"What Went Wrong in Iraq:
Reflections on Civilian Planning and Military Advice"

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I retired from the Marine Corps in 2000. Afterwards, a friend—another retired general officer and one of our previous commandants in the Marine Corps—approached me about joining the group, "Veterans for Bush." I wasn't particularly politically oriented one way or another, so I said, "What is that?" He said, "It's just a group of people who have served. We're going to have Colin Powell and Rich Armitage in that administration."

I knew both of these public servants as good friends, and my retired general-officer friend assured me that my joining this group didn't otherwise require anything. We would just sign up and join, to show our support. I thought, "Support an administration that has people like Colin Powell, Rich Armitage, and a number of others I knew very well? Sure!" I signed up. It didn't require anything. Well, somehow the *Washington Post* got hold of the list, and the group suddenly became known as "Generals for Bush" instead of "Veterans for Bush" (which had meant to encompass everything from sergeants and corporals to people that had served one tour), and my decision to join this group suddenly became a big deal.

At the same time, a friend of mine, Chuck Robb, was running for the Senate and asked if I'd stand with him as he gave a talk in front of the Iwo Jima Memorial in

Washington. I agreed, because I like Chuck personally. We were captains in Vietnam, and he was very kind to me when I was the commander of Central Command (CENTCOM). He adopted us when he was in the Senate, along with John Warner. I stood with him and said some nice words about his service and what a patriot he was.

So now I had dipped my wick in with both the Republicans and the Democrats, which confused the hell out of everybody. This prompted a call from then-Commandant of the Marine Corps, Jim Jones. He said, "What are you doing?"

"What am I doing?" I said, "I'm retired. I'm at home. I'm trying to earn a living, and stay out of my wife's hair."

He said, "You can't be involved politically in anything. Retired officers, general officers do not do this. You are causing me all sorts of problems."

I was trying to remember if I had somehow missed a day in my retirement transition course. Having retired, I thought I was now a private citizen who could do whatever he wanted, but obviously I was mistaken. So I apologized to the Commandant and said, "I won't do that again. I just thought I was helping out some friends by signing up. I wasn't campaigning or anything."

Not long after that, Peter Jennings from ABC News called. "General," he said, "We would like to ask you if you can come up to New York. We would like you to consider being a military analyst on ABC." I said I didn't know much about that line of work, or what was involved. I went up to New York, met with Jennings, and he asked me to think about it. I wasn't sure I wanted to do something like that, and I had talked to friends, fellow retired generals and admirals, who said, "You can't do that." This came as a surprise to me, but they said, "retired generals and admirals should never go on TV.

Your colleagues will condemn you." I replied that I must have missed that memo. But in the end they convinced me that I probably shouldn't accept this offer. So I thanked Jennings for his interest, but declined that offer.

Then Tom Clancy approached me to write a book in his "Commander" series about my time in the military. I talked to some of the other commanders that he had written about—Carl Stiner, Freddie Franks, and Chuck Horner. They suggested that this was a great idea, because I could tell the story of our generation, of our particular service and reflect on what we did in the Vietnam era and later. "Good idea," I thought, and I told people that I was going to write a book with Tom Clancy. More of my colleagues in active duty said, "You can't write a book. Retired generals should not write books." Once again I was surprised, remembering Eisenhower and Grant. But again, I concluded there must have been a memo or a flyer on these regulations that I missed out there somewhere.

Then I started to watch the work-up to this war and saw what a disaster it was going to be. I know a little something about the Middle East. I know a little something about Iraq. I know a little something about military plans, and to me, this was a catastrophe in the making. I happened to say so, and of course, all kinds of hell broke loose. What I heard was: "Retired generals and admirals are not supposed to speak about that. It's bad for the troops, bad for morale, and you're challenging civilian leadership." Here was yet another instruction I must have missed!

I came to the conclusion that maybe Congress or the American people ought to just shoot us at retirement. If there isn't anything that we can do within all these restrictions, then maybe we serve no useful purpose. Maybe our experience after four

decades in the military and what we have been involved in is of no value or use, so we should go away permanently, rather than just fading away. Maybe after the retirement ceremony, the Secretary of Defense could take us to a back room, where there's some sort of euthanasia process for retired generals and admirals.

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Let me explain now why I felt so strongly at that time and since about the work-up to the war, and what led me to say what I did. When I retired, I worked for the CIA on Iraqi intelligence. They had asked me to come in and continue to work, obviously because of my experience before in CENTCOM on preparing national intelligence estimates (NIEs) and working on the intelligence. So, up to the day of the war, I was involved in that, and I saw the intelligence firsthand.

In August or September, before the March intervention in Iraq, I attended a convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to receive an award. Vice President Cheney was the speaker, and of course, we had been hearing that that the U.S. may be going to war because Saddam was a threat. I thought nothing would happen—somebody was exaggerating the threat. This was probably just a precaution. Once the President had reviewed the intelligence report we were preparing, I thought to myself, nothing was going to happen.

I sat on that stage. The Vice President was speaking. I actually had the seat right next to him. He waxed on to the veterans about their service and how much that was appreciated. There was no mention of Iraq until about halfway through his speech. I don't know why–because I've watched the video, and there's nothing that he said–but suddenly I realized, "he is going to make the case for war!" I couldn't believe it! I just

had this sense. All of a sudden, as if there were two different speeches, he said (and this is just about an exact quote): "Saddam Hussein is amassing weapons of mass destruction along his borders to use against his neighbors."

If you have a chance to watch that video, you will see me just about fall out of my chair! (As a matter of fact, Tim Russert, on *Meet the Press*, has played that video a couple times since on the air, and commented on "Zinni's surprised reaction.") I couldn't believe it! There was no way that Saddam Hussein was amassing weapons of mass destruction, let alone had an ongoing program that anybody could pinpoint. There was no intelligence that he was weaponizing and massing with intention to use, and since we controlled the no-fly zones and everything else, if something like that were happening, we would immediately act. I knew this from my time at CENTCOM.

