in governments to massage and manipulate information to meet its political goals of the administration—after all, their next contract depends on it.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Coyne & Hall, *Manufacturing Militarism*, 63.

³¹⁹ *Why We Fight*, 1:06:40 & 1:08:05.

³²⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 384-85.

Yet another example of how the corruptive force of profiteering fueled seemingly every consequence of the wars.

Rumsfeld's active manipulation did not begin and end with the OSP, however. Wesley Clark's testimony (presented above) about a memo (originating from Rumsfeld's office) planning to take out seven countries in five years just days after 9/11 is also indicative of this manipulation of information and policy from the inside. Externally, Rumsfeld made many media appearances to tow the official talking points, such as his December 2, 2001, appearance on *Meet the Press* where he asserted, without providing any substantive evidence, the existence of elaborate multi-story underground bunkers used by bin Laden and al-Qaeda, complete with electricity and ventilation.³²¹

Rumsfeld and the neoconservatives had already decided on going to war with Iraq before 9/11, however, they needed to garner public support for the war. Throughout his tenure as Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld held frequent televised press briefings on the wars which helped in the administration's domination over the supposedly "free" media.³²² The perception of the media as completely independent, when it was heavily manipulated, proved instrumental in selling the war. As put by Charles Lewis (b. 1953) at the Center for Public Integrity, "We have this idea that we have lots of information available. There is so much that's not available and so much of the 'truth' is obscured by political actors who don't want the world to see what they're doing."³²³ Rumsfeld's dismissive comments during his televised press briefings characterized the whole ordeal: "Needless to say that the President is correct" and "I'm working my way to figure out how I'm not

³²¹ "Bin Ladens Cave according to Rumsfeld," *Meet the Press*, March 5, 2007, 0:25, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGhGHxw0mSo&ab_channel=TheSpacedog.

³²² *Why We Fight*, 1:10:59.

³²³ *Why We Fight*, 1:11:00.

going to answer that.”³²⁴ Dan Rather (b. 1931) of *CBS News* explained the situation expertly when he stated, “What’s going on, I’m sorry to say, is a belief that the public doesn’t need to know.”³²⁵ As a twenty-year war veteran who quit after seeing the manipulation of intelligence in the OSP firsthand put it, “If you join the military now, you are not defending the United States of America. You are helping certain policy makers pursue an imperial agenda.”³²⁶ To sell this imperial agenda, language and the media were manipulated thoroughly.

The Orwellian language draped around aggressive military operations (i.e. Operation Enduring Freedom), a feature of W. Bush-era neoconservative propaganda, proved to be influential as the Obama administration adopted this same technique. For example, when the Obama administration went to war with Libya in 2011, the NATO operation was christened “Operation Unified Protector.” As will be shown in the closing segment, the operation only further endangered the civilians it was ostensibly created to protect. Other Orwellian constructions of language included the obfuscation of statistics by labeling many killed as “military-aged males” or “unlawful enemy combatants” or simply “abstract collateral damage.”³²⁷ By using these labels, the military/government could avoid including these deaths in the civilian casualties and the media could glance over the pile of Iraqi, Afghan, and other brown bodies to fixate on much smaller losses incurred by the United States and its allies.³²⁸ Additionally, the dozens of combat zones the War on Terror spread to are often labeled “conflicts” or “engagements” or, in the case of Libya, a “humanitarian mission,” and not “wars.” This manipulation of language serves to avoid the hot topic of “war” by simply denying it exists by omitting the word. It also gives the executive branch more breathing room from Congressional oversight supposedly

³²⁴ *Why We Fight*, 1:11:31.

³²⁵ *Why We Fight*, 1:11:25.

³²⁶ *Why We Fight*, 1:16:35.

³²⁷ Herold, “Unworthy Afghan Bodies,” 304, 309.

³²⁸ Herold, “Unworthy Afghan Bodies,” 303, 304.

required to conduct a “war.”

