INTerview wIth tOMmy frAnks

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Participants

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Franks: My great regret in doing this is that my wife Cathy [Cathryn Franks] was going to come and participate. Actually, that would have been not a moral support issue but rather very beneficial.

Perry: We would have loved that.

Franks: She is a very bright GW [George Washington University] grad and we’ve been married for a long time.

Perry: I counted up, coming close to the golden anniversary.

Franks: We’re working on 46. One of the characteristics of Bush 43 that you will notice from talking to people and from reading my book is that she spent a great deal of time traveling with me. That was not by accident and that was not based on our relationship as much as it was based on the notion that we see every day in the media, and that is an absence of appreciation in the West for the Middle East, and in the Middle East of the ways of the West. I actually had lots of discussions with 43 about that and he never questioned it. We made it a point when we’d visit Saudi Arabia, for example. She would get off the airplane first, and she would walk by my side everywhere we went. We did that for years all over the Middle East. She is still very well known over there.

She was in fact an unrecorded piece of the strategy that we see an absence of today; that is, to spread appreciation and to enrich understanding of who we really are as people. You didn’t know that, but that is not a small point. That was an item of discussion.

Perry: I should say officially for the record that this is the General Tommy Franks interview for the Bush 43 Oral History Project. With that out of the way let’s go back to that. That is a fascinating point. That was a deliberate move on your part?

Franks: Absolutely.

Perry: Had you and Mrs. Franks talked about that as you began to visit the Middle East?

Franks: Absolutely. In fact, there are all kinds of subliminal messages in that book that you have lying in front of you. There is a story in there about Hamid Karzai’s inauguration that was the 22nd of December 2001. Kabul, Afghanistan was not well settled and peaceful at that time. I took her with me to the inauguration. It was a memorable event for a lot of reasons not important to this history. It was interesting to see the reaction of Afghans to an American civilian going
through metal detectors and whatnot. Literally, in the palace on that day, the toilets were overflowing; there was no infrastructure in Afghanistan at that time. We think it is bad today for a lot of reasons, but you should have seen it in October, November, December of 2001. There was lots and lots of that.

There are pictures on the walls in this little museum of my wife with people—I’d tell people at the time that I would neither confirm nor deny the existence of Seal Team Six or Delta Force, but just in case it might exist, there are pictures in there of my wife with some of the shooters from Delta Force and some CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] operators. That was in Camp Rhino just outside of Kandahar in Afghanistan in probably November of 2001 with the war very much ongoing. The troops couldn’t believe it. It was like a USO [United Service Organizations] show, because my wife actually likes the troops, cares about the troops, and goes out of her way to go around and say hi to them. There were a lot of reasons to do that. I’m not sure so many Commanders in Chief would either permit that or endorse it, and George W. Bush did.

Perry: You began the story by saying you had indeed talked to him about that. Can you re-create that for us?

Franks: Sure. Good times and bad times, he never questioned it, and Don Rumsfeld never questioned it, because I brought it up. And I brought it up in the context that I just described. There was an absence of understanding, there is an absence of touch, and where it makes sense we ought to do that.

I’m sure that President Bush bit me on more than one occasion. I’m sure. I don’t remember them, but it would have to be that in a wartime circumstance, the President of the United States would bite his on-the-ground commander. There are two occasions that come to my mind. One of them was when we went to Hamid Karzai’s inauguration and we landed at Bagram Air Base and got in some black helicopters. Our Special Operators flew us to Kabul for the ceremony. We got on the ground and we went to the ceremony and I came out. My Special Ops guy was with me, a guy named Gary Harrell, who at that time was Brigadier General, and he said, “We’re going to have to drive back on the ground in a convoy.” I said, “Really? Really?” He said, “Indeed.” I said, “Why?” He said, “Because we had a surface-to-air missile fired at the helicopter on the way from Bagram into Kabul and I’d rather not repeat that experience.” So we said fine and we spent an hour or two riding through burned-out vehicles in a war zone and got back to Bagram Air Base, loaded up and flew away. That did not escape the media’s notice.

Perry: I noticed you were asked about that at one of the press conferences.

Franks: I don’t remember what I said, but I probably would not have been too excited to chat about it. In any event the word got back to the White House probably about as fast as it got on the evening news. Either that day or the next day or the next time I went to the White House the President asked me about it. I related the story to him as I’ve related it to you as no big deal, one of those things, not at all a close call. We were in good company with good technology and I wasn’t worried about it.

President Bush looked at me and said, “Well, I am worried about it. Don’t do that.” This is a close paraphrase: “The last thing in the world I need is to have my commander shot down. Don’t
do that.” I said, “Yes, President.” We moved on to other things.

Perry: How did you interpret that? When he said, “Don’t do that.”

Franks: Literally.

Perry: Don’t put yourself in harm’s way?

Franks: Correct. This was not a wife story; this was a story about me. “Don’t do that.” With respect to the Commander in Chief, I would tell you I actually did that many, many times because there is a philosophical notion that you would certainly preach and see at the Naval War College: Leadership, in the military at least, occurs from the front. I’ve always believed that. I believed it as a young lieutenant and I still believe it. So I went to Afghanistan in the middle of the night on a number of occasions without difficulty early in the war, and the same thing in Iraq. I thought that was the right thing to do. I took the President literally with his instruction and I also believed that he actually cared about me as I would care about other troops, and there was sort of a personal thing in there. So that is that.

Perry: Tell us about your personal rapport with him. It seems to have been very beneficial and positive.

Franks: We could make a lot of time out of that story.

Perry: Good, those are the kinds of answers we like.

Franks: A professional relationship and a not a personal relationship although I believe that there was a personal comfort on both sides. I was very comfortable with President Bush and I believe he was very comfortable with me. I know he called me frequently when Rumsfeld was around and when Rumsfeld wasn’t around. He would ask questions, and I would tell him, “Well, I haven’t talked to the Secretary about this, and I’m not really sure, but my sense is this or that.” My experience is that people don’t call their subordinates just to chat unless there is a degree of respect there. Certainly that respect was mutual.

There are wonderful personal stories, some of which are in my book, some of which are in his book. I’m particularly fond of his version of the first time Cathy and I went to the White House after his inauguration in ’01, probably February or March. He made it obvious that he cared about the military in a sincere way early in his Presidency and among the big parties that he had, bringing people to the White House. Among the first groups were the military leaders, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCs, Commanders in Chief, the military guys with geographical responsibility.

When we went in the White House, the first time I actually ever met him, he walked up and said—Once again this is a close paraphrase— “I understand you and Laura [Bush] graduated from the same high school.” Being the smartass that I am, I looked at him and I said, “It’s true, President, but you needn’t worry, because I didn’t date her.” That’s actually around page 173 or 174 in his book. I thought that was nice.

We chatted for a minute and he was obviously pleased and happy to be the President of the
United States. We stood in the White House. He looked at me and I had medals and stars everywhere. My uniform just had a lot of stuff. He said, “Well, Tommy, it looks to me like an old boy from Midland did pretty good.” I looked around in the White House where we were standing and I said, “Mr. President, it looks to me like more than one old boy from Midland did pretty good.” He laughed. We actually got along well.

Not a lot of contact then with him until 9/11. We can pick that up in any way that you want to pick it up. Good relationship, I joked with him all the time and I still do.

He asked me one day early in the Afghan war, “How is it going?” And I said, “It’s not going well. We seem to be just diddling around.” This was in the Situation Room and all the principals were there. He laughed and he said words to the effect, “Attention, attention! There will be no more diddling around.” He laughed and everyone else laughed and the tension melted away and we did whatever the business was that we had to do. So we had that kind of relationship.

**Perry:** It sounds personal. But you made it a line directly and said, “We really didn’t have personal…We had professional—” Was that deliberate on your part?

**Franks:** Absolutely. I never had a doubt and I still have no doubt concerning who was the President of the United States. I understand the obligation that our military leaders have and subscribe to the notion of support and defend the Constitution and follow the orders of the President of the United States. There was no reason to want to do that in any sort of a different way.

He is quoted one time describing me as a no-nonsense professional. I would describe him the same way. That is why I say it was a business relationship. Never picky. I’ll give you a little philosophy you didn’t ask for. I believe that the quality of a Presidency relates to at least two things: One of them is the decisions that a Commander in Chief, a President, makes. The other is the context within which those decisions are made. I believe that the context within which the Bush Presidency took place may be one of the more serious, one of the more consequential—It may be one of the more difficult contexts in American history with which a President had to deal. So when I form a view about how did he do, and how did the various principals do, I’m always mindful of the context within which they did it. I think that the context of his time in office was a tough context.

**Knott:** Do you have any basis to compare President George W. Bush with Bill Clinton?

**Franks:** Sure.

**Knott:** Could you talk about your impressions of the Clinton Presidency?

**Franks:** There is something to be said about management and leadership style. Actually, in my opinion, this is not related necessarily to the military; it is a style issue. One is hierarchical and the other style, probably polar opposite of that, is a networked style. Bill Clinton was very much a hierarchical President. His relationship with the Defense establishment was like his relationship with the State Department, with Treasury and so forth, very hierarchical. His relationship with the military was also very hierarchical.
Under President Clinton the geographical CINCs worked for the Secretary of Defense through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During the Bush administration the CINCs worked for the Secretary of Defense, who received advice from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I don’t have a view as to whether either approach was good or bad. It’s just an observation on the leadership styles of the two Presidents.

It is pretty well known that I was a Clinton general when George W. Bush was inaugurated. I had been selected by Bill Clinton a year before President Bush took office and so I was associated with that, as were a number of other senior military people. It became obvious during the Bush administration, very early, that a certain vetting and sense of feel had to be established about all these military people and whether or not the new President wanted to keep Bob and Larry and Gary or whether he wanted to change Bob out. In my estimation, that goes with the assumption of office of each new President. A new team has to be built.

George W. Bush’s leadership style is not the leadership style of other Presidents that I’ve known and served, including Bill Clinton. Whereas you frequently will see this hierarchical thing, Bush, in my view, and I’m not sure how everybody else would see this, but I believe he has very much a networked, horizontal leadership style. That was to look around and say, “The people at the University of Virginia know an awful lot about polling, and I’ll get my polling information from the University of Virginia. The people at the Naval War College have great depth in strategy building. I’ll get my information there.” It was very much a horizontal thing having to do with people that the President knew, and people he was around.

A lot of people may disagree with me. This may be the most controversial thing that I say in this, but it is my view. Any administration that I know anything about is filled with large personalities. These are large personalities. Colin Powell has a large personality. Don Rumsfeld has a large personality. Dick Cheney, large personality. That is neither good nor bad. These are large people. Condi [Condoleezza Rice] has a large personality. When you have that, you will frequently have a view within the Defense establishment that says the State Department doesn’t get all of it. They don’t quite get it. They even have in the State Department a view that says we’re not necessarily matched up in the Middle East with our military the way we should be. Condi, as the one who referees this, will look at that and try to referee the ballgame among very large personalities.

George W. Bush was actually above that. He listened certainly to some people more than he listened to other people. He certainly had more confidence in some than he had in others. That was obvious to me, just as a casual observer of leadership technique and style, from the very beginning. But if you have these large personalities and you have some business to do in Saudi Arabia that may have to do with commerce, or may have to do with security, or may have to do with diplomacy, if you were a networked sort of an intellect you will go within the team to the place where you think you can get the greatest satisfaction. You pick the personality and have that personality go work that problem based on their networks and their relationships and all that.

If that personality turns out to be from Defense, it can make a person in the State Department
who believes that he or she should have responsibility for what is going on in Saudi Arabia craky. I’ve always thought that part of the picking that we saw in the media was related to the context. It was a tough time. It was also related to the large personalities and a management and leadership technique that, in my opinion, in wartime was very effective.

He simply went to the people he thought could get the job done. He would send somebody from the State Department in to get in my business in a minute. He would send me into central Asia to make some sort of a diplomatic arrangement for basing or staging, and it would make Colin Powell craky. That’s a long answer to your short question. Leadership and management technique at that level is probably worth lots and lots and lots of books all by itself, but you asked about Clinton and Bush and that was an obvious difference.

Perry: Yes.

Knott: That’s good.

Franks: There’s another point about that that’s worth making. After Khobar Towers and a number of terrorist-like events, and the first World Trade Center attempt—It might have been ’93. After some reluctance to get involved in the genocide in Rwanda, in the latter years of the Clinton administration, after the whole White House-Monica Lewinsky—all that, there was a desire in the White House to stay off the front page above the fold. Let’s get a little more reserved about the decisions that we take, and let’s stay away from controversy insofar as it is possible to do that. In my view, that is a characteristic of the later years of the Clinton administration, which is the piece of the Clinton administration that I know best.

That had an effect on me. That had an effect on my troops. You’ll know that the no-fly zones in Iraq, northern no-fly and southern no-fly zones, were populated every day by American and allied aircraft going in and ensuring that there was no flight in those zones. Our airplanes and our kids were flying over Iraq and getting shot at by surface-to-air missiles. I didn’t like it. Your story is about a President and not a humble military practitioner. But there is a view that I shared with President Bush that is important because he subscribed to it, and that was that America should do nothing unless America intends to do something.
down on the ground carrying the guns, so that we were in agreement about that.

