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U.S. Rushed Post-Saddam Planning

War strategy approved in August 2002

By Rowan Scarborough, The Washington Times

A secret report for the Joint Chiefs of Staff lays the blame for setbacks in Iraq on a flawed and rushed war-planning process that "limited the focus" for preparing for post-Saddam Hussein operations.

The report, prepared last month, said the search for weapons of mass destruction was planned so late in the game that it was impossible for U.S. Central Command to carry out the mission effectively. "Insufficient U.S. government assets existed to accomplish the mission," the classified briefing said.

The report is titled "Operation Iraqi Freedom Strategic Lessons Learned" and is stamped "secret." A copy was obtained by The Washington Times.

The report also shows that President Bush approved the overall war strategy for Iraq in August last year. That was eight months before the first bomb was dropped and six months before he asked the U.N. Security Council for a war mandate that he never received.

Senior U.S. officials, including Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, conceded in recent weeks that the Bush administration failed to predict the guerrilla war against American troops in Iraq. Saddam loyalists and foreign fighters have killed more than 60 soldiers since May 1, mostly with roadside bombs and rocket-propelled grenades.

The Congressional Budget Office projected yesterday that the demands of troop rotations globally will leave the Pentagon without any fresh Army units for Iraq in 2004 unless tours are extended beyond one year.

The Joint Chiefs report reveals deficiencies in the planning process. It says planners were not given enough time to put together the best blueprint for what is called Phase IV — the ongoing reconstruction of Iraq.

The report does not name any individual. Most war planning was conducted by Gen. Tommy Franks at U.S. Central Command; the Joint Chiefs of Staff, under the direction of Gen. Richard B. Myers, the chairman; and the Pentagon policy-writing shop led by Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith.

"Late formation of DoD [Phase IV] organizations limited time available for the development of detailed plans and pre-deployment coordination," the report says. "Command relationships (and communication requirements) and responsibilities were not clearly defined for DoD organizations until shortly before [Operation Iraqi Freedom] commenced."

In fact, the Pentagon was forced to scrap its original plan for rebuilding as violence increased against U.S. forces and basic services were slow to resume. L. Paul Bremer, a former ambassador, was tapped in mid-May to take over as Iraq's American administrator.

On the weapons search — the prime reason Mr. Bush cited for going to war — the Joint Chiefs report states: "Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) elimination and exploitation planning efforts did not occur early enough in the process to allow CentCom to effectively execute the mission. The extent of the planning required was underestimated. Insufficient U.S. government assets existed to accomplish the mission."

The initial search by military teams found no weapons at sites identified by the CIA and other intelligence agencies before the war. The Pentagon then replaced those teams with an overarching "Iraq Survey Group," which received additional expert personnel and new intelligence assets. Former U.N. weapons inspector David Kay is leading the search for weapons of mass destruction.

The report said the planning was poor because "WMD elimination/exploitation on a large scale was a new mission area. Division of responsibility for planning and execution was not clear. As a result planning occurred on an ad hoc basis and late in the process. Additionally, there were insufficient assets available to accomplish the mission. Existing assets were tasked to perform multiple, competing missions."

A Pentagon spokesman declined yesterday to comment specifically on the findings.

"We always look closely at everything we do to find ways to improve and do better," the spokesman said, "and Operation Iraqi Freedom is no exception. As to specifics of the lessons learned, it's still a draft document and classified, so it would be inappropriate to comment on that."

The report, labeled "final draft," suggests that combat commanders, such as Central Command, establish permanent cadres of specialists on weapons of mass destruction. It also recommends that each operational plan contain a section for dealing with such weapons.

On planning for the post-Saddam period, the interagency process, such as between the Pentagon and State Department, "was not fully integrated prior to hostilities." Before the war, "Phase IV objectives were identified but the scope of the effort required to continually refine operational plans for defeat of Iraqi military limited the focus on Phase IV."

The report also provides a classified timeline of events from September 11 leading to war. It says that on Aug. 29, 2002, Mr. Bush "approves Iraq goals, objectives and strategy."

Three months earlier, the Pentagon began a series of war exercises called "Prominent Hammer" to judge whether the force could win in Iraq and still maintain a deterrent in other theaters, such as South Korea. On Nov. 24, Gen. Franks, the Central Command chief, presented Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld with "six major tasks for success." Central Command held a major war game Oct. 4 and 5 to test Gen. Franks' plan.

The timeline also showed that the Bush administration stayed in close contact with Israel about its plans. In mid-February, "key Israeli leaders" received a briefing on the war plan. Shortly thereafter, CentCom began sharing information in Tel Aviv via U.S. European Command, whose area of responsibility includes the Jewish state.

The report states that the study looks at "the big issues — strategic perspective," as opposed to lessons-learned reports that examine many tactical issues.

The report awarded three grades. The worst was "capabilities that fell short of expectations or needs, and

need to be redressed through new initiatives." Getting this low grade were the postwar planning and the search for weapons of mass destruction, as well as the mix of active and reserve forces, and the troop deployment to the region.

The next grade was "capabilities that demonstrated effectiveness, but need enhancement." Public affairs, special-operations forces, finding bombing targets and tracking the whereabouts of friendly troops received the grade.

The highest marks came under the category of "capabilities that reached new levels of performance and need to be sustained and improved." Joint service warfare, a key war-fighting requirement of Mr. Rumsfeld, got this high grade, as did global war-gaming.

The report also gave high marks to bombing "time-sensitive" targets. In the 2001 Afghanistan war, the report says, Gen. Franks and Mr. Rumsfeld had to approve the target list. But in Iraq, the command improved guidance and procedures so that commanders could launch strikes when targets emerged.