

ority should be placed on eliminating that threat. Wolfowitz contended that the odds were “far more” than 1 in 10, citing Saddam’s praise for the attack, his long record of involvement in terrorism, and theories that Ramzi Yousef was an Iraqi agent and Iraq was behind the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center.⁷³ The next day, Wolfowitz renewed the argument, writing to Rumsfeld about the interest of Yousef’s co-conspirator in the 1995 Manila air plot in crashing an explosives-laden plane into CIA headquarters, and about information from a foreign government regarding Iraqis’ involvement in the attempted hijacking of a Gulf Air flight. Given this background, he wondered why so little thought had been devoted to the danger of suicide pilots, seeing a “failure of imagination” and a mind-set that dismissed possibilities.⁷⁴

On September 19, Rumsfeld offered several thoughts for his commanders as they worked on their contingency plans. Though he emphasized the worldwide nature of the conflict, the references to specific enemies or regions named only the Taliban, al Qaeda, and Afghanistan.⁷⁵ Shelton told us the administration reviewed all the Pentagon’s war plans and challenged certain assumptions underlying them, as any prudent organization or leader should do.⁷⁶

General Tommy Franks, the commanding general of Central Command, recalled receiving Rumsfeld’s guidance that each regional commander should assess what these plans meant for his area of responsibility. He knew he would soon be striking the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan. But, he told us, he now wondered how that action was connected to what might need to be done in Somalia, Yemen, or Iraq.⁷⁷

On September 20, President Bush met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the two leaders discussed the global conflict ahead. When Blair asked about Iraq, the President replied that Iraq was not the immediate problem. Some members of his administration, he commented, had expressed a different view, but he was the one responsible for making the decisions.⁷⁸

Franks told us that he was pushing independently to do more robust planning on military responses in Iraq during the summer before 9/11—a request President Bush denied, arguing that the time was not right. (CENTCOM also began dusting off plans for a full invasion of Iraq during this period, Franks said.) The CENTCOM commander told us he renewed his appeal for further military planning to respond to Iraqi moves shortly after 9/11, both because he personally felt that Iraq and al Qaeda might be engaged in some form of collusion and because he worried that Saddam might take advantage of the attacks to move against his internal enemies in the northern or southern parts of Iraq, where the United States was flying regular missions to enforce Iraqi no-fly zones. Franks said that President Bush again turned down the request.⁷⁹

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HAVING ISSUED DIRECTIVES to guide his administration’s preparations for war, on Thursday, September 20, President Bush addressed the nation before a joint session of Congress. “Tonight,” he said, “we are a country awakened to