This really began to trouble me. I questioned where this was coming from. There was a meeting at Langley, and a number of us were brought in to address a question from the administration on Iraq's use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in a conflict. I won't go into details, and I can't. But when we were asked to formulate responses to the question about Iraq and WMD that the Administration had posed, I stood up and said, "You've got to be kidding me!" (And I didn't say "kidding!") "You can't be serious," I said. "*What* weapons of mass destruction?" Literally, the analysts were looking at their shoes and saying, "We just answer the mail."

We were beginning to hear terms like "mushroom clouds" and all these metaphors that evoked this idea that Saddam had this vast array and arsenal. I thought for sure this would all go away. Secretary Powell was at the United Nations. He had the 15-to-nothing vote in the Security Council. Mohamed ElBaradei and Hans Blix were back

inside Iraq. Saddam was being forced to cut up Al-Samoud missiles, his short-range ones, and some had exceeded the range a bit, and they were being destroyed. Now that the inspectors were in and the United Nations had a unanimous Security Council vote, I thought that this would go away.

And yet, as I watched the buildup in Kuwait, it struck me that, no matter what Secretary Powell did in New York, no matter what the United Nations did, we were going to go to war with Iraq. As those with military service backgrounds know, there is a way we deploy forces merely as a show of force. There is a second way we deploy forces to intimidate. And there is another way we deploy forces when we actually intend to act. The differences all have to do with logistics, and support, and everything else, and so I knew that what I was seeing and watching was not a deployment in support of diplomacy. I was seeing a deployment to go to war completely, without regard for the diplomatic efforts in New York. It became clear to me that we had a Powell-led diplomatic effort, and we had an entirely separate, Rumsfeld-led military effort, and at some point the President was going to have to make a decision between the two, because they weren't supporting each other in any way. It became clear to me that, even though the diplomatic efforts in New York and the renewed presence of the weapons inspectors in Iraq was going to lead to a determination that there ***was*** no serious threat, nevertheless, we were going to act.

If we try to remember what was taking place during this time, the justification for acting and short-circuiting the U.N. effort was that we "couldn't keep our troops sitting in the desert in the summertime, and summer was coming upon us." Are you kidding me? Having been involved in CENTCOM for more than ten years as the Marine Operational

Commander, the Deputy Commander of CENTCOM, and the Commander, I can tell you that the Americans were the *only* people who went out into the desert in the summertime. No self-respecting Middle Eastern commander sent his troops out there to exercise! It was us. We were in the Udari Range, we ran our "Bright Star" war games, and did these other things out in the desert in the summer. So, our troops "being in the desert" was not the reason. It was as artificial an argument as the "creation" of the intelligence on which we were basing this mission.

What became even more troubling to me was that, by invading Iraq needlessly, we were going to be distracted from Afghanistan and the real war effort. We were going to get involved in something, in addition, that would break the very fragile Gulf Coalition and the support we needed that was dependent upon U.N. resolutions as validation for them cooperating with us.

I watched what started to happen regarding how we were going to do all this. Let me emphasize that I had been involved for a number of years in developing what is known as "1003," the war plan for Iraq, ever since I was the Commander of the First Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), which was the principal Marine operational force assigned to CENTCOM. I remember those days as the MEF Commander down at Camp Blanding in Florida, when General Peay was the Commander of CENTCOM. We went through the process of what would happen if we went into Iraq. We were never overly concerned about taking down the Republican Guard and toppling the regime. I recall, in the worst case, we estimated that would only take about three weeks. As I went through that planning, first as that Commander of the Marine Operational Forces, then as the Deputy Commander of CENTCOM and Chief of Staff and then later as the Commander,

our big concern, instead, was always *what came after the regime's fall*. Our big concern was the so-called "Phase 4," the reconstruction, the problems of who or what might come across the border, how to establish internal control, and underlying concerns about the deep-seated religious and ethnic hatred that would arise after the regime itself fell.

All of us involved, all the component commanders, all the commanders that worked this, including joint staff and everybody else, understood that that "Phase 4" was going to be the most difficult part of executing this plan. We had come to the conclusion that we would need 380,000 to 400,000 troops on the ground to do all the things that we felt were necessary: to seal the borders and control the population, for example, while we rolled up the Republican Guard or other forces.

We made some decisions (or I should say General Peay made some decisions) to plan for an information-operations campaign focused on the Iraqi regular army. We had a campaign planned to convince the regular Iraqi army that if the time came, they shouldn't fight. We would retain them. "We'll keep you—we'll pay you," was the message we tried to convey. Every time we hit their air defense sites to enforce the no-fly zones and support the inspectors, we dropped leaflets on the regular army garrison that said: "Our fight is not with you. As long as you don't engage our planes, we feel sorry for you. We think you have been victimized by Saddam." We sent back-channel messages through the Arabs to the Iraqi regular army leadership. We ensured when we appeared on Al Jazeera and other outlets in the Gulf that we always included the regular army as part of Saddam's set of victims. It was always our intention in the plan that the army would not be disbanded.

When we struck in Desert Fox in December 1998, the strikes were a complete

surprise to the Iraqis. I think they anticipated a buildup of forces before we hit. We were to strike as soon as the inspectors came out. General Hugh Shelton, the chairman at the time, wanted us to strike with in-country or in-regional forces, and not rely on bringing in outside forces. Every time we used outside forces, Saddam moved things around and dispersed his forces, and the bomb damage assessments weren't always what they could be. The plan was called "Desert Fox," because we would outfox them by hitting them as soon as Richard Butler cleared Baghdad. We did, and we caught them by surprise.

A couple things about Desert Fox really struck me. Up to then, I would have said that Saddam did have an ongoing program for WMD. I believed this, as I said repeatedly in my yearly testimony as the Commander-in-Chief of CENTCOM, because that's what the intelligence was telling me. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the CIA, and all the reports indicated he had a program. We worked very closely with inspectors and flew missions to support them under a U.N. flag. Richard Butler and his predecessor, Rolf Ekeus, came to our headquarters and described what they were finding and cutting up. Later, they weren't finding anything, and there were team members who were beginning to doubt that there was an existing program.

