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## **RUMSFELD'S WAR**

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With the United States Army deployed in a dozen hotspots around the world—on constant alert in Afghanistan and taking casualties almost every day in Iraq—some current and former officers now say the army is on the verge of being broken. The man responsible, according to those officers, is a secretary of defense who came into the Pentagon determined to transform the shape of the military.

In “Rumsfeld’s War,” airing Tuesday, October 26, at 9 p.m. on PBS (check local listings), FRONTLINE® and the Washington Post join forces for the first time to investigate Donald Rumsfeld’s contentious battle with the Pentagon bureaucracy to assert civilian control of the military and remake the way America fights.

“The remarkable journalistic skills of five Washington Post reporters combined with FRONTLINE’s own original reporting and archive represents a rare opportunity to tell the story of the war inside the Defense Department at this critical time,” says producer Michael Kirk.

“Rumsfeld’s War” traces Donald Rumsfeld’s career from his time as an advisor to President Nixon to his rise as the oft-seen and well-known face of the George W. Bush administration during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In interviews with key administration officials, military leaders, and reporters from the Washington Post, the documentary examines how a secretary of defense bent on reform became a secretary of war accused of ignoring the advice of his generals.

“He came in determined to reassert civilian control over the Joint Staff and the rest of the military and it was a pretty tough process, a lot of friction in those first months, with Rumsfeld saying, ‘No, I don’t think you heard me clearly. I’m the boss. I want it this way,’” reporter Thomas Ricks of the Washington Post tells FRONTLINE.

In the early months of the Bush administration, Rumsfeld saw his biggest enemy as the outdated Cold War thinking of the troops he commanded. “Donald Rumsfeld wanted to build a smaller, nimbler, and more networked military that could respond swiftly to threats anywhere in the world. He came into the Defense Department where the forces were heavy and slow, took months to deploy and worked best when used in massive numbers,” says Professor John Arquilla of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

Former Secretary of the Army Thomas White says that when Rumsfeld tried to push for a reduction in the number of troops in the army, the secretary found himself clashing with General Eric Shinseki, the army’s respected Chief of Staff.

“There were very strongly held views, myself and General Shinseki and others in the room, that this was not the right answer,” White says of one meeting with Rumsfeld. “The secretary, he just got up and walked out, which was a signal to all of us that he wasn’t terribly happy with the results of the meeting.”

To the Pentagon generals, Rumsfeld’s sharp elbows and strong views on the military came across as insulting. But those who know him best say that Rumsfeld’s unorthodox style is hardly a surprise. Robert Ellsworth, longtime friend, former ambassador to the UN and also former deputy to Rumsfeld, says that as a wrestler in college, Rumsfeld learned to always stay on the move.

“He has a very sharp tongue as well as sharp elbows. And he knows how to use salty language. And he didn’t hold back even against these senior bureaucrats, senior officers. He let them have it because he was in a hurry,” Ellsworth says.

By the eve of September 11, 2001, Rumsfeld’s sharp tongue and tough attitude had gotten him into plenty of fights and created a number of enemies.

“Inside the beltway, there are all these discussions about ‘Well, who’s going to be the first cabinet secretary to leave this administration?’” defense analyst Andrew Krepinevich tells FRONTLINE. “And the early betting line is it could be Don Rumsfeld. And of course then 9/11 happens, and as the saying goes ‘That changes everything.’”

As the United States prepared to respond to the attacks of September 11, Rumsfeld pushed a reluctant military to think unconventionally about going to war in Afghanistan. Dissatisfied with the plan for a large-scale invasion that he received from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Rumsfeld turned to the Pentagon’s Special Operations forces.

“He is willing to start military operations in Afghanistan before most of the military thinks that we’re ready to do so. And [a] small number of special forces soldiers combined with CIA support for indigenous Afghan resistance forces brings about spectacular results,” Krepinevich says.

When the president’s attention turned towards Iraq, Rumsfeld pushed his war planners to think outside the box. Emboldened by his success in Afghanistan, the secretary once again pushed aside Pentagon critics and demanded an unconventional war plan.

“Rumsfeld thinks you can re-invent [the] war plan,” the *Washington Post’s* Bob Woodward tells FRONTLINE, “And anything that smacks of the old way or something that

looks conventional to him, he asks questions about. Doesn’t necessarily oppose it, but will ask questions about it, and is looking to make this quicker, with less force and with less casualties.”

Now, the secretary’s critics allege that Rumsfeld’s push for unconventional thinking effectively marginalized advice about troop strength, post-war planning, and the treatment of prisoners.

“I think to a degree, he’s stubborn. Being stubborn, holding to your convictions is good to a point, but when the evidence around you indicates your position is not tenable, then you ought to start adapting to the situation,” says retired USMC Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper.

That stubbornness, some officers say, led Rumsfeld to put the military in the difficult position of fighting in simultaneous conflicts against an unconventional enemy. With mounting casualties in Iraq and without a clear exit strategy in either Iraq or Afghanistan, Rumsfeld’s critics charge the secretary has pushed too far. The danger, they say, is a military incapable of effectively fighting the next major conflict.

Former CENTCOM Commander-in-Chief General Joseph Hoar (Ret.) tells FRONTLINE, “Today we find over fifty percent of the United States Army, the regular army, ten divisions, committed overseas. It’s not sustainable.”

Rumsfeld, however, has stood firm in his assessment that U.S. fighting forces are more than capable of handling these or future conflicts, recently telling the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that with over 2.5 million Americans already enlisted, the military’s problem is management of resources, not recruitment.

“Rumsfeld’s War” is a FRONTLINE co-production with the *Washington Post* and the Kirk Documentary Group. The producer for FRONTLINE is Michael Kirk. The co-producer for FRONTLINE is Jim Gilmore. Executives-in-charge for the *Washington Post* are Bill Hamilton and Tina Gulland. Reporters for the *Washington Post* are Dan Balz, Dana Priest, Tom Ricks, Bob Woodward, and Robin Wright.

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