Perry: Prior to 9/11 was it your sense that there would be a pullback? In other words, if the theory was don’t do anything if you can’t do something, and given that the President in 2000 had run on a more domestic agenda, saying quite frankly that we were not going to be engaging in regime change, was it your sense that it would be better, for example, to stop the flying in Iraq and just bring that back?

Franks: In my view, the options were to do it or to leave it. That is a pretty good guide, actually, for the Naval War College. Let’s do it or not do it. So it was perfectly fine with me to pull out of the no-fly zones.

If my memory serves—Well, it does serve. When the new team went to Washington, Don Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and the Defense administration, the civilian administration, was focused, and rightly so, on a Cold War structure where we had way too many of this and way too many artillery things and we didn’t have enough of some other things. There was a desire on the part of Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and others, to reorganize and redesign the Defense establishment. All of that was the context within which each of these military four stars was getting his paper graded on who was going to come along and get on board with updating and modernizing the military for the 21st century rather than continuing to live in the 20th century. All that was going on and I was perfectly happy with that.

Perry: You were supportive of that?

Franks: I was supportive of that because—Why would we be sitting here in Hobart, Oklahoma rather than—I’ve had some very interesting businesspeople want to put our little leadership institute in New York and in Los Angeles. Why would we be here? Because there is value in people in the Midwest, in people doing what they say they’re going to do and saying what they’re going to do. There’s value there. As a point, actually, George W. Bush has that same value. That probably was part of the foundation of a pretty good relationship with him.

On the other hand, the point that I was making about being a heretic, about being contrarian about—There is a question about Title X, a question about the Washington bureaucracy in some of your work, and we’ll talk about that as much as you want. The fact is that all of the ships in the sea, the airplanes in the air and the troopers on the ground, work for someone outside of Washington, D.C., because the only command authority in Washington, D.C., is the President of the United States and whatever he may give for execution to the Secretary of Defense. He takes advice from Secretaries of the Air Force, Army, Navy and so forth, and from the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; good men, very bright, but they command nothing.

George W. Bush identified that fact very early on. With the transition to a new administration there was a lot of interest in what was going on in Washington, D.C., because in Washington, D.C., the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army are very concerned about manning, equipping, training, and sustaining the force. Those are the responsibilities of the Washington military leaders, so they were working hard to try to figure out how to transition from a Cold War military to a relevant 20th century military, and there was lots of interest and focus on that in Washington, D.C.
The Commanders in Chief, the military CINCs now called Combatant Commanders, around the world—one in Europe, one in the Pacific and one in the Middle East—are farther away. They are less directly relevant to reorganizing the military. That’s a long way of saying there was a lot of focus in Washington, D.C., and some concern about getting to know these other military people who are worrying about commanding the troops on the sea, in the air, which is going on outside Washington, D.C. At that point in time the President was getting in the saddle with this. He had not faced any crises in the Middle East or in the Pacific and so was working his way around to getting to know all these people.

Don Rumsfeld, on his behalf, was doing exactly the same thing. He was traveling and bringing people in, bringing the commander from Europe in to talk, bringing me in to talk about the issues and the concerns in the Middle East. That is the context within which the new administration left the station and was getting on with trying to revamp the military. I believe that for the most part the military people in Washington didn’t resist that. I believe that the military people outside Washington didn’t resist that.

There were lots of discussions on the margin about: Is it true that we have to trade off a ship to get airplanes? Do we have to trade off force structure and divisions in order to get ships? Should we downsize the conventional military force and up-size the Special Operations piece, which everyone has always recognized as very important to the United States of America? All that was up for discussion.

One thing I learned in spades—and then I’ll stop this soliloquy—through my study of history, which is not exhaustive, and from my personal experience, is that any new administration when it arrives in Washington from Day One does not know exactly what it wants to do. But it does know from Day One that it does not want to continue to do anything that the prior guy did. There was about a year’s worth of transition after 43 came to office, built a new team with Colin and Condi and Rumsfeld, and I was just one small piece of that over on the Defense side. That’s what I observed.

Knott: There were reports at the time, though, that there was some pushback from the military regarding Rumsfeld’s reorganization schemes. Is that overstated?

Franks: Don Rumsfeld is not the easiest guy in the world for military leaders to get along with.

Knott: We’ve heard this.

Franks: I’ve said to many people, and probably will say for the rest of my life, it’s OK to question Don Rumsfeld’s people skills. In some cases it is OK to question his appreciation of facts as they really were on the ground. It’s OK to question his personality, but it is not OK to question his patriotism, his devotion to the country, his loyalty to this President. So what I describe is a mixed bag wherein senior military leaders lots of times just didn’t like what Don Rumsfeld said because it came out of Don Rumsfeld’s mouth and they didn’t like his techniques. That kind of friction is correctly reported.

What I mentioned a minute ago, the nuts and bolts of trading an airplane for an aircraft carrier—I’m pretty sure it’s in my book that my relationship with the Joint Chiefs of Staff was not especially warm. That’s because of Title X of the U.S. Code. I don’t believe that a President of
the United States is going to get much help by going to the Secretary of the Navy or going to the Chief of Naval Operations seeking information on how to employ squadrons and aircraft carriers, because the Chief of Naval Operations was not selected to come and advise the President of the United States based on his knowledge and his understanding of squadrons, aircraft carriers, subsurface work. He was grown and selected based on a different set of qualifications. I respect service chiefs for being bright, gifted, talented, but not necessarily for their war-fighting elegance. So I have been known to use unkind words.

In my opinion, in 2001 the modernization of the military was an ongoing thing. Defense was over here doing that with Don Rumsfeld and with me and with the service chiefs. Meanwhile on the domestic front there were lots and lots of issues, and things that 43 wanted to do and wanted to get underway, so there was a lot going on. It had not obviously at that point in time reached critical mass before 9/11 and we didn’t have a 90 percent Presidential focus on Defense. There was just a lot of stuff going on. I tried to describe what was going on over on our side.

Perry: Ideally, what would you have liked to see happen at that point? This is pre-9/11. I think to me one of the most fascinating elements in your memoir is how you were seeing around the corners, particularly when that sergeant asked you what keeps you up at night.

Franks: Yes. Isn’t that amazing?

Perry: It is. It seems that you had that long, two-decade view that what seemed perhaps to some
to be discrete acts of terrorism are of a whole. You have your Vietnam experience, but you also have the Cold War experience to fight the Warsaw Pact countries on the plains of Europe. You’re seeing that the Defense Department is trying to move from 19th century to 20th century, but it seems to me that you’re actually seeing around the corners into the 21st century.

**Franks:** I tried to give everyone their due. We’ve got really smart people doing all kinds of really important things and each of them has a very large personality. I believed, based on the experience you described, that the wave of the future was not going to be the battle of Kursk. We weren’t going to fight Midway again. Since I believed that, I asked myself: Americans are peace-loving people, but my goodness we’ve hardly had a generation without a war, so what is the next one going to be?

I would amuse myself on long airplane trips by worrying about these things and writing about these things. I thought about the previous ten, fifteen years. I started thinking about Beirut, Lebanon, and the effect of such a small thing on an entire population and an entire region of the world. Then I worked my way up through the other events, through Khobar Towers, through 1993 and through—

**Knott:** You had the embassy bombings.

**Franks:** The embassy bombings in 1998.

**Perry:** Then the *Cole*.

**Franks:** The USS *Cole* in 2000. Literally when the sergeant asked me a question—It was in a Commander’s call thing, actually. It was in a theater in Tampa. Every now and then I’d just get a whole bunch of sergeants and troops together and say, “So what’s on your mind? What are you thinking? Where are we screwing this up?” This one female sergeant raised her hand and she stood up and said, “What keeps you awake at night?”

I didn’t think about what happened, but I said, “What keeps me awake is one tower of the World Trade Center going like this against another tower and they both go down as a result of a terrorist act.” Not because of the horrendous loss of life associated with that but because my understanding of the American psyche, my understanding of the American people, is that they will by God demand that their government cause that to never happen again and become very aggressive in terms of Americans dealing with Americans on American soil. How do you cordon things off? How do you get the National Guard federalized? How do you protect Chicago? How do you protect Miami? How do you protect Tampa and all that?

I believe, and I still believe, that the greatest threat we face is not necessarily events that precipitate that work, the difficulty, like 9/11, but the actions that we take that start to rub up against the American morality, the American sense of value, the American dream, the Constitution of our country, which has pretty well stood the test of time. All that stuff was going on.

Now let me launch into another thing. You guys are not necessarily lucky, but you are unusual, because I don’t participate in things like this. I’ve gotten lots and lots of people who want to write the authoritative history of the Army, and people who want to write the authoritative
history of 9/11 and people who want to write the military history of Special Operations Command. I’ve never done one; not interested. I’m not interested because every one of these histories that we put together, except yours, brings with it a sense of bias that begins to look like the TTMF [ta-ta MOFO (curse)] issue in Washington, D.C. The SOCOM [Special Operations Command] history has a bias. When they forward the questions the bias becomes obvious. “Did you find yourself ill-prepared and under-served by Special Operations Command and the Army?” “Do you believe that it would have been better if—?” Those are the kinds of questions that I think we frequently wrestled with.

I so believed that terrorism was a problem for America in the 21st century that when I went to Central Command I believed that Special Operations was not necessarily the answer, but it was an answer to what America is going to face in the future, that one of the first things I did was hire the Delta Force Commander, who had been on the ground in Mogadishu and had spent a long time in the hospital as a result of that, to come and be my security advisor. The second thing I did was to hire the Commander of SEAL Team Six, Bert [Albert, III] Calland, to come be my Special Operations Commander.

When the Delta Force guy and the SEAL Team Six guy came to Central Command, guess what they did? They brought with them the best minds that they could find in Special Operations. Why did I want the Delta Commander to be my security guy? Because I believe that we had adopted within the Middle East a view of how to protect an embassy or a consulate, based on building walls and building barriers and building ways to fortress our embassies, and that is not how a Special Operator thinks.

A Special Operator looks at something like an embassy as a target and asks himself, as a shooter, “How would I get into that embassy? What would I do if I wanted to attack a consulate?” Then he puts in place ways to screen and vet outside the embassy to preclude the attack of an embassy. That’s why I brought Gary Harrell out of Delta Force to come take a look at embassies in the Middle East to determine how best to protect them based on what we had seen in 1998 in the bombings in East Africa, based on what we had seen in Beirut, based on what we had seen in Khobar Towers, based on what we had seen in 1993 in New York City.

That is also why I brought Bert Calland out of SEAL Team Six because I knew he would bring with him people who are, number one, tied day and night to the CIA because that is their way of life. I wanted permanent CIA relationships and I wanted a permanent CIA presence in CENTCOM [Central Command]. That is how we, during the course of the year—the summer of 2000 and up to 9/11—That’s the team that we were building in Central Command. I’m not interested in people who would look at me and believe the press and wonder how a guy from a conventional Army background wouldn’t be under-prepared for something like a terrorism issue, or something in Afghanistan or the Sudan, or in Somalia or in Yemen. Well, for a year before 9/11 we had worked to put in place a team that could handle the kind of problem that America saw when 9/11 occurred.

Why would I give you that 15-minute soliloquy? Because I believe that the President of the United States during his year leading up to 9/11 had a sense of what Central Command was. I believe that he had a trust not in me but in the military capacity that we had built in the Middle East. I’d been at this for years.
I’d spent three years before becoming the Commander in Chief out there being the Army Commander. I knew the personalities and I knew the people. We’ll let history reflect how much I knew; that’s not my purpose. The issue here for your work is when the President looked around at the things that he had on the military side, where did he have comfort? I had dealt with him infrequently, but I had dealt with him and Rumsfeld on things like no-fly zones and trigger mechanisms that would in fact increase the lethality of our work there. I don’t even remember the various stages, but we had stages where if the Iraqis shot but didn’t get close, then we would take certain action. If they shot and had a near miss, then we would take other action.

The President, while not close with all of that, had developed a sense of who we were. Don Rumsfeld had developed a sense of what Central Command was. I think that their sense of what it was sort of set the stage for what happened after 9/11.

When 9/11 occurred I was en route to Pakistan and stopped in Crete to get gas in the jet and to get sleep before I went into Pakistan. Somebody said, “Turn on the TV.” I did and watched as the second jet hit the second tower. I took an aluminum chair and put it up on top of a building with a satellite phone.

By this time Rumsfeld was having his own problem in the Pentagon, you’ll recall. I sat on this aluminum chair and talked to him. He said, “Where are you?” In his jovial way, because we actually did and do get along very well, he said, “Well, General, you’re in the wrong place.” I said, “You know, I figured that out, Secretary.” He said, “What do you think?” I said, “Afghanistan, al-Qaeda, Bin Laden.” He asked me the hardest question I’ve ever been asked. He didn’t say, “Now this is what we’re going to do, and that’s what we’re going to do.” That’s not what he said. He asked me a question and the question was, and I quote: “What are you going to do about it?” That’s instructive with respect to the comments I just made.

