Review of *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*. By Douglas J. Feith. Harper. 656 pp. $27.95

The invasion of Iraq by the United States, critics quip, was a "Feith-based initiative." As Under Secretary of Defense and chief policy strategist for Donald Rumsfeld's Pentagon, they argue, Douglas Feith declared that in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 the United States was at war, not only with Al Qaeda, but with a world-wide network of extremist groups, including state and non-state sponsors. Placing Iraq at the head of the list of rogue regimes, Feith (and his neo-conservative colleague Paul Wolfowitz) pressed to depose Saddam Hussein before he (again) attacked his neighbors—and Americans—with impunity. In making his case, detractors declare, Feith proved willing to "politicize" CIA assessments of the threat posed by Iraq.

In *War and Decision*, Feith, now a professor of National Security Policy at Georgetown University, fights back, defiantly. Drawing on thousands of previously undisclosed Department of Defense documents and the notes he took at meetings, he takes readers inside "the situation room," where policies were promulgated to disrupt terrorist networks, invade Afghanistan, and occupy Iraq. Feith acknowledges that the Bush Administration made mistakes, especially in managing the "post-overthrow disorder" in Iraq and protecting America’s credibility. But he maintains that it was "unreasonably risky" to allow Saddam to remain in power. And he remains convinced that the hardliners in the Pentagon had "the right understanding of the enemy" and "the right global strategy" to defeat them.

Detailed and well-documented, *War and Decision* is the most thorough and thought-provoking defense to date of the response of the government of the United States to 9/11. Feith insists that a "doctrine of anticipatory self-defense" is the "inevitable result" of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. And he refutes the commonly held assumption that the
Administration failed to plan for the postwar reconstruction of Iraq or anticipate the "Parade of Horribles" that might follow the official end of hostilities. Had it not fallen victim to interagency conflict, he maintains, the Pentagon proposal for an Iraqi Interim Authority could well have avoided the insurgency that drew strength from the disenfranchisement of Iraqi citizens and the dissolution of the Iraqi Army.

Although he left office in 2005, Feith remains a prisoner of a Pentagon perspective. His account is provincial and petty. Feith does not provide the political context for policy formation or pay much attention to Bush or Vice President Cheney. Nor does he revisit or revise any of the recommendations made by the DOD during his tenure. His Donald Rumsfeld is a cross between Solomon and Socrates, who "endorsed intellectual modesty—for himself and others," rarely gave commands, and encouraged give-and-take in a "tour de force of reason and education."

According to Feith, Rumsfeld sagely suggested limiting the capacity of detention facilities for suspected Al Qaeda fighters, to increase pressure to release anyone the U.S. did not absolutely need to hold.

As he circles the wagons around the Pentagon, Feith starts shooting at the State Department and the CIA. Colin Powell, George Tenet, and their minions, he suggests, were incompetent, misguided, or downright disloyal. Their mistakes damaged America's "war on terror." The CIA provided almost no useful intelligence on Afghanistan; wanted to hit Al Qaeda but not overthrow the Taliban; and declared that an American arrangement with the Northern Alliance would antagonize Pashtuns in the south. The Agency suppressed relevant information about connections between Saddam and Al Qaeda; was wrong on WMD; predicted that Iraqi police would function effectively after Saddam was deposed; and did not anticipate the insurgency.
The State Department, according to Feith, advocated containment rather than regime change—and balked on developing new policy options for the president. State's campaign of ideas against jihadist extremists was "anemic." State opposed, delayed, or mismanaged the task of bringing exile groups into the political process. Worst of all, Feith fumes, "leading officials" at State and the CIA "chose to air their dissent outside," supplying journalists and Democrats with accounts, "full of inaccuracies," designed to made the administration look unreasonable. They should have "pitched in" or "stepped aside."

Relying more on faith than fact, Feith claims that the United States could have avoided the "parade of horribles" by putting in place a government of exiles in Iraq, as it did in Afghanistan, instead of waiting for elections and a constitution. He denies that the DOD wanted to "anoint" Ahmad Chalabi, head of the Iraqi National Congress, who was despised at State and the CIA. But he protests too much. Downplaying dissension within the ranks of the "externals," he mobilizes the will to believe that a coalition interim authority, headed by the U.S. educated businessman, "one of America's most capable friends," would have had a good chance, had it exercised power in 2004, of establishing a unified, non-theocratic, perhaps even democratic, Iraq.

Feith ends War and Decision where he began—with a full-throated endorsement of the doctrine of "the doctrine of anticipatory self-defense." Given the proliferation of WMD, he claims, exceptions must be made to the traditional concept of sovereignty. The threat doesn't have to be imminent. It didn’t really matter to him that Iraq had destroyed its stockpiles. As long as Saddam—or any tyrant—retained the intent, the infrastructure, the support for terrorism, and designs on his neighbors, the United States was well within its rights to take him out. This doctrine, Feith admits, appears to authorize an attack against any country the president of
the United States dislikes or suspects. His assurances that Congress, the media, and America's allies operate to check and balance the use of military power by the commander-in-chief ring hollow. Would he extend the doctrine, one wonders, to countries other than the United States?

The debacle in Iraq had not made Americans—or the men, women, and children of the Middle East—safer and more secure. It has given jihadists a "just cause" around which they can rally and recruit—and wrecked havoc with America's image around the world. *War and Peace*, at bottom, is a syllabus of errors, egregious and expensive.

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