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The Mirage of Instant Victory

Two weeks after George W. Bush took office, his secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, invited an old friend named Andrew Marshall to lunch.

Rumsfeld had held this job once before, in 1975, during the final year of Gerald Ford's brief presidency. He was just forty-two back then, the youngest defense secretary in history. Now, at sixty-eight, he was the oldest, though still vigorous. In the quarter-century between the two appointments, he had done well in the private sector, most notably as chief executive officer of G. D. Searle Pharmaceuticals. By the time Bush was elected, Rumsfeld was eager to return to power, but only if he had a mandate to shake things up. Bush gave him that mandate.

Near the start of his presidential campaign, Bush had given a speech at The Citadel—the historic military college in Charleston, South Carolina—spelling out his top priorities for a new defense policy. He would deploy antiballistic missiles “at the earliest possible date,” even if doing so meant withdrawing from the ABM Treaty, the long-standing centerpiece of Russian-American arms control accords. And he would transform the United States military. A “revolution in the technology of war” was in the works, he declared. Battles of the future would be won not by an army's “mass or size,” but by its “mobility and swiftness,” and vital new

roles would be played by information networks and by highly accurate missiles and bombs.

If taken seriously, this was a truly dramatic pronouncement. It would mean a new concept of nuclear deterrence, an overhaul of the Army, a new look for war and peace.

As president, Bush said, he would order his secretary of defense to conduct “an immediate, comprehensive review of our military—the structure of its forces, the state of its strategy, the priorities of its procurement.” The secretary would have “a broad mandate—to challenge the status quo and envision a new architecture of American defense for decades to come.” Now that he was president, he told Rumsfeld to carry out that comprehensive review.

That’s why Rumsfeld asked Andy Marshall to come have lunch. Marshall had done more than any single person to foment this revolution. He had been a central figure in spelling out its elements and implications. He had directly influenced dozens of defense officials and analysts, in and out of government. Bush’s Citadel speech was based, in large measure, on ideas that Marshall had long propagated.

Marshall was just short of eighty years old when Rumsfeld called him. He’d been working in the Pentagon for the last twenty-eight of those years, uninterrupted, through six—now, with Bush, seven—presidents. His title all those years was Director of the Office of Net Assessment. James Schlesinger had appointed him to the job when he was defense secretary back in 1973, during Richard Nixon’s administration. Schlesinger and Marshall had been friends and colleagues at the RAND Corporation, the U.S. Air Force-sponsored think tank in Santa Monica that fostered some of the early thinking about nuclear war and nuclear deterrence in the 1950s.

Marshall had started work at RAND in 1949, among the very first of those thinkers. Some of his associates would write books, or give lectures to vast audiences, or take jobs in Washington. But Marshall had no craving for the limelight or for visible power. When he did finally go to work in the nation’s capital—at first,

briefly, as a consultant at the National Security Council before moving over to the Pentagon—his office was obscure by design, mandated to report only to his immediate boss, not to Congress or the public, and that suited him fine. He was a gnomish operator who never put his name on an article and rarely said a word at meetings. His furtiveness spawned a mystique, which amused him. After the movie *The Empire Strikes Back* came out, some referred to him as “Yoda.” He had stayed at his job for so long (longer than anyone else at a policy level in all of Washington) for two reasons. First, he tried, as much as possible, to stay out of the fights over budgets and weapons systems, which stirred so many rivalries and frayed so many tempers. Second, he built a far-flung network of acolytes and loyalists: officers whose unconventional projects he had encouraged and helped to fund; analysts whose work he had sponsored and whose ideas he had helped form; and high-ranking officials, as well as committee chairmen on Capitol Hill, who simply valued having a man of ideas so high up in the Pentagon.

When Bill Cohen, the third of President Clinton’s three secretaries of defense, tried to eliminate Marshall’s office as a cost-cutting measure, dozens of powerhouses from all over Washington urged—in some cases threatened—Cohen to back off. He did.

Marshall figured the lunch with Rumsfeld would be a perfunctory get-together, the two of them in the secretary’s office, discussing what roles the Office of Net Assessment might play this time around. But he was told the lunch would take place in the Gold Room—the ornate private dining hall near the secretary’s office on the Pentagon’s third floor, where the waiters have security clearances, so that classified matters can be discussed without restraint—and that a few other officials, including Rumsfeld’s new deputy secretary, Paul Wolfowitz, would also attend.

As soon as everyone sat down, Rumsfeld came to the point. He wanted Marshall to write a paper on a new strategy, a guide on how to look at the new world and how the U.S. military should adapt to it.

Marshall was almost excited. His office had no institutional power; it was influential only to the extent that a secretary of

defense wanted it to be, and the last couple of secretaries hadn't been keen about the notion. He had known and liked Rumsfeld for many years. The first time Rumsfeld was secretary, he frequently marked up the margins of Marshall's reports with notes and questions. In recent years, when Rumsfeld chaired panels on military issues—to prepare for a return to power—he had always asked Marshall to present a briefing.

Rumsfeld wanted the strategy paper done within six weeks. Marshall wrote a first draft in just a few days. A paper like this had been swirling around in his head for years. The events and inventions that served as its foundation had been evolving and coalescing for three decades, and he had been tracking them all closely, in some cases helping to push them along. Maybe now something would really happen; maybe someone would translate his ideas into policy.

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In 1973, the year Marshall came to the Pentagon, two big things were happening in the realm of defense policy. First, the Vietnam War, clearly a disaster, was winding down. Second, attention was shifting back to the military balance in Europe, and it didn't look good. Along the border of East and West Germany, the troops of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact had long outnumbered those of the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO's qualitative superiority had always compensated for the Warsaw Pact's numerical edge. Now it seemed that the Soviets were catching up on quality.

The Yom Kippur War erupted in October, one month before Marshall went to work for Schlesinger. Israel beat back the Arab armies through superior tactics and firepower, but some of the Arabs' Soviet-made weapons performed better than expected. The war also revealed how intense and fast-paced modern battles could be. Guided missiles, especially antiarmor and antiair missiles, played a bigger role than they had in previous wars. Forces advanced and retreated on the battlefield with remarkable speed.

Officers who considered the possibility of a NATO–Warsaw Pact war had assumed the United States would have time to mobilize reinforcements if the Soviets ever invaded. Now it seemed that the first battle might be decisive. And it was widely accepted that the United States couldn't use nuclear weapons to beat back the Soviet army; the Soviets had attained nuclear parity with America by this point; if the U.S. fired nukes, the U.S.S.R. could fire back.

That year, the Advanced Research Projects Agency, a high-tech think tank inside the Pentagon, commissioned a secret study that carried a deliberately vague title: "The Long Range Research and Development Planning Program." Its purpose was "to identify and characterize" new military technologies that might give the president "a variety of response options"—including "alternatives to massive nuclear destruction"—if the Soviets invaded Western Europe.

ARPA set up three working panels to conduct the study. One, the Strategic Alternatives Panel, was chaired by a defense analyst named Albert Wohlstetter. At the time, Wohlstetter was a professor at the University of Chicago. But through the 1950s and into the early '60s, he had been one of the top nuclear strategists at the RAND Corporation. Wohlstetter was Andy Marshall's chief mentor in his RAND days; he was the chief mentor to most of the analysts who thought about deterring and fighting nuclear wars.

Wohlstetter was intensely charismatic. He grew up in New York City, studied mathematical logic and philosophy at City College, knew about good wine, food, modern design, and architecture. His wife, Roberta, wrote a seminal book on why U.S. intelligence didn't detect signs of the attack on Pearl Harbor. (Titled *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, it was written at RAND under Andy Marshall's supervision.) She was also a gourmet cook. Albert's acolytes would gather for dinner at the Wohlstetters' home in the Hollywood hills and discuss the finer things in life as well as the deadliest. It was a heady experience for men who spent their workdays calculating bomb-damage probabilities on slide rules.

In the early '50s, Wohlstetter had led RAND's most famous study, a quantitative analysis concluding that the U.S. Strategic Air Command's massive fleet of nuclear bombers was vulnerable to a

Soviet sneak attack. There were vast gaps in SAC's early-warning radar systems. The bombers themselves were sitting out on runways, unprotected and, for the most part, unarmed. They lacked the range to fly nonstop from the United States to Russia, so, in order to launch a retaliatory attack, they would first have to fly to "staging bases," where they would be armed and refueled. The problem, in Wohlstetter's analysis, was that the equation worked both ways. The staging bases were close enough to hit Russia, but that meant Russian bombers were close enough to hit the bases. The Soviets could bomb the bases and render them useless before American commanders could even get their own strike under way.

Wohlstetter was a showman. He took his top-secret study to Washington and briefed it to officers and officials—in the Pentagon, the State Department, and the White House—ninety-two times. A few years later, he wrote a follow-up study that revealed vulnerabilities in the Air Force's deployment plan for intercontinental ballistic missiles. He wrote an unclassified version of the study and published it in the January 1959 issue of *Foreign Affairs* under the title "The Delicate Balance of Terror." Everyone in the foreign policy establishment read the article. Everyone was stunned by it. Washington was in the grip of fear over a "missile gap." The intelligence branch of the Air Force and its allies in Congress were charging that the United States was perilously behind the Soviet Union in long-range missiles. Wohlstetter considered the charge oversimplified, but his article fed the fears and lent them intellectual credibility.