Let me comment in more detail on the weapons inspectors themselves. Those inspectors had three parts to their mission. One was to ensure that all the WMD capability that Saddam had before the first Gulf War was accounted for in one way or another. The second part was to ensure he didn't have an ongoing program, and the third part was to ensure he couldn't restart a program. By this time (in 1998), there still wasn't accountability for everything he had before, but the things unaccounted for were artillery rounds, rocket rounds, chemical rounds, or an odd SCUD missile. There were maybe a

dozen SCUDs unaccounted for. These weren't strategic or operational threats. They were at best tactically threatening if you engaged them in close quarters. Their viability was in doubt, because they were sitting around for so long. Their units were not training with them. The viability and the threat posed by anything that might have been left over didn't seem to be much of a problem. There certainly was not a strategic threat or a regional threat.

There was no evidence of an ongoing program. The ability to start up a program was there, because Saddam still had the scientists. He still had his elite Republican Guard, and he still had special high-tolerance machinery to support a program. He was allowed to have the Al Samoud short-range missile system, so obviously he could work on weaponization, at least in theory, and he had potential dual-use facilities– pharmaceutical plants and fertilizer plants–that could be converted. The inspectors always had cameras in these places and did surprise checks.

As we were going through the target list for Desert Fox, the Chairman asked me on behalf of the President whether we could take out Saddam's "WMD program" through military action, now that the inspectors had come out. I said, "I have to look at the target list." Up to that time, I believed that Saddam had the stuff that our intelligence reports said he had. When we received the potential targets from the CIA and elsewhere, there were no WMD sites. Every target we had in Desert Fox was something that could support a WMD program. For example, we would hit the Republican Guard because they would protect the system, even though there was no evidence of an ongoing program. We would hit a press that made high-tolerance ball bearings. We would take that out, because it could possibly be used, along with certain other dual-use facilities.

Another target was the Taji Missile Facility, which Saddam was allowed to have, at which he was manufacturing Al Samouds. So while the target list was designed to "take out" his WMD program, it was really taking out targets that could *support* a WMD program. Add that to what the inspectors were not finding and what some of them were saying about the nonexistence of a current program., and this created doubts in my mind. I am now describing the situations as it existed in early 1999, in the aftermath of Desert Fox.

After Desert Fox, we began to get some intelligence feedback from countries that were friendly to us. They had missions inside Iraq embassies. We started to pick up from some of our Arab friends that the government was really shaken by the Desert Fox attacks. We threw in a couple of bonus targets, such as the intelligence headquarters, and really did some damage. The reports we received were that the government was badly shaken. There wasn't heated rhetoric from Saddam or his cronies. The government was so shaken that there was even the possibility that some Republican Guard generals were tempted to act, and it looked like we had really done some psychological damage.

I didn't think much of it except that in my next visit out in the region, the Kuwaitis and the Jordanians came to me and said, "Look, we are getting reports that you shook the government up. A lucky bomb in the wrong place or something that incites somebody to act, and this place will come apart like a cheap suitcase." The Jordanians and the Kuwaitis were worried about a flow of refugees across their borders if we took out the regime, destabilized it, or caused somebody else to act, resulting in chaos inside Iraq.

I thought about something I hadn't before. Our war plan, 1003, was based on

Saddam committing an unacceptable act, to which we would then respond. For example, he decides to re-invade Kuwait, or he takes another shot with an odd SCUD toward Israel, and then we would go in. What I hadn't thought about is what happens if Iraq implodes, and the regime collapses. What my friends in the region were telling me was this would be just as bad as him committing an unacceptable act and the U.S. reacting. The question they put to me was: "Are you going in if Iraq begins to implode?" I thought that the end result wasn't that much different, but I had a war plan that took me to Baghdad and took down a regime. I didn't have a plan for dealing with that chaos.

So I asked Secretary Powell and General Shelton if I could sponsor a so-called game in Washington. We hired Booze, Allen, and Hamilton, and conducted a game with the State Department, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, the intelligence representatives from all the intelligence agencies, and others to talk about what would happen if we took down Saddam either way, either after an implosion, or after we invade in response to an unacceptable action. What do we face after that? It was called "Desert Crossing," and we spent a week going through various scenarios, getting feedback on what we would face in that so-called Phase 4. I was ashen-faced when I came out of that week.

What kept coming up was the chaos and fragility of Iraq, how it would come apart so quickly. I walked away, truly believing that General Peay was prescient in those internal-looking war games at Camp Blanding and elsewhere, where he said 380,000 to 400,000 troops would be needed, because we'd have a mess on our hands. This would be a true occupation, and we would have to reconstruct this nation almost from scratch. Everything I heard in the "Desert Crossing" exercise, which has finally come out now

through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, indicated exactly what we would face.

I went back and asked if the State Department, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and others would help now in building a Phase 4 plan, a reconstruction plan. Something struck me when I was in Korea and looked at the Korean war plan, along with all the other war plans I'd seen in CENTCOM, Pacific Command (PACOM), or European Command (EUCOM). Everybody had a war plan. Everybody could achieve their military objectives. But nobody ever seemed to have a reconstruction plan.

The answer came back from State Department and others: "We don't do planning. We are not tasked, nor are we structured, nor do we know how, nor do we have the ability to do that." Eric Newsom was my point of contact, their Assistant Secretary at the time, and he said, "We'd like to help, but that's really not how we're structured. We don't do plans like you do plans."

Now, coming to the end of my tenure as CENTCOM Commander, I faced the reality that if we should ever go into Iraq, we the military would be stuck with the task of reconstruction. I tasked my planners to say: "We may not be able to know what to do, but we know the task and the requirements." At least if we went in, the military forces could say: "We're not here to do the political, economic and social reconstruction, but boy! We have examined this, and brought in experts, and here is what has to be done, and here are some recommendations for how to do it."

