President Bush Deserved Better

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On 8 September, a somber President George W. Bush told the nation that accomplishing his goals in Iraq would take a lot more money and a lot more time than the public had been led to believe. He deserved better from his military.

A few days earlier, The Washington Times reported how he had been let down. It published excerpts of a Department of Defense (DoD) “lessons-learned” paper that found planning for the situation following major combat was so rushed there was insufficient time for essential work, and that command relationships and responsibilities were not defined clearly until just before combat began. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and U.S. Central Command (CentCom) Commander General Tommy Franks had one chance to do it right—and they failed to do so. Recovery proceeds, but the outcome is far more in doubt than it had to be.

On the News Hour of 30 September, Jim Lehrer asked retired Marine Corps General Anthony C. Zinni, the former CentCom commander, “Do you believe what is going on on the ground now, postwar in Iraq, could have been avoided?” General Zinni replied, “I think we could have done it better. I think many of the things we’re confronting now could have been and should have been anticipated. . . . I think those responsible for planning in the Pentagon should have [foreseen many of the conditions that are now being encountered].”

In answer to Mr. Lehrer’s question about General Franks’s role in preparing a postconflict plan, General Zinni said “That wasn’t Tommy’s responsibility; that was the responsibility of the Pentagon . . . they [told Congress] they had a post-Iraq or post-Saddam administration they were ready to put in place. It failed.”

Asked if “heads should roll because of this,” General Zinni replied, “Absolutely. Any time we lose lives, any time we have miscalculated, any time we have to go back to the American people and ask for more treasure, more sacrifice, and it was not calculated and it should have been, then somebody should be held responsible.”

After watching his appearance, I sent an e-mail to General Zinni (whom I have known for many years and greatly respect) stating that, while Secretary Rumsfeld and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff must be held primarily accountable for the second phase ineptness and the resulting problems, I also hold General Franks accountable. The Rums-