If he didn’t know me from Adam in the midst of extreme turmoil, which 9/11 was, then we would have gone through a whole different sort of approach, rather than having him tell me, “Put together a plan and I want it in a week or ten days because we’re not going to stand by and let this happen.” I said, “I’ll do it.” I can see that just at the very beginning, that could have been an entirely different sort of way. The President of the United States could have named a czar. We could have pulled a General John R. Allen and said, “OK, Allen, we have ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], you go worry about the——” A lot of things could have happened. But for whatever it was and the uncertainty that we faced, the decision was to ask me, “What are you going to do about it?” And to tell me, “Bring me a plan.”

**Perry:** Shall we carry on with that, and talk about the plan and putting that together? You already had the foundation, based on just what you had said, and what your fears had been of what would happen to this country. What is the process for that?

**Franks:** Well, the logistics of just getting back to the United States were substantial and took a day or two, but we finally got back to the States. By the time we got there, the CENTCOM team was already together. I had asked the CENTCOM team to reach out to Washington and to be sure that we had CIA and every kind of advisor in the world. I had a permanent ambassador on my staff. I asked him to identify key members of the diaspora from Afghanistan in the United States. I asked the State Department to get us in contact with Russia at a very high level because
I knew that they could tell us what not to do.

We had a team of—I don’t want to overstate it—50 to 150 people come in from all over the world. By the time I got back to Central Command we had a staff that I didn’t even know, plus my own. We sat around and we just started to war-game this thing. What would you do and how could you do it? It took probably a week before I took an initial—I talked to Rumsfeld multiple times every day but I actually took him something in like a week or ten days.

Being the contrarian guy that he is—Keep in mind the personality issue—he automatically didn’t like anything, ever. Actually, it is based on probing subordinates. The guy is a very serious taskmaster, very bright. Sometimes he asks questions that are not really relevant just because it toughens people up and it builds intellectual juices. It is very hard to describe and not comfortable to go through. We worked our way through all of that.

My view was that the Russian model of putting a bunch of tanks and divisions and whatnot in Afghanistan was not doable, because my sense was that the President of the United States was not going to wait six months to build up troop deployments.

Plus, we had had agency linkages with the Northern Alliance and [Ahmad Shah] Massoud for years. We had people on the ground inside Afghanistan. So the idea was why not use what is available to us and we’ll get this thing going. Once we get it going, we’ll add to it until we get the result that we want.

Perry: So that’s the speed factor that you always talk about.

Franks: Without a doubt.

Perry: Not only for the President to respond, but that’s one of the keys to the operation.

Franks: You can’t get anywhere without beginning. One of the things that is a military tradition—One of the most important, least understood pieces of a strategy for a regional fight or for a war is time. If you ask me what is the optimum solution to the Battle of Kursk or to any major battle in history, or to the First Gulf War, it is to take days and months and weeks and build up what Colin Powell calls “overwhelming force,” and there’s nothing wrong with that. But in the aftermath of the loss of a few thousand Americans on our own soil, my assessment was that no President of the United States is going to say, “Yes, we’ll build this stuff up and we’ll put some divisions in Pakistan and then we’ll go into Afghanistan.” I just didn’t think that the element of time was doable for that.

What you try to do is figure out how not to do what the Russians did, which was build up a big force and go down there. You try to figure out how to get the people to do the work for you. That’s what we did. That’s the long and short of it. You can imagine the thrill that the Chief of Naval Operations got when I called him one time and said, “I’d like you to take all the jets off the Kitty Hawk and maneuver her at flank into the Strait of Hormuz because I’m going to use her as a staging platform for JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command] for Special Operators. It has to be right now.”

Moving an aircraft carrier without airplanes halfway around the world, well, that creates another Title X thing. We had a little friction about all of that. I had friction with [Eric K.] Ric Shinseki
because he didn’t understand, or he didn’t believe, that we should do what we were going to do without building up troops.

**Knott:** So he took the same approach prior to Afghanistan that he took prior to Iraq?

**Franks:** Absolutely. We got the Kitty Hawk in there and we got JSOC on board and we got Rangers in there. I went to Pakistan and said, “Out in the woods I need to stage some people.” I went into Central Asia and drank vodka all night long with the President of Tajikistan. It’s a health thing. Colin Powell is mad at me because I’m not—“Where’s the Ambassador?” There’s not an ambassador. I know the guy, so I went in there in a black jet and flew into Dushanbe and went to the palace. He and I, and a couple of translators, had vodka and sat around. He said, “What do you want?” I said, “I need places to stage a massive operation.”

Afghanistan is kind of like the marrow in the bone. You’ve got to figure out how to influence activity in the marrow but not from inside it, which was my first friction with Doug Feith. Doug Feith is a very bright man and he wanted to pick a place in Afghanistan and put thousands of U.S. troops in and secure them. Then he would have a way to reach out from that. Well, is that as effective as going into Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and establishing operations from which we can launch everything from drones to battalions of Rangers? I took that approach.

**Perry:** I’m just thinking that is an interesting analogy of the bone marrow. Would Doug Feith be for a bone marrow transplant and you’re more for chemotherapy; that is, coming in and attacking from the outside and knocking off the groups of people that you need to knock off, the cancer cells that are in the marrow of Afghanistan? Is that too much of a stretch?

**Franks:** I don’t know if I like all of that analogy. I think that placing a unit inside Afghanistan means that it is landlocked. Every time it is to be resupplied, every time it is to be contacted, it is contentious because you’re going to fly over Afghanistan to get to it, plus it is on the ground. Once it’s on the ground, what happens if I need it in Kandahar but it’s not in Kandahar because it is up in Waziristan? It has to get in vehicles and drive around. I didn’t want a wheeled and track-based sort of activity in Afghanistan. But that is an oversimplification.

We didn’t need to do that, because we had Northern Alliance contacts with people, all of whom worked for and with Massoud. We called them the warlords. We had guys. Each guy had his own army. The idea became, how can we use them? It is a strategy that the current administration would like to figure out how to use with ISIS.

We did it fortunately very quickly, because when George W. Bush said, “As long as it takes,” and when he said, “You are either with us or against us,” do you believe that people in Central Asia believed him? I do, because I saw it firsthand. When I went into Saudi Arabia, when I went into Pakistan, when I went into you-name-it in the Middle East, and said, “Here’s what I want. We can do this the easy way or we can do this the hard way,” the relationships that we were operating with were all influenced by George W. Bush’s comments. They believed him. So when I told the President of Tajikistan that I wanted to stage some people in there, he walked down the hall, got a map, came back, laid it on the desk in his office and showed me every old Soviet installation in Tajikistan, and said, “Whatever you want.”

That’s how these things, Manas and various airbases, Special Operations staging bases—That’s
where they came from. That was not Tommy Franks. It was not Colin Powell. It was the President of the United States, saying, “You are either with us or you are against us.” They believed him. There is a certain elegance in that. There is a certain power in that.

**Perry:** Do you think it was because it was such a simple statement? These people wouldn’t have known George Bush. He had just come into office and had very little foreign policy or defense policy background. And the statement at Ground Zero of, “I can hear you and soon everyone will hear you.”

**Franks:** Without a doubt. That is why I said elegant. There is elegance in simplicity. This seeming country boy, this stream of country-boy one-liners is very powerful. I knew all these leaders in the Middle East and in Central Asia, but anyone who believed that they did anything I asked them to do because we had a good simpatico would be wrong. They responded—When 9/11 happened, every one of the leaders over there said, “Holy smoke.” Then when the President followed that up at Ground Zero, when the President followed it up with comments, they believed it. He didn’t send me. He approved a concept. I just got in my airplane and went around and talked to these guys.

Then I would call back and talk to the President and Rumsfeld every day or two and say, “I went to Tajikistan and this is what the guy said.” “I went to Kyrgyzstan and this is what the guy said.” “I’ve already told our guys to start building a little base down in Uzbekistan just north of Mazar-e-Sharif. We’ve got to get some stuff staged in there, I’ve asked the Navy to do—” So there was not a “Mother, may I?” in all of this. There was a commitment by the nation, a commitment by the President of the United States. I didn’t call and ask anybody for any permission. He didn’t ask me to do that, which is probably the source of my great loyalty to George W. Bush.

A military guy can ask for nothing greater than the trust of his Commander in Chief. If you don’t trust someone, then you pick on him. That’s not to say that President Bush didn’t ask questions; he asked thousands of questions. If I didn’t have an answer, I would say, “I don’t know.” Sometimes he’d remember the question and he’d ask it later, by which time I’d have an answer. Sometimes I’d go get an answer and I’d send him a note. Sometimes I’d just not do it. His view is really the only one that counts in this. His view may be that he didn’t trust me nearly as much as I thought he did. Who knows? But he came across as trusting me, so it made what we were trying to do possible to do. Let’s take a break.

**Perry:** Thank you sir. This is wonderful.

[BREAK]

**Perry:** I have a civil-military relations question going back to Doug Feith, whom you mentioned. He had a certain approach he was suggesting for Afghanistan.

**Franks:** Right, very bright but without background.
Perry: That was my question. You’ve just answered it. We’ve had a very interesting interview with him and we could certainly see how bright he is and was, but in the military, at your level, how do you deal with that with someone who is a civilian, who doesn’t have a military background, who obviously has a high-ranking position in the Defense Department but doesn’t have that knowledge or experience?

Franks: I didn’t do that very well. There is a thing that I call appreciation of affect. There was so much going on—Let’s step aside and maybe attack it in a little different way. If we were without 9/11/01, and if we were transitioning the military into a military force for the 21st century, I think Doug Feith would have proven over time to not only be bright, which we know he is, but to be a friend, because he asked good questions. He was very thoughtful. We would have sat around and he would have challenged a whole bunch of existing military ideas and it would have been beneficial.

The problem was that for two years of my life I was sleep-deprived and impatient and cranky. Maybe I was wrong, but I didn’t want to do anything that I didn’t believe had a direct bearing on what I was asked to do. It would be like me sitting around with a bunch of Harvard people, or University of Virginia people, talking about philosophy where I would ask you so many questions that would be, in your minds, really stupid.

Perry: We prefer the word obvious. We always say in the classroom that the only stupid question is the one not asked.

Franks: I would ask you so many things that you’ve spent a lifetime learning about and dismissing as really not helpful, not relevant to what we’re talking about. Doug Feith did the same thing. He, I’m sure to this day, would never give me credit for having spent days and weeks and months and years dismissing the obvious. If he asked me a question that I spent time 15 years ago learning about and experiencing and dismissing, then I had no patience to go and give that to him from 15 years’ experience, because there are a lot of other things that I want to get on with.

I don’t want to take anything away from Doug Feith. He is a very bright guy. But when I feel the need and believe that I have been asked to deal with a strategic endeavor, I really don’t want to spend time in the Defense Department talking about tactics. I really don’t want to talk about the range of the M16 A1 rifle. I really don’t want to talk about how many thousand pounds of bombs an F15 can carry. Those are tactical discussions and at some point you’ve just got to give me credit for knowing the tactics. So that’s the best I can give you.

It really is about context, as I said initially. If the context is permissive, then there is all kinds of time to wax rhapsodic and have views and discuss the obvious or dismiss the obvious. But if you have only so much time and you’re cranky to begin with—At that time I was not trying to convince anyone of anything. I was just simply trying to do what I thought the President and the Secretary of Defense had asked me to do. I just was not very tolerant. It is a lick on me as much as it is on anybody else.

Knott: General, would you talk a little bit about Tora Bora? There was a lot of criticism then that has persisted to this day, fair or not, that you guys let this guy slip out of the noose.
Franks: Sure. I’d love to dismiss it. A lead-up story: I remember the story before Tora Bora in the media was, where is Bin Laden? Our first grandchild, a wonderful kid who is about to go off to university next year, was a little baby at that time. Every time I saw her she called me Pooh. Every time I saw her she would say, “Pooh, where is Bin Laden?”

Perry: How old was she?

Franks: She’s 18 now.

Knott: Thirteen years ago.

Perry: So she would have been four or five.

Franks: Beyond a toddler—a great kid.

Perry: What did you say to her when she’d ask?

Franks: “No.” The same thing I said to CNN, ABC. “Do you know where he is?” “No, I don’t.” But that shouldn’t imply to anyone either in the media or in government that we weren’t interested. We were interested in Bin Laden, of course, for two reasons: One, the strategic impact of taking the guy out; and two, just because it would give me great satisfaction to kill him. We were interested.

In the lead-up to Tora Bora you have to think about the Afghanistan inauguration having taken place, and so the inclination at that time from a strategic point of view was to get provincial teams out and begin to work all over Afghanistan on engineering projects and schools and all kinds of stuff. I could ask you the question, was there a view in America at that time that we should add 20 or 30 or 50,000 troops in Afghanistan, having just inaugurated a new President, and having dismantled and demolished the Taliban, and having killed lots and lots of terrorists? Strategically there was no inclination to build a force of that size.