The obfuscation of individuals’ status as “unlawful enemy combatants” complicates the process of totaling the number of innocent lives taken by the War on Terror which varies widely depending on the particular methodology. Some outlets claim the War on Terror took hundreds of thousands of lives while others claim it took millions.³²⁹ This issue is complicated further in the case of Iraq when trying to estimate the total killed. Does it start in 2003 or the 1990 bombing and sanction campaigns? Are the deaths resulting from sanction and disease to be counted in either case? These discrepancies created plausible deniability for the United States government to always assert the lowest estimates possible for the damage they wrought, though Rumsfeld and the neoconservatives did not invent this trickery. Calculating lives lost in war has always been difficult for a multitude of reasons. From the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the firebombing that burnt down almost every other Japanese city including Tokyo to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the margin of error for deaths is massive and the exact figures are contentious.³³⁰ In Cambodia, for example, it is estimated that the bombing campaigns during the Johnson and Nixon administrations (the bombings that Rumsfeld “warned” Nixon against) killed between 50,000 to 150,000 innocent people in a country the United States was not at war with.³³¹ The estimated losses in Laos reach as high as 750,000 civilians.³³² During the Vietnam War, the United States lost roughly 58,000 men. Even based on the conservative estimates for just Cambodian deaths, it becomes apparent that the United States killed more Cambodians than Americans died in Vietnam between 1964 and 1973. Under Johnson, the Cambodian and Laotian bombing campaigns were named Operation Menu; under

³²⁹ Benjamin and Davies, “The staggering death toll in Iraq.”

³³⁰ Alex Wallerstein, “Counting the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” *The Bulletin.org*, August 4, 2020, <https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/counting-the-dead-at-hiroshima-and-nagasaki/>.

³³¹ Kiernan, “Making More Enemies Than We Kill?” 13.

³³² Herold, “‘Unworthy’ Afghan Bodies,” 315.

Nixon (perhaps with Rumsfeld's influence), the bombing campaigns earned the euphemism Operation Freedom Deal, a precursor to the misleading names of Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The information about the Cambodian bombing campaigns that the Clinton administration released to the public in 2000 shook the established consensus on the estimated damage wrought by the bombs dropped on Cambodia (and Laos). Before Clinton declassified available data, the generally accepted bomb tonnage dropped over Cambodia was only a quarter of what was actually dropped which was around 2,756,941 tons, and that is only from the incomplete Pentagon datasets that list over 10,000 instances of indiscriminate bombing.³³³ It is likely that in the coming years, it will also be easier to calculate the damage of Rumsfeld's wars through currently classified information. However, it is already a documented fact that Rumsfeld and other officials blatantly lied about many aspects of the war efforts and its consequences, whether it was Saddam's WMDs or their knowledge of torture programs during the War on Terror. Furthermore, when they did not lie outright about the legality of their designs, they used more manipulative language to rhetorically dance around legal loopholes, such as Rumsfeld's reclassification of POWs to skirt the Geneva conventions. All of the blatant lies and manipulation were a constant in the W. Bush administration and eventually outlasted Rumsfeld who, by late 2006, saw his time at the helm of the Pentagon come to a premature end.

By the time of Rumsfeld's departure in late 2006, the War on Terror proved to be a full-fledged disaster. United States steel and depleted uranium continued to rain over Afghanistan and Iraq with no end in sight.³³⁴ The reconstruction and counterinsurgency

³³³ Kiernan, "Making More Enemies than We Kill?" 6; Ben Kiernan, Taylor Owen, "Bombs Over Cambodia: New Light on US Air War," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (2007): 2, <https://apjif.org/-Ben-Kiernan--Taylor-Owen/2420/article.pdf>.

³³⁴ Herold, "'Unworthy' Afghan Bodies," 306-307.

efforts in both countries were failing.³³⁵ Fueled by the United States' occupation and sustained terror at the hand of the occupying American force, the threat of violence by the region's inhabitants had only metastasized.³³⁶ By all accounts, the wars were complete catastrophes and politically unpopular amongst the vast majority of the American population.³³⁷ By the time W. Bush left office, his approval rating was down to just twenty-four percent.³³⁸ For Rumsfeld, his prospects did not look any better. He faced widespread calls to resign, led by a group of retired generals and admirals who had decided to speak out against his strategic failures.³³⁹ General Hugh Shelton (b. 1942), chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1997 to 2001, later claimed that "it was the worst style of leadership [he] witnessed in 38 years of service...based on deception, deceit, working political agendas, and trying to get the Joint Chiefs to support an action that might not be the right thing to do for the country but would work well for the President from a political standpoint."³⁴⁰

In November of 2006, Rumsfeld—despite then-President W. Bush's public support—formally resigned as Secretary of Defense. This resignation marked the end of Rumsfeld's time in government and his position of power over United States foreign

³³⁵ Pollack, "The Seven Deadly Sins of Failure in Iraq."