Out of that process came several realities, small things that to me had a big impact. The last thing we would want to do after an invasion, for example, is de-

Bathify." Reconciliation is what we would have to do from the get-go, or else we were going to alienate the Sunnis. We knew we should not disband the army. Instead, we would have to vet the leadership, keep them in garrison, bring them back, re-establish them, and put them back as soon as we believed they were ready to go.

Saddam paid fifty percent of the paychecks in his country directly, and another twenty-five percent indirectly. This means that, the day you take down the regime, 50 to 75 percent of the Iraqis get no paycheck. Hence, our recommendations were: "Keep the factories open. Keep the jobs open. Keep them at work!" I could go on and on with the kinds of non-military recommendations that we made. Think about this in light of the decisions made by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to disband the army, close the state-owned factories, and de-Bathify. People with no knowledge, no understanding, just a pickup team thrown on the ground made absolutely the worst set of mistakes. Even we, who were not economists or diplomats, nor humanitarian workers, could quickly see these decisions were mistakes.

With this background, I am now reminded of how this incompetent and ill-advised scheme came about. I remember listening to the Secretary of Defense talking about being greeted in the streets with flowers, describing how this is going to be a liberation and not an occupation, that we could do this with 130,000 to 140,000 troops, despite what General Eric Shinseki is saying. Shinseki is being dismissed as wildly off the mark by Wolfowitz.

Incidentally, when he was in the Description of Operations (DesOps) of the Army, Eric Shinseki came down to my headquarters. He knew our plan thoroughly. When he was going through his own transformation planning, he came down and made

sure that the Army would be able to meet their commitment according to our plan's requirements under the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCAP). So, when he was subsequently giving those estimates of required troop strength publicly, he wasn't simply guessing at them. He knew the numbers, and he knew the plan thoroughly.

As a matter of fact, in my time at CENTCOM, I created the land component commander under the Third Army. General Tommy Franks was the commander, so we had a good idea of the ground forces required with the land component commander, both Army and Marine, with Third Army in charge of the Joint Force Land Component Command (JFLIC). We knew the numbers. We knew how to phase them in. We had an idea of what needed to go in Phase 4. Now we were hearing that this was "old think." I heard the Secretary of Defense saying the plan that he received was old, stale, and on the shelf.

Let me, by way of contrast, clarify what goes into deliberate planning. The joint staff sets the requirement for the combatant commander to establish a war plan. That plan is reviewed by the joint staff every other year. That plan is exercised by the theater commander every other year. That plan is exercised by the component commanders in the alternate year. That plan is reviewed and changed every year based on new intelligence estimates and new capabilities.

If the Air Force gets centrifuge munitions and decides to put them in theater, it affects our plans. If the Army decides to go through a transformation process and changes its structure, that affects our plans. When those plans are reviewed, we are given the assigned forces, and they're designated under the JSCAP. We build a time-phased deployment schedule on how we're going to get there. That is then given to the U.S.

Transportation Command (TRANSCOM). We rehearse it, and we practice it.

Earlier I mentioned "Bright Star," the largest military exercise in the world. During our periodic execution of Bright Star, we rehearsed parts of that Iraqi war plan. We actually had allies involved with the plans: the British, Australians, and others. That plan had been developed over ten years, almost thirteen by the time the actual war in Iraq started. That plan was not "old" or "on the shelf." That plan was dynamic, it was vital, it was living, and it was based on exactly what we knew almost to the hour of what was going on.

And yet all that planning was dismissed by the sitting Secretary of Defense as "old think." Apparently, in his estimation, there was no longer a need for time-phased deployment planning. Those numbers were no longer needed, and ground forces were becoming irrelevant after all. We could do this all with precision weapon systems and space-based intelligence systems. Somehow, we would zap the Iraqis with some sort of technology that solved the problems on the ground where the boots needed to be. While listening to this, I recall thinking: "You're heading for disaster. You're not only heading for disaster in our relationships in the region; you're not only distracting us from the real war and where we ought to be focused; you're not only alienating international support that we have built; but you're about to throw our troops into a situation that is going to make them pay a hell of a price, and America a hell of price, not only physically in terms of our treasure, but otherwise."

I felt so strongly about this that I had to say something. Not only me, but also my predecessor General Peay, his predecessor General Hoar, and even General Schwarzkopf voiced concern. The four previous commanders of CENTCOM had, to one degree or

another, voiced their concern about what we were about to do and how we were going to get into this.

I watched the formation of the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, this little pickup team stuck in Kuwait that was supposed to be the be-all and end-all to Phase 4. A good friend of mine, Jay Garner, was in charge, but he had only a handful of people, no real charter, no real planning base, and no real understanding of the relationship with the military. The formation of the CPA that followed was an absolute disaster. We would have been better off with nothing rather than the bad decision making that came out of that pickup team. They were totally unqualified, owing to their lack of knowledge and understanding of what this conflict was all about and what they would face after the fall of Saddam.

Watch my country go off to war like that provoked a visceral reaction that one simply cannot imagine. What made it even worse was listening to the way our leaders were describing military planning, as if a military plan was some sort of a simple process done by a bunch of people with no real understanding. Apparently, we needed the enlightened leadership of some political appointees to decide on military action, size of troops and maneuvers, and all the other things that have to go on the ground. The dismissal of military leaders who tried to speak out, coupled with senior military leaders who didn't stand up to the challenge, who disappointed us—that will one day cause a sequel to *Dereliction of Duty* to be written.

Speaking of that book, let me take us back to 1997. I had just been appointed as the Commander of U.S. Central Command. General Shelton was the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff. He sent a copy of H.R. McMaster's book, *Dereliction of Duty*, to every

one of the commanders, the service chiefs, and unified command commanders. He required all of us to read it, prior to our coming to Washington three weeks later to meet with him for a breakfast with all 17 four-stars, chairmen, vice chairmen, joint chiefs, the service chiefs, and unified commanders. H.R. McMaster made a presentation about the book and what he found. At that time, he was a major. He talked about how, during Vietnam, the joint chiefs knew the war was not being conducted correctly; they had reservations but elected not to speak out. They were stifled by the civilian leadership and accepted it.