I don’t want to use the word cleanup, because there was a whole lot more to it than cleanup, the country of Afghanistan was not pacified. We still had fights going on here and there. Not literally but figuratively every day we would receive reports from Afghans and other nationals, members of the coalition, the Brits who were working down in the southern part of the country.

Perry: How about the Pakistanis?

Franks: The Pakistanis actually had set up a pretty fair trap on the border and had arrested busloads of escaping terrorists, Al-Qaeda, pretty bad Taliban guys. We had taken these guys and shipped them off around the world. That was the context.

Every day there would be more reports. I’ve told a lot of people this story: On the day that someone first told me, “Tora Bora is the deal, Franks. He’s in Tora Bora.” Literally on that same day I had an intelligence report that Bin Laden had been seen yesterday at a recreational lake northwest of Kandahar and that Bin Laden had been positively identified someplace in the ungoverned western areas of Pakistan.
We for sure were doing a cleanup operation in Tora Bora and the cave region, as we had similarly done in the White Mountains. So we were going to have a war fight and our approach to that war fight was the same as it had been in many places in Afghanistan, and that was to use the locals. By this time we had Special Operators with these Afghan forces. We had Agency people with the Afghan forces. We were going to conduct this operation using them.

Somebody asked me one time, “Why didn’t you just do this as an American operation? That’s what you should have done as an American operation.” Well, the question is how long do you think it would take to deploy a division? You’ve got 16 to 20 thousand troops with associated support apparatus. How long do you think it would take to get that in place to go after the report in Tora Bora? Should we just wait and do that, or should we use the forces that we had because we didn’t have a division of U.S. forces to go do that work?

You say, “Why didn’t you?” Look at the political context in America at that time. What was the appetite to have positioned after the inauguration of Hamid Karzai another 15,000 or 20,000 Americans in Afghanistan? Why would we do that? Would you do that because you hadn’t killed Bin Laden yet? There was a whole lot going on that had to do with Bin Laden, mostly intelligence activity, but there was a whole lot of other work going on trying to figure out how to assist Afghanistan in finding her way forward. In that mix there was no desire to bring additional people in there just in case we might find Bin Laden at Tora Bora.

**Knott:** To this day you’re not convinced that he was even there.

**Franks:** Absolutely not. You can talk to people and they’ll look back in hindsight and say that Bin Laden was in Tora Bora, and I will say he may have been in Tora Bora. But he also may have been at a recreational lake northwest of Kandahar. He may have been by this time in Karachi. I’m not entirely sure.

Even if I had positively identified him, I would not have done a heck of a lot different than what we did, which was to use forces that had within a period of less than three months destroyed the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. They had done what we had asked them to do, so why not use them?

Now the media does not find that to be especially digestible and I’m not sure they ever will, but that’s the truth. That’s a fact. I’ve told lots and lots of people, if you want to blame somebody, blame me, because I’m the guy who had the responsibility to get the work done, and if he was in Tora Bora, obviously we missed him.

**Perry:** That we know. That’s a fact.

**Franks:** That we do know. I will not say he was not there. I don’t know.

**Perry:** I noticed in the press conferences with you and President Bush that when the media would ask, President Bush would focus on the phrase, “We will find him and we will bring him to justice.” He would tend to say that more than—

**Franks:** I’d say, “And we’ll kill him.”
Perry: That was my question. Of course he was famously quoted often as saying “dead or alive,” but I wanted to get to that distinction. He would say “bring him to justice.” Your goal was to take him out, which maybe meant to bring him to justice.

Franks: I don’t know that intellectually I ever put a point on it that said, “OK, now here’s what we’ll do: If we get the guy, kill him.” I actually subscribed then and do still subscribe to the idea of dead or alive. There may be a circumstance where we have an opportunity to take the guy alive. I’m sure I’d be more than happy to do that because America was behind this thing in a very big way at that time, and to bring him to a court in Guantanamo would have been great with me. To kill him would have been great with me. I didn’t really have a preference. The President may have had a preference, but if he did, he never stated it to me. Dead or alive.

Knott: Can I ask a follow-up? And this may fall into the category of a Doug Feith kind of question.

Franks: I doubt it.

Knott: As a military leader, what was your assessment of Osama bin Laden as an adversary?

Franks: Worthy. I think a military leader ought never to sell his adversary short. The guy was obviously very bright. As a leader he was very effective. As a motivator he was very capable. As an ideologue he was without peer. You don’t want to sell that short.

I said there were two reasons to kill him: One was just because it would make you feel good. The other was because he was a worthy adversary and had been for a long time. I would like to have met him.

Perry: What would you have said or talked about?

Franks: Ideology. More important to me than anything else is: Why do you do what you do? If you asked me that question, I could give you an answer and my answer probably wouldn’t be a lot different from his answer. His answer would be, “Because with every fiber of my being I believe in what I’m doing.” I don’t think of the guy as a narcissist. I don’t think of him as a coward. I just think of him as a guy who spent a long time being very good at what he was. In the grand scheme of things, that turns out to be like Adolph Hitler. He was a very bad guy. That’s why I believed what the President said, that dead or alive it was important that we get this guy.

I used to tell the media all the time—They’d ask, “When are you going to get him?” I’d say, “I have no idea, but we will get him.” I was perfectly satisfied when the current administration gave permission to our elite forces to go kill him.

Perry: We started our conversation today with your intriguing points about taking Mrs. Franks with you into the Middle East to have the Middle East understand western culture and how we treat women in the West. In this conversation about Bin Laden and in every fiber of his being, his holding firm to his ideology, what do you make of fundamentalist Islam and what it is doing, not only in the Middle East, but around the world?

Franks: I’m a little bit of an outlier, maybe. I believe that words matter. I don’t have a problem
with fundamental anything; what I have a problem with is extreme. When any ideology is perturbated from, in this case, its Koranic existence to something that is an extreme from that—I think extremism is bad. Extremism is bad biblically and extremism is bad when it comes to the Islamic faith. I’m not OK with saying we have a problem with Islamic fundamentalism. I don’t believe that’s the case, because the fundamental of Islam is not maim and murder; that is not the fundamental. That is the extreme of an interpretation of Koranic principles, to my way of thinking, and I’ve read the book.

So I have a problem with the use of the term Islamic fundamentalism, but I don’t have a problem with the term Islamic terrorist, or Islamic extremism, because the two latter are exactly correct.

Perry: You also had mentioned, I think specifically in the news conferences, that when being asked about Bin Laden whether you trusted the Pakistanis to give information about where he would be, you would always say yes to that.

Franks: Not entirely. Probably that is factual enough to not characterize me as a liar, but it is probably not to liberals. If someone asked me, “Do you trust the troops under your command?” “Well, sure, of course.” But I also believe in verify. There is an adage that says, “Trust and verify.” We had our own contacts in Pakistan. Pervez Musharraf was actually a friend of mine. I could say that about a bunch of people.

Perry: He was my next topic.

Franks: Would I characterize him as a guy who told me everything he knows? Well, no. I believe that the first rule of statecraft is that at the end of every day, every nation on this planet and every leader of every nation on this planet will do what he perceives to be in his own best interests. I believe that Pervez Musharraf was no different. So do I trust the Pakistanis? Well, of course not, because of their alliance and association with the Taliban, which goes, among other things, to the border issue, Kashmir and all of that.

There were people in the Pakistani intelligence service who were bad guys. So trust them? Literally no. Trust that they will behave in their own best interests? Yes. Did they respect the word of the President of the United States and his promise of “as long as it takes to bring Bin Laden to justice?” Yes. I could go play golf with Pervez Musharraf, go sit around the palace with him and eat with him and get along fine, but there are a lot of reasons why you trust someone.

Musharraf told me one time that he had reason to believe that a senior personality in ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence], his intelligence service, did not have my best personal interest at heart. If I were making a movie about it, I’d say, “put out a contract on me,” but I won’t go that far. “I have a guy, a very senior guy, who does not have your best interest at heart and I’ve taken care of it.”

So in the real world, that stuff happens. That along with a lot of other things caused me to generally believe what Musharraf had to say. At one point we thought—I mentioned a minute ago that there were reports that Bin Laden was in Waziristan, in the ungoverned part of Pakistan. I went to Musharraf and asked him if he would give me permission to use paramilitary and Special Operations Forces to go into Waziristan to go after these guys and he said, “Absolutely not.” He said, “I can’t even get my own people in there. They wouldn’t last a day.” I said, “You don’t know my people. We have people who know people. We can do that.”
Perry: OK.

Franks: In Waziristan.

Perry: Right.

Franks: There are not so many ungoverned places. Look at it like this. If you really don’t want to be found, because you’re a serious terrorist, where will you go to hide? Well, if Sudan is ungoverned you might go to Sudan. If Afghanistan is uncontrolled, ungoverned, you might go to Afghanistan. Based on those two facts alone, if I started looking for where Bin Laden might be, where would I go? He could have gone to Somalia maybe. He could have gone to the tribal areas of Yemen. There are not so many literally ungoverned areas. This area of Pakistan has devoured entire regiments of British troops back in the old days, as historians would know. Why not?

I always thought that he might be there. People come and go from Afghanistan into Waziristan across that nonborder all the time. All the guys are up there making guns and making knives and stuff. It’s just very military in that whole area. There was no doubt in my mind that we had guys who could get in there, no doubt about it.

Perry: This is a broader question about ungoverned areas in the world as being these hotbeds and refuges for these terrorists, as we knew that Afghanistan was for the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Franks: Yes.

Perry: Taking maybe the longer view now, or saying, even from the shorter view at the time, that you correctly judged the American people not to have the appetite to send in divisions, and for the long term we certainly don’t have that appetite, what do we do as a nation? What should we have done in Afghanistan in terms of trying to stand up a government that can prevent these areas from becoming ungoverned? What happens if these areas are ungovernable?

Franks: I’ll bet you President Bush would agree with me that it is a great deal easier to create a leadership vacuum in a country than it is to fill one. Afghanistan to be sure, Iraq to be sure, Somalia. I don’t know how to put my finger on the place where all organs of government power and military—the Venn diagram that has organs of power, military and politics—I’m not sure how you find the center point of that Venn diagram.

If you have a country like Afghanistan and we, America, have chosen to create a leadership
vacuum—it is not an overstatement to say that we have the military capacity to create a leadership vacuum in virtually every country on the planet. We have capacity to do that. How we go about filling that vacuum, especially in a country like Afghanistan—and actually Iraq in this sense has proven to be similar to Afghanistan—it occurs to me that it has to be done from the inside out rather than from the outside in.

I’ve thought for a long time that if we had put the same level of competent energy from the judiciary, from the State Department, from Commerce, Treasury, that we put in from the military, we may have seen a different outcome. I’m not sure that there are very many examples in our history where we’ve seen that. The one that I think a lot about, knowing that it is not a precise match, but I think about, is the Marshall Plan.

**Perry:** I’m thinking about after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Iron Curtain. I was doing a fellowship at the U.S. Supreme Court for a year in the mid-’90s. I’m struck by your reference to the judiciary. Justice [Sandra Day] O’Connor, for example, was very much involved in bringing the judges and parliamentarians from those former Iron Curtain countries to the United States, and she was herself going, and sending judges at the highest level there.

**Franks:** Right.

**Perry:** Maybe that is a model.

**Franks:** We didn’t have a model for military action in Afghanistan. We had to build one. We didn’t have a model for military action in Iraq. The previous model had failed and we had to build a new model. I’m not sure, if you want to try to figure out how to solve Afghanistan for the long run, that there is a precise model. But I do know that as long as—So you have a lot of people in the country and the leadership is gone and they are now milling about. There is milling going on. If you want to solve the problem and create a long-term viable state, you have to approach that from the inside, not from the outside.

How is it that we can approach a country from the inside? Well, how did it work with the Marshall Plan? After we firebombed Dresden, did the German people just love us and just form themselves up and move forward? I don’t think so. How about in Japan after Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Did the people just form up and say we like the West? I don’t think so. I think that we went through stages of occupation. I think we went through the bringing in of truckloads and truckloads of money. Those are models that we did not use in Afghanistan.

**Perry:** And we wrote their Constitutions. The Americans wrote their Constitutions.

**Franks:** We didn’t do that in Afghanistan and we did not do that in Iraq. Remember the Venn diagram?

**Perry:** Yes.

**Franks:** I’m not sure that the politics of the 21st century will ever again permit us to do that.

**Perry:** You’re right.
**Franks:** It may be insolvable. It may be that it is a catch-22. I don’t know. Why do nations go to war? They go to war because they perceive it to be in their best interest to go to war. In some cases that is just for no other reason than to make the problem go away.

If you look at Afghanistan as a problem, a harbor for people and ideology that does great harm to the United States of America, what is in our best interest? The primary of our interests is to make that problem go away. How’d we do? America’s Armed Forces went in and did something in a very short period of time. How many more attacks have there been on U.S. soil sponsored out of Afghanistan? I want everybody to give George W. a break. Give me a break, guys. We solved a problem. Now, we created other problems and we have not taken care of the centuries if not thousands of years of poverty and all the problems that go on in Afghanistan. Should we have outlined that as an objective? That’s not for me to say.

