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Rumsfeld is doing what Bush wants him to do

Editorial
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Calls for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's replacement cite several reasons: Rumsfeld wrongly calculated that a lightly armed force could conquer and pacify Iraq. Under his command, the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo was widespread and continued long after military commanders and the Pentagon learned of it. Lately the defense secretary has seemed insensitive to the peril of poorly equipped U.S. troops. He couldn't be bothered to sign his name to condolence letters sent to the families of soldiers killed in Iraq.

However, Rumsfeld's critics overlook the fact that the defense secretary is doing exactly what President Bush, the commander in chief, wants him to do. At his press conference Monday, Bush confirmed the matter, saying Rumsfeld remains the right man for the job.

Urged on by neoconservative advisers, Bush decided to invade Iraq and set the date. Bush persuaded Americans and Congress that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and the capacity to make more. Bush believed victory would be swift and most Iraqis grateful. After the invasion, with the insurgency in full swing, the president could not call to mind a single mistake he had made.

Calls for Rumsfeld's head exaggerate his role. What purpose would it serve to replace Rumsfeld with someone who would continue the same policies and strategies, changing little or nothing?

If Rumsfeld were a man of high principle, he would have resigned when the sickening prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib and other Iraqi locations came to light. He chose not to. According to recent reports, the inhumane treatment of prisoners was widely known to the FBI, CIA, Defense Department and various private contractors. If all those who knew and kept silent were to resign, certain government parking lots would stand empty.

In November, a majority of American voters returned President Bush to office. Some polls indicated that confidence in Bush's ability to run the war was an important factor in his victory.

With the war a long way from being over, perhaps the highest and best use of Rumsfeld's time is to redouble his efforts to diminish the number of condolence letters he has to sign.