Though he didn't know it, Wohlstetter's conclusions were based on faulty intelligence (it turned out that the Soviet Union was way *behind* the United States in long-range missiles and had *no* ability to launch a disarming first strike). His analysis had useful consequences, in any case. The Air Force dispersed its bomber fleet and put the planes on alert. When ICBMs came along, they too were dispersed and encased in underground, blast-resistant silos.

Inside the community of defense intellectuals, Wohlstetter's study influenced the way all such subsequent studies would be conducted. His method of quantitative "systems analysis" gave the

strategists a niche. The military establishment at the time had no training in this sort of analysis. Civilians like Wohlstetter and his colleagues could brief their studies in Washington—and possibly have an impact. And Wohlstetter emerged from the exercise a sort of demigod; in certain circles, anything he said would be taken very seriously.

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When Wohlstetter was appointed to the Strategic Alternatives Panel, he talked frequently with Marshall about the study. ARPA had a number of intriguing technologies on the drawing board. One implicit purpose of this study was to make a case that these projects should be given more money. Thinking about the lessons of the Yom Kippur War and the growing parity in the European balance of power, Wohlstetter figured out at least a theoretical role for some of those projects, especially those involving highly accurate bombs and missiles.

“Based on the analysis,” Wohlstetter wrote in the classified report, which was finished in February 1975, “it appears that non-nuclear weapons with near-zero miss may be technically feasible and militarily effective.”

A bomb’s ability to destroy a target depends on two things: its explosive power and its accuracy. There’s a trade-off: the bigger the blast, the less need for an accurate weapon; the more accurate the weapon, the less need for a big blast. If small, non-nuclear weapons really could be guided to within a few feet of their targets (“near-zero miss,” as Wohlstetter put it), they would have the same destructive power—the same ability to destroy a specific target—as a much larger nuclear bomb.

Wohlstetter was also intrigued by another set of ARPA programs called remotely piloted vehicles, or RPVs—small, unmanned aircraft, guided by remote control and loaded with a small bomb and a camera.

The idea was the brainchild of John Foster, a former Los Alamos physicist and at the time director of the Pentagon’s research

and engineering division. Foster got the idea from his enthusiasm for model airplanes. When Wohlstetter was writing his report, two RPVs, called Praerie and Calere, were in the early stages of development. Each vehicle weighed seventy-five pounds, was powered by a modified lawn mower engine, and could stay aloft for two hours while carrying a twenty-eight-pound payload.

Wohlstetter envisioned a way to link all these technologies—the RPVs, the highly accurate munitions, and a few other devices, some still hypothetical—into a single weapons system or a network of systems. A camera inside an RPV, he wrote, would scan the ground along its flight path and transmit the images back to base, where a commander would steer the vehicle to the target by remote control. The RPV would also carry an accurate bomb or missile, which the commander could fire—again, by remote control—when the plane came within range of the target. Both the vehicle and the bomb could be guided by radio, microwaves, or—in the more distant future—the signals from satellites using the Global Positioning System, the first of which were about to be launched while Wohlstetter was writing his paper. With GPS guidance, he calculated, bombs could land “less than 10 feet” from their targets.

The project’s assignment had been to identify technologies that could give the president a variety of non-nuclear “strategic response options” to a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Here was such an option.

If the Soviets invaded West Germany, these accurate, long-range bombs and missiles could destroy targets well behind enemy lines—knocking out air bases, supply depots, follow-on echelons of Soviet tank formations, and so forth—and could thus disrupt and delay the Soviet offensive, giving NATO a chance to regroup and fight back.

In 1976, as a direct result of this study, ARPA began to develop a program called Assault Breaker, designed to launch “precision strikes” against moving targets deep behind enemy lines. The weapon system consisted of several components: “precision-guided” missiles, radar that could track enemy tanks and guide the missiles to their locations, as well as a data-transmission network

that linked the weapons and the radar together. Bundled together, this “system of systems,” as ARPA described it, matched Wohlstetter’s concept almost exactly.

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In 1978, ARPA and the U.S. Army started conducting tests to demonstrate the Assault Breaker’s technical feasibility. One year later, Andrew Marshall started noticing signs that the Russians were in a panic. One major task of his Office of Net Assessment was to monitor the writings of Soviet military officers. In their classified journal, *Military Thought*, then in a series of articles by Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov in their army’s newspaper, *Red Star*, Soviet commanders were depicting the Assault Breaker as a huge threat to their strategy on the European front.

The Russians tended to view history as a force propelled by revolutions. In the twentieth century, military revolutions—technological advances that triggered whole new strategies of warfare—had included the armored tank, aerial bombardment, radio, radar, and nuclear weapons. Ogarkov in particular saw the Assault Breaker as the harbinger of another “military-technical revolution,” as he called it, which could give the United States a decisive edge on the battlefield.

Andy Marshall didn’t quite know what to make of these writings. The Assault Breaker was still new; the early technical tests were uneven, at best. It was unclear whether the system would ever work. But the Russians were taking it very seriously, and that was important. If *they* thought that these weapons not only worked but revolutionized warfare, the Pentagon should buy lots of them, to reinforce the Russians’ perception, to persuade them that they couldn’t win a war in Europe and that, therefore, they shouldn’t start one.

By the mid-1980s, as microprocessing technologies advanced, the various branches of the U.S. military developed a host of new weapons that fell into this category—laser-guided bombs, radar-guided missiles, high-resolution surveillance gear, and high-speed communications networks that could link them together.

In the summer of 1986, Wohlstetter and another former RAND analyst named Fred Iklé chaired a panel called the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy. Marshall and a RAND economist named Charles Wolf ran one of the commission's working groups, which focused on likely changes in the "security environment" over the next twenty years. Two of the predictions by Marshall and Wolf were especially pertinent. One was that Ogarkov would be proved right—the new weapons systems really would change the face of warfare. The other was that the Soviet economy was in worse shape than the CIA was estimating. The implication of the two predictions together was that the high-tech weapons might give America a profound advantage—and that the Soviet Union might not have the resources to compete. Marshall, in describing this phenomenon, didn't want to use the Russian term—"military-technical revolution." So he called it a "revolution in military affairs." The term caught on in certain circles and was widely referred to by its initials, RMA.

The final report, finished in August 1988 and titled *Discriminate Deterrence*, was an elaboration of the ideas that Wohlstetter, Marshall, and a few others had been mulling for the past decade. But unlike the earlier reports, this one was issued to the public, replete with a Pentagon press conference featuring the coauthors. Several Western European governments reacted furiously. They took any suggestion that America might not protect them with nuclear weapons as a sign of abandonment, a ripping apart of the transatlantic alliance. (The Cold War's final decade was a strangely abstract time.)

But the report's more enduring impact was that it put the RMA concept on the table—with official backing—just at the moment when many of the weapons systems it envisioned were going into production and assuming high profiles in the Pentagon budget.

These weapons included not just the Assault Breaker, which had been taken over by the U.S. Army, but a new generation of laser-guided bombs in the arsenals of the Air Force. And the new secretary of the Air Force, appointed after George H. W. Bush took over the White House in January 1989, was Donald Rice, a man as sympathetic to these new weapons as anyone could be.

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Through most of the 1970s and '80s, Don Rice was president of the RAND Corporation. He kept in touch with Marshall and Wohlstetter during those years, and he knew about their reports on accurate weapons. Marshall and Wohlstetter had left Santa Monica many years earlier, but they had stayed in touch with several RAND analysts who were engrossed in similar studies on how the laser-guided bombs could boost the Air Force's fortunes.

These weapons had achieved one spectacular success toward the end of the Vietnam War—the bombing of the Thanh Hoa Bridge, a 540-foot-long span of steel across the Song Ma River, seventy miles south of Hanoi. Most of the North Vietnamese Army's supplies were sent across this bridge. In the mid-to-late 1960s, U.S. Air Force and Navy pilots flew hundreds of sorties, dropping thousands of bombs in an attempt to destroy it. These were “dumb bombs,” not much different from those used in World War II. Dropped from an airplane's bomb bay, they fell by the force of gravity and, on their way down to Earth, were thrown off target by the wind. The North Vietnamese had surrounded the bridge with a ring of air defenses—three hundred antiair artillery guns, eighty-five surface-to-air missile sites, and a wing of MiG fighter jets at a nearby base. Eleven U.S. planes were shot down trying to get at the bridge. As a result, American pilots had to fly at higher altitudes to avoid the air defenses, which made their bombs drift still farther away from the target. Overhead photos showed so many bomb craters around the bridge that some nicknamed the area the “valley of the moon.”

On May 13, 1972, the Air Force had another go at the bridge, its first in four and a half years, this time flying a mere fourteen F-4 fighter bombers, some of them loaded with two dozen two-thousand- to three-thousand-pound versions of the new laser-guided bombs. They looked like any other bombs, except that the nose cone contained a laser-seeker. A crewman aimed a laser beam down at the target; the bomb's laser-seeker followed the beam. Several of these bombs scored direct hits, putting the bridge out of

commission for the rest of the year (though, since the Viet Cong found alternative supply routes, they didn't profoundly affect the war).

For the rest of the decade, and into the 1980s, the Pentagon's research-and-development departments kept modifying these bombs, and Congress kept funding them, but most Air Force generals weren't enthusiastic, didn't believe that the new weapons justified big changes to their budgets or to their war plans.

There were two reasons for the generals' skepticism. First, they were pilots. Those who had risen through the ranks flying nuclear bombers for the Strategic Air Command didn't think much about conventional warfare generally. Those who had flown tactical fighter planes didn't warm to the idea of "smart bombs," as the weapons came to be called. To these officers, air combat meant fast, maneuverable planes swooping in low, underneath the range of enemy radar, so low you could practically plant the bombs on the target; to do that, you needed skilled pilots and maneuverable planes; the only thing the bombs had to do was explode.