I was glad many times that the President never asked me, “Well, should we do this?” Because I would have said, “That’s your job, not mine. My job is to tell you the cost and I tried to do that.” If you want serious work done, I’m your Huckleberry. If you don’t then you’ve got to go somewhere else.

**Knott:** I have a question about a specific battle that occurred during the war operation, Anaconda, March 2002. This is another one of these that I’d like to get your take on because there has been some criticism of the way that was conducted, and sort of the stove-piping between the services, the kind of thing that you talked about with your experience in the tank. Did you see that phenomenon during this engagement, where the services were not quite cooperating to the extent that you might hope they would?

**Franks:** I didn’t. I think the cooperation in Anaconda was really good. I talked earlier about the existence of pockets of real bad guys. Of course this is now months after the inauguration and we still would get reports from time to time about groups of real bad guys, Taliban, al-Qaeda and so forth, and foreign people who were there to support the bad guys. This area in the White Mountains was a place that needed to be cleaned up. It would have to be cleaned up by a combination of Army troops, aviation troops, Air Forces, Special Operators and Afghans.

Any time you put that kind of combination together on the ground where you have Special Operators who are working with Afghan forces, and you have other plain Army forces and Marine forces who are going to get involved in a battle, then the number of seams in that kind of an operation that have to be knitted together is problematic. So when people say, “Well, if the Army had done this…. Or, “They wouldn’t do what we wanted them to,” and all that, that is the kind of commentary that you will get frequently from the tactical level. I attribute it all to that. I don’t have any concerns about there having been big failures with that. We got some people killed; there was no question about that, and I wish we hadn’t, but that’s why they call it war.

**Perry:** You mentioned earlier—I think it was in the context of where Bin Laden was and the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and bad guys, al-Qaeda crossing back and forth—You mentioned capturing some of them and rendering them. I wonder if you would talk a little bit about that, because that did become so controversial, along with the issue of POWs [prisoners of war] picked up on the battlefield and what to do with them, how to treat them, were they or were they not POWs, the Geneva Conventions, et cetera, and then ultimately the opening
of Guantanamo.

**Franks**: From the very early meetings that we had in the White House to talk to President Bush about our plan for Afghanistan and then a subsequent week or so where he thought about it, where we refined it, and that sort of thing—There was concern, since the Northern Alliance had been working with the Agency for years, about how much Agency work and control we were going to have, and how much military work.

Ten days or so after 9/11, I went to the White House for the first time to talk to the President about the mission and the concept of operations. As I recall, the Chairman, Dick Myers—No, it wouldn’t be.

**Perry**: Hugh Shelton?

**Franks**: Yes, Hugh was there. Cheney was there, Rumsfeld—Condi may have been there. I don’t remember Colin being there. It was very small, done in private quarters in the White House. George W. was smoking a cigar. We talked about that and Rumsfeld said, “I think we should use a World War II model and have the Agency work for me. They’ve been so involved in this thing over there so I believe that we need to have the CIA working for Defense.”

Dick Cheney, who did not frequently offer observations in my presence—He is a quiet, thoughtful man—came out of his chair at Rumsfeld’s suggestion and said, “We’ll talk about that. We’ll talk about that later,” and sort of dismissed it. I don’t remember whether George Tenet was in that meeting or whether it was subsequent to that meeting, but he and I talked many times. He told me on many occasions and would tell you today that he told me, “I work for you. When we go into Afghanistan I work for you, Franks. My people are going to work for you. I will send you an ambassador-level agency rep who will live with you in CENTCOM, and will be with you every step of the way.” That’s how we established the relationship between the CIA and the military.

In virtually everything that we did with Special Operators, we had Agency people involved with them and they lived together 24 hours a day. The thing that we did not do had to do with rendition and had to do with POWs and that sort of thing. Being together like this when a high-value target was acquired, the Agency took that target. When they sorted and these guys appeared to be Guantanamo-type guys, we took them.

It is kind of an interesting thing. We didn’t have some sort of a kludge of ideas where we worked together to render people and to do that. We worked together, but the Agency would make the call. “This is a high-value target.” They would come in and they would pick up some targets and take them out. We would take some targets and go to Guantanamo with them.
Perry: Interesting division of labor, to be sure. Do you have any more questions, Steve, before we leave Afghanistan?

Knott: I think we can segue into Iraq.

Perry: It is very clear in your book and in the timeline when you first start getting questions and/or suggestions and/or perhaps even orders from Don Rumsfeld to start looking into that.

Franks: That’s when I brought my pony blanket.

Knott: We’ve got it as early as March 2002.

Franks: Before that.

Knott: February?

Franks: As Iraq was developing, the media were alleging that George W. had this idea right from the very beginning, immediately to go do Iraq. I’ve told a lot of audiences that may be true, but if he had it, he never shared it with me. Karzai’s inauguration was on the 22nd of December, 2001.

Within a week of that, after I returned from the inauguration, on the 25th or 26th of December, I got a call. I was back in my stateside headquarters in Tampa and I got a call from Rumsfeld one afternoon. He said, “The President wants to see you in Crawford.” I said, “Of course,” because I can go tell him what I see and what I think is going on in Afghanistan. I said, “Why don’t you come pick me up, or I’ll come pick you up?” to Rumsfeld, who was in Washington. He said, “He didn’t ask to see me. He wants to see you.” I said, jokingly, “That’s fine, but I’m not going unless you go.” He said, “Yes, you are.”

So I went to Crawford by myself. I’m going to say it was the 27th or 28th of December ’01. I had just come back from Afghanistan—so that I could update the President on what I saw in Afghanistan. But that was the first time that I talked to him about Iraq.

Sometime the previous month, in November, Rumsfeld had told me—I don’t know that he said the President, but he said, “You guys need to start thinking about Iraq.” This would have been November of 2001. The term he used may have been “dust off the plans.” But there was nothing specific about it. There was no sense of urgency. When I was getting ready to go to Crawford he said, “Be ready to talk to the President about what you’re thinking about Iraq.” I believe at that time we hadn’t even briefed anybody.

I got to Crawford, met the President, did all that. Then we had a video teleconference from Crawford with Rumsfeld and the principals in Washington. I ran the President through what the old plan to go into Iraq looks like: This is how many people; this is what the buildup looks like, and I don’t recommend it. Everybody nodded wisely.

So December of 2001 was our first discussion of Iraq. I don’t remember the specifics of the next two, three, four months—the time frame you were talking about—February, March and on when we began to build and refine the plan. That is the timeline as I recall it.
Perry: General, when you said that you didn’t recommend it did you mean that you didn’t recommend that plan, not that you didn’t recommend, period, going into Iraq?

Franks: I never had a view about whether or not we should.

Perry: That’s a “should” question.

Franks: The plan that we had on the shelf was massive and cumbersome and very slow.

Perry: Did that come from the Powell era? And it would have been a reflection of Gulf War I, presumably, with that same type of view?

Franks: Yes. That plan had been updated probably several times since Gulf War I but it was still massive and big and unnecessary. Colin Powell and I could disagree on a number of things and what has been called the Powell Doctrine is a fine doctrine: the notion of overwhelming force. All I did was add a few words to it. Those few words are “at points of decision.” You want to overwhelm the enemy, but you want to overwhelm the enemy where it matters. The Powell Doctrine is overwhelming. It’s big everywhere. You just overwhelm them.

At the time of the First Gulf War we did not have precision with respect to our knowledge of either our own condition or the condition of the enemy. By 2002 we had, through tracking systems and intelligence, ways to know where we are and what our condition is, where our tactical units are precisely and where the bad guys are precisely. So it is not necessary to overwhelm places where the enemy “is not.”

Perry: Yes.

Franks: What you need to figure out is where are the points of decision that are critical to the accomplishment of the mission, and where those points of decision are, you obviously want to overwhelm that. We had planning that looked like the old days, but we had not yet done planning that figured out, if the bad guys are here in these kinds of numbers and with this kind of technology, what does it take in order to accomplish the mission?

If the mission is, Mr. President, go into Iraq and kill everyone, then I will design a plan to go into Iraq and kill everyone. If the plan is to remove the regime and install a new government, I will have a different plan. We discussed that and that then became the origin of the planning, which went on obviously for a year.

Perry: In those initial discussions, what are the discussions of the “should” questions? For those who are saying, “Let’s have a plan because we need to think about the fact that we at some point should go into Iraq,” and do the following—We presume early on it was to take out Saddam [Hussein]—where did WMD [weapons of mass destruction] come into that discussion? Was it in early on?

Franks: WMD was part of that discussion from beginning to end. The intelligence that we were receiving and the White House was receiving was coming from the CIA. It was coming from a whole bunch of input to the CIA where analysis was being performed all the time about what was going on in Iraq. It was coming from foreign intelligence services and I don’t remember
who all of them were, but the two very obvious ones were the Brits and the Germans. The Germans in fact gave me charts and photographs of what they believed or assessed to be decontamination capability to be used in the event of a WMD war.

Those discussions I believe prompted President Bush to tell me, not on one occasion but on many occasions, “General, I hope we never go into Iraq except by invitation. But based on what the intelligence is telling me, I’m not sure we’re going to be able to get away with that. So just in case….put together a plan that we can use if we have to go into Iraq.” So we did. We worked on it very seriously for about a year.

Knott: So to those who contend that this was a man, this was a President who was upset over the fact that Saddam had tried to kill his father or was itching to do this, you would say what?

Franks: President Bush never shared with me his innermost thoughts, so I cannot say that he did not have that in mind. I can say that he never communicated that to his military commander. I never got the sense that President Bush wanted to do this. By gosh, I’m going to do this, and sooner is better than later. That was never communicated to me.

We treated this planning as a very serious iterative process, and we looked at lots of possibilities. The President asked me a bazillion questions. One of the questions was what should we think about in terms of timing if we ever have to do this? Well, there are certain things that a military guy would think about. The state of training of the Iraqi military is much better at certain times of the year because their training cycle builds up to competency at certain times of the year. The weather, there are certain times when you wouldn’t want to be driving across the desert in Iraq. There are certain religious holidays when they’re likely or not likely to be in a high readiness status. We talked about all those kinds of things.

In fact, one of the stories that I point out in my book, and I believe it was Andy Card who said, “Mr. President, we have Congressional elections coming up in November.” The President looked at him and said, “Whatever we decide to do we will do based on what I believe is in the best interests of the American people and it won’t have anything to do, Andy, with when Congressional elections are.” That made me even more inclined to be a fan of this President.

Of course that was in November and we had been working through this planning process since the February-March time frame. I just never saw any anxiety that said we have got to do this. I do believe that I knew the President well enough that if he had had some pent-up anger, I would have known it. I didn’t see it.

Perry: In terms of timing on the front end, was there also discussion, as this iterative process went along, to think in terms of strategy about post-Saddam Iraq? By that I don’t mean what ultimately did happen, which was to try to stand up infrastructure and get a government going. But was there ever a broader question about what will the removal of Saddam do to the region, particularly in reference to Iran?

Franks: Obviously not enough.

Perry: Was there any discussion?
Franks: You bet. Not specifically related to Iran or Saudi Arabia, or Jordan or Syria or Turkey, but the discussion of generations’ worth of difficulty between Sunni and Shi’a, the fractious nature of the tribals within Iraq, the overwhelming oppression of Saddam Hussein vis-à-vis his own people. The fact that it was going to be a lot easier to remove Saddam Hussein than it was going to be to fill his shoes because as a dictator he was able to manage the people inside Iraq because he kept his thumb on them. The question is if you remove a dictator and the people no longer have a thumb on their neck, how are they going to act? There was a lot of discussion. There was a lot of speculation. There was no certainty with respect to how they would act, and I’ll leave it at that.

Knott: Are you concerned at all at this time that perhaps your attention, your eyes are no longer—Maybe I’m in Doug Feith territory again here—I know this isn’t your job—but your eyes are now sort of being removed from Afghanistan and you’re focusing on Iraq. Is that a concern of yours? Is it a concern of others around you?

Franks: Concern of others to be sure. I have to say that at the end of the day I had it my way. I don’t remember, truthfully, whether it was the President or Don Rumsfeld, or maybe both, who didn’t suggest but rather asked me, “If we’re going to have a major operation in Iraq, should we split this function and have one guy continue to focus on Afghanistan and have another guy focus on this operation in Iraq?” I said, to either one of them or both of them, “I have a question: Who is going to referee the allocation of resources between general number one and general number two? Would you want to do that?”

I said the issue is that there are lots and lots of people out there who have competency better than my own to handle the continuing operation in Afghanistan where we are trying to get provincial readiness teams set up to work through all the engineering and government building—elections and so forth—that we need to be doing in Afghanistan. At the same time, we’re going to be putting our services under a pretty serious strain to continue to do that while we focus to get this thing done in Iraq.

So what I believe is you leave one guy in charge of both to referee, but then you put a very competent commander in Afghanistan; [Dan] D.K. McNeill, the best war fighter that we had in the country, the Commander of the 18th Airborne Corps, and a close personal friend of mine. We’ll take him out of command of the 18th Airborne Corps, put him in Afghanistan, and we will build up rather than permitting that to come down. Then I will get a different sort of arrangement to do the work in Iraq. That is the answer to your question.

