

# THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Published on *The National Interest* (<http://nationalinterest.org>)

Source URL (retrieved on Feb 11, 2011): <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/the-rise-rumsfeld-by-don-rumsfeld-4867>

## The Rise of Rumsfeld, By Don Rumsfeld

| [More](#)<sup>[1]</sup>

|  
February 11, 2011

[Benjamin H. Friedman](#)<sup>[2]</sup>

I wish Donald Rumsfeld had written about politics more and been in politics less.

His [new book](#)<sup>[3]</sup>, and especially the [documents](#)<sup>[4]</sup> that accompany it,\* show that he is not simply well-organized but a student of organization, especially the process by which government decisions get made and where in that process power is. The documents show him to be a canny observer and a spare and direct writer. The same quality is evident in the book (which has no ghost writer), though its a political gloss clouds his directness and wit.

One sees Rumsfeld's keen observation of process, for example, in a recollection he wrote in 2000 on his efforts, in 1964 as a 31 year old Congressman, to help make Jerry Ford House Minority leader. Rumsfeld recounts finagling votes for Ford right up to the vote itself, which was held in the ways and means room, with three Republican congresswomen tallying. At first count, the incumbent, Charlie Halleck, was ahead. But there was a vote too many. Some Congressman had voted twice! Ford won only on the revote. For some reason, though, when Rumsfeld tells this story in the book (pp. 91-95), he doesn't mention that the revote reversed the outcome.

Another personal document, written an hour after the event (more or less reprinted in the book, only with some edits that make Rumsfeld seem more charitable), recalls a February 1966 briefing the White House held for Congress. Rumsfeld, who supported the Vietnam War, demonstrates the old saw that you can't BS a BSer. He scoffs at Vice President Humphrey's claim that the Viet Cong had more defections than the South Vietnamese Army and notes that Humphrey's use of the word "victory" refers to U.S. policy achievements in Vietnam separate from progress in the war itself. Rumsfeld observes White House aides planting softball questions with Democrats.

He points out that the meeting, ostensibly a briefing by Vice President Humphrey on his recent trip to the region, was really an effort by President Johnson to tie Congress to his policy, convince doubters he has the support of everyone that matters ("everyone in the world, including the Pope," Rumsfeld writes) and threaten dissenters. Johnson, Rumsfeld writes, knows he's in a tough spot, and is "squealing" like a "stuck pig." Rumsfeld says that politics of

the matter favor Republicans. In the book (p. 72), however, it is the nation that is the squealing pig and the observation about the political situation is made more subtly elsewhere (p. 95).

Forty years later, of course, Rumsfeld's career ended when the Democrats were swept back into power largely because of public discontent about the war in Iraq, which he helped oversell. The irony goes unnoted in the book.

In another document, Rumsfeld gives a blow by blow, contemporaneous account of the meeting held in Richard Nixon hotel suite at the Republican National Convention in the wee hours of August 8, 1968, to select the vice presidential nominee—complete with a seating chart of the two dozen bigwigs in the room. One of Rumsfeld's top three recommendations for the job was Nelson Rockefeller.

That recommendation became ironic. When Rockefeller got the job, under Ford, Rumsfeld was chief of the staff, and they became bitter antagonists. In a transcript of an interview conducted two decades later with Rockefeller biographer Cary Reich (complete with Rumsfeld's written edits of his answers), Rumsfeld gives a lengthy account of those battles. Rockefeller thought Rumsfeld undermined his efforts to manage domestic policy and pushed him off the ticket in 1976. Rumsfeld thought Rockefeller was a paranoid incompetent. He argues that Rockefeller failed as a policy-maker because he lacked management ability, that he tended to blame others for decisions Ford made, and that Ford alone decided to chuck him because he was unpopular with the public.

In another Ford-era document, Rumsfeld recommends possible CIA chiefs. He lists for the president twenty-three candidates, with brief pros and cons for each, and a chart showing which advisor recommended which candidate. The job ultimately went to George H. W. Bush, who thought, according to Rumsfeld, that he had been stuck there at Rumsfeld's behest, maybe to open the Vice Presidential slot for Rumsfeld. In the document, however, Rumsfeld gives Bush a low ranking among the candidates.

Among the "cons" listed for all those in their mid-sixties, Rumsfeld wrote that they might be too old. Twenty odd years later he became Secretary of Defense at age 68.

Next post: Rumsfeld's frequent, acerbic, and unsolicited advice to Condi Rice on how to run the NSC.

\*The documents I mention here can be found using the excellent search engine at [www.rumsfeld.com](http://www.rumsfeld.com). [5]

More by

**Source URL (retrieved on Feb 11, 2011):** <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/the-rise-rumsfeld-by-don-rumsfeld-4867>

#### Links:

- [1] <http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=nationalinterest>
- [2] <http://nationalinterest.org/profile/benjamin-h-friedman>
- [3] <http://www.amazon.com/Known-Memoir-Donald-Rumsfeld/dp/159523067X>
- [4] <http://www.rumsfeld.com/library/>
- [5] <http://www.rumsfeld.com>