³³⁶ "The Iraq Effect: New Study Finds 600% Rise in Terrorism Since U.S. Invasion of Iraq," *Democracy Now!*, February 22, 2007, https://www.democracynow.org/2007/2/22/the_iraq_effect_new_study_finds.

³³⁷ "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008," *Pew Research Center*, March 19, 2008, <https://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008/>.

³³⁸ "Bush and Public Opinion," *Pew Research Center*, December 18, 2008, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2008/12/18/bush-and-public-opinion/>.

³³⁹ David S. Cloud and Eric Schmitt, "More Retired Generals Call for Rumsfeld's Resignation," *The New York Times*, April 14, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121109133044/http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/14/washington/14military.html?pagewanted=all>.

³⁴⁰ Thomas E. Ricks, "General Shelton: Rumsfeld was the devil in the form of a defense secretary," *Foreign Policy*, August 2, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/02/general-shelton-rumsfeld-was-the-devil-in-the-form-of-a-defense-secretary/>.

policy. Although he was forced to retire in shame, he would be able to retire in the comfort of his home, a privilege that hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, Afghans, and other victims in the War on Terror, along with thousands of United States troops, did not have.³⁴¹ As of 2022, millions of people are forcibly displaced due to the ever-growing maelstrom of violence unleashed by the seemingly never-ending consequences spreading across the region afflicted by the War on Terror that Rumsfeld spat upon the world.³⁴²

Rumsfeld Out of Office and the War Continues

*“The haze got me thinking why
We killed Osama and plenty of innocent people died
We should see the signs, but we still be blind
No disrespect to the man or the legend but
I’m sick and tired of asking my brethren if
It all ends in 2011
Would God come through or would he actually forget us?
Cause apocalypse is getting closer
But they’re more focused on our ‘lil youth sippin’ soda
Fuck the sugar act, ***** out pushing crack
And I lost my father figure because of that.”*

- Capital Steez, “Free the Robots.”³⁴³

“Rumsfeld was the worst secretary of defense in American history. Being newly dead shouldn’t spare him this distinction.”

³⁴¹ “Costs of War: Human Costs,” Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, November 2021, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human>.

³⁴² Benjamin and Davies, “The staggering death toll in Iraq.”

³⁴³ Capital STEEZ, “Free the Robots,” track 3 on *AmeriKKKan Korruption*. 2012, Soundcloud.

- George Packer, *The Atlantic*.³⁴⁴

Despite Rumsfeld's seemingly ignominious exit from the W. Bush administration, he lived the last chapter of his life quite comfortably. In fact, in the years immediately after his resignation Rumsfeld still received honors and distinctions from ideologically aligned institutions such as the Claremont Institute Statesmanship Award in 2007, the Victory of Freedom Award from the Richard Nixon Foundation in 2010, and the "Defender of the Constitution Award" from the Conservative Political Action Conference in 2011.³⁴⁵ Of course, this is not necessarily an anomaly as some of the most prestigious awards in the world, like the Nobel Peace Prize, have been given to American "statesmen" such as Kissinger and Obama, despite their explicitly contradictory records to what the awards are *supposed* to represent; i.e. Kissinger's support for extreme bombing campaigns in South East Asia, and Obama's disastrous surge in Afghanistan and expansion of drone warfare into several countries with a record so dismal one would guess it was designed to hunt civilians.³⁴⁶ The point is that, as a member of the American political elite, Rumsfeld was ultimately protected from any real consequences for his decisions and policies

³⁴⁴ George Packer was a journalist who covered the Iraq War for *The New Yorker* and wrote several books on the topic. George Packer, "How Rumsfeld Deserves to Be Remembered," *The Atlantic*, June 30, 2021, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/opinion/how-rumsfeld-deserves-to-be-remembered/ar-AALDCd0>.