Who knows whether they liked it or not, but they permitted it, so that’s the reason we did it. It had to do with parsing Armed Forces, allies, government agencies, the CIA. Some of this has got to work Afghanistan and some has got to work Iraq. Well, who is going to make the decision about who works where? I’ve told the press a lot of times, if you look at the facts of what went into Afghanistan, we had more agency and we had more troops in Afghanistan after we went into Iraq than we did before. So this idea of people taking their eye off the ball in Afghanistan is simply not true. That’s not to say we did everything right, but what we didn’t do right was not because of an absence of attention.

Perry: And resources.
Franks: And resources. That is sort of a red herring in this in my view. It may have been Don Rumsfeld’s idea to split the commands. I think I talked to him about it. He brought it up several times and I just continued to say, “Well, you’re the Secretary of Defense, but that’s not how I’d do it.”

Perry: Prior to the beginning of the Afghanistan war, you mentioned prominently Doug Feith having his views and attempting to have his input on the plan.

Franks: Right.

Perry: Was he or Paul Wolfowitz—Were they involved in any discussions you had about the plan for Iraq?

Franks: Both of them, always. Anytime I would talk to the Secretary, Paul and Doug would both be there. We would have eight or ten people sitting around Rumsfeld’s table and we’d go through all of this. Rumsfeld would ask questions, make suggestions, expound on ideas, and ask Doug and Paul for their inputs. Yes, sure, it went on for months.

Perry: In the discussions about whether to do this—At some point obviously it goes from whether to do it to how to do it, but we know from their comments and their books and the public record that they were very passionate, for the reasons of their personal backgrounds, to take out Saddam, comparing him to Hitler, for example.

Franks: Yes.

Perry: Did that passion come out in the discussions that you took part in?

Franks: The fact that I have to stop and think about that hard would cause me to say I’m sure that the passions came out, but the passions were not prime among the issues. If other people around the table would be passionate that this guy is a sorry guy and we’ve got to get him, and sooner is better and all that—Rumsfeld was actually thoughtful about all of that. He would hush those kinds of discussions if they came up. He would hush them down. Wolfowitz may have had passion on this, or Doug Feith may have had passion on this, but it was never a centerpiece of anything that we talked about in the Secretary’s office.

Perry: Steve, did you have questions on the plan? I also wanted to ask if there was anything you wanted to add to your discussion in the book about the differences that you had with General Powell, with Secretary Powell, on the plan?

Knott: That’s exactly where I want to go.

Franks: That is fodder for books, in my mind, more than it is a substantial thing. Colin Powell, one of the brightest guys and one of the best Americans I know, did what he did with America’s military a decade before I was called on to do with our military what I did. The technologies that we used, and candidly the quality of our troops and the quality of our leadership, not my leadership but our leadership in the military, had evolved greatly in that decade. It was my opinion and it is my opinion that Secretary Powell knew about as much about strategy as anyone sitting around the table. But I believe he was about a decade out of date with respect to U.S.
military capacity.

I had the greatest, and have the greatest, respect for Secretary Powell, but when it comes to judgments on how best to use existing capacity, as I sit here in 2014 I would not suggest to the commander of Central Command tactical use of U.S. military forces because I believe that some things have changed. There has been an evolution over the past ten years. I had the same view of Secretary Powell and our discussion then, great respect, but I thought that his place was better occupied by talking about how to build capacity for after the war. I thought that we could have a more productive discussion concerning governance and civil affairs and linkages between U.S. organs of power and the structure to be built inside Iraq than to engage him in a discussion about the length of supply lines, and how many tanks it takes to do this, and how many aircraft it takes to do that. He knew that. He knew my view. I’m sure that he didn’t really appreciate it all that much.

Perry: Because your view was, to sum up what you’re saying, that by this time he was in the wrong lane, he was trying to get into your lane and not taking care of his lane and he was a decade behind.

Franks: Those are your words and not mine, but they’re pretty close. There is value in experience. One of the things that I asked to do for both Afghanistan and Iraq was to get the most experienced war fighter in America to come and sit with me and work with me and advise me. His name was Gary Luck. Gary Luck had been a confidant of sorts of President [William J.] Clinton. He had commanded JSOC. He had been the CINC in Korea. He had been my boss on several occasions. He was involved in Special Operations, highly classified ones around the world. So I asked to bring him to live with me. Even though he was ten years out of date, I respected his views and I respected his ability to ask questions. I appreciated his willingness to tolerate my answers, to give me advice that I couldn’t get from somebody who worked for me. Gary Luck was, and probably is under-appreciated in terms of his gift to the country in that role, a very special man, a retired four-star.

I had the same respect for Secretary Powell, but I had something more in my mind that I wanted from him. I didn’t want his military advice, just to be blunt. There may have been value there, but I didn’t want it. He is quite the gentleman. He called me and he said, “We’re going to go to Camp David in the next day or two or three, and I don’t like part of your plan.” I said, “What is that, Secretary?” He expressed to me his view of the value of overwhelming force and he talked about the fact that it is a long way from the Saudi-Kuwaiti border to Baghdad.

Perry: That was the supply line issue that he was having?

Franks: Yes. I thanked him. He said, “I just don’t want you to take it personally.” I said, “I won’t take it personally, Secretary. You don’t either.” I called Rumsfeld and said, “This is what is going to happen.” Rumsfeld said words to the effect of, “Good for him. I’m glad he’s going to share his view because we owe it to the President of the United States to give him the best views.” I said, “I absolutely agree.” So we all went off to Camp David and got along fine.

That whole discussion probably lasted two minutes. I mean we got up there and we went through what it was we were going through. I think I said, “Mr. President, Colin has a different view
about part of that. Mr. Secretary?” Then Colin said what he said to the President. The President looked at me and said, “OK, Tommy, what do you think?” I looked at the President of the United States and said, “Mr. President, I already told you what I think.” Everybody nodded wisely and we did what I recommended.

**Perry:** The President then at that point didn’t press Secretary Powell and say, “Is there anything more?”

**Franks:** He may have asked Rumsfeld—He may have gone back to Secretary Powell. To be honest with you, that was such a small thing in my estimation of what we were all there to talk about that we went on with it.

So much more important than that discussion with Colin, or times when Don Rumsfeld would have a problem with Condi—I mean so much more important than all of that, it seems to me, are things like this: We were either at Camp David or in the Situation Room and it was a planning discussion and we were getting closer. It may have been the end of 2002. I don’t know what prompted the President but the President asked this question: “How much money do old people get in Iraq?” Like Social Security or something. For some reason Condi knew the answer to that and she said, on this order of magnitude, “They get $3 a month.” The President laughed and we all kind of laughed a little bit. He said, “Well, heck, we ought to double that to $6 a month and then when we go in there we’ll at least know somebody likes us.” Then we went on with whatever we were talking about.

Some minutes later, Don Rumsfeld gave the bicycle seat explanation and said, “Mr. President, just a minute, I want to go back and talk about the old people. I think we’re going to find that if we put our hands on the bicycle seat it is going to be very difficult for us to get our hands off the bicycle seat.” Everybody nodded wisely with Rumsfeld’s comment. The smartest man in the room was the President of the United States for asking the question, and we should have done what he said.

He had concern about how to build relationships in that country that would outlive the military, and we collectively didn’t go along with that. He was the smartest man in the room for asking the question.

**Perry:** That is a social safety net issue, a social welfare issue.

**Franks:** Absolutely. There are two other issues that were not well handled. This is my view, speaking at the strategic level. When [L. Paul, III] Bremer disbanded the Army—bad choice of terms. Factually, on the ground what happened was we permitted the Iraqi soldiers to lay their weapons down and go home. We may have codified that by writing hereinafter and forever more the Iraqi Army is disbanded, but the fact is they laid their weapons down and went home so they didn’t get killed. There’s nothing wrong with that.

Where we made a mistake in my view strategically is not hiring them back within 48 hours at whatever their income had been before, brought them close to us, taught them how to drive trucks, operate power plants, do street sanitation. We should have picked the ones we wanted to be cops, picked the ones that we wanted to help with the military. In my view it was a strategic issue that we collectively did not do correctly. When the media says, “when you disbanded the
Iraqi Army,” that didn’t have anything to do with it. Disbanding the Iraqi Army was fine, but not hiring these people back and putting them on the payroll in my view was an error.

The other one is—Maybe I’ll ask you a question: What happens when you outlaw the involvement of the Ba’ath party in the politics of Iraq? What effect does that have? You disenfranchise the middle class, because the Ba’ath Party was the middle class in Iraq. So now have we caused them to be more inclined in our direction or less inclined? What do you think?


Perry: Less.

Franks: I view those three things as places where we all could have done better. We could have listened to the President and figuratively, if not literally, paid attention to the old people and social welfare in the country. We could have hired the entire population of Iraqi military to come in and do what needed to be done in the country, and we should not have outlawed, writ large essentially, the middle class in the country of Iraq.

Perry: Could we come back to the first and the President’s comment, because when you stated it, it sounded as though he meant it as a flip comment. Do you think he did, or that people took it as a flip comment? In terms of leadership, he wasn’t saying we need to focus on the post-Saddam era so—I’m going back to your Venn diagram—let’s think about where the military and the political and the governmental issues and then the social network will come together. Let’s find that point. Was that the problem, that it was not really meant as a serious comment, or that people didn’t pick it up as a direction to go in?

Franks: I think it was a very serious question and a subsequent very serious discussion wherein the wrong answer was reached. It is one thing to say, “How much do old people make? Three dollars a month? Ha, we ought to at least double that.” On one hand you can say that’s flip. Well, what caused the President to ask the question? That’s an indication to me that he is thinking about “the day after.” It’s on his mind.

Perry: Could he have guided the conversation, where maybe people laughed and could he have said, “I was making a joke, but seriously, people, let’s talk about—”

Franks: When we left the conversation at that point the President’s last words were, “Let’s double that and at least we’ll have some people in there who like us.” Even though it was light, that was a decision that the President made. “Let’s double that and we’ll go forward.” The conversation went forward for some number of minutes and Don Rumsfeld went back to it with the bicycle seat discussion. I don’t recall that the President said anything. The President may just have raised his eyebrows and said, “Oh.” But the fact is that we didn’t do it.

Perry: Right.

Franks: We went from “Let’s double it” to not doing it. Whatever the discussion was, we didn’t do it. On its face, that’s not a huge deal. But it does indicate perhaps the need for a broader discussion on the bicycle seat. If you’re a Marshall Plan-instructed kind of historian, then you believe that it is necessary, or you believe that it is advantageous, to fill a social vacuum with programs that support the population. Well, I’m not really a historian, but my view is that it is good to do that. That is polar opposite the bicycle seat discussion. Because if you provide a
Marshall Plan, wouldn’t that indicate we had our hand pretty substantially on the bicycle seat at the end of World War II?

**Perry:** And we are providing a lot of bicycles with training wheels, would be another way to look at it.

**Franks:** I don’t want to be overly critical, looking at it in hindsight. You’ve got lots and lots of things that America is trying to put together. Why did we do away with the Ba’ath Party? Well, on its face you don’t want the bad guys in there. OK. Why didn’t we hire back the military? Well, it would be hard to figure out how to go about hiring them and finding them jobs. Who would they work for?

So there is rationale, there is reason behind all these things that happened. It’s kind of like when you have something bad happen in America and you say, gosh, I guess that was an intelligence failure. Well, you can look back and find lots of “failures.” I don’t believe that this was a failure. I don’t believe it was a failure of leadership. I believe it was just simply a fact that we were living in an imperfect time. The plan was not perfect.

Our planning for postcombat phase in Iraq was not as good as it should have been. We should have been better. I wish we had been better. But you know what? Remember what I said a minute ago? No plan survives the first round. Well, no administration succeeds itself. Who is to know how much of the problem we see today is related to the plan from 2003 and how much of it is related to what has happened since 2008? I don’t know.

**Knott:** General, could I just clarify something? Would you say there was an intelligence failure regarding weapons of mass destruction?

**Franks:** That’s tough. I know you read in the book—it’s interesting. One of my very best friends truly is His Majesty King [Bin al-Hussein, II] Abdullah from Jordan. If you guys take time to go through the little museum here you’ll see a motorcycle that he gave me. To this day he would tell you, “No, Franks is not telling the truth about this.” If Hosni Mubarak—I hesitate to call him a friend but we were close—were sitting here he’d say the same thing. “No, Franks doesn’t remember this correctly.”

When you have the kind of intelligence “snippets,” we used to call them, coming into the Agency DI [Director of Intelligence], NSA [National Security Agency], all the time over a long period of time, that Saddam Hussein is messing around with weapons of mass destruction, I believe that, if you’re a President, that has to have an effect on you. You don’t like this guy to begin with for valid reasons. And you’re getting these snippets about this guy. It’s kind of like our speculation now about Iran. What odds would you give that if we went into Iran right now we would find a weaponized nuke? At least it is debatable.