Second, the new bombs had a technical flaw. Laser beams are obstructed or deflected when they hit dust, smoke, or rain. Dust and smoke are common on the battlefield; rain is commonplace in northern Europe, where, in the wake of Vietnam, the generals were turning their attention. In short, if there was a war in Europe, these new wonder weapons might be duds.

When Don Rice came into the Pentagon, he knew that service secretaries rarely had power; they were, in the main, civilian figureheads in a building run by uniformed officers. But Rice knew the Air Force well from his days at RAND. He was determined not only to be an exceptional secretary but also to override the officers' resistance to the new technology—to make sure the smart bombs were given a higher priority in the budget and a central place in a more expansive Air Force strategy. The Wohlstetter-Iklé report had been out for several months. Rice had an ally in Marshall, who had connections higher up. Inside the Air Force itself, Rice sought out the smartest young officers and appointed them to a special "Secretary's Staff Group."

One of the most ambitious of these officers was a lieutenant colonel named Dave Deptula. The previous year, Deptula had worked with an even harder-driving colonel—some hailed him as a visionary, others dismissed him as a crank—named John Warden. All Air Force officers knew the tale of Billy Mitchell, the aviator of the First World War who believed that future wars would be won by air power alone and that ground armies, with their brute skirmishes, would be rendered obsolete. Nobody quite believed that anymore, but many dreamed of a day when air power would at least dominate the other aspects of warfare—that is, when the Air Force would dominate the Army and the Navy.

The ideas that Warden was talking about, combined with the new technologies, suggested to some that their day was near.

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On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. Five days later, Don Rice called a meeting of his staff group. The world was on the verge of a dramatic shift. The U.S. military was geared to fight a war in Europe. That was where most of its troops and bases were. Yet the great division in Europe was on the verge of mending. What was the new world going to look like? What threats would the United States face? Most important, what would be the role of the U.S. Air Force?

After several weeks of intense discussions, Rice assigned Deptula to write a paper answering these questions, especially the last one. It would be, remarkably, the first official statement of the Air Force's role since 1947, the year it became an independent branch of the armed services. (Before then, it was the air wing of the Army.) The paper was completed in June 1990 and titled "Global Reach—Global Power." It argued that as the Cold War wound down, new threats would emerge from as-yet-unknown quarters; that the United States might have to respond to these threats on short notice but with massive force; and that the modern Air Force uniquely possessed the traits that America would need in this new era—"speed, range, flexibility, precision, and lethality."

To Rice, Deptula, and the rest of the small study group, the new guided bombs—the instruments of “precision and lethality”—were central to this vision of reinvigorated Air Force supremacy.

As recently as 1986, when Ronald Reagan ordered an air raid on Libya, the job had taken 119 aircraft and 20 warships. Now, Deptula calculated, the same job could be done with the laser-guided bombs on board only 6 B-2 Stealth bombers. And the B-2s wouldn’t need access to remote foreign bases. They had the range to fly, fully loaded, from American territory to almost anywhere on Earth.

Don Rice distributed Deptula’s paper to every senator and congressman and to all the major media. The Air Force public affairs office adopted the title “Global Reach—Global Power” as the service’s new slogan. Air commanders scheduled a large military exercise for August to demonstrate their new power.

They were preempted in their plans. On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, invaded Kuwait. President George H. W. Bush decided to push back. The Air Force demonstration would be a real war.

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In the week following Iraq’s invasion, Warden and Deptula drew up a plan for a U.S. air attack. Warden, who ran a special office on air doctrine in the Pentagon’s basement, had devised a concept of air warfare that he called the “five-rings” strategy. He likened the modern battlefield to the rings on a dartboard. In the bull’s-eye were the enemy’s political and military leaders, along with their networks of command, control, and communication. The next ring consisted of the nation’s infrastructure—electrical grids, power plants, and military factories. The third ring was its transportation—roads, bridges, airfields, and ports. The fourth was the population. The fifth and most outward ring was the enemy’s army.

In Warden’s scheme, the first ring—the enemy’s leadership and communications network—was the prime target. Obliterate that ring, and the enemy will collapse. The enemy’s troops, tanks,

and other frontline weapons were the *least* important targets, hardly worth an air campaign's attention. It was the exact reverse of the conventional view of air warfare, which put the highest priority on destroying the enemy's army in the field.

The attack plan drawn up by Warden and Deptula applied the five-ring strategy to Iraq. Though President Bush's goal was to push the Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, Warden and Deptula argued that the best way to do that was to launch air strikes against dozens of key targets in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. They called the plan Instant Thunder, by way of contrasting it with Rolling Thunder, the Vietnam War's bombing plan, which had called for rolling out a gradual escalation of air strikes over a period of months. Instant Thunder, as they envisioned it, would last six days. The plan even listed the specific targets—eighty-four of them—that corresponded to the innermost rings, the key “nodes” that held together Saddam's military command. Destroy those nodes, and the regime collapses like the proverbial house of cards.

Don Rice, who had encouraged Warden to push his plan, told Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney that the air strikes *alone* would defeat Iraq. No ground war would be needed afterward. Cut off from their commanders, the Iraqi troops in Kuwait would be so isolated and debilitated that the Arab armies, which had joined the American-led coalition mainly for political reasons, could push them out and reoccupy Kuwait by themselves. The American troops, he said, could stand by, like a “cocked fist,” waiting to pounce if needed, but they would probably not be needed.

Few outside Rice's inner circle believed that air power alone could do the job: not Cheney, not even most Air Force officers, certainly not the top military leaders of the war effort—General Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of U.S. Central Command—both of whom were Army officers.

Still, Deptula was sent to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to run the air campaign's operations. The strategy that he and Warden had devised back in the Pentagon was heavily watered down—most would say realigned with reality—but much of its basic concept survived,

especially the emphasis on bombing early and repeatedly the bull's-eye targets in Baghdad.

The accuracy of the laser-guided bombs made this concept at least feasible. Warden drew up a chart showing how many bombs had been required to destroy a basic target—say, a factory—in various wars over time. In WWII, when the average “dumb bomb” missed its target by more than a half-mile, a B-17 had to drop 9,000 of them to score a direct hit. In Korea and Vietnam, when primitive guided bombs first entered the arsenal, an F-104 or F-105 still had to drop 176 bombs to hit a single specific target. In Desert Storm, the official name for the first war against Iraq, Warden predicted that an F-16 would have to drop a mere 30 bombs—and that the brand-new F-117 Stealth fighter-bomber would need to drop just 1.

In the era of dumb bombs, it would have been impossible to contemplate attacking targets in a large city like Baghdad. Thousands, tens of thousands, of bombs would miss their targets and therefore kill vast numbers of civilians. (It was one thing to kill lots of Germans and Japanese in the course of a world war, quite another thing to kill so many Iraqis for the limited goal of pushing Saddam's occupation army out of Kuwait.) In the era of smart bombs, though, you could think about hitting specific targets within a city. Maybe you could pull it off.

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As it turned out, the war didn't quite go as the air-power champions had hoped. In some respects, the results were stunning. On the attack's first night, F-117A Stealth planes crept into Iraqi skies and bombed crucial air-defense batteries. Other fighters and bombers followed over the next few days in waves, dropping hundreds of bombs on communications centers, command posts, microwave relays, and leadership bunkers. The campaign harked back to the attack on the Thanh Hoa Bridge, but repeated many times over, and more precisely still. In particularly dramatic strikes, laser-guided bombs scored direct hits on a bridge, a specific building, even a

specific chimney pipe. Video footage shot from bomb-bay cameras was broadcast to the world on CNN, over and over.

But the five-rings theory wasn't vindicated. The opening days' air strikes, against the key nodes, were supposed to cut Saddam off from his troops—maybe, if things went really well, cut him off from his officer corps, who might feel compelled to mount a coup. But the U.S. Air Force's own official history of the war concluded that Saddam's network of command, control, and communication never collapsed. The study noted that despite "the lethality and precision of the attacks," this network "turned out to be more redundant and more able to reconstitute itself than first thought. Fiber-optic networks and computerized switching systems proved particularly tough to put out of action."

Nor was the overall air campaign as revolutionary as the videotapes suggested. Smart bombs were still new, expensive, and in short supply. Of the thousands of bombs dropped during America's thirty-day air campaign, just 9 percent were smart bombs—and many of them weren't so smart. The technical flaw, which had been noted by many officers a decade earlier in the wake of the Vietnam War, had not yet been corrected. A lot of laser-guided bombs went astray, as their beams were deflected by dust and smoke. After the first week, most of the air strikes consisted of B-52s laying down hundreds of dumb bombs on Iraqi bunkers and A-10 attack planes swooping in low and firing hundreds of armor-piercing rounds at Iraqi tanks. It was old-fashioned bombing and strafing of troops in the field—the sort of bombing that, according to Warden's five-rings theory, would not be necessary.

Ultimately, the war didn't end until Saddam Hussein's elite Republican Guards were killed and pushed back in a still more old-fashioned way—by American troops on the ground, a half million of them. The endgame seemed to vindicate the traditional Army view, which was spelled out by General Powell and thus became known as the "Powell doctrine"—that a nation should not go to war, and could not attain victory, without "overwhelming force."

Still, the Gulf War did mark a shift in the relationship between air and ground forces on the battlefield. Before, air forces were

seen as supporting ground forces. Now their positions seemed reversed.