³⁴⁵ Steven Greenhut, "Rumsfeld honored as a statesman," *The Orange County Register*, October 30, 2007, <https://www.ocregister.com/2007/10/30/rumsfeld-honored-as-a-statesman/>; Michael Mello, "Rumsfeld accepts award at Nixon library," *The Orange County Register*, December 6, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20101210075035/http://www.ocregister.com/news/rumsfeld-279081-nixon-library.html>; "Donald Rumsfeld Remarks," CSPAN, February 10, 2011, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?297952-14/donald-rumsfeld-remarks>.

³⁴⁶ Andrew Blake, "Obama-led drone strikes kill innocents 90% of the time: report," *The Washington Times*, October 15, 2015, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/oct/15/90-of-people-killed-by-us-drone-strikes-in-afghani/>.

regardless of how destructive they were for the people caught in the maelstrom of violence. Rumsfeld garnered praise for his actions not only through ideological political institutions but also by gaining perverse accolades such as *People* magazine's "sexiest man alive" in 2002, "*CNN* called him a 'virtual rock star,' *FOX* dubbed him a beltway 'babe magnet,' [a]nd *The Wall Street Journal* hailed 'the new hunk of home-front airtime.'"³⁴⁷

Rumsfeld did not hold any government titles or lead any corporations in his later years. However, that is not to say he was rarely seen or heard from as he periodically gave interviews and speeches. He was particularly active in the media circuit during 2011 to promote his new memoir entitled, *Known and Unknown*, a play on one of his most notable quips during his routine press conferences as the Secretary of Defense in the W. Bush administration. In many of these interviews, Rumsfeld was asked to reflect on his decisions and policies regarding the War on Terror. He was even asked for his supposedly "expert" opinion on current foreign policy issues. For example, in an ABC News interview in 2011, he offered criticism of the Obama administration's handling of the Libya crisis and urged that the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (1942–2011) must be removed from power because it would negatively affect the "prestige" of the United States if Gaddafi remained.³⁴⁸ Even in exile, Rumsfeld still advocated for the United States' military intervention in the political affairs of nations in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Bipartisan Consensus

³⁴⁷ Carly Tennes, "'People' Magazine Once Named Donald Rumsfeld in their 'Sexiest Man Alive' Issue," *Cracked*, July 1, 2021, https://www.cracked.com/article_30643_people-magazine-named-donald-rumsfeld-in-their-2002-sexiest-man-alive-issue.html.

³⁴⁸ Joshua Miller, "Rumsfeld: If Gadhafi Stays, U.S. Reputation Damaged, American Enemies Emboldened," *ABC News*, March 27, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200706103245/https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/rumsfeld-gadhafi-stays-us-reputation-damaged-american-enemies/story?id=13232616>.

The Obama administration's stance on Libya ultimately fell in line with Rumsfeld's prescriptions, and Gaddafi was removed from power and murdered in the street by NATO-backed and al-Qaeda-affiliated rebels on October 20, 2011.³⁴⁹ Shortly thereafter, many of these rebels, refugees, and radical extremists (now armed with military-grade weaponry and millions of dollars of gold pillaged from the corpse of the Libyan state) poured across the borders into neighboring states and Syria, further destabilizing the region.³⁵⁰ These known al-Qaeda-linked extremists were then given the euphemism "moderate rebels" in Syria to obfuscate the fact the United States was now collaborating with elements of the faction that served as the initial enemy in The War on Terror (see Jake Sullivan's (b. 1976) 2011 email to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (b. 1947) titled "AQ [al-Qaeda] is on our side").³⁵¹ This framing of "moderate rebels" was a continuation of the Orwellian language manipulation. This aggressive and violent regime change is emblematic of the neoconservative shift in American foreign policy for which Rumsfeld laid the groundwork. As a presidential candidate, Obama was highly critical of the W. Bush administration's invasion of Iraq. However, once in office, then-President Obama's critique softened and he refused to investigate and prosecute key W. Bush administration officials for their connection to possible war crimes, including Rumsfeld, as Ratner and The Center for Constitutional Human Rights predicted would be the case in 2008.³⁵²

Here, Obama's criticisms of the United States war machine ultimately worked to launch a continuation of W. Bush-era neoconservative foreign policy, following the model set by the Clinton administration. In fact, in 2003, Clinton's United Nations

³⁴⁹ Oyeniyi A. Bukola. *The History of Libya* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2019), 203.