Shelton (who is a big guy, for those of you who don't know him) slammed his fist on the table. He said, "That will not happen while I am Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. If each of you feels strongly or has something to say, then you are obliged to speak out. I guarantee you can walk into my office anytime. You can walk past my office to Secretary Powell, who agrees with this, and you can voice your objection even if it is opposed to administration policy. We will ensure you get a hearing at the highest levels."

I did that twice. One time, the Secretary of Defense took me to Camp David to meet with the President. He said, "Mr. President, we are in agreement with your policy on this. We accept it. General Zinni disagrees. You need to hear his view."

Another time when I disagreed with administration policy and congressional policy, the Secretary of Defense took me to see Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. He said, "This is what the sense of the Congress has been. The administration agrees with it. I agree with it. General Zinni does not. You need to hear his point of view on this." (Actually, that time it was about supporting Ahmed Chalabi, which I thought was a big

mistake.)

That was the environment I found as a four-star. When I was confirmed by Congress and stood before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Chairman Strom Thurmond stood up, looked at me, and said, "General Zinni, raise your right hand." I did, and he said, "Do you solemnly swear that if we confirm your appointment as the Commander of U.S. Central Command that you will appear before this body when called and that you will give your honest opinion, even if it is in opposition of administration policy?"

I said, "I do," because our forefathers thought that these members of Congress were representatives of the people. Congress has the right to oversight when it comes to conflict. Congress' ability to confirm ensures that these representatives get your commitment and obligation to come and speak the truth. My boss at the time, Secretary of Defense Bill Cohen, had no problem with that. There were several times that I said things in hearings that didn't make his life easy. He never chewed me out for it. There were a few times he expressed his frustration, but he also said, "You do what you have to do."

I respect that. And so I left the service thinking that's the way it was designed to be. I have an obligation to speak about things that are "in my lane," that I know about, that are military in nature. I have an obligation to voice my opinion on policy–not to make it, but to voice my opinion from where I see it. I have an obligation to voice such opinions to my bosses in the administration, but also to the Congress that confirmed me with the understanding that I will do that. I didn't have a boss who stifled my views and opinions. He accepted the controversy and difficulty that came with that (and I believe

that I generated some problems on occasion for Colin Powell and Hugh Shelton as well).

Subsequently, we saw an administration that decided to change those rules. We saw the stifling of our military. We saw civilians with no military experience now decide that they were best informed and could provide the kind of decision making normally left to generals and admirals. They stepped beyond the policy making and strategic goals and got into the deployment of troops, the maneuvering of troops, and the actions on the ground. We are witnesses to the results.

People sometimes say to me, "General, the problem I have is that you're challenging civilian leadership. You can't do that." I reply, "Why not? I'm a citizen, too!" With thirty-nine years spent in the military defending the Constitution, I believe I have a right when I retire to enjoy some of those rights under that Constitution. I can say whatever the hell I want, and I don't do it lightly. I do it based on what I understand, what I know, and what I feel is in the country's best interest. I am no threat to the Republic. I live in Williamsburg, Virginia, in a community of mostly retired guys. Us old vets aren't about to march on the capital, I can tell you that!

When people tell me that my actions will hurt the morale of the troops, I point out that my own son is a captain in the Marine Corps. Last week, he came back from Iraq. Before that, he was in Afghanistan. I would never do anything, ever, to harm our troops. I would do everything to defend them. But our troops are not stupid. If you think they don't know what's going on, then you're crazy. We lived through this kind of thing in Vietnam, where we wondered where the hell our generals were as we watched a war that was prosecuted in the wrong way. To the people who challenge me about morale, I always say: "Suppose that you knew we were putting our troops on the ground with

flawed rifles. You knew that those rifles malfunctioned, and yet despite all the indications that there would be problems, the decision was made to field those rifles, putting our troops into battle with that flawed weapon system. Would you, as a senior officer or a retired senior officer, speak out?" I defy anyone to tell me they wouldn't.

When troops are put in the field with a flawed strategy, a flawed plan, one in which the American public is being deceived, no one can tell me–after forty years of dedicating my life, bleeding for my country, swearing an oath to the Constitution, and watching Marines, soldiers, sailors, and airmen die in combat–to sit back and accept it. Whoever wants to argue with me–have at it–but that's how I came to this decision.

Audience Discussion

Question

General Zinni, you just described in detail a plan that had at least talked about the Phase 4 tasks. I saw some remarks about flowers in the street, but no brief about the types of problems that you outlined. Why did we ignore that part? We can talk about the goal of the war all we want. Why did military authorities at that time ignore what your staff had already put together about the dangers of Phase 4?

General Zinni

We did not put together a plan, because we were not qualified. It was the best I could do in my last year to outline as much as we understood of the problem of reconstruction and the issues that would come up.

I'll tell you what my hope was had I stayed on longer at CENTCOM. The first

thing to do would be to try to get the Secretary of Defense and maybe the Secretary of State to agree that we needed to build an annex plan for "1003" (the Iraq war plan) that dealt with this. That was the immediate problem, not just for me, but for Korea and other war plans. Then maybe in the future, these plans could be done jointly, rather than adding post-war reconstruction as an annex.

I object to the term "phase 4," because "reconstruction" actually begins when the first boot crosses the line of departure. You can make decisions and take actions there that will harm the reconstruction or enable it. The military has to understand that part of it. There isn't a clear firewall between them. In Somalia, Northern Iraq, the Balkans, and Vietnam, we saw this in spades. The military needs to be involved in that planning. We can support it. We can contribute to it. We can create the security environment. We have the logistics capability to help. I hoped that maybe after my time, they would create the annexes first, then move to this true joint planning, understanding that the nature of the conflicts we face today involve reconstruction right from the beginning. It never happened.