So the White House is continuing to receive information about WMD. Some are very specific, like the diagrams that I described that we got from German intelligence. Then your head military guy in the Middle East calls you on the phone and says, “Mr. President, I just met with King Abdullah in Jordan and he says Saddam has it. I’m just telling you what he said.” Then a few days later you’re the President and you get a call from the same military guy, who says, “I just left Hosni Mubarak—” As a matter of fact we were talking about moving multiple nuclear
powered ships through the Suez Canal, and obviously the Egyptians own that. I was there making a deal with Mubarak to let us do what we needed to do, and he said fine. He also looked at me in my beady eyes and he said, “General, I tell you the truth. Saddam, he has the WMD. He told me he will use it on you.”

How long do you think it took me to call President Bush and say, “Sir, I just left Hosni Mubarak and this is what he had to say”? Now, is there a place where I can put my finger on the paper and say intelligence failure? The answer is no. In the aggregate, in the assessment, it is obviously a failure because it was incorrect.

When we moved the troops into Iraq in March of 2003 there was not a doubt in my mind. Because of my talking to Bush, I can guarantee you there was not a doubt in his mind, not a doubt, that Saddam Hussein not only had weapons of mass destruction, but that he would use those weapons of mass destruction on our troops, 100 percent convinced. Was it right? Nope. Intelligence got it wrong. And President Bush’s assessment of the intelligence he received got it wrong. And my assessment of the intelligence we received got it wrong, because I believed what I saw and I was 100 percent convinced.

**Perry:** You gave us an example of Vice President Cheney in a reaction in a discussion, and you said, “literally coming out of his seat” and you said we’d discuss that later.

**Franks:** Right.

**Perry:** You said he was usually very quiet.

**Franks:** Yes.

**Perry:** And that would be the case all the way through these discussions?

**Franks:** Dick Cheney was marvelous because he listened. When he had something to say, he said it, and it would be a few sentences or a paragraph and then the discussion went on. He did not engage in the back-and-forth discussions because it was obvious that in our meetings he would defer to the President. But it was very obvious that he would then sit with the President one-on-one.

The President and Cheney sat at the top of the stack. Condi and Colin and I and whoever else discussed these things—and the President would ask many questions, many questions. If Cheney knew something, he would say something, but it would be short and infrequent. It was obvious to me, or I believed that then the two of them would go do what Presidents and Vice Presidents do, and the President would decide whatever he decided.

**Perry:** How was that obvious to you? You said at one point when he said, “We’ll discuss this later—” Was it that sort of thing that made you understand that that was what he was doing with the President?

**Franks:** I can’t put my finger on something. They would sometimes come together. They would sometimes leave a meeting together. The only time that I saw the Vice President actually interrupt someone speaking was that one event with Rumsfeld, and he was talking to Rumsfeld.
The President was listening and Vice President Cheney told Rumsfeld, “OK, we’ll look at that. We’ll talk more about that later.” He was talking to Rumsfeld, not to the President. They may have done that. There may have been other discussions, because for every one time that I saw the President, Rumsfeld saw him ten or twenty times. So I don’t know what went on in that interim. I just found the Vice President to be very mature and very thoughtful. Well, I’ll leave it at that.

**Knott:** What about the impression some have written about that the Vice President was actually pulling the strings behind the scenes?

**Franks:** I don’t believe that. There were times when the President would ask a question and I would answer it or Rumsfeld would answer it or Condi would answer it or someone sitting in the room would answer it, and the President—this happened a few times—would ask the Vice President, “What do you think, Dick?” I don’t know what that sort of a meeting is supposed to look like, but I found it to be a very positive experience. Never one time did I leave a meeting at the White House or Camp David and think to myself, God almighty, we’re in trouble now. Not one time.

There was never confusion. I never saw a rush to judgment in anything. I never saw the President reach and push for an answer, just never saw it.

**Knott:** Could I also ask about [I. Lewis] Scooter Libby and David Addington and members of the Vice President’s staff?

**Franks:** No contact.

**Perry:** When you were discussing with us—

**Franks:** Not so with Karl Rove. Karl Rove is a friend of mine now.

**Knott:** Let’s go down that path.

**Perry:** Yes, tell us about that.

**Franks:** Karl Rove is a friend of mine now and I knew him not as well, but off and on had contact with him in the White House.

**Perry:** You had mentioned in conversations about Iraq that Andy Card mentioned the Congressional elections—I’m glad you mentioned Karl Rove because it didn’t raise in my mind to ask if he was there. Did he ever bring up domestic political issues such as that?

**Franks:** I may be wrong—You can ask Karl—but I believe the President precluded that because I don’t recall Karl ever having been in the room in one of our meetings. The President bit Andy Card as I described it. I don’t want to overdo that, but it was obvious: “That’s not why we’re here. We’re not going to talk about a political agenda and talk about all those things, important as they are, Andy, but that’s not why we’re here and that’s not what we’re talking about.”

I wouldn’t doubt that Condi, or maybe the President himself—I can only speculate—just didn’t have Karl in these meetings. He may have been in one or two, but I don’t ever recall him being
there. I never heard him say a word.

Perry: What kind of impact do you think he was having, if any?

Franks: I must have thought he had some impact because I used to call him every now and then and say, “You know, you might want to mention this to the old man.”

Perry: What kinds of things, do you remember?

Franks: One of them was—This was later in the administration before W let Colin Powell and Rumsfeld go, after I was gone. They were talking about troop surges and they were talking about all kinds of stuff like that. I was a civilian. I decided that it wouldn’t be good for me to call the President. I was riding around in my car. Cathy and I were doing something down in Texas and we were having lunch. I just had a good idea.

I walked outside and called Karl Rove and said, “You know, there’s a lot of stuff that people are talking about with troop levels, but the fact of the matter, in my mind, is that this has got nothing to do with troops. This has to do with things like de-Ba’athification, and things like what to do with the disenfranchised force over there, and things to do with stuff like the Marshall Plan. I don’t know, Karl, that I’m asking you to do anything with it, but I just thought you might like to know.” That kind of thing.

Perry: What would be his response to something like that?

Franks: “Thanks a lot.”

Perry: Did he ever then circle back with you to say he had chatted with the President?

Franks: No, never. He had been a friend for a while. In fact we just went to Normandy with him for the 70th anniversary. Good guy, real smart guy. But I was very much aware—I’m not above trying to influence policy makers. If I wanted to get a message to him, I’d call Rove.

Knott: General, we’ve read a lot of reports about bad blood between General Powell’s staff, or Secretary Powell’s staff and Secretary Rumsfeld’s staff. Some have even argued that that had something of a crippling effect on the postinvasion policies in Iraq. Any comments or insights on that?

Franks: I can only speculate on it. I started off by saying two big personalities. Rumsfeld and Colin had big personalities. Because of Rumsfeld’s prior work in prior administrations, he actually had a good understanding of the way the White House operates. Because of Colin’s previous experience, he had a good understanding of how the Defense Department operates. Keep in mind this thing I was talking about, horizontal leadership. Any time that one or the other would get a sense that the other was crossing into his lane, there would be some friction.

Sometimes Colin would like to have a meeting at the White House be organized in a certain way and Rumsfeld would want to organize in a different way. Then they’d get maybe cranky with Condi because she would make a decision about how to orchestrate the meetings and the content of the meetings and all of that. So it is large personalities involved in this. To say that it had a
downstream effect, I don’t know.

I can tell you that I would get a call from one or the other of them, saying, “What is he doing? What is he thinking?” I would say something like, “You’re the Cabinet official. So is he. Why don’t you talk to him?” It was more out of frustration than anything else. Neither wanted me to do anything other than just do my best, in my own lane. When the times are tough and you have two serious players trying to get the job done, they will bump into each other. Whether there was an effect or not, I don’t know.

Knott: How aware of this was President Bush? Again I’m probably asking you to engage—

Franks: Sure, that’s fine. That’s an absolute fact. My memory is quite precise on that point.

Knott: I can imagine.

Franks: Actually, the President said things—We probably said things to each other—We weren’t together all that much, but there is some kind of a connection between a President and a
senior military guy from Midland, Texas that we talked the same way. He’s a lot smarter than I am. A lot of times I could look at him and he would tell me by the way he looked whether to stand up or shut up. I could say something. Rumsfeld would start to say something and the President would look at him and then look back at me. Even things like that make a difference in American history.

Knott: Sure. This is something that historians down the road will be grateful for. It wouldn’t hurt anyone’s feelings at that point.

Franks: Who knows?

Perry: What would you say along these lines were President Bush’s greatest strengths in how you dealt with him and how he dealt with the War on Terror? Were there any weaknesses that you saw?

Franks: Greatest strength? Thoughtful listening. The Iraq war plan is in the museum; you can see it. It is one chalkboard about this big. After about ten or twelve months of working this in very thoughtful ways, I decided that the way to tell the President about this thing was, in a war, there are things that you’d like to do. You’d like to kill bad guys. You’d like to interrupt their lines of communication. There are five or ten or fifteen things, and I call those slices. It is a matrix. So it says kill bad guys, drop bombs, drop leaflets, shut down the radio stations, whatever. Those are slices.

Then there are about ten or fifteen things that U.S. power has that give it the ability to do that. If you want to kill a whole bunch of people, you can use aircraft, you can use Rangers, you can use—I call those lines. No matter what we call it in the books, the way it was pitched to the President was a chart of lines and slices and it showed the nexus of—for example, we want to win the hearts and minds of the people; that was a slice. We want to drop bombs to kill people, to interdict, but you do not want to kill the people if you’re trying to win the hearts and minds. For some reason, that hit the President and that was the way the plan was approved. The ability to go through all of the thought processes and ask a million questions and then put something on a hand-drawn chart like that for approval. It is a very interesting thing.

Knott: Why do you think the impression emerged outside of the inner circles that this is not a particularly thoughtful man?

Franks: That’s a great question. One of President Bush’s characteristics pitches two of his personal traits against each other. Consumption by the American people is forced to choose between his two great traits. One of them is being very thoughtful. I’m watching and I hear what you have to say, and I can impute to you what you’re thinking. Thoughtful. The other is his charismatic cuteness.

Knott: Folksiness maybe?

Franks: That’s the right word, but it is charismatic. Some people really identify with the folksy side of this. In answer to your question, I believe that those two things compete with each other on the stage. If you identify with the charismatic leadership, “...as long as it takes, dead or alive,” standing at the World Trade Center, “I’m coming.” Whether it’s folksy or not, it is a
charismatic trait that is George W. Bush. He wouldn’t be George W. Bush without it. He was elected based on it.

**Perry:** That’s his essence, would you say?

**Franks:** He’d argue with that, but I think it is an essence. I think that this business of being thoughtful—I never saw the guy rush to judgment. He would challenge me but, he was never hateful. I was never afraid of him and I’m not afraid of him now. Not a minute. I’d say to him—I was profane—I would use bad words in talking to the President of the United States and the rest of the people in the room would go [facial expression]. I just found him to be thoughtful.

You asked a question that really is a great question, but I think his greatest strengths compete against each other.

**Perry:** Is another way to think about it—We talked about the simplicity, in a good way, of the message that he sent to leaders of the world after 9/11 and you said that was that kind of folksy simplicity. That is at odds, isn’t it, with nuanced thoughtfulness.

**Franks:** Absolutely. And you know, in a session like this when we talk, I think I come across as being a guy who believes that he knows everything and knows the President so well and all of that, and that’s not the case. Compared to the very senior people in that administration, I was a bit player. I just had a bit part in all of this.

As I said earlier, these other people, the Cabinet principals, spent many hours with this guy, and I didn’t. But the sessions that I had with him were substantial sessions; they were life-and-death sessions. I think you get a pretty good glimpse into the soul of a person in a life-and-death sort of thing. He was never flip; he was never quick. He was never—you know, well, you haven’t done it. He never looked at me and said, “That’s not very good. I expected better. So go out and do something different.” He never took a hard line with me. In every discussion that I had with the President I felt like we were in it together. That is a massive strength for a leader.

I can tell people to go do something and if they think that they’re just being told to go do something, they never feel like they own a piece of the rock. With this thing I felt like we owned it and I never worried about my back.
Perry: Did you see the President change over those couple of years?

Franks: He got more tired.

Perry: Got tired?

Franks: Not tired to the level of fault. He’s tough. Bush is a tough guy. When you’re telling jokes in the White House with an old Midland guy, that’s one thing, but he didn’t tell as many of those jokes after a couple of years as he did at first.

Perry: Any change in his style or his approach?

Franks: You civilians have a lot better feel for all that stuff than I do because you have a savvy about media and about what goes on inside a White House. I don’t have that. I don’t have that same kind of touch. Without a doubt I can see Bush doing all the domestic things and doing all that stuff that Presidents do, and doing fundraisers and all that kind of stuff. I never saw any of that and didn’t care anything about it. In fact I was so ignorant that I’m almost ashamed to admit it. My wife tells a better story than I do, but for the entirety of the time that I was Commander down there, I never watched a news broadcast.

Knott: Down there being Tampa?