³⁵⁰ Burkola, *The History of Libya*, 206.

³⁵¹ Jake Sullivan, email message to Hillary Clinton February 12, 2011, <https://wikileaks.org/clinton-emails/emailid/23225#efmAGIAHu>.

³⁵² Ratner, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld*, 3.

ambassador Richard Holbrooke (1941–2010) consulted with the W. Bush administration and claimed that the precedent set by the Clinton administration's unilateral invasion of Kosovo demonstrated no need to bring the Iraqi case before the United Nations.³⁵³ By 2011, Obama picked up where W. Bush-era neoconservatives left off and the United States' military operations in the region expanded. Hedges summarized the phenomenon as follows:

The dark reasoning of George W. Bush's administration was that the threat of terrorism and national security gave the executive branch the right to ignore all legal restraints. The Obama administration has made this disregard for law bipartisan. Obama assured us when [the operations in Libya] started that it was not about "regime change." But this promise proved as empty as the ones he made during his presidential campaign. He has ruthlessly prosecuted the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where military planners speak of a continued United States presence for the next couple of decades. He has greatly expanded our proxy wars, which rely heavily on drone and missile attacks, as well as clandestine operations, in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and Libya. Add a few more countries and we will set the entire region alight.³⁵⁴

This policy had little to do with Rumsfeld's critiques. By the time Rumsfeld's pro-regime stance was published, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and critical NATO allies had already decided on removing Gaddafi from power. The United States and NATO's claims that Operation Unified Protector was a humanitarian effort to "protect civilians in Libya" was a farce. Instead, the NATO alliance was motivated by political prestige, as well as economic

³⁵³ Ratner, *The Trial of Donald Rumsfeld*, 3.

³⁵⁴ Chris Hedges, "Libya: Here We Go Again," Truthdig, September 5, 2011, <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/libya-here-we-go-again/>.

motives laid bare in since-leaked or released emails from ranking politicians in the Hilary Clinton circle.³⁵⁵

Furthermore, the United States and NATO coalition ignored the commanding initiative to “protect civilians” entirely when the civilians happened to be pro-Gaddafi.³⁵⁶ Just as the Democrats adopted Orwellian doublespeak to name aggressive military operations, they also took cues from the neoconservatives on media manipulation. They propagated unverified “evidence” that “Hitlerized” Gaddafi as Rumsfeld had done with Saddam and H.W. Bush did directly to Saddam a decade before Rumsfeld’s attempts. Hysterical news blurbs painted the picture of a Viagra-riddled mass-raping genocidal force (later proven to be almost entirely without merit) that fired on its people with advanced aircraft.³⁵⁷ In an ultimate twist of bloody and depressing irony, United States officials were later forced to admit that all reports of pro-Gaddafi forces firing on unarmed civilians from aircraft could not be proven.³⁵⁸ At the same time, multiple human rights organizations documented evidence that NATO aircraft not only killed scores of civilians in airstrikes but that at least two of these strikes constituted a war crime.³⁵⁹ NATO craft fired and then targeted the same spot again shortly after in an illegal maneuver called a “double-tap” designed to kill civilian first responders showcased in the widely publicized “Collateral Murder” video.³⁶⁰ This video published by Wikileaks, amongst other inconvenient information is likely a major contributing factor to its founder’s, Julian Assange (b. 1971), continued legally dubious detention that

³⁵⁵ Christopher M. Davidson, “Why Was Muammar Qadhafi Really Removed?” *Middle East Policy* Vol. 24, no. 4 (2017), 100.

³⁵⁶ Maximilian Forte, *Slouching Toward Sirte: NATO’s War on Libya and Africa* (Montreal: Baraka Books, 2012), 108.

³⁵⁷ Davidson, “Why Was Muammar Qadhafi Really Removed?” 105.

³⁵⁸ Forte, *Slouching Towards Sirte*, 242.

³⁵⁹ Forte, *Slouching Towards Sirte*, 100.