After I retired, I did some senior mentoring at Joint Forces Command with General Gary Luck and his crew. General Luck called me and said that Tommy Franks, who had been my Army and land component commander, wanted me to come down and help with some of the preliminary planning going in.

I said, "Sure, glad to do it." I cleaned my calendar off and waited for the call, which never came. I called Gary Luck.

He said, "Yes, he said he wanted you. I've been waiting for his call."

I called Mike Delong, who was the Deputy Commander in Chief down there and

said, “Mike, I understood that General Franks wanted me to come down. I’m glad to come and work with you on the plan.”

“You didn’t hear it from me,” he answered, “but he was told that you can’t come down. ‘Anybody but Zinni.’ You can’t come down to do this.”

Fine with me.

I was still doing the Joint Forces Command senior mentoring, when Gary Luck called and said that the Commander of Joint Forces Command had banned me from Joint Forces Command. Then he called later and said, “I think we’re over that. Can you come down now for the CAPSTONE forces?” And then he called back again and said, “No, I misspoke. You are still banned from Joint Forces Command.”

I watched how this whole process was working. What was coming out of Joint Forces Command was, frankly, garbage–rapid, decisive operations, effects-based operations, network centric warfare.

I had a little joke. I had three columns of words, and what I used to do was pick one from each column. We randomly would roll the dice. I’d pick three words, come in the next day, and say: “We just thought of this new phrase.” We would have this three-word bumper-sticker phrase, and I’d say, “We all need to adopt this.” All the contractors loved it and jumped in, along with all the little people with several brain cells. This was great new stuff.

Of course, we applied all that thinking in Iraq, and we see the end result of all that wonderful stuff.

I was discouraged with the whole process, the idea that somehow operational net assessment and all this other garbage would win this war. We can see what happened

and the disasters that occurred.

When I picked my son up at Camp Lejeune, I asked him to tell me about his experiences and impressions from the ground. I don't influence him on any of this. He does what he has to do. He's a great Marine, who loves his troops, and he's ready to go wherever his country sends him.

He said, "From my point of view on the ground in Anbar Province and Haditha and who I dealt with, it's all about tribes, power, money, jobs, and guns."

Put those five things together, and you understand what's happening on the ground. Now listen to the testimony you have just heard for two days, and tell me at the top they're talking in those real terms. [1] We understood that. That's why we planned to do what we did, and if committed, we would have understood that we had to control the ground. We had to control it in a way that we were playing to those five issues right from the beginning, understanding the nature of what we were going to face.

Why was that plan dismissed? What I have heard (and this is admittedly secondhand) was that when the assumptions underpinning 1003 were presented, administration officials said that those were overly pessimistic assumptions that were not going to happen. Ahmed Chalabi will save the day. Richard Perle and the neocons believed they had a better understanding of Iraq than I did, and believe me, I fought with them and the Chalabi supporters my whole time down there. Chalabi floated a plan around Congress, helped by a retired general by the way, that said if he could go in there with 1,000 men and CENTCOM in support, answering his call, he could defeat Saddam Hussein. Patently ridiculous. We knew his group had been infiltrated by Saddam and his

[1] General David Petraeus and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker testified before Congress about the situation in Iraq on April 8 and 9, 2008.

intelligence agencies, and Chalabi was wanted on three warrants in the region. He had no credibility, and here we were propping him up as the savior of Iraq. That's how ridiculous some of this stuff was.

I want to say one other thing. People were calling me who had been on my staff at CENTCOM. They were still there and really discouraged by what was happening. They were being told to do things that they knew were wrong. I remember one colonel said to me, "Sir, they won't let us use the 'O'-word ("occupation"). These stupid idiots believe we're going to go in there, and it will be a liberation. Everything we know says this has to be a hard and fast occupation before we can get this right in the reconstruction." To me, that was telling in and of itself.

Some of the talking heads, retired generals on TV, did us a great disservice. I remember one general in particular, a supporter of the administration on the plan, who said on CNN, "That plan 1003 that they had, that wouldn't have worked anyway. You couldn't have put all those troops in Kuwait. You couldn't have done these other things."

When you do planning, you have this time-phase deployment plan. You work with the minister of the interior in Kuwait. You have what we term RSOI: reception, staging, onward movement, and integration. These are rehearsed. They're gamed. You actually map them out on the ground and go through them. What this major general was saying to the American people, by way of reinforcing Rumsfeld's propaganda, was that, in effect, the American military does not know how to plan–that "these idiots" had dreamed up some stupid, outdated plan that wouldn't work, or for which they couldn't get the forces. That's nonsense! The JSCAP assigns the forces required to implement your plan.

Rumsfeld was fond of half of an Eisenhower quote: "Plans are nothing." He forgot the second part: "Planning is everything," as Eisenhower also said. Rumsfeld was not just throwing away a plan. Who cares about a plan? It doesn't survive the first shock or the first boot across the line of departure. But when you *throw away everything you learned during the process of planning*, that's when you're inviting disaster and catastrophe.

Question

Everything I've read suggests that Tommy Franks was actively disinterested in this kind of planning. There's one account of him driving away from the Crawford ranch, and a colonel said, "We really have think about Phase 4." Franks was quoted as saying something like, "We're not going to be there beyond Christmas. I'm not interested." How would you characterize that attitude from a senior military leader?

General Zinni

I have never had that conversation with Tommy. I haven't seen him since I left CENTCOM. Tommy was my ground Army component commander for three years when I was the commander of CENTCOM. Tommy knew 1003. Tommy was invested in 1003. Tommy drove many of the numbers in 1003. Tommy was through all the exercises that I mentioned. He ran his own exercise, Lucky Sentinel, out there in Kuwait that brought everybody together. We participated from the unified command level to go through all the steps and set the requirements that we put into the plan.