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On January 24, 1991, eight days after the air war started, Andy Marshall called a staff meeting. He was wondering whether the “revolution in military affairs” was now a reality, whether the opening air strikes of the Gulf War—their speed, accuracy, concentration, and the types of targets they were hitting—marked a fundamental change in the nature of warfare, similar to the Germans’ “blitzkrieg” tactics at the start of World War II.

It was an unforeseen twist. Nearly twenty years earlier, Marshall and Wohlstetter had thought that these new weapons would restore parity to the Soviet-American military balance in Europe. Now that the Soviet Union was gone, it seemed that they might secure American military preeminence worldwide.

Marshall asked his military assistant, Andrew Krepinevich, to write a paper exploring the question. Krepinevich was an Army lieutenant colonel who, five years earlier, had written a book called *The Army and Vietnam*, which argued that the United States lost the war, in part, because the Army commanders fought it as a conventional battle, similar to Korea or World War II, with heavy firepower and large-scale units—when in fact it was a guerrilla war, which required more flexible, small-scale tactics.

His paper for Marshall concluded that the revolution had indeed begun. “Quality is becoming far more important than quantity, revolutionizing the nature of warfare,” Krepinevich wrote. It would soon be possible, he continued, to identify an enemy’s “center of gravity,” its “jugular” or “central nervous system”—the small number of targets that, if successfully hit, would destroy its ability to resist. The new precision weapons made it possible to hit these nerve centers with a small number of bombs or missiles. The 1991 Gulf War was a “sequential war”—thirty days of air strikes, followed by four days of fighting on the ground. The new weapons would make possible “near-simultaneous operations” in the air and

on land, against enemy targets across the battlefield from front to rear. The strikes on targets deep in enemy territory would be the “tip of the spear” that opened the way for “more ‘traditional’ forms of military power.” These strikes might be so successful that the traditional forms would not be needed.

The key weapons systems in this new kind of warfare, Krepinevich continued, would be unmanned aircraft, high-speed computers, and precision-guided munitions. Weapons such as tanks, short-range fighter planes, and large surface ships—weapons that can’t be mobilized quickly, can’t easily be integrated into this network, and can’t be used at all without large, vulnerable supply lines—would “likely become progressively less central to military operations.”

Those “less central” weapons, of course, were the core assets of the U.S. Army, Air Force, and Navy.

The paper was finished in July 1992. To those in the know, it was the culmination, synthesis, and extension of all the reports done on the subject—most of them classified—over the previous seventeen years by Marshall, Wohlstetter, Deptula, and others. But this paper advanced the agenda in two ways. First, it provided a context in which to view the recent Gulf War. Second, though also classified, it circulated widely among those with security clearances. In those circles, it became *the* topic of conversation—the centerpiece of a debate over what wars might look like, and how defense strategies and budgets should be reshaped, in a world without the Cold War or the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, in political circles, including the Pentagon’s upper corridors, the report seemed dead in the water. The Cold War was over, and the United States had won it. The military establishment saw no need for a revolution. Why change anything when you’re by far the most powerful fighting force in the world?

In the wider political world, the public wanted a “peace dividend.” The budget-slashing started not with Bill Clinton but with George H. W. Bush. In his State of the Union address in January 1992, Bush announced the cancellation of several high-profile weapons systems—MX missiles, B-2 bombers, Advanced Cruise

Missiles. In budget hearings the same month, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney—who at first resisted any arms reductions but finally followed the president’s orders—testified that he was cutting the five-year defense plan by \$300 billion, with another \$50 billion of cuts to come. “You’ve directed me to buy more M-1s, F-14s, and F-16s—all great systems,” Cheney told the Senate Armed Services Committee, “but we have enough of them.” At the same hearing, General Powell testified about plans to cut Army divisions by one-third, Navy aircraft carriers by one-fifth, and active-duty troops by a half-million men and women, to say nothing of “major reductions” in Air Force fighter wings and strategic bombers.

By coincidence, the kinds of weapons that were cut—expensive items that yielded big savings—were precisely the kinds of weapons that Krepinevich had advocated cutting. They were artifacts of old-style warfare—tanks, big ships, short-range fighter aircraft—that would only bog down a revolutionary style of fighting.

But advancing the revolution would require spending more money for the new weapons—and overhauling military strategy, tactics, and training. Few officials paid much attention to these matters, either in the final year of George H. W. Bush’s presidency or in the first few years of Bill Clinton’s. Andy Marshall briefed some high-ranking Pentagon officials on the issues. In August 1993 he wrote a memorandum titled “Some Thoughts on Military Revolutions,” a politely toned-down summary of Krepinevich’s paper. But it stimulated little interest. And the Pentagon’s top generals—who, by and large, still consisted of men who had risen through the ranks as Army tank officers, Air Force fighter pilots, or Navy aircraft-carrier commanders—had no interest in pursuing these ideas at all.

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By the mid-1990s, several members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, many of whom had known Marshall for years, were growing concerned that his ideas weren’t being taken seriously

enough. In 1996, Joe Lieberman, Democrat of Connecticut, and Dan Coats, Republican of Indiana, coauthored a bill to create a National Defense Panel, which they envisioned as a forum for advancing the “revolution in military affairs.”

The panel had nine members. Seven were selected by the Defense Department, one by the committee’s Republicans, and one by its Democrats. The Republicans picked an ex-Marine and former Pentagon official named Richard Armitage. The Democrats picked Andrew Krepinevich. One of the panel’s staff members was Dave Deptula, who was now a full colonel.

The secretary of defense, Bill Cohen, wasn’t enthusiastic about this panel. He thought it should suggest ways to make the military more efficient. Armitage and Krepinevich saw their mission as making the military more *effective*, and they struck up an alliance to keep the panel on that track.

Most of the panelists had a more political and diplomatic focus than Armitage and Krepinevich did. But much of the final report reflected Marshall’s thesis. “We are on the cusp of a military revolution,” the report stated up front, “stimulated by rapid advances in information . . . technologies.”

While preparing the report, Krepinevich coined the term that would enter the public lexicon. Marshall’s phrase, the “revolution in military affairs,” *described* the new era. Krepinevich mulled over a slogan that would prescribe what to *do* about it. He finally hit on it: “military transformation.” The panel released its report in December 1997. The title: *Transforming Defense*.

Not long after, Armitage went to work on the presidential campaign of the Republican governor of Texas, George W. Bush. On September 23, 1999, Bush gave his speech at The Citadel, the speech in which he heralded a “revolution in the technology of war,” an era when battles would be won not by “mass or size” but by “mobility and swiftness.” Armitage wrote the first draft of that speech. He took much of its language straight out of the National Defense Panel report.

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Donald Rumsfeld took special note of that speech. Two days earlier, he had chaired a panel assembled by a former Pentagon official and weapons physicist named James Wade. When Rumsfeld was briefly secretary of defense in the mid-'70s, Wade was chief of his policy planning staff. The two kept in touch over the years.

Wade was heavily influenced by Andy Marshall's thinking. Marshall was the bookish intellectual; Wade was the sharp-elbows operator. Through the 1980s, when Wade was the assistant secretary of defense for research and development, he put Marshall's ideas in motion, pressuring the Pentagon's top civilians and the reluctant military chiefs to boost spending on the new precision-guided weapons and advanced radar systems. Now, like many advocates, he feared the revolution had stalled, and he set out to do his own bit of jump-starting.

He formed the panel to discuss—and thereby promote—a book that he had recently coauthored called *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, which was essentially his own take on Marshall's "revolution in military affairs," with an emphasis on the primacy of speed. The aim of shock-and-awe warfare was, as he put it, "to stun, and then rapidly defeat the enemy through a series of carefully orchestrated land, sea, air, and special operations forces strikes that take place nearly simultaneously across a wide battle space," with the aim of throwing the enemy into "immediate paralysis" and "capitulation."

Marshall was a member of Wade's panel. So were Johnny Foster, the former Pentagon R&D chief and model-airplane enthusiast who dreamed up the modern remotely piloted vehicle, and Newt Gingrich, the former House Speaker whose views on military matters still carried weight in Republican circles.

When Rumsfeld read Bush's Citadel speech, he knew exactly where its ideas came from. He realized how central they now were in the mainstream Republican agenda—and how big a role they might play in his own reentry into high office.

(Three years later, as Rumsfeld geared up for the invasion of Iraq, he sent a copy of Wade's book to the U.S. commander, General Tommy Franks. As the war began, Franks publicly said the

point of the bombing campaign was to “shock and awe” the enemy.)

After Bush won the 2000 election, his policy advisers wanted Dan Coats, the congressman who had set up the National Defense Panel, to become secretary of defense and Rich Armitage to be his deputy. But Coats did poorly in his interview with the president-elect; he came across as uninformed and as tepid about reviving a missile-defense program, which Bush considered his top priority.

Dick Cheney, Bush’s vice president, suggested Rumsfeld as an alternative. Thirty years earlier, Rumsfeld had tapped Cheney to come work for him in Richard Nixon’s White House. The two had been friends and political allies ever since. Now it was time for Cheney to return the favor. The original plan was that Rumsfeld would be director of the Central Intelligence Agency. But he was more interested in returning to the Pentagon. He had spent the past two years as chairman to three defense panels—not just Wade’s one-day session, but also a six-month-long panel to investigate the threat from hostile nations’ ballistic missiles and another panel, which was just wrapping up, on the vulnerability of America’s military systems in outer space. Rumsfeld scored well with Bush; he seemed so energetic, and he knew so much. He got the job.