³⁶⁰ The double-tap maneuver was first made infamous by the neoconservatives during the war in Iraq. “Wikileaks: Collateral Murder (Iraq 2007),” *Wikileaks*, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfvFpT-iypw>.

some, including the United Nations, consider torture itself.³⁶¹

The Obama-era foreign policy, which hardly differed from the previous administration, represented the systematic product of the neoconservative shift away from the political realism of the Kissinger-era (that still racked up its own body count across the globe). Nonetheless, the rightward shift did not start with Obama. The Clinton administration used their own spin on liberal internationalism to justify military operations such as the spread of democratic values, economic liberalization, and humanitarian concern.³⁶² This so-called liberal internationalism served as the blueprint for the Obama administration and their NATO allies for the justification of the regime-change operation in Libya and the immediate expansion of The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) into the Central African Republic, Uganda, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, announced just days after Gaddafi's death.³⁶³ The expose on Clinton and her inner circle's emails exposed the fact this was part of a neoliberal scheme from the beginning. By Saturday, February 26, 2011, just over ten days after the first stirrings began on February 15, 2011, William J. Burns (b. 1956) emailed Sullivan, Alice Wells (b. 1963), and a redacted email address about a meeting he had with French diplomat Jean-David Levitte (b. 1946).³⁶⁴ The email emphasized the need for the United States to play a role in "supporting pol [political] and econ [economic] change in the

³⁶¹ "Julian Assange subjected to psychological torture, UN expert says," BBC, May 31, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-48473898>.

³⁶² Mann, *The Rise of the Vulcans*, 215.

³⁶³ AFRICOM is an organized United States military command that oversees American military operations throughout the continent of Africa (except Egypt which falls under the U.S. Central Command). AFRICOM was established by the Bush administration in 2007 and its stated purpose is to enhance security cooperation with African allies and partners. Forte, *Slouching Towards Sirte*, 139.

³⁶⁴ Burns is the current CIA director as of 2022. William Burns, email message to Jacob Sullivan, February 26, 2011, https://wikileaks.org/clinton-emails/Clinton_Email_December_Release/C05791905.pdf.

region” and that the United States and the European Union “should coordinate ambitious approach to Maghreb, Egypt and perhaps others on *liberalized trade*.”³⁶⁵

Rumsfeld and other neoconservatives advocated for increased military and political intervention in the Middle East long before it became a centerpiece of American policymaking. As mentioned, the consequences of the destabilization of Libya only brought more violence to the region, including Libya, which is still teetering on the edge of crisis as of 2022.³⁶⁶ Furthermore, the deception of the NATO allies at the United Nations included: an explicit promise the purpose of the operation was not to institute a regime change; used Qatari influence and propaganda machines to manipulate the African Union and The League of Arab Nations; violated the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 which greenlit Operation Unified Protector and denied “a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory” further alienating China and Russia.³⁶⁷ As permanent members of the UNSC, either Russia or China could have vetoed the resolution, however, both countries abstained or voted in favor because they believed the NATO allies.³⁶⁸ China began to condemn the operation shortly after it began and long before Gaddafi was removed.³⁶⁹ Russia, which previously signaled some willingness to work within the confines of international law and

³⁶⁵ William Burns, email message to Jacob Sullivan, emphasis added.

³⁶⁶ Hamza Mekouar, “Libya Capital rocked by battle as rival PM vies for power,” *Digital Journal*, May 17, 2022, <https://www.digitaljournal.com/world/libya-capital-rocked-by-battle-as-rival-pm-vies-for-power/article>.

³⁶⁷ United Nations Security Council, United Nations Security Resolution 1973 (March 17, 2011), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/268/39/PDF/N1126839.pdf?OpenElement>.

³⁶⁸ Łukasz, Jureńczyk, “Position of the People’s Republic of China Towards the Crisis in Libya in 2011,” *Historia i Polityka* Vol. 28, no. 35 (2019): 52, <https://doi.org/10.12775/HiP.2019.014/>.

³⁶⁹ Jureńczyk. “Position of the People’s Republic of China Towards the Crisis in Libya in 2011.”

assisted the United States in the aftermath of 9/11, only became more hostile on the world stage since 2011.