What happened? I don't know. I don't know why he made the decision to back off the plan, to disregard it and to accept that his piece was only to march to Baghdad,

and that somebody else would take care of the rest. I can only speak for me. I would have never accepted that, because I know who gets stuck with the rest. I've been down that road before, and I would have departed when Rumsfeld sent the White House spin guy down to be the public affairs officer at CENTCOM. I wouldn't have accepted that. We don't do propaganda. You can do it at the Pentagon (which I still think is wrong) or you can do it somewhere else, but you're not going to do it at CENTCOM. I would not have accepted that plan. I would have walked. I can't speak for him.

Question

Looking to the future, it's pretty clear we're tasking the military to do a lot of reconstruction, something at which the military is not uniquely competent or perhaps even especially competent. Do you see any serious conversation going on about evolving in that direction?

General Zinni

There is a lot going on in Washington now to address this problem. I am co-chair of a council of fifty-two retired admirals and generals retired, forty-four of whom are four-stars. We have testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We are working toward getting the resources and the funding to beef up the other pieces we need in this. If you are going to do political reconstruction, humanitarian work, economic reconstruction, social reconstruction—it isn't going to be done by battalion squadrons and fleets. We need counterparts on the ground, and they have to be established ahead of time. We need planners by our side who know how to plan for this. Even more importantly, where unified commanders work prevention programs in this, we need the other dimensions involved with us, helping stabilize environments before they launch

into crisis.

There are a number of studies going on about how to do this in every think tank in Washington. The problem has the attention of the Senate, particularly the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and they are trying to figure out how best to go about this. One of the problems is that there are maybe too many studies and ideas. What always worries me is that some think tank with a one-page solution will carry the day, while the in-depth study and understanding, getting the view from the practitioners out there, may be neglected.

The military should not be tasked with these responsibilities. We are not humanitarian workers. We are not political reconstructors. We are not economic reconstructors. We are not social reconstructors. As I said before, we can help. We can support. We can create the security environment you need to do it. But as Dave Petraeus said, there is no military solution. We can create an environment that favors the applications of these requirements to get to a solution, but the military is not the solution.

Question

General, you predicted that a sequel or second edition of *Dereliction of Duty* will be written someday. I agree, and think that one of the theses of whoever writes the book will be that there was a generation of flag officers who "caved," and my question to you is: "Why did they cave?" It was the generation just behind you. Your generation promoted them. Your generation selected them. Your generation developed the general officer development programs that created them, and yet when an overbearing secretary came in, too many flag officers, strategic leaders of the military profession, caved. Now

you are speaking to a group of military educators here. We are responsible for ethics education, and for moral and character development. So we need to know, what went wrong? What should we be thinking about?

General Zinni

Well, first of all, I accept that criticism, and I accept responsibility. I'll give you my point of view, and I think it's certainly arguable. My generation really was the last of the Vietnam generation. It doesn't mean that our successors didn't have Vietnam experience. Some did. Most of them, the ones who came behind us, caught the tail end of Vietnam. They had, perhaps at most, one short tour. They weren't the generation that lived through Vietnam from start to finish, with multiple tours, going through the whole experience. It was burned into our souls as junior officers.

When Pete Schoomaker was Chief of Staff in the Army, he ran a program for his general officers that I thought was fantastic. It dealt with strategic thinking. He brought his general officers together several times a year, and I was fortunate enough to participate. In these discussions with them, I noticed a difference. In the last one I did, every one of the promotable colonels or brigadier generals (and that's all there were) had been brigade and battalion commanders in Iraq in multiple tours. There was a much different attitude from what I saw in the previous ones. I mean, they were angry. There were mistakes and errors of judgment and leadership that were burned into their souls. It reminded me of my generation coming out of Vietnam. They saw the things that were wrong. They were making commitments to themselves about things they would never allow to happen again. I think we had an interim generation in there that by and large did not see this sort of conflict for most of their careers.

A very close friend of mine, Ray Smith, is a retired major general in the Marine Corps and one of our most highly-decorated Marines in Vietnam. He was in Grenada, Beirut, and everywhere else. He has a Navy Cross, several silver stars, multiple Purple Hearts, and bronze stars. He is a combat genius, who really has a sense of the firefight. He was with one of the Marine regiments in the march up to Baghdad and wrote a book, along with Bing West, called *The March Up*. He told me about a firefight, one of the first firefights. There were probably a dozen casualties or so. Probably because this was one of the first firefights, the mood and atmosphere was as if this was a major battle, with heavy casualties and major contact. He was listening to the contact and looking at the reports and saying, "This ain't right." His context is a lot different than the regimental commander, those battalion commanders, or certainly those company commanders who were in combat for really the first time.

As I wrote in my book about the first firefight I was ever in, I couldn't tell you what was going on. I can just tell you there was a lot of noise, I was scared, and I didn't know what the hell was happening. A year later, by the time I left, I could tell you what weapons were firing, how many, and whether we had the firepower advantage, or the bad guy did, simply by listening to the weapons–where they were and what they were maneuvering to do.

Ray Smith's little vignette tells me a lot about that generation all the way up the line. They looked at our generation as the real combat veterans. They looked to us for that measure of what's happening and what needs to be done. We had an interim generation that, throughout their careers, with the exception of a few events, really did not have that kind of combat experience and maybe weren't that confident in making

those decisions.

Let me say something else that worries me a lot. I never served a tour in the Pentagon. That and never learning to play golf are my two proudest achievements. I really worry now that when we try to create officers, we put a lot of value on things that don't necessarily contribute to being the smartest war fighter or war planner in the world. We have an archaic system of tenure in the military. We have the same retirement system that the Roman army did, with twenty to thirty-year careers. We put people out when they're in their early forties, at the peak of their time. What we need to do is have 30- to 40-year careers, so you have multiple years in grade beyond what you do now. You're not trying to cram everything in from your joint tour, your school, and whatever else you need to do beside the command time, which has to be shortened. There's not enough to go around, and all this hinders us from developing the kind of officer and senior staff non-commissioned petty officer (NCO) that we need today. We have to say, "We can use you for 30 to 40 years. You're going to spend much longer in grade, but you're going to get a much richer set of experiences."