One result of this switch was that Armitage was out. Bush had selected Colin Powell as secretary of state. Everyone knew that Armitage was Powell’s best friend. Rumsfeld didn’t want a State Department spy in his midst. When he met with Armitage at the transition headquarters, Rumsfeld told him, “You have less than a 50–50 chance of being my deputy.”

Armitage, husky, profane, and able to match Rumsfeld’s brusqueness, replied, “No, I have a *zero* chance.” The meeting didn’t last long.

Meanwhile, Paul Wolfowitz, one of Bush’s top foreign policy advisers during the campaign, had his own bad interview with Powell. Wolfowitz wanted to be deputy secretary of state, but Powell wasn’t keen on that notion. In his exile during the Clinton years, Wolfowitz had been one of the leading “neoconservatives,” the

group of ex-Reagan officials who, in the 1970s, rebelled against Nixon-Kissinger Realpolitik with its emphasis on vital security interests and a stable balance of international power. The neocons, and Wolfowitz in particular, denounced Kissinger's school of thinking as immoral because it tolerated Soviet Communism's oppression and human-rights violations for the sake of détente and arms-control treaties. Now the neocons were advocating the forcible overthrow of various other dictators, especially in the Middle East, above all Saddam Hussein. Powell proudly regarded himself as a Realist and was leery of the neocons' rush to arms. Wolfowitz, however, had performed professionally as ambassador to Thailand, so Powell offered him the job of ambassador to the United Nations. Wolfowitz had no interest in that.

Instead, Rumsfeld took on Wolfowitz as deputy secretary of defense. Armitage went to Foggy Bottom to serve as his friend Powell's deputy. And so the power equation of the next four years was set—the hard-driven Rumsfeld at the Pentagon and his protégé Cheney in the White House, squeezing the pinstriped diplomats at State in a pincer hold.

Rumsfeld had no intention of merely presiding over a federal agency. He was determined to shake it up. He was looking for levers, and Marshall's concepts—their very labels, "revolution," "transformation"—seemed the model of a shake-up in waiting. And so he invited his old friend Andy Marshall to lunch and asked him to write *the* paper on a new military strategy.

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As expected, the military chiefs resisted Rumsfeld's call for transformation. The quarrel centered not so much on Marshall's paper, which was written for Rumsfeld's eyes, but on a larger, more institutional follow-on document called the Quadrennial Defense Review—a congressionally mandated report, to be put out by the Pentagon every four years, outlining the official strategy and how it relates to the military's budget and programs. The next QDR was due in September 2001. Krepinevich was brought back as a

consultant to write much of it. Deptula, now a two-star general, contributed sections, too.

It was a wide-ranging document, full of boilerplate and inter-service compromises. But the key themes stood out clearly. These were “the ongoing revolution in military affairs,” which “could change the conduct of military operations”; the beginning of an “ambitious transformation of U.S. military forces,” including a “transition to network-centric warfare,” to exploit this revolution; and the need to focus more on “long-range precision strike” munitions and “rapidly deployable” forces, which could deal with threats “swiftly wherever they might arise.”

The military services resisted, especially the Army, whose generals understood that “rapidly deployable” was a synonym for “smaller and lighter”—meaning fewer big and heavy armored vehicles, such as the M-1 Abrams tank, the U.S. Army’s mainstay. The QDR referred to such weapons as “legacy systems.” Legacies are about the past, not the present, much less the future. Army officers had good reason to conclude that Rumsfeld meant to put them out to pasture.

In his first six months, Rumsfeld managed to kill just two Army weapons systems: the Cheyenne helicopter, which many Army officers realized was a dog in any case, and the Crusader artillery cannon, which was deemed too large and heavy for a transformational military. But on all other fronts, the Army—and much of the Air Force and Navy, which saw their beloved fighter planes and aircraft carriers threatened—put up a huge struggle.

Rumsfeld got into so many quarrels with the brass and grew so frustrated by their obstacles that Pentagon reporters were predicting he would be the first casualty of Bush’s cabinet.

On September 10, 2001, Rumsfeld delivered a “town hall” speech to the Pentagon’s employees. “The topic today,” he began, “is an adversary that poses a threat, a serious threat, to the security of the United States of America. This adversary is one of the world’s last bastions of central planning. . . . With brutal consistency, it stifles free thought and crushes new ideas. It disrupts the defense of the United States and places the lives of men and women in

uniform at risk. Perhaps this adversary sounds like the former Soviet Union, but that enemy is gone.” The new foe, he said, is “more subtle and implacable. . . . It’s the Pentagon bureaucracy.”

The next morning, a group of al-Qaeda jihadists crashed passenger jetliners into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers, killing nearly three thousand Americans. In retrospect, Rumsfeld’s speech of the day before seemed churlish. But to some, not least Rumsfeld himself, it was galvanizing. Over the next month, the Bush administration planned for war against al-Qaeda’s harbor and sponsor, the Taliban regime of Afghanistan. The war would be a test of what the Pentagon could do. It would be a test of transformation.

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In a sense, Afghanistan was precisely the sort of post-Cold War battleground that Marshall and the other transformation theorists foresaw—remote, landlocked, with no secure or friendly nearby bases and no easy access routes for American ground troops. Long-range planes carrying accurate bombs seemed the best way to punch in. But Afghanistan also seemed to defy transformation’s premises. It was a preindustrial society. What “nerve centers” could the smart bombs attack? Did it *have* nerve centers? Did the concept make any sense? American air power could get to Afghanistan, but what would it do once it got there? In planning meetings, Rumsfeld complained about the country’s lack of good targets.

The breakthrough idea came not from the Pentagon but from the Central Intelligence Agency. CIA director George Tenet suggested sending in several twelve-man teams of special-operations forces. Helicopters could fly them into Afghanistan from secret bases in nearby Uzbekistan. The special-ops teams could link up with anti-Taliban warlords, with whom the CIA had relations from the days when they jointly beat back the Soviet Union’s occupation.

Bush approved the plan, but nobody—not Bush, Rumsfeld, Tenet, and certainly not Tommy Franks, the hidebound Army

general who rose through the ranks as an artillery officer and was now commander of U.S. Central Command—believed it would be enough to defeat the Taliban.

Franks and his staff worked up a war plan that involved two Army divisions invading Afghanistan through Pakistan. He regarded the combination of special-ops forces and air power as a prelude—a useful way of distracting the Taliban, keeping them off balance—while the “decisive” stage of the battle was prepared, a process that Franks calculated would take nine months.

Dave Deptula, now the head of the Air Force Combat Command, was sent to Prince Sultan Air Force Base, in Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia, to run the war’s Air Operations Center. But even he knew that there was no systematic plan and no way, really, to lay one out in any detail. The operation was made up as they went along.

However, in the decade since Desert Storm, without much notice, two major advances had been made in the technology of air warfare—both fulfilling the visions in Albert Wohlstetter’s ARPA study of the mid-1970s.

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One of these advances was an unmanned aerial vehicle called Predator, the realization of Johnny Foster’s epiphany about model airplanes and military reconnaissance. Predator could fly for twenty-four hours straight, at an altitude of 25,000 feet, carrying a 450-pound payload, which initially consisted of communications gear and a camera focused on the ground below. The digital images taken by this camera were beamed to a satellite, then transmitted to a ground station hundreds or thousands of miles away (theoretically, anywhere on Earth), where an operator, who controlled Predator’s flight path with a joystick, could watch its video stream on a monitor in real time.

The second big advance was a new kind of smart bomb, which the Air Force and Navy developed together, called the Joint Direct Attack Munition or JDAM. The JDAM project was put in motion by Don Rice in the weeks following the 1991 Gulf War. Looking

at the postwar aerial photos, he saw a lot of empty craters in the sand, the result of laser-guided bombs that missed their targets because the lasers had been deflected by smoke or dust. Rice ordered a technical review of alternative technologies that might guide bombs accurately in all kinds of weather and conditions. Air Force scientists quickly hit upon satellite guidance by the Global Positioning System. Wohlstetter, in his paper fifteen years earlier, had mentioned the GPS as one of “various accuracy-improvement programs” on the drawing board. At that time, it was barely a vision in a handful of R&D labs.

Its significance was threefold. First, with GPS guidance, a smart bomb could not be thrown off course by bad weather, smoke, or camouflage. The ground operator would punch a target’s coordinates into a computer and upload the instruction to a satellite, which would beam the data to the JDAM’s GPS receiver. The JDAM wouldn’t follow a laser beam; rather, it would plunge to a specific point on the earth—a designated latitude and longitude—and explode precisely on target.

Second, JDAMs were cheap, so the Pentagon could buy a lot of them. The laser-guided bombs used in Desert Storm cost over \$250,000 each. A JDAM cost just \$20,000. They were kits, consisting of the GPS receiver and other electronic gear, which could be attached to the tail of almost any bomb in the U.S. Air Force or Navy’s inventory. In other words, JDAMs would turn dumb bombs into smart bombs for almost no money.

Third, they could be carried inside nearly any plane with a bomb bay. The plane didn’t have to be at all sophisticated; it wouldn’t have to be more than an airbus, dropping off JDAMs from a very high altitude, above the range of anti-aircraft fire. No crew member, laser, or radar inside the plane needed to guide the weapon to its target; the weapon would do that by itself.

Both new weapons, Predator and the JDAM, were first used during Clinton’s presidency, in the war to defend Kosovo against Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic. The programs had moved slowly through the Pentagon bureaucracy. Predator’s first test flight took place in 1994; JDAM entered production a year later.