Scholars Geir Ulfstein (n.d.) and Hege Fosund (n.d.) claim, at the very least, that the NATO operation in Libya severely damaged the credibility of NATO in future crises.³⁷⁰ The continued violence in the region and the damaged credibility of the United States and NATO before the world stage are just some of the continuing consequences of the neoconservative foreign policy shift orchestrated by Rumsfeld and his allies over decades of bellicose fearmongering and myth-building. The only winners in the world they orchestrated are weapons contractors. In fact, as defense company Palantir Technologies predicts, the Russian-Ukrainian War will boost profit margins for defense companies, Jim Taiclet (the CEO of Lockheed Martin) was praised in interviews on *Face the Nation* on May 8, 2022, for the weapons Lockheed Martin produces.³⁷¹

Defiant to the End

When Rumsfeld was not promoting his memoir or being asked for his “expert” opinion on current United States foreign policy, Rumsfeld was occasionally asked to defend his decisions in the W. Bush administration. In one particularly confrontational interview with *Al-Jazeera* in 2011, he revealed his staunch opposition to taking any sort of accountability for the disastrous outcomes of the wars in the Middle East and North Africa. First and foremost, he

³⁷⁰ Geir Ulfstein and Hege Fosund, “The Legality of the NATO bombing in Libya,” *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* Vol. 62, no. 1 (2013): 159-171, https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/stable/43302692?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_content.

³⁷¹ “Transcript: Lockheed Martin CEO Jim Taiclet on ‘Face the Nation,’” CBS News, May 8, 2022, https://news.yahoo.com/transcript-lockheed-martin-ceo-jim-153712487.html?fr=sycsrp_catchall. For more information, see: Chavi Mehta, “Palantir Q2 revenue forecast below estimates; expects Ukraine war to boost growth,” NASDAQ, May 9, 2022, <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/palantir-q2-revenue-forecast-below-estimates-expects-ukraine-war-to-boost-growth>.

justified the war in Iraq because, in his view, it removed the “brutal regime” of Saddam Hussein which ultimately made the world a “better place.”³⁷² When pressed by the reporter about how the war and its aftermath improved the lives of Iraqis, Rumsfeld could only resort to the knee-jerk response that Saddam was responsible for more deaths than the United States was, as if this was to bring any sort of solace to the many thousands of families who lost loved ones at the hands of the United States-led war against their country. Incredibly, Rumsfeld even cited Saddam’s use of chemical weapons in the years before the United States invasion to bolster his point of Saddam’s ruthlessness and brutality.³⁷³ Of course, Rumsfeld played an integral role in establishing United States relations with Iraq when Saddam used these weapons against not only Iranians but also Iraqis. The reporter, privy to this knowledge, challenged Rumsfeld on this point. Rumsfeld simultaneously denied his involvement, as well as the United States’ involvement, in the facilitation of Iraq’s chemical weapons, yet he also claimed he was without knowledge and not in a position to deny or validate the claim.³⁷⁴ Thus, Rumsfeld gave an inherently contradictory and unbelievable response, given his intimate involvement in relations with Iraq during this time. Finally, when asked by the *Al-Jazeera* reporter if he would “apologize to Iraqis” for his role in their devastation, Rumsfeld became visibly agitated and responded with “of course not” and said it was “the right decision” to invade claiming that the “people of Iraq today are vastly better off.”³⁷⁵ It is in this interview that one can see the essence of American exceptionalism, embodied by Rumsfeld, who remained steadfast and defiant in the face of criticism and accountability for his own, as well as his government’s, calamitous actions around the world.

³⁷² “Donald Rumsfeld talks to Al Jazeera,” *Al Jazeera English*, October 5, 2011, 5:25 to 6:26,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xosu94rPSmw>.

³⁷³ “Donald Rumsfeld talks to Al Jazeera,” 7:00 to 7:15 and 8:50 to 9:05.

³⁷⁴ “Donald Rumsfeld talks to Al Jazeera,” 9:05 to 11:00.

³⁷⁵ “Donald Rumsfeld talks to Al Jazeera,” 15:41 to 16:00.

