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Andrew Cockburn, *Rumsfeld: His Rise, Fall, and Catastrophic Legacy*. New York: Scribner, 2007. Pp. vii, 247. ISBN 978-1-4165-3574-4.

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Andrew Cockburn gives us a well written career study of Donald Rumsfeld; readers will find its arguments suggestive rather than conclusive. The book's limitations stem, in part, from its narrow focus, but also from the author's reliance on unnamed sources ("one senior general," "an Assistant Secretary of State," "a former senior official," "a Rumsfeld intimate"); the citations of printed sources require just eight pages. Cockburn finds few redeeming features in this career. His portrait of Secretary Rumsfeld as a man imbued with unquenchable ambition allied with boundless hubris rings true. Although Cockburn does not make this claim, many of his readers will see the Donald Rumsfeld portrayed here as representative of a generation (or more) of policy makers whose choices have left most Americans believing their nation is on the wrong course—and large numbers of the world's citizens actually loathing the United States.

Rumsfeld came into modern conservatism on the ground floor. "By the time he began running for Congress as a twenty-nine-year-old ... he had attended Princeton on an ROTC scholarship, which he followed with three years in the navy" (12). In 1962, he won a "safe" Republican congressional seat north of Chicago; he served three terms before joining the Nixon administration as head of the Office of Economic Opportunity. This "half forgotten" dimension of Rumsfeld's career reveals to Cockburn much of his protagonist's essence. The future Secretary of Defense possessed ambition, but no particular ideology. The author describes him as "a conventional conservative, loyal to his business sponsors and to the routine prejudices of their class" (14). Indeed, "few people had much idea of his ideas," perhaps because Rumsfeld viewed "ideology simply as a matter of tactics" (13). He cared little about facts or information (as Cockburn frequently reasserts); he worshipped only success. The neophyte politician fit well in the Nixon White House and into the neo-conservative political movement Nixon was beginning to fashion. Like Nixon and those around him, the young Rumsfeld displayed a flair for intrigue and divisive politics. He acquired, according to Cockburn's sources, the reputation of a "ruthless little bastard" capable of almost any "slimy maneuver" (21-2). Predictably, such a man created a skein of resentful colleagues—"embittered enemies," Cockburn calls them. His most inveterate antagonists? Nelson Rockefeller and George Herbert Walker Bush. While Cockburn offers no systematic analysis of Rumsfeld's electoral weaknesses, it does seem that he lacked the common touch, which, added to his powerful enemies, meant he was unlikely to achieve his goal of the presidency. Instead, he settled into a new role, becoming, in Cockburn's somewhat hyperbolic phrase, "one of history's great courtiers" (98). A man of limited experience, education, and knowledge, Rumsfeld succeeded by loyally serving the needs of

individuals and interests that could advance his career. He also proved to be lucky: Watergate did not touch him; instead it brought opportunity.

In 1975, Rumsfeld became Gerald Ford's Secretary of Defense and revealed himself as the avatar of the Military Industrial Complex (MIC). A key theme of his tenure at the Pentagon was the effort to increase expenditures and thereby to serve his clients. Successful courtiers know what's expected of them. As had been the case since the 1950s, the MIC viewed the Soviet Union as a "fearful specter" and an imminent danger; this was the era of the Committee on the Present Danger. As in the Eisenhower years, these threats were mostly fictional. However, Rumsfeld accepted this position without question or qualification. Thus, he approved weapons systems (M-I tank, B-I bomber) better designed to win votes and profits than to win wars. Rumsfeld displayed an eager "willingness to bend before corporate requirements" and to "feed the machine"; it "was all a game, a game ... [the MIC] could win" (49, 109).

Denied power in the Reagan years, Rumsfeld remained active in national security issues. In 1983, he took up the position of special envoy to the Middle East. Cockburn observes: "despite his total lack of experience or knowledge of the region's turbulent politics, he was, of course, fully confident that he had the answers" (75). Saddam Hussein was the man of the hour, so Rumsfeld sought business deals with Iraq and had himself photographed shaking hands with the dictator. In 1998, he signed a statement demanding the overthrow of the fiend. Inconsistency did not trouble him, if it advanced his career.