But by the time of Kosovo, in 1999, fewer than one hundred of each were available for use.

In Clinton's final year, the Pentagon and the CIA developed a modified version of Predator that carried not only a camera but a laser-seeker and a Hellfire antitank missile, which could be fired by the same sort of joystick that steered Predator. It was successfully tested in January 2001, just before Clinton left office. The Air Force mission statement noted that the Hellfire-armed Predator would be ideal for hitting "fleeting and perishable" targets—a phrase that could mean tanks on the battlefield or cars carrying terrorists. Richard Clarke, the White House counterterrorism chief, sent a memo to Condoleezza Rice, President-elect Bush's incoming national security adviser, recommending "going forward" with new missions that exploited this new feature.

The armed Predator was due for deployment on September 1, 2001. Technical flaws delayed it, but after September 11, the first units were shipped to Afghanistan anyway. So were the JDAMs. On October 7, the bombing began.

Early on, the JDAMs—dropped by B-1, B-2, and B-52 bombers, and by F-14 and F-18 fighter-bombers launched from nearby aircraft carriers—destroyed the Taliban's handful of bases and runways, putting the regime's air force out of commission. But for the next two weeks, the bombing had little effect. As Rumsfeld had fretted, Afghanistan had no industry, no centralized command facilities, few paved roads—no "high-payoff targets." Combat planes bombed and strafed Taliban troops, but the troops could hide—and reemerge to fight.

Not until October 15 did U.S. special-operations soldiers meet up with warlords of the Northern Alliance, the main anti-Taliban insurgency. Then, toward the end of the month, something remarkable happened.

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A few miles outside the village of Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan's second-largest city, an American special-ops officer, wearing native

garb and a thick beard, rode along a rocky trail on horseback. Through his night-vision binoculars, he spotted a regiment of Taliban fighters a few hundred yards away. He pulled out a laptop computer, typed out the regiment's coordinates, and pushed the Send button. A Predator drone, hovering twenty thousand feet overhead, received the message and beamed it to Deptula's headquarters at Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia. An Air Force officer at the base sent back a signal to the Predator, directing it to fly over the regiment. A video camera on the drone's belly scanned the terrain and streamed the imagery back to the base in real time. The officer then ordered a B-52 bomber pilot, who was patrolling the skies, to attack the target. En route, the pilot punched the target's coordinates into the GPS receiver of one of his JDAMs. He flew to the area and fired the JDAM, which darted toward the regiment, exploded, and killed the Taliban.

The total time that elapsed—from the officer punching in the data to the pilot dropping his bomb—was *nineteen minutes*. Just a decade earlier, in Desert Storm, the sequence would have taken three *days*. A few years before then, it could not have taken place at all; it could not have been imagined.

Over the next few weeks, the incident at Mazar was replicated, with variations, all across Afghanistan—phenomenally accurate air strikes by American bombers, followed by offensives on the ground by anti-Taliban insurgents, along with small teams of soldiers, Marines, Green Berets, and CIA advisers. In mid-November, just five weeks after the war began, the Taliban were driven out of Kabul, the country's capital; commanders of the Northern Alliance, the main U.S.-backed insurgency, moved in. A month after that, U.S. Marines secured the airport in Kandahar in a battle that became known as the "Taliban's last stand." Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda no longer had a base of operations. On December 22, a new interim government, led by Hamid Karzai and backed by a vast international coalition, took office.

On January 31, Donald Rumsfeld delivered a triumphant speech at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C., recounting the air strikes on Mazar-i-Sharif as the turning point of the war—and as Exhibit A in the case for transformation.

“This is precisely what transformation is about,” Rumsfeld exclaimed to his audience of officers and students. “Here we are in the year 2002, fighting the first war of the twenty-first century, and the horse cavalry was back . . . being used in previously unimaginable ways. It showed that a revolution in military affairs”—Marshall’s phrase—“is about more than building new high-tech weapons, though that is certainly part of it. It’s also about new ways of thinking and new ways of fighting.”

In World War II, he said, taking another page from Marshall and Krepinevich, the German army’s blitzkrieg “revolutionized warfare,” with its “small, high-quality, mobile shock forces”—coordinated with dive bombers and mobilized infantry and artillery—all concentrated on one part of the front line. “In a similar way,” he said, “the battle for Mazar was a transformational battle. Coalition forces took existing military capabilities, from the most advanced laser-guided weapons to antique, forty-year-old B-52s . . . to the most rudimentary—a man on horseback. And they used them together in unprecedented ways, with devastating effect on enemy positions, on enemy morale, and this time, on the cause of evil in the world.”

Rumsfeld was overstating his case. American air power and the new precise weapons made a big difference, but not all the difference; they didn’t produce the battlefield victory by themselves. Air strikes had no effect on the Taliban’s hold until ground troops were in place to follow through. Even then, the Americans and Afghan rebels met fierce resistance from Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters.

In the early clashes, the Taliban forces did little to disguise their presence or take cover. However, by the end of October, they had begun to adapt to U.S. tactics and technology. They smeared mud on their vehicles, so the cameras in the sky wouldn’t spot them. They camouflaged their movements and took cover along the mountainous terrain. In November and December, in battles at Bai Beche and Sayd Slim Kalay, north of Kandahar, they mastered cover and concealment so well that U.S. special-ops forces couldn’t find them and thus couldn’t beam their positions to the Predators overhead.

The new technology had proved very effective at killing people and destroying targets, but—even when it was combined with a small number of ground forces—it didn't bring capitulation; it didn't win the war. The world hadn't quite yet changed that much.

When Rumsfeld gave his victory speech at the National Defense University, Kabul had fallen, but the Taliban and al-Qaeda were still fighting. The biggest battle of all wouldn't be fought until March. It was called Operation Anaconda, and its aim was to root out the al-Qaeda holdouts in the Shah-i-kot Valley. If Rumsfeld hadn't already drawn his conclusions—not just about the Afghan war, but about the nature of modern warfare generally—Anaconda might have compelled him to draw different ones.

Before the operation began, Predators and spy satellites took aerial photos of the entire prospective battlefield—a fairly confined space of less than fifty square miles—in order to locate every al-Qaeda position. Yet postwar analyses determined that fewer than half of these positions were detected before the battle began—and most of the fire came from positions that the aerial cameras hadn't detected.

At the start of Anaconda, U.S. infantry troops dismounted from their assault helicopters and found themselves almost on top of dug-in al-Qaeda troops. The American soldiers were pinned down for most of the day, and had to be airlifted out that night. For the next week, U.S. bombers pounded al-Qaeda's positions. Yet by the time the American soldiers fought their way back, they were again met with al-Qaeda fire.

American forces won the battle—but only after overrunning and killing al-Qaeda forces on the ground. And doing that was harder than it might have been because, after Kabul fell, Rumsfeld—thinking the war was over and the theory of transformation had been proved—put sharp limits on how many American troops could be mobilized. No units—not even individual soldiers or Marines—could be sent to Afghanistan without Rumsfeld's explicit permission.

Meanwhile, air power couldn't stop Osama bin Laden from escaping into the mountains of Tora Bora along the Pakistani border.

And the American and British hadn't deployed enough troops to surround the area on the ground. Instead, they assigned the task to Afghan warlords, who—whether due to loyalty, indifference, incompetence, or bribes—let bin Laden slip through.

Finally, the Taliban fighters themselves were not defeated. They maintained their armed resistance against Karzai's government and stepped it up, gradually, then fiercely, after Bush and Rumsfeld—basking in apparent victory—moved on to the next war, in Iraq.

It wasn't that the United States won the war but lost the peace, as many critics later charged. Rather, the United States won the battle but left the war unfinished. The Taliban were ousted from power, for the moment, but they remained a powerful force, which returned to fight a few years later. And Osama bin Laden, President Bush's number-one dead-or-alive target, wasn't caught for even a moment.

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When Rumsfeld proclaimed in late January that the theory of transformation had been vindicated, it was not yet obvious that the war remained unfinished. Two things about the Afghan war, up to that point, bolstered his confidence. First, the brutal ground clashes notwithstanding, air power—and, specifically, the new, amazingly accurate air munitions—played an indisputably prominent role and crushed Taliban defenses more rapidly than any other weapons could have.

Second, the senior officers of the U.S. Army and Central Command turned out to be wrong about everything. General Franks, the CentCom commander, had told Rumsfeld at the outset that the decisive phase of combat wouldn't take place until the following summer, the earliest time when two armored divisions could be mobilized for combat. Franks approved the air operations with their unorthodox pairing of special-ops forces and high-tech bombs. He thought they might keep the Taliban preoccupied while CentCom prepared for the *real* battle ahead. He never

expected—nor did many of the air-combat planners working with General Deptula—that they *were* the real battle.

War plans are broken down into four phases. Phase I: Set the conditions; Phase II: Initial operations; Phase III: Decisive operations; and Phase IV: Postconflict stability. By the time Kabul fell in November 2001, General Franks's planners at CentCom thought the war was still in Phase II.

Rumsfeld kept this misjudgment constantly in mind over the next year, as he and the generals argued about how many troops would be needed for the invasion of Iraq. When the generals said they needed three hundred thousand troops, Rumsfeld would remember that they had vastly overstated the numbers they needed in Afghanistan. They were wrong then, and it seemed a logical inference that they were just as wrong now.