The most valuable officer to me as the Commander of CENTCOM was the foreign area officer. On a day-to-day basis, that person out there was running my security assistance program, serving as an attaché, and coming back to my staff with that valuable cultural knowledge, language ability, and experience. Every service put a stake in the heart of those guys and girls, and they did it because the FAOs didn't (couldn't, in fact) meet their wickets in their occupational specialty. Because they chose to go off and do something interesting and genuinely vital to the success of the military, there simply wasn't enough time left in those individuals' career tracks for them to complete their own

career and promotion requirements.

I had a major, in the United States Army, who graduated *summa cum laude* from a "Big-ten" school. He went to Fort Sills as an artillery officer, graduated number one in his class, went off and did his tour as a foreign observer and then a battery commander. He had straight outstanding fitness reports, made major, and went into the foreign area officer program. He was one of our first officers in Central Asia, and it was unbelievable what he created in the way of relationships and language ability. He came back to CENTCOM on my staff and built the theater engagement plan for Central Asia. He was a one-man show on this whole thing and a remarkable success. Then he came up for lieutenant colonel and failed his selection. I put more medals on this guy than you can imagine for the things he did. When he failed his selection, I called the Chief of Staff of the Army and said, "I can't believe this."

"Oh," he answered, "maybe he'll get it next time. He's lost his credibility in the artillery." Lost his credibility? He was number one at Fort Sills and an outstanding battery commander. He could go in and get an artillery battalion today and wouldn't have a problem. He was a genius, a hard charger. He loved the service, but he got out because he didn't see a future.

The way we're developing officers needs to be looked at, and we have to start making some radical decisions. I'm in business. If you look at my business, you'll see a whole bunch of retired officers and senior staff NCOs in my business. We get them in the prime of life, and they have a long career in working with us. It's a shame. My company would never develop somebody for more than 20 years and then put them out to pasture in their early forties, having invested in them the education, the experience levels,

and everything else and then arbitrarily cut short their career! We need to rethink that as a professional military force and an all-volunteer force.

Question

Given that the Department of Defense budget is such a large part of our federal budget, and federal agencies have been drastically cut in their resources, isn't the military inevitably going to have to do this reconstruction work or risk losing some of the resources we have been given?

General Zinni

First of all, I don't believe this is a zero-sum game. If you look at the percentage of GNP we spend on our military, it's low compared to other nations. Secondly, if you want somebody to do this, you're going to have to pay for it. Suppose you say to the military: "You are going to do it. You are going to have civil affairs on steroids, and you are going to do all this work. You are going to reconstruct societies politically, economically, and socially." Our military doesn't have the capability to do all of that now. Just because there's a manual in the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) doesn't mean anything. Who will actually do it? If you want the military to do it, rather than the Department of Commerce or the State Department, then we're going to have to build units, recruit people, train them, and create this additional capacity. It's going to cost something.

Now, suppose you tell the military: it's going to come out of your hide. Let's cut some infantry brigades, some F-22 squadrons, and whatever, then let me tell you the risk you have just created in our ability to execute our missions and handle our war plans. As

I said to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that's like saying: "I won't pay the fire insurance premiums. I will pay the flood insurance premiums and hope I don't have a fire." Well, you better be protected against both fire and flood if you're in a flood plain that's prone to wildfires.

This isn't zero-sum gaming, and you can't tell me we don't have the resources when we fund studies on the mating habits of the sea otter and build bridges to nowhere and waste so much on pork and earmarks and tax cuts.

We also have a lack of leadership–no one is explaining to the American people that the planet has shrunk. You cannot wall yourself in. We can't become self-dependent. We can't bar anybody from trading with us and be protectionist. We can't build a wall across the Mexican border or the Canadian border and man our coasts from end to end. This is fantasy land, just like it is when you talk to senators who still think we go off and fight a war and then come home. The boys have a parade, and it's over.

As I told one senator, "We don't come home anymore. We didn't come home from Germany. We didn't come home from Japan. We didn't come home from South Korea. We didn't come home from the Gulf War. We don't come home. So whatever you do," —keep in mind, this was three weeks before the war—I said to these Senators, "Whatever you do in Iraq, I guarantee you will live with it. CENTCOM will live with it. Whatever you lay down, you will live with, from here on and for decades and decades to come."

The decision making for strategy and policy belongs with the civilian leadership. The decision making about maneuvering forces on the ground, applying firepower, putting the military application to achieve those goals, given the political and resource

constraints, those decisions belong to the uniformed military.

When dilettantes decide they are going to get into the business of war fighting, I take issue. Tell me what you want done. Give me the constraints I have to operate under. Tell me what resources I have, but don't come down and try to maneuver units and tell me how to fight. That's where you have to draw the line.

Lincoln was never happy with a whole set of generals, but Lincoln didn't go down and try to maneuver battalions. Lyndon Johnson did. He had a mock-up of Vietnam and was directing air strikes from the White House basement. This is a partial dereliction of duty on the Joint Chiefs' part. That's not where the civilians should be involved.

When the Deputy Secretary of Defense, with no military experience, says to the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, with all his experience, that his opinion on numbers of troops required was "wildly off the mark," that's where I have trouble. There needs to be a clear delineation and understanding of roles and what decisions are made by those wearing the uniform.

I haven't seen one retired general or admiral, or any on active duty, who ever thought that they should be involved in policy making and setting strategy. They contribute. They can present views, but the ultimate decision on that rests with the President of the United States and the leaders in the Executive Branch, to be reviewed and approved by Congress in some oversight capacity, and determined to be legal by our judiciary if challenged. That's the system I grew up in. But when people wearing suits with no experience decide they know more about the battlefield than we do, that's where we had better stand up. Who pays the price if we don't? Our troops pay the price. The

American people pay the price. Our national treasure pays the price. Our image around the world and our leadership pay the price. That's where I draw the line.