The symbiotic relationship between government and corporations began long before Rumsfeld was born, but he perfectly embodies the pattern of individuals crossing and recrossing the line between public and personal interests. His first term as courtier having ended with the Ford Administration, Rumsfeld jumped easily to the private sector, chosen as President and CEO of G.D. Searle, a pharmaceutical company. He brought in others like himself "who knew the world of government and how to use it" (57). They gained approval of a sweetener ("Equal"), despite studies that suggested a link with brain cancer. In this effort, Rumsfeld displayed a quality that typifies his whole career: "not interested in facts, not interested in truth, not interested in ... the fundamental realities," his only concern was "setting a goal and then by will and force... [achieving] that goal" (65). As a CEO, Rumsfeld cultivated a reputation as an efficient manager. Cockburn will have none of it: he was a "bully," more interested in keeping subordinates "off balance" and "impeding" their work than achieving efficiency. It was all about him, all about control—not about team building.

We need to know much more than Cockburn tells us about Rumsfeld's return to Defense in the George W. Bush regime. Given the strained relationship between Bush *père* and Rumsfeld, we sense that this decision plumbs deep psychological waters for all three men. Cockburn sees the second term as largely "a rerun" of the first. However, in some respects it was much worse. The Pentagon boss showed little interest in the effective management of the place, remaining addicted to the "contemptuous bullying" and "aggressive rudeness" toward subordinates that had characterized his tenure at Searle. In some areas he micro-managed; in others he followed a policy of *laissez-faire*. On his second watch, the Department of Defense became rife with feuding and rivalries. He was a persistent—even

vehement—spokesman for lighter, more sophisticated high-tech modes of war fighting; however, in Cockburn’s view, this campaign primarily served corporate interests. In any case, only one old-fashioned project was cancelled (the Army’s Crusader artillery system) and, in the end, few of the military’s high brass lost jobs for opposing the Secretary. Perhaps because of the war, the MIC felt new weapons were not a high priority.

Like those of others in the Bush administration, Rumsfeld’s thoughts turned to Iraq even as the smoke cleared on 9/11. Oddly, Cockburn is not entirely clear as to why. Patent-ly, preemptive war satisfied some of the same needs that bullying at the Pentagon and Searle had. Some of Cockburn’s sources locate the desire for war in his commitment to “will and force” and to impressing the world with “America’s (and his own?) invincible power” (162, 151). Perhaps, as a good liege courtier, he was simply doing what he sensed his masters wanted. In any case, for a time, he was “the public face” of an administration at war—it’s warlord. Sadly, George C. Marshall he was not! Impressed by the success of the “light” war in Afghanistan—and characteristically ignoring the key role played there by Afghan forces—he demanded a limited military commitment in Iraq. He showed almost no interest in postwar arrangements, aside from finding Weapons of Mass Destruction; later he was in full “denial” on the insurgency. He insisted on being “personally involved” in the general administration of facilities like Guantánamo, but also demanded continuous reports on the torture of individual suspects. It was Rumsfeld who ordered that Abu Ghraib be “Gitmoized.” None of this will shock many readers. However, one new dimension, of particular interest to military historians, is Cockburn’s assertion that, as in Vietnam, the military “accepted” Rumsfeld’s Iraq strategy without complaint. Recent revelations of General Shinseki’s quiet equivocations on the amount of force needed to police post-war Iraq reinforces this point. A question Cockburn might have taken up concerns the use of contractors in Iraq. Should we view their numbers, variety, and no-bid contracts as yet another benefit provided by this loyal retainer of the MIC? One amusing tidbit: in a fit of pettiness in a time of war, Rumsfeld barred Pentagon employees from visiting France. In the end, he was removed by the same political strategies he had always followed.

So, while the overall story is not exactly new, Cockburn moves the narrative along and provides plenty of anecdotes. There is much we do not yet know about this man Rumsfeld and his age—and won’t know for decades. Think of the present book as a good introduction to Rumsfeld and his milieu; that is, as an introduction to our times. Cockburn may be right about the hubris, greed, and self-promotion of the conservatives shown here. As a teacher, I half-hope he is wrong; what, after all, does the existence of such officials say about us? However, since we seem destined to teach future students about America’s decline (absolute or relative), the big story here will have intense relevance. *Rumsfeld* the book will recede to the margins of memory, but Rumsfeld the man will remain central to any understanding of the Age of George W. Bush.

—revised 7 Sep 2008