He had been at odds with the generals, openly and brusquely, ever since the start of Bush's term—over the new strategy, over the Quadrennial Defense Review, over decisions to cut weapons systems. Their drastic misreading of the war in Afghanistan hardened his belief that they were wrong as a matter of course and that their wrongheadedness stemmed from their failure to grasp the “revolution in military affairs,” which, to Rumsfeld's mind, had transformed the nature of warfare.

His disdain toward the Army was reinforced by his frequent dealings with Tommy Franks, the general he had come to know best. Franks, by no means a strategist, was widely regarded as a dim bulb, even by fellow officers. Rumsfeld, by nature impatient with people who weren't smart, despised Franks and wanted to get rid of him after the Afghanistan war. But over the Christmas holidays, Bush invited Franks out to his ranch in Crawford, Texas. Franks was a tall, salty, plain-speaking, profane Texan—he had gone to the same high school as Bush's wife, Laura—and he and the president got along like gangbusters. Bush called Rumsfeld and said, “Tommy Franks is a hell of a guy!” Rumsfeld realized that Franks would have to stay.

Confident that the Army was stuck in an outdated mind-set and frustrated at having to deal with the likes of Franks as the

top commander, Rumsfeld tore into CentCom's war plans on Iraq. He would ask questions. Franks couldn't answer them satisfactorily. So Rumsfeld would slash. He'd slice out not only whole combat units but elements within the units. Why did the brigades need so much heavy artillery, when smart bombs dropped from the air could smash up enemy defenses just as well? In transformational warfare, ground forces should be light, lithe, and fast. Artillery cannons and the long supply lines that went with them were heavy, cumbersome, and slow.

On one level, Rumsfeld was right and the officers were wrong. The Army, it turned out, did not need a few hundred thousand troops to crush the Iraqi military and topple Saddam's regime. Nor did its brigades need so much artillery; precision bombing and shelling blasted and scattered Iraqi defenses, so that American armored vehicles could punch on through.

But on another level, Rumsfeld profoundly misunderstood what was happening on the battlefield, what constituted victory, and what war—this war, as well as war in general—was all about.

The first thing that Rumsfeld missed was that, Tommy Franks aside, the Army wasn't entirely clueless. Just as bright young Air Force officers had rethought their service's roles and strategies in the wake of Vietnam, bright young Army officers had done so, too. One of the brightest was a colonel named Huba Wass de Czege.

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Wass de Czege was born in Transylvania in 1941, the son of prominent Hungarian novelist Albert Wass de Czege, who fought briefly in the Hungarian army on the western front during World War II before escaping with his family across the border to Bavaria. When Huba was ten, they emigrated to America, where his father taught French and German at universities. The first English-language book that Huba read was about West Point. He dreamed of going there when he grew older, and he did.

After graduation, he served two tours of duty in Vietnam, his second, in 1968, as a company commander with the 173rd Airborne

Brigade. Brash and confident, he would tell his men that the Army's way of fighting, with its emphasis on large-scale units and static set pieces, was doomed. Deployed to the Highlands, not far from the North Vietnamese border, Wass de Czege formed his own small-scale unit—just him, his first sergeant, a radio operator, and a forward observer for calling in artillery support. Most teams of this sort stayed hunkered down, waiting for Viet Cong to come to them; Wass de Czege's team went out on raids every night, scoping the terrain, avoiding the major trails, and ambushing the enemy from behind. Wass de Czege's four-man operation, according to a postwar memoir by one of his men, "killed and wounded more enemy than the entire rest of the battalion."

His superiors didn't go for his unorthodox methods. But after the war ended in disaster, a few Army generals were on the lookout for reformers, and Wass de Czege—who, after his tour, went to Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and then back to West Point for a graduate degree in social sciences—seemed a likely candidate.

Like their Air Force counterparts, the Army's strategists were turning their gaze back to Europe and noticing a more intense battlefield and a more serious Soviet threat. In 1982, they called on Wass de Czege to rewrite the Army's field manual on operations, FM 100-5. This was no academic exercise. FM 100-5 was the book that laid down the principles of Army strategy, tactics, and training.

The edition in use at the time had been written in 1976 by General William DePuy, a highly decorated veteran of World War II and a deputy chief of staff at headquarters in Vietnam. DePuy and his aides—nicknamed the "Boathouse Gang" for the retreat on the Virginia coast where they went to write the field manual—shifted doctrine back toward large-scale, close-range armored combat on the plains of Germany. But they viewed warfare as mechanistic, almost abstract, a static clash of firepower and attrition; and they assumed that the Soviet army would mount frontal assaults against NATO's reinforced strongpoints. It was, in short, a regurgitation, on a larger and deadlier scale, of everything that was wrong about American tactics in Vietnam.

Wass de Czege's revision of FM 100-5 took a wholly different path, emphasizing speed, maneuver, flexibility, and taking the initiative with offensive thrusts that enveloped the enemy from the flanks and the rear. It was an elaboration of his own company's tactics in Vietnam.

He was promoted to brigadier general and placed in charge of a new one-year postgraduate program at the Army's Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It was called the School of Advanced Military Studies, or SAMS, and its purpose was to instill these ideas in the elite echelon of the future officer corps.

While preparing to write the new field manual, Wass de Czege read the classics of military strategy—Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, Karl von Clausewitz's *On Strategy*, J. C. C. Fuller's *The Conduct of War*, and B. H. Liddell Hart's *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*. Their ideas resonated with his own combat experience, with its emphases on surprise, shock, and maneuver. At one point, he looked up the 1940 edition of FM 100-5, written on the eve of the Second World War, and found that it stressed the same principles; clearly, its authors had also gone back and read the classics. Yet Wass de Czege hadn't been exposed to any of these works at West Point, nor was anyone teaching them at Fort Leavenworth before he started SAMS. The Army, he realized, had forgotten history—had forgotten how to fight wars.

SAMS began in the summer of 1983, with twelve students attending classes in a converted gymnasium. The next year, enrollment doubled to twenty-four (eight of whom would go on to become generals) and increased gradually each year after. During the course of a school year, each student read one hundred fifty books and wrote two monographs, one on tactics, one on operations. "We need to begin a program of deeper and broader education in the science and art of how to prepare for, and conduct, war," Wass de Czege wrote at the time. The aim of so much reading was to distill "enduring principles and insights," which will make officers "adaptive and innovative," to teach them not so much what to think, but *how* to think, about military affairs.

The basic ideas weren't so different from the strategies circulating inside the Air Force around this time—the premium on speed, surprise, and going on the offensive, not only on the front lines but also deep behind those lines—except that in the Army's case, there was no pretense that one service could fight and win by itself. Wass de Czege acknowledged that air power would be needed to attack the deep targets and to protect the flanks while ground forces advanced. A few years later, he wrote a revision of his field manual to emphasize this idea of joint warfare, which he called *AirLand Battle*.

By then, he had trained three years' worth of acolytes, who called themselves the "Jedi Knights," after the maneuver warriors in the movie *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, which came out in 1983, the year that Wass de Czege came to Leavenworth.

During the Gulf War of 1990–91, the commander of U.S. forces, General Norman Schwarzkopf, recruited four Jedi Knights, headed by a lieutenant colonel named Joseph Purvis, to write a plan for the ground-war phase of Desert Storm. What they devised was a reflection of Wass de Czege's thinking—a feint up the middle to lock the Iraqi Army in place, and a simultaneous thrust of American forces from way to the west, enveloping the Iraqis from the flanks and the rear, and destroying them from all sides.

The U.S. Marines were on the same page of maneuver warfare, owing to the influence of another, more maverick, officer named John Boyd. A former Air Force fighter pilot, he was known as "Forty-Second Boyd" because, at the fighter-pilot training school where he taught in the 1960s, he had a standing bet—which he never lost—that he could "shoot down" anybody in forty seconds or less.

Boyd's background was very different from Wass de Czege's. He grew up impoverished in Erie, Pennsylvania. His household wasn't bookish, nor were his manners refined. But when a puzzle intrigued him, he immersed himself in it. He had an uncanny creative spark; he grasped concepts quickly and saw the links that connected them in ways that more educated specialists missed.

He had become a pilot toward the end of the Korean War and, during that time, devised a formula for successful air-to-air combat.

It had to do with outmaneuvering the other pilot, anticipating his next move, and reacting to it preemptively—“getting inside the other guy’s decision loop,” as Boyd put it. Over the next few years, he worked his observations into a lecture called “The Aerial Attack Study,” which soon became a textbook for fighter-pilot tactics, not only in the United States but, by emulation, almost everywhere.

Around the time Wass de Czege was staging ambushes in the Vietnamese Highlands, Boyd started seriously studying military history—Sun Tzu, Nazi blitzkriegs, and everything in between. He came to realize that the secret he discovered for successful aerial combat was also the secret of successful warfare generally, from battalion tactics to grand strategy. The key ingredients were speed, maneuver, deception, and multiple thrusts deep behind enemy lines, siring confusion and disorder among the enemy ranks and disorienting them into surrender. It was like “shock and awe,” but on the ground, and it was directed not against theoretical “nerve centers” in the enemy’s capital, but against the enemy’s military and command structure.

Over the next two decades, Boyd worked on a study that he called “Patterns of Conflict.” It evolved into a massive briefing, twelve hours long in its final stage, which he delivered with tireless devotion—over a thousand times, by his estimate—to any officer, official, scholar, journalist, or legislator who cared to listen.

Wass de Czege, too, had long conversations with Boyd during the time he was writing FM 100-5, and he invited Boyd to deliver guest lectures at SAMS.