Franks: Tampa, yes. Don Rumsfeld would know what CNN and ABC and people—what the story line looks like and what the early bird is saying about what is going on inside the Beltway and all those kinds of things. He’d call me and he’d say, “Did you see this and that?” I’d say, “Beats the shit out of me.”

Let me tell you what happens if you’re a military guy: Either people are fascinated by your brilliance, and the news reports that this went well and the General said this and all that. And you become so infatuated with the tone of your own voice that you lose your effectiveness. Or, things are being said in the media that you know really aren’t factual, really aren’t true, and you become so frustrated by it that that also affects your—I remember one time Dan Rather asked my wife what news I watched. Cathy went to Tribeca to do something and Rather asked her and she said, “He doesn’t watch the news.” He said, “Why not?” Cathy said, “Because he’s afraid he’d get confused about the facts.” [laughter]

So you’ve got all this stuff going on in the White House and they’re doing all this and W is putting up with it, and I’ve just got my one little thing. I’m down here worried about that. At the end of his Presidency where he said, “You know, it was a great ride and I’m glad to not be the President anymore. Wouldn’t have missed it for the world.” But he has been true to his word and I have great respect for that.
We have some friends in various media places, and for several years every now and then I would say something and they’d bring the film trucks out here and I’d sit in the museum and pontificate. Then all of a sudden about the time W left office I looked at that example and I said, “Why would I do that? Why did I feel some obligation to talk to [Sean] Hannity?”

**Perry:** Sean Hannity from Fox?

**Franks:** Any of them, or Wolf Blitzer.

**Perry:** Was it because you had gone through this period that you talk about at the end of the book when you were independent, when you did not identify with one party or another, but by 2004 you were prepared, now that you were in retirement, to say the positive things that you wanted to say about President Bush?

**Franks:** True.

**Perry:** Did you feel at that point too that you wanted to say these things to the media?

**Franks:** I’m sure I did. A lot of it is self-justification. You know, the older you get you’re not only infatuated by your own brilliance but you seek to correct the misimpressions held by the world. I think we all go through that. I kid Rumsfeld all the time that the difference between us is that he hasn’t lost his yet. Don Rumsfeld still calls me every now and then. We actually are good friends. We go to Washington and see them. We go with him and Joyce [Rumsfeld] out to dinner and all that.

It never fails that he’ll say, “Tom, do you remember that time when you were sitting there and we were talking about the off ramp and we were talking about the troops going into Iraq and you said that you thought we should not send the First Cav Division? Do you remember that?” I’d say, “No, Secretary, I don’t remember that.” He just continues.

**Perry:** He relives it.

**Franks:** He lives it. That’s where he lives, and I don’t.

**Perry:** When he would call you when you were serving and want to talk to you about media and how they were reporting, did he want to instruct you about that, or cause you to do something differently?

**Franks:** He never told me a thing to say; he never told me a thing not to say.

I remember one time I was in the Pentagon having I’m sure very important meetings. He said, “Come up for lunch.” I said, “You bet.” So I went up for lunch. Alan Greenspan was a good friend of Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld had Greenspan to lunch. He said, “Alan just learned that you were up here and he asked if he could meet you.” I said, “I’m humbled.”

So the three of us sat and had lunch. I took my jacket off and hung it over the back of the chair, and I’m sitting there eating. We’d been eating for about 15 minutes and Rumsfeld said, “OK, General, time to go.” I said, “OK, Secretary.” He said, “We’re going to go do a press
conference.” It’s stranger than fiction. I said no. This was early on. I said, “No, Secretary, you are going to go do a press conference because that’s what you do. I’m going to finish my business and then I’m going to go back to the job for which you pay me.”

He looked at me, being the personally lovely man that he is, and he said, “General, you didn’t run for office to become the President of the United States.” I said, “I know that, Secretary.” He said, “Neither did I.” I said, “I know that Mr. Secretary.” He said, “But Tommy, George W. Bush did and the people of this country elected him. If he says you’re going to do a press conference, General, you’re going to do a press conference.” I said, “Secretary, like I said, I’m going to put my jacket on and we’re going to get our asses down there and do a press conference.” That’s my favorite press conference story. Alan Greenspan can confirm that one for you.

Perry: We’re coming to the end of our time that you’ve so generously scheduled for us. I have a quick question about notes. You mentioned in your book that you would take notes. Have you archived your materials and are they anywhere to be seen now or in the future?

Franks: It’s a shame. I actually don’t know what happened to my papers from CENTCOM. I would have to believe that they’re still at CENTCOM, but I don’t know that.

Museum representative: We have a few papers here, mostly the research you had when you were writing the book. They are not archived, but we are in the process of archiving them.

Franks: That’s actually a very important kind of thing. These pony blankets—

Perry: Maybe explain what those are.

Franks: Did you look at them?

Perry: No.

Knott: I don’t think so.

Perry: I don’t think we had those.

Franks: No one has them. I think this is all there is. This is a June ’03 and July ’03 summary, and what these were prepared for is Congressional testimony. When I would go to the Hill, which was really a lot. When I was a kid, when I was a Major, I did the backup work for the Chief of Staff of the Army on the Hill. We had several books called backup study books and they were about this thick. They were big red books. I used to sit behind the Chief of Staff of the Army and somebody would ask him a question and I would tear out a sheet and just pass it to him. He’d look at that, answer questions and all that. I always thought that was ineffective.

We didn’t have iPads at that time, so I came up with this idea that I called pony blankets. I would put information on chronologies and facts that said, “It might interest you to know that during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan they had 118 jets shot down, 333 helicopters. They lost 433 artillery pieces, 147 tanks. They committed 620,000 troops and they had 14,453 killed and 54,000 wounded.” I found that I could take a couple of these pony blankets like this, facts,
figures, Afghanistan National Army, closed investigations, coalition contributions, total number of countries in Afghanistan, 34 ground operations, 20 countries, 2300—I could put these things together and sit there at a Congressional hearing with one of them in front of me. While somebody would be asking a question I’d just scan and do what I just did with you. That way I controlled the agenda. But I didn’t make a very good habit of collecting that stuff. I have a habit of writing on everything that anybody gives me. That’s what I hope they still have down in CENTCOM.

**Museum representative:** When we went to write the book, you had it all cataloged, and it was all classified. I could go in there and look at it and help him write the book, but they kept it there.

**Franks:** You just need to verify that it is still somewhere down there, for the record.

**Perry:** If you want to include that when you send your transcript back to us after you edit it, that would help historians in the future to know that they exist, that they’re classified. They’re still opening up and un-classifying documents at the Kennedy Library and people are going back into the early ’60s to look at things, so somewhere down the line that would be helpful.

Our last question would be is there anything we didn’t ask you about today that you wanted to tell us?

**Franks:** No. You were kind enough to listen to lots of stories so we’ll go through the transcript and try to figure out how to keep everything in there that needs to be in there.

**Perry:** As Steve said, we encourage you, for future generations, to keep everything that you think is appropriate and that you want to keep. If there are things that you believe are sensitive you can always put—As our colleague Russell Riley says, there are still two interviews from the [Jimmy] Carter project that have not been released, and they were done in the early ’80s. It’s better to keep the things in and redact them, than to take them out forever. Then no one will have them. But that is totally up to you, of course.

**Franks:** You can tell me how to mark what I want—If I want to take it out I’ll just take it out.

**Perry:** Yes.

**Franks:** But if I want to leave it in there but I don’t want it opened for 25 years or something, how do I mark that?

**Perry:** Those instructions will be clear when you receive the transcript and we have superb people.

**Franks:** When do you need the transcript back by?

**Perry:** As soon as it is convenient for you to return it. We obviously like them sooner rather than later but we want it to be convenient for you. We just can’t thank you enough for giving us four hours of your day. This we can say will be very helpful to understanding the Bush Presidency. More importantly, we thank you for your long service to our country. We always think about this as another service to your country.
**Franks:** I want to thank you for your service to the country. It is important for the democracy that somewhere or other over the next hundred years we give America an opportunity to better understand a time in history that is very important and not very well understood.

**Perry:** Thank you.

**Knott:** Well put.

**Perry:** We agree.

**Franks:** Don’t let them wear you out.

**Perry:** We’ll try not to, sir.

**Knott:** And I’m happy to have experienced my first visit to Oklahoma. I’m pushing 60 and it is the first time I’ve ever set foot in the state.

**Franks:** Hell, if I could be 60 again I’d get it right next time. Warren [Martin], do you have a minute to take these fine folks through the library?

**Perry:** We would love to see it.

**Franks:** I actually think you’ll find it interesting in a couple of different ways. There is a lot of stuff in there that actually doesn’t exist anywhere else. The sketch of the war plan I think is something that is interesting. The day that the President gave us the execute order to go into Iraq, we had a video teleconference. The President and the Vice President and the principals were in the Situation Room of the White House and I was in Saudi Arabia at an air base with, as I recall, my air component commander and my Aussie commander. We were hooked up on a video teleconference, but we also had every major command in the U.S. military up on the video teleconference because all of them were supporting what we were doing.

It is the President issuing the order to attack in Iraq. It’s the only copy there is. The Smithsonian has worked us over to get it. It’s very grainy and it’s very poor. It’s very cute because when we first come up on the teleconference the President is talking and I’m answering him but he can’t hear me, or I’m talking or he’s talking and I can’t hear him. There is some kind of a technology thing. He’s getting a bit testy with this thing and we’ve got the whole world up on this video teleconference and it is the day before we’re going to launch the attack into Iraq.

Finally I look down at my little video teleconference box in front of me and I say, “Oh, I see a problem. If you push this ‘on’ button it will work better.” Everybody in the White House cracked up. But to watch the President interact with my ground commander, air commander, naval commander, Special Operations commander, my headquarters in Tampa and me, to listen to the questions that he asks and to listen to these senior military leaders answer the President’s questions, you will find fascinating.

**Perry:** That’s great.

**Franks:** It is about two or three minutes long. In every case his question—and what America
doesn’t know, the ground commander says, “We’re in position now, we’ve got this many troops and here is where they are and we’re going to launch into Iraq.” The President sits there and he listens—This is David McKiernan—and he says, “Well, General, do you have everything you need to win?” McKiernan says, “Sir, we have everything. We have everything in the right place and we’re ready to go.” The President says, “Thank you. OK, back to you, Tommy.”

I’d say, “Next is the JSOC commander and he is positioned here and there. Give him a run down.” The JSOC commander talks to the President, and the President says, “General, do you have everything you need to win?” He asked that same question of every one of the military commanders and at the end of it he says words to the effect of, “Based on what I believe is necessary for the United States of America and for peace in the world, I issue the order for you to attack.”

**Perry:** Powerful.

**Franks:** Big deal, powerful. There is a bunch of that stuff in there. There is a jacket that I had Laura steal out of his closet. There are clothes from Condi in there, one of Rumsfeld.

**Perry:** You have Condoleezza Rice’s clothes?

**Franks:** Oh, yes.

**Perry:** I love her clothes.

**Franks:** The uniforms of all of the major military commanders are in there. It’s cute and fun to have that stuff but what is really cute and fun is that we’re in a population—This little town has a population of about 4,000 people. We’re right out in the middle of the unknown universe.

**Knott:** That is true.

**Franks:** In the last year we have had visitors in this little place from all 50 states and from how many foreign countries?

**Martin:** This year, nine.

**Franks:** People actually come here just to go through this thing and see it. I’m proud of it, and I’m proud of Warren Martin, our Executive Director. He does a good job trying to tell the truth.

**Perry:** And schoolchildren no doubt. Colonel [Michael] Hayes and I were talking about schoolchildren who are now in grade school were not alive on 9/11.

**Franks:** Exactly right.

**Perry:** And you’re starting from scratch to teach them the history of this period.

**Franks:** Exactly right.

**Martin:** You can take high school, the senior today.
Perry: Would have been five.

Martin: Would have been four or five max.

Franks: One of the best things about it is that these guys run probably one of the very few 501 (c)(3)s in the country that actually operates in the black.

Perry: We need you to come to the Miller Center.

Franks: We do OK. We’re getting a lot of help. They have a great outreach program with that trailer that is parked out there. We go to schools all over about four states and show kids out in these rural communities what an abaya looks like, what a Koran looks like, what a khanjar looks like, where the country is on a map compared to the United States. We call that the road show. We have a program that brings kids—we bring 50 high school kids every summer in here to listen to the likes of King Abdullah and Jack Kemp and a bunch of people like that where we talk about leadership and scholarship. These kids go to great American universities.

Perry: That is a wonderful contribution.

Franks: He’s got an inspired leadership program where he travels around and teaches ethics to businesses and is certified—whatever you call it—they get their credit by going to—business ethics training. We’ve got a lot of stuff that we try to do that I find to be very fulfilling.

I don’t do much of it, but these guys do. All I do is raise Angus cattle and ride a motorcycle. I’ve ridden a Harley in all 50 states.

Perry: And that’s how you’re spending your time. We will certainly invite you when we do our rollout. Obviously, whether that is in Dallas or Charlottesville, we’ll hope Mrs. Franks can come and we’ll get a chance to talk to her.