In a final reflection on his life, Donald Rumsfeld proved to be a significant and influential figure in American politics, economics, and foreign policy over several decades. His rapid ascent into the echelons of power during the Nixon and Ford years served as an expression of the rise of neoconservatism—a political ideology that Rumsfeld would become intimately tethered to throughout his political life. Simultaneously, Rumsfeld’s frequent shuffling between roles in both the private and public sector in the decades after similarly served as an expression of the rise of neoliberal capitalism, the ideology pioneered by Milton Friedman who mentored Rumsfeld since his earliest days in politics. Then, in his final act in government as the W. Bush administration’s Secretary of Defense, he used his position to empower both neoconservative foreign policy and neoliberal capitalist profiteering in the spectacularly disastrous conflicts in the War on Terror. Rumsfeld was not unique in his promotion of destructive wars and unfettered capital, nor was his manipulation of the media to sell the aggressive foreign policy. Yet, his life traces a definitive history of the United States’ reliance on neoconservative foreign policy and neoliberal capitalist profiteering as a means to maintain its global dominance, to the extreme detriment of all those who are caught in the crosshairs or continue to be born in the dust of depleted uranium (*Figure 2*).³⁷⁶ Meanwhile, known war criminal Donald Rumsfeld lived out the remainder of his days in peace, able to falsely claim to his dying breath that all of these episodes of military adventurism were purely motivated by innocent desires to promote democracy and freedom around the world. And so, he was simply allowed to live out the rest of his life in dignity and with distinction regardless of the absolute terror his decisions wrought.

³⁷⁶ Herold, “‘Unworthy’ Afghan Bodies,” 306-307.



Figure 2. Newborn with anencephaly, one of the leading birth defects that rapidly increased following the United States' use of depleted uranium in Iraq.³⁷⁷ Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.³⁷⁸

“Donald Rumsfeld, killer of 400,000 people [some estimate it to be 600,000 in Iraq alone by 2006, and 1,033,000 by 2007], dies peacefully.”

- Spencer Ackerman, Daily Beast.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Herold, “‘Unworthy’ Afghan Bodies,” 306-307.

³⁷⁸ CostaPPPR, “Anencephalia,” 1986, Wikimedia Commons, public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anencephalia.jpg>.

³⁷⁹ Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who has reported on American foreign policy and national security stories for various media outlets throughout his career. Spencer Ackerman, “Donald Rumsfeld, Killer of 400,000 People, Dies Peacefully,” *The Daily Beast*, June 30, 2021, <https://news.yahoo.com/donald-rumsfeld-killer-400-000-224008965.html>; Benjamin, “The staggering death toll in Iraq.”

*“We died for oil, we died for borders
Killed for democracy, still believed every platform
Can you handle the death
Accept what we create together?
I still know every politician is a fucking monster...
History said we died for freedom
But today no justice was served...
Two world wars later
Countless military interventions
We erect monuments to history
And give apologies to the dead
All that was fought for the living is quickly forgotten
We don’t remember the dates
We don’t remember the reasons
We have no idea what’s going on
Building the histories of western corporations.”*

- *Against Me! “Y’all Don’t Wanna Step to Dis.”*³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ Against Me!, “Ya’ll Don’t Wanna Step to Dis,” track 3 on *Crime. Plan-It-X* Records, 2001, CD.

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Author Bio

Devin Gillen is currently at California State University, San Bernardino scheduled to graduate with his bachelor of arts in history Fall 2022. He is returning to CSUSB to work on a master's degree in history and ultimately hopes to teach at the university level and publish future works. Devin is interested in history, philosophy, political science, and art history. He is also interested in pursuing artistic endeavors, from multi-media work, painting, screen printing, and playing multiple instruments, which he hopes to make a career of in tandem with academic work. Prior to working as an author and editor on *History in the Making*, Devin planned to compile and print a zine of independent art and essays on global politics and history to be handed out at local concerts to educate the “underground.”



Author Bio

Levi Gonzalez is a researcher, investigator, and critical analyst of various topics related to politics and history, some of which include: United States foreign policy, criminal justice, mass media, and public policy. Levi earned a bachelor of arts degree in political science in 2018 and a master's degree in public policy in 2020, both from the University of California, Riverside. His most recent research analyzed the effects of automated surveillance technology employed by police departments on systemically marginalized communities. Levi's research investigates how these surveillance tools reinforce poverty, inequality, mass imprisonment, and the prison-industrial complex. In addition to writing, Levi is an avid reader (with a current focus on 'deep politics' and 'deep political events'), frequent hiker, and devoted fan of the National Basketball Association (NBA) as well as the Los Angeles Dodgers. Levi has lived the entirety of his life in the Inland Empire region and currently resides in Rancho Cucamonga.



Reviews