Boyd made a deeper impression still on the U.S. Marines. In the early 1980s, a colonel named Mike Wyly, vice president of the Marine Corps University at Quantico, wrote a revision of the Marines’ field manual, called FMFM-1, based explicitly on Boyd’s study. Wyly met with far less institutional resistance than Wass de Czege did. The Army’s main weapon was the heavy tank; the Marine Corps’s was the light-armored vehicle. Under the old strategy of firepower and attrition, the Marines were regarded as the Army’s little cousin. Under a strategy of maneuver warfare, with its emphasis on liveness and speed, the Marines could be regarded as equal,

maybe even superior. The Marine Corps commandant at the time of Desert Storm, General Alfred Gray, was an avowed Boyd disciple. When the Marines led the assault up the middle into Kuwait, Gray ordered them to avoid direct frontal attacks and instead to maneuver around the Iraqi defenses, bypassing them, then enveloping them from behind or ambushing their flanks.

Before the Army and Marines could take advantage of the technology that emerged in the 1990s—the smart bombs and the computerized radar that let commanders see the battlefield in real time and adjust their tactics and positions accordingly—they had to know how to fight with speed, maneuver, and flexibility. They learned how to do that from Wass de Czege and Boyd.

Wass de Czege saw the war in Afghanistan as marking not a revolution but an evolution in military affairs. Especially as the fighting wore on, and the Taliban adapted to American tactics, it looked more and more like a classic “combined-arms” campaign, in which commanders call in heavy fire to smash or soften up enemy resistances before ground forces punched through. There were crucial differences: the heavy fire came from the air, not from artillery, and it came very quickly and accurately. But as dramatic and impressive as these differences were, they were not *fundamentally* new. They resembled the sort of warfare, though on a smaller scale, that Wass de Czege had envisioned in his *AirLand Battle* manual—which itself derived from principles of warfare that went back centuries.

Through the 1990s, when Marshall and the others were developing their ideas on transformation, they were only dimly aware of the work being done by Wass de Czege at Leavenworth and Mike Wyly at Quantico. Rumsfeld wasn’t aware of it at all. If he had been—or, perhaps, if he had been a soldier in his youth instead of a Navy pilot, if he had consulted with Boyd and Wass de Czege as well as with Marshall and Wade back during his first tenure at the Pentagon—he might have seen the war in Afghanistan through a different lens. He might have drawn different lessons for the war in Iraq.

Different lessons might have sired different views not only on how many troops he needed, but more important, and very much

related, what those troops would need to do after toppling Saddam Hussein.

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Rumsfeld wasn't entirely to blame on this score. The military's top leaders, too, had failed to study the lessons of history.

In the spring and fall of 2002, the Army and the Air Force each held its seasonal war games. The Army's game, in late April, was called "Vigilant Warrior." The Air Force's, in mid-November, was called "Global Engagement." The games weren't field exercises but tabletop simulations—sophisticated versions of combat board games. On a Sunday night, dozens of officers, active-duty and retired, would assemble at the Army War College in Carlyle Barracks, Pennsylvania—or, in the case of "Global Engagement," at a U.S. Postal Service conference center in the Maryland suburbs of Washington. The next morning, the game would begin. There would be a Blue Team (playing the U.S. side) and a Red Team (playing the enemy). The game's managers—officers from Joint Forces Command or the Air Staff—would set the scenario, assess each side's moves, and announce the next event that moved the game along. The game would end on Friday, when senior officers would show up for a briefing.

Formally, these games were supposed to gauge the armed forces' requirements for combat ten or fifteen years in the future. In fact, these two games were rough rehearsals for the coming invasion of Iraq. The fictitious country being invaded was called "Nair"—an anagram of Iran—and its features clearly resembled a composite of Iran and Iraq.

Wass de Czege had retired from the Army in 1993. He had begun to run into resistance from the remnants of the Army's old guard, and he knew that if he stayed in the service much longer, he would come to be seen as a crank, if not a threat. He remembered that J. C. C. Fuller, the pathbreaking British officer-strategist of the interwar years, was seen as an irritant by his superiors. The British high command didn't pay attention to Fuller's ideas about

maneuver and blitzkrieg, but the German generals did—and the Western world nearly went up in flames as a result. Wass de Czege didn't want to be a twenty-first-century Fuller, so, after retiring from the Army, he kept in touch with his old colleagues—consulting for the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, attending conferences, talking with the most promising colonels and majors that he saw rising through the ranks, and participating in war games.

He played a Blue Team officer in the Army's game that year and an Army adviser to a three-star general in the Air Force's game. The games ended the way everyone knew they would: Blue (the United States) won, Red (Nair) lost. But the games disturbed Wass de Czege because they skirted the main issue.

They didn't properly define the end of a war and so couldn't clearly settle which side had won.

Shortly afterward, still several months before the actual invasion of Iraq, Wass de Czege wrote and privately circulated a memo called "'02 Wargaming Insights," a memo that Rumsfeld, Franks, and those around them would have done well to read.

War games such as these, he observed, "tend to devote more attention to successful campaign-beginnings than to successful conclusions." They "usually conclude when victory seems inevitable to us (not necessarily to the enemy), at about the point [where] operational superiority has been achieved and tactical control of strategically significant forces and places appears to be a matter of time."

However, he noted, winning a war doesn't mean simply defeating the enemy on the battlefield. It means achieving the strategic goals for which the war was fought in the first place. This was basic Clausewitz—"War is politics by other means." By the same token, the war isn't *over* until those political ends are achieved.

In both of these war games, Wass de Czege pointed out, the Clausewitzian question—how to achieve those strategic goals—wasn't answered, wasn't even addressed, because the game ended too soon.

Important as it is to understand a war's early stages, he went on, "it is just as important to know how to follow through to the resolution of such conflicts." If the managers of these games had followed

through and played for longer, after the enemy's army was defeated, they might have realized that they—and, by extension, U.S. military commanders generally—were underestimating “the difficulties of ‘regime change’ and the magnitude of the effort required to achieve strategic objectives.”

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The invasion of Iraq began on March 19, 2003. In the battlefield phase, it went, to a remarkable degree, as planned. The second part of the war—after Saddam fled and his regime crumbled—went disastrously, in part because it had not been planned at all.

Rumsfeld was so enamored of transformation—as a theory of war, as a tool for control, and as an explanation for what still seemed the triumph in Afghanistan—that he forgot, if he ever fully understood, that winning wars means more than hitting targets or winning battles. Rumsfeld didn't plan for Phase IV—securing and stabilizing the country after the capital has fallen—because he didn't think it would be necessary.

The theories that had riveted his attention—RMA, transformation, shock and awe—were recipes strictly for crushing armies and toppling regimes. War was an instrument of politics. Transformation might sharpen the instrument, but it offered no wisdom about the politics. Some of the theorists, especially Deptula and Wade, were explicit on this point. They cautioned that their ideas had little or no relevance when it came to such matters as what to do after the fighting was finished. But these caveats were easy to overlook.

Rumsfeld was not alone in his failure to think about the post-battle phase. As Wass de Czege noted in his memo on the war games, senior military leaders weren't thinking about it, either. There were no U.S. Army field manuals still in print on the subject of how to end a war. In the entire Army structure, there was just one active-duty unit devoted to civil-military operations: the Ninety-sixth Civil Affairs (Airborne) Battalion, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina—consisting of fewer than two thousand soldiers—and just two more battalions in the Reserves.

The U.S. Army's Third Infantry Division swept up through the Iraqi desert with impressive speed, fought off guerrilla marauders on the way, captured the Baghdad airport, and from there rolled into the capital. But the division's official "after-action report" noted that the Army "did not have a dedicated plan to transition quickly from combat operations to SASO," the military acronym for "stability and support operations." Its commanders put a large premium on capturing the Baghdad airport, but—remarkably—they had no plan for using its facilities to fly in personnel or materials that might have helped impose order.

During World War II, the Army had an enormous civil-affairs apparatus; the occupation of Germany was planned in elaborate detail well before the war was over. Over the subsequent decades, postwar planning dwindled to a lost art. There was no opportunity to practice it. Korea was a stalemate, Vietnam a rout. Wars in the Western hemisphere were minor and manageable. Desert Storm's shady aftermath—the survival of Saddam, his repression of local rebels—could conveniently be attributed to the UN Security Council's resolution that authorized the war and allowed for no missions beyond ousting the Iraqi Army from Kuwait.

The failure to plan for an aftermath was also a product of institutional incentives. During the Cold War, officers were promoted on the basis of their performance in combat or, more often, their success at managing big-ticket weapons programs. Joining the civil-affairs battalion or the military police was no way to get ahead. So the best officers stayed away, and the function dwindled.

Rumsfeld had no interest in even thinking about Phase IV because the whole point of transformation was to keep wars fast and short. Nor was much of the Army brass bothered that the secretary of defense wasn't issuing orders for postwar operations. When Baghdad fell in late March, Tommy Franks told his generals that most of them would be going home by summer and that the American occupation would be down to thirty thousand troops by early autumn.

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On May Day, 2003, President Bush, flying in the copilot's seat of a Navy S-3B Viking turbojet, swooped onto the deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln*, jumped out of the plane wearing a tight padded flight suit, and before a cheering crowd of sailors standing beneath a huge banner reading MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, declared, "Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed."

At that moment, he—and most of those around him—believed it. The dreams about a new kind of war and a new level of American supremacy seemed to have come true. The possibilities seemed limitless. The previous January, in his State of the Union address, Bush had referred to an "axis of evil" consisting of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Baghdad was down. It was time to confront the next tyrant—Kim Jong Il and his Hermit Kingdom of Pyongyang.

