

Rumsfeld Memo on Iraq Proposed 'Major' Change

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By [MICHAEL R. GORDON](#) and [DAVID S. CLOUD](#)

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 2 — Two days before he resigned as defense secretary, [Donald H. Rumsfeld](#) submitted a classified memo to the White House that acknowledged that the Bush administration's strategy in [Iraq](#) was not working and called for a major course correction.

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Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld arrived at the White House on Nov. 13 to meet with the Iraq Study Group and President Bush.

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"In my view it is time for a major adjustment," wrote Mr. Rumsfeld, who has been a symbol of a dogged stay-the-course policy. "Clearly, what U.S. forces are currently doing in Iraq is not working well enough or fast enough."

Nor did Mr. Rumsfeld seem confident that the administration would readily develop an effective alternative. To limit the political fallout from shifting course, he suggested the administration consider a campaign to lower public expectations.

"Announce that whatever new approach the U.S. decides on, the U.S. is doing so on a trial basis," he wrote. "This will give us the ability to readjust and move to another course, if necessary, and therefore not 'lose.' "

"Recast the U.S. military mission and the U.S. goals (how we talk about them) — go minimalist," he added. The memo suggests frustration with the pace of turning over responsibility to the Iraqi authorities; in fact, the memo calls for examination of ideas that roughly parallel troop withdrawal proposals presented by some of the White House's sharpest Democratic critics. ([Text of the Memo](#))

The memo's discussion of possible troop reduction options offers a counterpoint to Mr. Rumsfeld's frequent public suggestions that discussions about force levels are driven by requests from American military commanders.

It also puts on the table several ideas for troop redeployments or withdrawals, even as there have been recent pronouncements from American commanders emphasizing the need to maintain troop levels for the time being.

The memorandum sometimes has a finger-wagging tone, as Mr. Rumsfeld says that the Iraqis must "pull up their socks," and suggests that reconstruction aid should be withheld in violent areas to avoid rewarding "bad behavior."

Other options called for shrinking the number of bases, establishing benchmarks that would mark the Iraqis' progress toward political, economic and security goals and conducting a "reverse embeds" program to attach Iraqi soldiers to American squads.

The memo was finished one day after President Bush interviewed [Robert M. Gates](#), the president of [Texas A&M University](#), as a potential successor to Mr. Rumsfeld and one day before the midterm elections. By then it was clear that the [Republicans](#) appeared likely to suffer a setback at the polls and that the administration was poised to begin reconsidering its Iraq strategy.

The memo provides no indication that Mr. Rumsfeld intended to leave his Pentagon post. It is unclear whether he knew at that point that he was about to be replaced, though the White House has said that Mr. Bush and Mr. Rumsfeld had a number of conversations on the matter.

Told that The New York Times had obtained a copy of it, a Pentagon spokesman, Eric Ruff, confirmed its authenticity. "As it became clear that people were considering options for the way forward, the secretary had some views on the subject, and this memo reflects those views," he said.

At the Pentagon, Mr. Rumsfeld has been famous for his "snowflakes" — memos that drift down to the bureaucracy from on high and that are used to ask questions, stimulate debate and shape policy. Mr. Rumsfeld's Nov. 6 memorandum, circulated as part of the administration's review of Iraq policy, is written in that spirit and with the same blunt

aphorisms that Mr. Rumsfeld frequently uses in public.

Unlike the lawyerly memo on Iraq policy submitted Nov. 8 by Stephen J. Hadley, the national security adviser, Mr. Rumsfeld's listed more than a dozen "illustrative options" that the defense secretary did not endorse, but suggested merited serious consideration. "Many of these options could, and in a number of cases, should be done in combination with others," Mr. Rumsfeld advised.

With Mr. Rumsfeld's resignation, the options no longer have the same weight. In recent weeks, some have been discarded as the Bush administration tries to adjust its military and political strategy in Iraq. But others, like increasing the number of advisers attached to Iraqi forces, live on and have also been recommended by others.

Mr. Rumsfeld, who has presided over two wars and is one of the longest-serving Pentagon chiefs, is scheduled to leave when his designated successor, Mr. Gates, is confirmed by the Senate, expected later this month.

Titled "Iraq — Illustrative New Courses of Action," the memo reflects mounting concern over a war that, as Mr. Rumsfeld put it, has evolved from "major combat operations to counterterrorism, to counterinsurgency, to dealing with death squads and sectarian violence."

The first section of the memo contains two pages of options that Mr. Rumsfeld describes as "above the line" ideas worthy of consideration. Some that Mr. Rumsfeld found intriguing appear to reflect his long-held view that the United States should use relatively modest force in intervening in foreign countries to avoid creating a dependency on American power. That approach, critics have charged, left the United States unprepared to deal with the chaos that followed the ouster of [Saddam Hussein](#).

Mr. Rumsfeld has frequently emphasized the difficulty of stabilizing Iraq and the need to turn over responsibility to Iraqi authorities as quickly as possible. But he has also been a forceful, even cantankerous, defender of American policy, often insisting his critics were unduly pessimistic. On Oct. 31, just a week before finishing the memo, Mr. Rumsfeld told a radio interviewer, "I feel that we are making good progress with the piece of it the Defense Department has."

One option Mr. Rumsfeld offered calls for modest troop withdrawals "so Iraqis know they have to pull up their socks, step up and take responsibility for their country."

Another option calls for redeploying American troops from "vulnerable positions" in Baghdad and other cities to safer areas in Iraq or Kuwait, where they would act as a "quick reaction force." That idea is similar to a plan suggested by Representative [John P. Murtha](#), a Pennsylvania Democrat, a plan that the White House has soundly rebuffed.

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James Glanz contributed reporting from Baghdad.

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